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Deliverable report for

YOUNG_ADULLLT

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Deliverable 8.2
Comparative Analysis Report

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PU	Public	X
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

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1. Description of task

Resulting from the ongoing research in Work Package 8, this Deliverable has drawn together the empirical results from previous WPs and conducted comparative cross-case and cross-national analyses. By doing so, it has aimed at contributing new scientific knowledge to the discussions surrounding the impact of LLL policies on young adults' life courses, particularly those in vulnerable positions. In addition, the analyses have contributed to a better understanding of the structural relationships, functional matching(s), and specific forms of embedding of LLL policies in the regional economy, the labour market and individual life projects of young adults. Furthermore, they have enabled a thorough regional review of policies and programmes in the countries studied, thus yielding new knowledge on regional and local policy-making (networks) related to LLL, with particular attention to actors, dynamics, trends, mismatches and overlaps. Finally, these analyses have helped to identify parameters for a better coordinated policy-making and more effective delivery of LLL policies in European countries and regions.

The above mentioned aims included two particular tasks. *First,* developing further and refining the overall research strategy (WP 2) in order to encompass and guide comparative analyses and construct a paper with a comparative analysis strategy for the whole project. *Second*, conducting cross-case and cross-national comparative analyses of the evidence produced in previous WPs (3-7), thus discussing and developing further the hypotheses laid out in WP 2. As a result, Comparative Analysis Report with the main findings at regional, national and international level has been produced.

2. Description of work & main achievements

The comparative analyses have been done in reference to three theoretical perspectives and three research questions. Then, alongside the project´s thematic entry points – lifelong learning policymaking, local and regional landscapes, and young adults in their life course – the researchers have developed their main messages. Some of them have highlighted the relationships between young adults´ life courses and implementation of lifelong learning policies. Others have focused more closely on the impact of regional and local landscapes on these relationships. Still others have explored and inquired into the processes of lifelong learning policymaking, while concentrating either on its context-specific aspects, or on its existing and emerging tensions and networks of coordinated

policy-making. Thus, the main findings could be discussed and best summarized within the following four central messages.

The *first* message is that there are remarkable discrepancies concerning the expectations of young adults and the expectations of the policy-makers. These two groups of actors have different views on the importance and potentials of lifelong learning. A great role in shaping these relationships is played by structural and economic determinants, such as the allocation of labour supply and demand on the job market or the existing disparities across as well as within European countries and their Functional Regions. Yet, there seems to exist a growing rupture between young adults´ desires to construct their own life projects and the awareness and readiness of policy implementers to include these desires in the design of lifelong learning programmes. In these processes, the influence of the dominant neoliberal narrative emphasizing the instrumental nature of lifelong learning could be traced as well.

With regard to the *second* message, our research has pointed to the fact that lifelong learning policy-making is extremely context-specific. In that respect, more accurate and context-sensitive analytical categories such as the concept of 'Functional Regions' are needed to allow for incorporation of the existing functional and structural relationships on sites. In addition, these analytical units shed a different light on the spaces where policy actors and other stakeholders take their actions, and question how far do they construct and sustain them for their own sake. Looking into these contextual specificities more closely has also revealed the interdependencies between the implementation of lifelong learning policies and the sedimented economic and socio-cultural arrangements, such as focus on a single industry or a long-term structural unemployment.

The *third* message reflects the impact of discursive practices and context-dependent aspects of formulation and implementation of lifelong learning policies. Culture and local 'common sense' have been understood as the crucial prerequisites that enable the actors involved to identify and name the most pervasive problems to be solved and prescribe what possible solutions could be applied. The research has shown that this selective interpretation of problems and solutions affects, in turn, the ability of local and regional authorities to counteract the structural deficits, turning them instead into individual lacks of skills and knowledge. This paradoxically further stigmatises and overburdens young adults in the most vulnerable positions with new demands and expectations.

Finally, the *fourth* message is that the construction of lifelong learning policies is greatly dependent on the dominant assumptions that seldom reflect the current changes in life paths of young adults. Optimising employability, as the most prominent assumption, prescribes the orientations and underpins the relevance of lifelong learning policymaking in the majority of the sites analysed. This, in turn, corresponds with the effects it has on young adults in vulnerable positions. While constructing standardised target groups to include "vulnerable" young adults, lifelong learning policymakers continue to expect vulnerability to occur as a natural phenomenon. In consequence, young adults appear to be in need of a service, which is why better policy coordination seems to be the most appropriate answer. Contrary to this assumption, the comparative analyses have revealed weak points of the policies´ orientations, which reside in the mismatch between individual biographies and institutionalised life courses.

3. Deviations from the Workplan

The submission date of Deliverable has been set for August 31, 2018 and later postponed to November 15, 2018. Several reasons underlie this time-deviation. *First*, the presented Comparative Analysis Report is based on the previous work in the preceding Work Packages (WPs 3-7), meaning that all the delays incurred previously have impacted this part of the project. *Second*, the summing up of the preliminary work has, in some instances, entailed a careful reanalysis of findings, which had to be further elaborated for proper cross-case and cross-national analyses. *Third*, since the Comparative Analysis Report (D8.2) precedes the Final Report to Research, Policy and Practice (D8.3) and at the same time draws on the results from the Policy Roundtables (D9.2), much attention has been devoted to drafting and designing adequate reflexive tools for a better coordinated policy-making. *Fourth*, there were also considerable internal as well as external obstacles that hindered the work on this Deliverable, in particular sudden change of personnel, unplanned partner delays due to private issues.

Thanks to the contingency plans devised between the Coordination and Consortium the timing of the work has been continuously adjusted and alternative ways of performing the tasks have been developed and communicated among the partners. Consequently, the time delay has been set to a minimum, thereby eliminating negative effects on further work-progress and guaranteeing quality of the overall results.

4. Performance of the partners

Managing the work on this Deliverable has been challenged in a twofold way. Since the project has entered its last phase, the main challenge was to catch up on the postponements and delays incurred in previous phases. Second, the bulk of research work was paralleled by research and dissemination activities.

Thanks to constructive-minded engagement of partners, the above-mentioned challenges have been overcome. The additional efforts of the Coordination could ensure that the remaining tasks of the Deliverable have been addressed in depth and the particular duties have been shared among the partners in more detail. All partners have fulfilled their tasks.

5. Conclusions

The Full Assembly deems this Deliverable to be fulfilled satisfactory.

Deliverable D8.2

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Work Package 8

Comparative Analysis and Reporting

Comparative Analysis Report

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Executive summary

The Comparative Analysis Report sets out the cumulative results that are based on the preliminary work done in the previous research phases of YOUNG_ADULLLT, a European research project based in nine EU-member countries—Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Scotland-UK and Spain. The report presents comparative analyses that draw from three thematic perspectives – Life Course Research Perspective, Cultural Political Economy, and Governance Research. These three conceptual lenses underpin the central goal of the project, i.e., to enquire into lifelong learning policies that support young people in their life course. Using this particular three-dimensional scope has enlarged the array of themes and problems that the implementation of lifelong learning policies encompasses and has shed more light on young adults who find themselves in difficult and precarious life situations conditioned by local and regional settings. Because of these vulnerable positions, young adults' ability to build continuous and desirable life projects has in many cases become radically constrained. It is this crucial cleavage between the existing structural settings, the implementation of lifelong learning programmes and the individually experienced life conditions of young adults that has been explored and studied in YOUNG_ADULLLT and that this report brings to the fore. In following, the executive summary reprises the Comparative Analysis Report in three steps: *first*, it presents the overall research questions that guided the work in the project and within its sub-studies; *second*, it discusses the main messages of the Report´s chapters, and *third*, it gives an overview of the central insights and reflections of the comparative analyses.

Guiding Research Questions

Exploring the complex relationships between lifelong learning policies, regional and local landscapes and young adults in their life courses has required a considerable amount of conceptual and methodological reflection. As a result, the work has been organised alongside these three thematic entry points of the project.

Regarding the first theme focusing on the *lifelong learning policymaking* the goal was to map the European policy landscape and understand its regional and local transformations within the last decade. Given these preconditions, studying lifelong learning policy-making has raised several guiding questions, for example: Which actors and stakeholders are involved in designing, implementing and evaluating the lifelong learning policies? Who is deemed suitable for outlining and conceptualising lifelong learning programmes? What

role do young adults play in these processes? How do the various actors cooperate among themselves and to whom in terms of sustainability and efficiency do they account? What are the new emerging (and visible) patterns and networks of coordination and policy-making at the regional and local levels and what are the possibilities of their transfer to other European sites? Scrutinising the embeddedness of lifelong learning policies in regional economies, labour markets, education systems, and the life aspirations of young adults has prompted researchers to identify sustainable practices and re-construct patterns of interactions in (coordinated) policy-making at regional and local levels. Therefore, a relevant research question underpinned by the Governance perspective asks whether the observed fragmentation of lifelong learning policies is less resulting from the lack of coordination of actors and more from the tensions and asynchronities within the various levels of policy-making.

With respect to the second theme, *the regional and local landscapes*, much attention has been devoted to the study of the socio-economic and political conditions of the most effective lifelong learning policies and programmes, especially to their ability to counteract youth unemployment. The regional and local scope of analysis has helped to identify the most relevant cases for further cross-case comparative analyses. It has also enabled more elaborated in-depth studies of what under certain conditions and local contexts counts as an efficient lifelong learning policy measure and what are the specific cultural constructions involved in the processes of policy-making. Thus, this research theme has inspired the following questions: How are the objectives of lifelong learning policies shaped according to the local and regional landscapes? How do the regional and local policy implementers perceive the role of these policies? What culturally constructed obligations inform their decision-making? Are young adults perceived as an active part of the policy-making? Given the nature of local and regional landscapes, what issues are considered problematic and how does the problem perception influence the choice of possible solutions? To what extent do relationships between the education sector, labour market, social programmes, youth policies, and local economies support or obstruct the development of lifelong learning policy measures? How are ‘wicked problems’ of young adults as well as structural inefficiencies discursively constructed and reproduced and what sort of mismatches and redundancies do they cause? Highlighting the regional and local dimension of lifelong learning policymaking has thus stimulated the search for a more appropriate interpretation of local processes that mirror and supplement the national and transnational trends in education. Against this background, a relevant research question

informed by the Cultural Political Economy perspective asks whether lifelong learning policies depend more heavily on ongoing labour market fluctuations and pay less attention to the long-term, holistic educational objectives, thereby transforming themselves into instruments of political decision-making.

The last theme focused on *young adults in their life course*, especially those who find themselves in vulnerable positions, and tried to comprehend their experienced realities and social and material conditions they live in. Young adults' transitions from youth to adulthood are marked by a considerable amount of instability, repetition and missing guarantees of successful outcomes. Within this framework, they construct and try to follow their life projects, which are, in turn, socially sanctioned or abandoned depending on the grand narratives and dominant social expectations. Based on these considerations, the following questions have guided the research work: What kind of life projects do young adults have and how do the educational and training providers respond to them? What are young adults´ life perceptions and expectations and how do they create subjective meaning and continuity in their lives? How do the policy makers respond to the needs of young adults and how do they implement them in lifelong learning programmes? In what ways do lifelong learning policies respond to the living conditions of young adults and how do they react to those who are in vulnerable positions? How is vulnerability treated on different sites within the same Functional Region and over the course of time? In addition, considering the changing structure of family and gender roles, what hidden challenges do young adults face? How sensitively do lifelong learning programmes react to the needs of young adults, such as the balance between guidance and autonomy, work life and leisure time, self-respect and social acceptance etc.? What mechanisms do they use to enhance the potential abilities of young adults and for what purposes? In what respect do they stimulate young adults to understand and cultivate their priorities? The scope of this theme has helped to bring young adults´ voices back into the debate on lifelong learning. From the perspective informed by the Life Course Research, the overall question is whether the processes of lifelong learning policymaking are more dependent on current socio-economic developments and consider less the impact of the local conditions and contexts as well as the unchallenged potentials of young adults.

Discussing the Reports´ Leading Messages

The chapters in this Report present and discuss the results from comparative analyses with reference to theoretical perspectives and overall research questions discussed

above. As a result, their main messages have been developed along specific thematic issues, stressing one or another aspect of the research questions. Thus, some of the chapters highlight the relationships between young adults´ life courses and implementation of lifelong learning policies (especially Chapters 2, 3, and 4), whereas others focus more closely on the impact of regional and local landscapes on these relationships (especially Chapters 7 and 8). Still others explore and enquire into the processes of lifelong learning policymaking, focusing either on its context-specific aspects (especially Chapter 6) or on its existing and emerging tensions and networks of coordinated policy-making (especially Chapters 5 and 9).

The leading messages of the Report could be summarized within four themes:

First, there are remarkable discrepancies concerning the expectations of young adults and the expectations of the policymakers. These two groups of actors have different views on the importance and potentials of lifelong learning. A great role in shaping these relationships is played by the structural and economic determinants, such as the allocation of labour supply and demand on the job market or the existing disparities across as well as within European countries and their Functional Regions. Yet, there seems to exist a growing rupture between young adults´ desires to construct their own life projects and the awareness and readiness of the policy implementers to include these desires in the design of lifelong learning programmes. In these processes, the influence of the dominant neoliberal narrative emphasizing the instrumental nature of lifelong learning could be traced as well.

Second, the research has pointed to the fact that lifelong learning policymaking is extremely context-specific. In that respect, more accurate and context-sensitive analytical categories such as the concept of 'Functional Regions' are needed to allow for incorporation of the existing functional and structural relationships on sites. In addition, these analytical units shed a different light on the spaces where policy actors and other stakeholders take their actions, and question how far do they construct and sustain them for their own sake. Looking at these contextual specificities more closely has also revealed the interdependencies between the implementation of lifelong learning policies and the sedimented economic and socio-cultural arrangements, such as focus on a single industry or a long-term structural unemployment.

Third, the research reflects the impact of discursive practices and context-dependent aspects of formulation and implementation of lifelong learning policies. Culture and local

'common sense' have been understood as the crucial prerequisites that enable the actors involved to identify and name the most pervasive problems to be solved and prescribe what possible solutions could be applied. The research has shown that this selective interpretation of problems and solutions affects, in turn, the ability of local and regional authorities to counteract the structural deficits, turning them instead into individual lacks of skills and knowledge. This paradoxically further stigmatises and overburdens the most affected and vulnerable young adults with new demands and expectations.

Finally, *fourth,* the construction of lifelong learning policies is greatly dependent on dominant assumptions that seldom reflect the current changes in life paths of young adults. Optimising employability, as the most prominent assumption, prescribes the orientations and underpins the relevance of lifelong learning policymaking in the majority of the sites analysed. This, in turn, corresponds with the effects it has on young adults in vulnerable positions. While constructing standardised target groups, including vulnerable young adults, lifelong learning policymakers continue to expect vulnerability to occur as a natural phenomenon. In consequence, young adults appear to be in need of a service, which is why better policy coordination seems to be the most appropriate answer. Contrary to this assumption, the comparative analyses have revealed weak points of the policies´ orientations, which reside in the mismatch between individual biographies and institutionalised life courses.

General Insights From Comparative Analyses

The demands of the YOUNG_ADULLLT comparative project to inquire into dynamics, relationships and functionalities of multi-national and multi-regional contexts have provoked a series of new conceptual questions and analytical challenges. *First*, the project´s concept and its methodological choices have departed from traditional and well-known methodologies and have instead absorbed a variety of comparative processes that include a multi-layered and polyscalar nature. While enlarging complexity and at the same time maintaining coherence, the crucial part was to re-define traditional and often stereotyped categories, such as 'policy' or 'vulnerability', in order to make them eligible for comparative analyses. *Second*, a lot of attention was devoted to the context-specific particularities of the studied cases. This has helped to avoid producing contextual-free information for policy makers and research communities, as well as to strengthen the core understandings of local and regional features. Therefore, when signalling possible policy transfer, much discussion is needed on the fundamental structural, functional and cultural

differences and, moreover, on the state of embeddedness of these differences in the local, regional, national as well as supranational and global contexts. *Third*, far from taking a simplifying or reductionist approach of developing a unifiable concept or algorithm of coordinated policy-making, the comparative analyses have rather steered the view towards the dynamics that have to be taken seriously when implementing lifelong learning policies. In that respect, the term 'eco-system' relates to the changing structural circumstances as well as to the institutional developments and individual life courses much more adequately. It does not deny the complex mix of processes and relationships involved in lifelong learning policymaking, but rather addresses the diversity of its components and their varying and amorphous natures.

We invite readers to follow the diverse treads in the chapters of this Report and delve into the rich and context-sensitive discussions of the themes at hand.

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Introduction – Comparative Analysis Report

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the new millennium, lifelong learning policies have become significant tools in tackling ongoing economic and social structural problems.[1] Across the European Communities, one of the first major programmes to highlight the need for this type of education was the *Lifelong Learning Programme* established in 2006*.* Its general objective was to build "an advanced knowledge-based society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, while ensuring good protection of the environment for future generations" (EP & CEU, 2006, p. 48). Thus, ensuring the overall prosperity and well-being of European populations has become largely dependent on the lifelong learning education and training opportunities provided by the national and local/regional governments. Ever since, much attention has been paid to optimising the reach and efficacy of lifelong learning programmes across European countries. What has also become apparent over the course of time is that the role of young adults as active shapers of lifelong learning is largely missing, and more often than not they are viewed as passive recipients. This is true for young people in general since they struggle with several challenges at the same time – developmental, personal, educational, and professional, etc. – but this has particular relevance for groups facing difficult situations and at risk of social exclusion. Further, the highly diverse and dynamic life projects of young adults are not necessarily or completely consonant with societal expectations. Against this background, researching the compatibility of the objectives of lifelong learning policies and young adults´ life projects and living conditions becomes crucial in assessing policies' ability to be successful at local and regional level.

[1] Lifelong Learning implies an ongoing process of learning in formal, informal and non-formal settings. In that respect we refer to lifelong learning (LLL) policies in their multi-spectral dimensions, focusing on aspects beyond vocational (and recurrent) training for employment of adult, while incorporating economic, political and social aspects also for the younger generations, in particularly those who find themselves in vulnerable situations. Such conceptualization of lifelong learning aims at including everyone in the learning with the aim of 'lifelong learning for all'.

The *Comparative Analysis Report* of the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project represents an attempt to bring together data and results from the various Work Packages (WPs). The Report features a variety of perspectives on the relationships between lifelong learning policies and young adults that are shaped by the diverse local and regional structural conditions and circumstances.[2] Within this Report, this introductory Chapter sets out the general design of the comparative research conducted and its central objectives and questions. It is divided into three sections:

Section *one* starts with contextualising and embedding the YOUNG_ADULLLT project in the current debates on lifelong learning policymaking and adult education in Europe by drawing on key indicators. In doing so, it especially highlights the need for a broader concept of lifelong learning and displays the conditions of young adults, emphasizing in particular the 'vulnerabilizing' effects of the ongoing developments on them. Section *two* continues to debate the project´s objectives that target the individual level of young adults, the institutional level of policymaking, and the structural level of local/regional settings. While discussing its theoretical choices inspired by the Life Course Research, Governance and Critical Political Economy perspectives, it explains the relevant research hypotheses and presents the questions derived from them. It then presents the strategy for comparative analysis and explains the three underlying comparative approaches that focus on comparing realities, visions, and functionalities/relationships. Section *three* concludes with an overview of the subsequent chapters of the Comparative Analysis Report and gives an initial overview of contents and questions debated.

Lifelong Learning and Young Adults: European Contexts

YOUNG_ADULLLT reacts to the current global and European changes in lifelong learning policymaking. The paradigmatic shifts of the last decades have tremendously influenced the ways lifelong learning is perceived and provided. Moreover, recent economic and socio-cultural developments have given rise to new challenges that the project´s target groups – young adults – are facing in their struggle to give meaning to and experience

[2] Since there are different definitions and understandings of young adults across the European countries, we are in following referring to the age group of minimum 18 and maximum 29 year-olds, which bests accommodates to the variable definitions.

continuity in their life projects. Adding to this, the aspirations of the European Communities to secure sustainable economic growth, while at the same time maintaining social inclusion, mirror the local/regional economic and socio-cultural state of affairs. Thus, in order to understand the overall objectives of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, it is vital to have a short introspective look into the European policymaking debate as well as into the current challenges that young adults are exposed to.

Perspectives on Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning policies reflect ongoing socio-political and cultural changes in Europe and worldwide. As with many other policies, they are too influenced by the current dominant rationales that emphasize a particular view on the purposes and objectives of education. In this respect, the recent lifelong learning policies have been strongly shaped by the dominant view that education directly stimulates economic growth and national well-being. This has been particularly the case since the OECD´s report “Education and the Economy in a Changing Society” (OECD, 1989) was released. The report stressed that “national differences in economic performance could be attributed to educational effectiveness and a country´s learning capabilities” (Rubenson, 2018, p. 338). However, as Kjell Rubenson points out, “instead of exploring adult education and learning broadly the OECD came to primarily emphasize the economic aspect of learning” (ibid.). Thus, since then, the economic orientation of lifelong learning policies has largely determined their reasoning and implementation within the OECD countries.

In the European context, the same development could have been observed in the late 1990´s and at the beginning of the new millennium, within the so called “post-Maastricht period”. The European Commission´s White Paper “Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society” (EC, 1995) mirrored the global trends by emphasizing “the importance of lifelong learning in terms of its potential contribution to employability and a competitive European economy” (Lee et al., 2008, p. 453). Therefore, a strengthening of the economic orientation of policy-making as the main ideological narrative has been widespread. And indeed, there is a remarkable number of research studies based on portraying participation in adult learning as primarily job-related. Dämmrich et al. (2014), for example, “distinguish between four different types of adults learning activities in the following sections: employer-sponsored formal and non-formal adults learning, as well as formal and non-formal adult learning without employer support“ (Dämmrich et al., 2014, p. 30).

Even if this distinction contains categories of formal and non-formal adult learning without employer support, it nonetheless stresses the job-related nature of lifelong learning as its point of reference. Similarly, Vono de Vilhena et al. (2014) specify their interest "on learning related to the labour market" (ibid., p. 353), thus highlighting "the effective role of this type of adult learning in promoting improvements in individuals´ careers, especially when compared with non-formal activities" (ibid. p. 358). Such perspectives tend to further emphasize the functionalisation and vocationalisation of adult learning, thereby transforming it into an instrument of welfare politics. However, there are emerging voices critiquing this "narrow 'job-related' bias" (Rubenson, 2018, p. 342) and pleading for a more diversified and context-specific perspective, not linearly associated with employability.

YOUNG-ADULLLT is a case in point for research that has broadened the category of job-related adult learning and come up with a more comprehensive definition of lifelong learning, one that encompasses other dimensions of education. What we saw as important was to take into account the whole variety of lifelong learning strategies and activities, especially those which "can contribute to democratization and individual fulfilment" (Rubenson, 2018, p. 338), thereby fostering the individual life projects of young adults. Moreover, we have strived to make a strong case for young adults in vulnerable positions, who face manifold difficulties in their transition to adulthood. The main reason for this was that in current discourses they are still very often categorised as inactive populations, who are in need of additional education that would help them "to align their skills to the needs of the labour market" (OECD, 2014, p. 4). Further, when focusing on lifelong learning opportunities on a broader scale, we have tried not to establish a typology of education and training provisions or exhaustively define the various forms of lifelong learning policy-making, but rather to capture the myriad understandings of what counts as lifelong learning policy in the local conditions and settings in nine chosen European countries and their distinct Functional Regions.[3] The participant countries, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Scotland (UK), represent core European

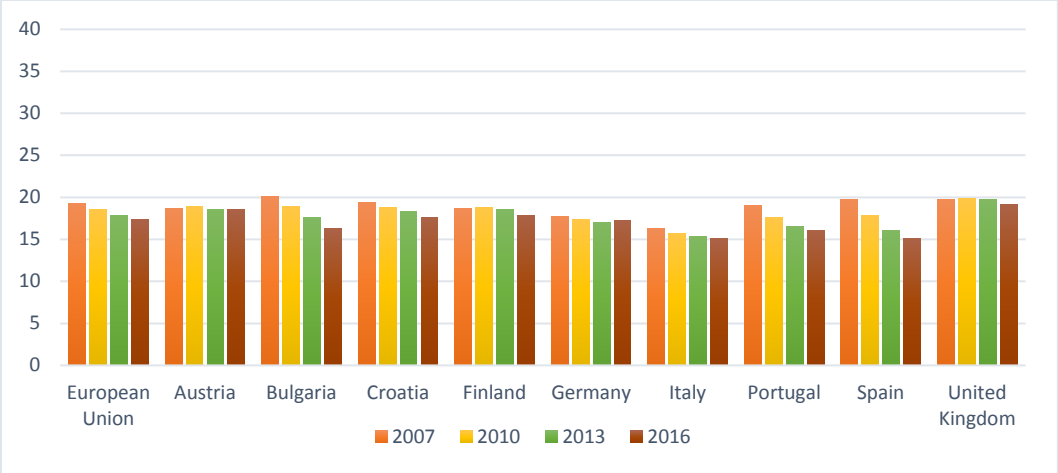
[3] We conceptualise 'Functional Region' (FR) "as a region organised by functional relations that are maximised within the region (maximisation of intra-regional flows) and minimised across its borders (minimisation of inter-regional flows or interactions) so that the principles of internal cohesiveness and external separation regarding the intensities of spatial flows or interactions are met" (Klapka, Halás & Tonev, 2013, p. 96). For more insights see Chapter 7, in this Report.

sites with their respective political, economic, socio-cultural, and demographic differences, whose comparisons could yield valuable knowledge about the ways policymaking functions and what kind of practices could be possibly transferred. Finally, this choice enabled us to overcome the narrow perspective on education as a welfare determinant and to look for those realities that influence social cohesion and sustainable economic growth, as well as the embeddedness of young adults´ life projects in the formulation and implementation of lifelong learning policies.

Young Adults in Europe

As remarked above, the focus on young adults plays a crucial role in European lifelong learning policy-making and there is much discussion about the processes that shape their transition from youth to adult life, such as the processes of de-standardisation or the so-called 'yo-yo transitions'. However, more information is needed about the actual state and trends that underlie and determine these processes. This means seeing young adults not as a mere social or analytical category or indicator, but as a group of young women and men with their individual life projects, which do not necessarily correspond with the expectations that policy implementers have for them. In addition, since the participating countries differ greatly in terms of education and training systems and labour markets, as well as the organisation of the social welfare system, their different realities have an effect on how the political frameworks are structured and consequently on the kind of policy-making that is carried out in each of these countries. Therefore, looking at a few selected indicators helps us to better understand and identify the similarities and differences regarding the education and training, labour market, and social welfare related to young adults. While the national indicators below are useful at a rather descriptive level and may shed light on the most pressing social issues facing young adults in Europe, they might gloss over important regional/local differences. For this reason, the project aimed at capturing these developments also at the level of 'functional regions', which will be further discussed in the subsequent chapters (see Chapters 3 and 7, in this Report).

To begin with, one trend is the overall decline of the young population in the observed European countries. When looking at the ratio of young people in the total population (see Graph 1), there was a stunning change over the last decade or so, especially in the South-European (Italy, Portugal, Spain) and Post-Socialist (Bulgaria, Croatia) EU member countries.

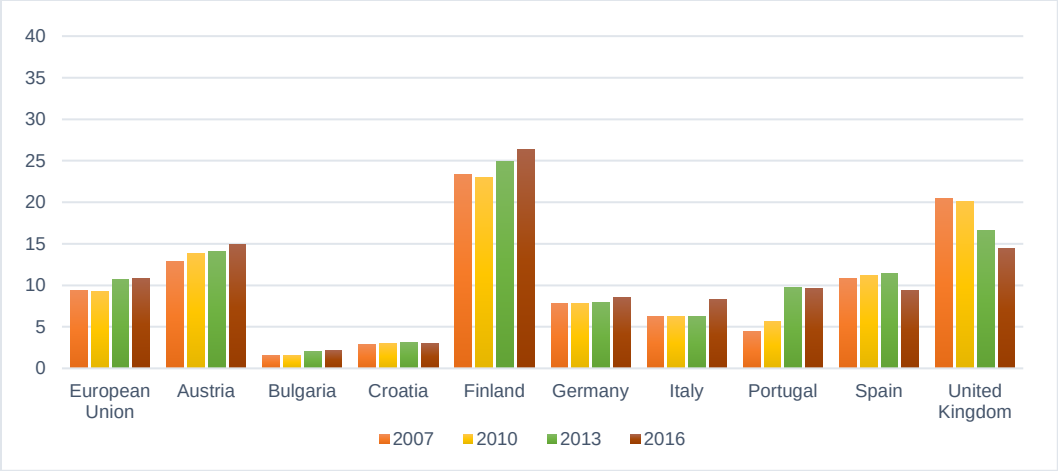


Graph 1. Ratio of young people in the total population on 1 January, % of population aged 15 to 29 years, Source: Own calculations based on the Eurostat statistics (Last update: 07.09.2018)

In these countries, the ratio of young people is showing signs of decline, especially considering Spain or Bulgaria, where the ratio of young people in the total population has declined by almost one quarter.

Adding to this, national governments' attempts to compensate for the ageing population are trying to raise levels of employability and participation of young people in the labour market to secure, among other things, national economic growth and pension benefits. Therefore, the question to ask is: what are the consequences of this trend for the implementation of lifelong learning policies and how do these policies reflect and react to the new circumstances? If the number of lifelong learning policies is continuously growing but targets a lesser number of young people, what disparities, redundancies and mismatches does this cause on the institutional as well as on the individual levels? How do the objectives, orientations and target groups of LLL policies change over time and how do they correspond with the life projects of young adults?

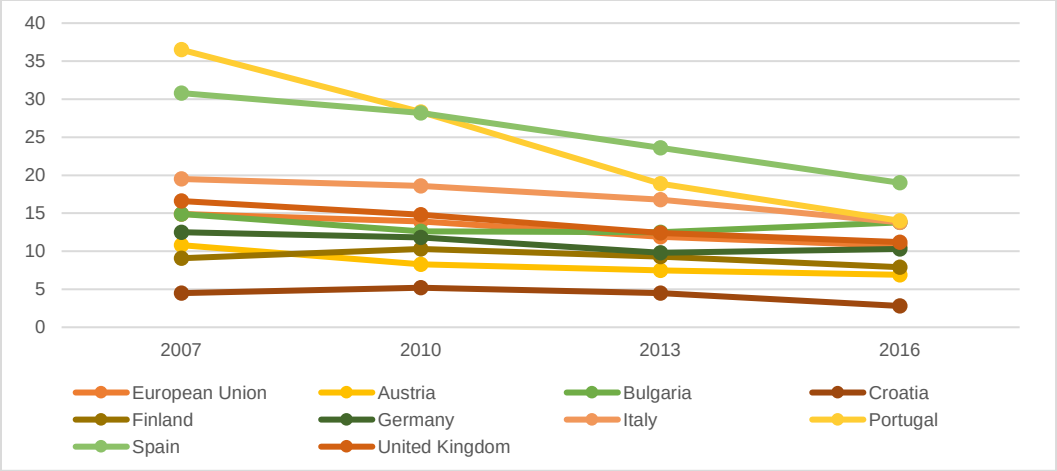
Another indicator portrays the adult participation in learning within the same period of time (see Graph 2). This indicator, along with the following three indicators debated below, is included in the EU Commission´s "Strategic framework on Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020)" (EC, 2009) and plays an important role in estimating the objectives and orientations of the lifelong learning policies.



Graph 2. Adult participation in learning, % of population aged 25 to 64 years, Source: Own calculations based on the Eurostat statistics (Last update: 01.08.2018)

Generally, it shows a rather steady rise of adult participation in learning. However, when taking a closer look, one may identify a decline in the last observed year in Croatia, Portugal, and Spain, and a continuous fall of this ratio over the last ten years in the United Kingdom. There are also remarkable differences among the European countries participating in the project and their Functional Regions, respectively. The population in Finland, for example, demonstrates an extraordinary interest in adult learning, when compared to other participating countries. The populations in Bulgaria and Croatia, on the other hand, participate much less in adult learning. However, what needs to be taken into account are the countries´ structural and institutional determinants that stimulate or reduce the participation in adult learning. In addition, the existing learning infrastructures and their capabilities vary strongly among the participating countries. This is why YOUNG_ADULLLT looks at these very concrete interfaces between the individual, institutional, and structural levels in each site, and the synergies and/or mismatches they create to stimulate social and economic prosperity.

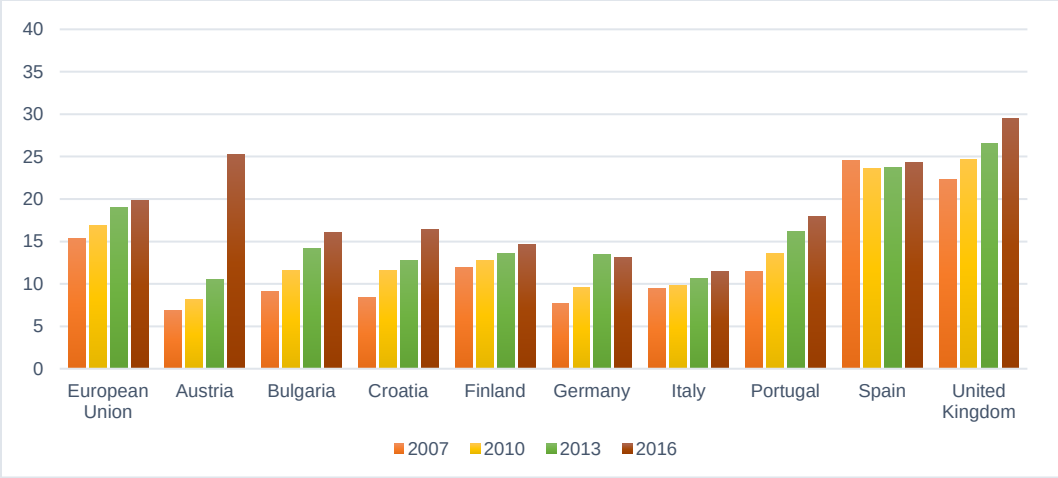
Narrowing the sight further on young adults, there are a few crucial indicators that give an account about their current learning activities. The most prevalent one features the ratio of early leavers from education and training, or the ratio of Early School Leavers (ESL). As the indicator demonstrates (see Graph 3), although this ratio declines in most of the participating countries since 2007, it nonetheless remains fairly stable at a fairly high level.



Graph 3. Early leavers from education and training, % of population aged 18 to 24 years, Source: Own calculations based on the Eurostat statistics (Last update: 06.06.2018)

On average, in 2016 over 11% of young adults in education or training have left their studies or training without completing. This situation has dramatically changed since 2007, especially in Spain and Portugal, leading to a decline by 10% in Portugal and by over 20% in Spain. Meanwhile, apart from these two countries, in the majority of the participating countries the ESL ratio continues changing much less dramatically, declining by less than 3% over the last ten years. This observation defies the substantial efforts of national governments as well as supranational agencies to prevent dropouts and early school leaving. Also, it raises questions about the compatibility of young adults´ life projects´ and the possibilities they have during their studying and/or training period. In other words, how do the implemented LLL policies resonate with young adults´ desires and expectations and what do the almost even ESL ratios tell about the promotion of lifelong learning?

Against this background, the next indicator on educational attainment (see Graph 4) illuminates the attempts to mark tertiary education as the leading learning perspective for young people. When looking at this trend in the participating countries, it could be seen that in the overwhelming majority of the countries, except for the last year in Germany and Spain, the ratio of young people in higher education is steadily growing. In Croatia and Germany the numbers have doubled over the last ten years. In Austria, they have become even four times higher.



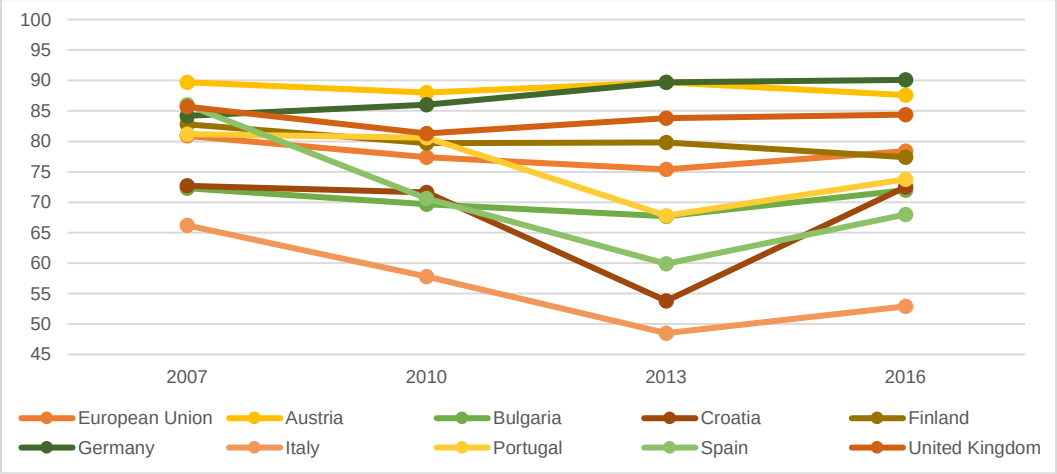
Graph 4. Young people by educational attainment level, % of population aged 15 to 29 years, tertiary education (levels 5-8), Source: Own calculations based on the Eurostat statistics (Last update: 01.08.2018)

When considering the general European context, the ratio has risen by one quarter. This tendency is at the same time accompanied by the attempt to provide stable employment opportunities, especially for recently graduated young people.

The next indicator encompasses this ratio (see Graph 5) and sheds light on the current challenges that the participating European countries face in the so called post-crisis period. In some countries, like Italy, Portugal, Spain and Croatia, the ratio of employed recent graduates has plummeted since 2007. Within these countries, young adults have faced huge difficulties in finding permanent employment. This impacts not only their personal planning, but also affects the implementation of lifelong learning policies. As a result, manifold intervening measures have been introduced as a response to the global economic changes, generally focusing the activation and responsibility of individuals. However, more attention needs to paid to the long-term effects that the unstable economic situation and socially oppressing conditions have had on young adults and their preferred and desired life projects.

In particular, when comparing the last two indicators, countries like Portugal and Croatia show developments that are remarkably similar. In these two countries, the ratio of young people in tertiary education and the ratio of employed recent graduates seem to complement each other, meaning that the growing ratio of young people attending tertiary education corresponds with the declining rates of employed recent graduates. Therefore,

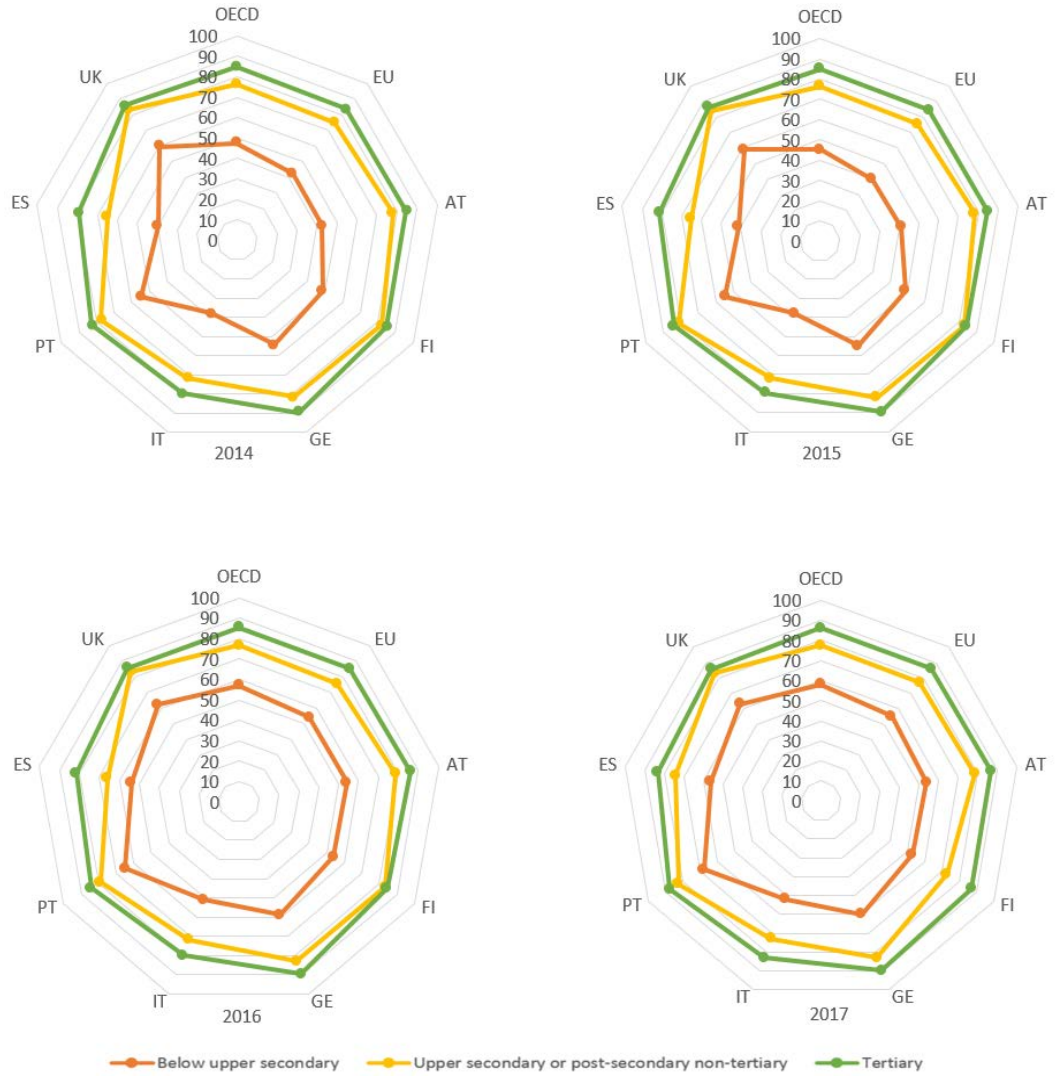
it could be asked, what role does tertiary education play in the implementation of lifelong learning policies and how does it transform the life perspectives of young adults?



Graph 5. Employment rates of recent graduates, % of total population aged 20 to 34 years, Source: Own calculations based on the Eurostat statistics (Last update: 01.08.2018)

Finally, broadening the scope to a larger part of the population (25 to 64 year-olds) and adding further levels of educational attainment, in particular the level below upper secondary education and the level of upper secondary or post-secondary, but not tertiary education, further comparisons may be made (see Graph 6). The graphs below draw on OECD data to show the development in seven EU member countries. In the period between 2014 and 2017, several developments have become visible. In all countries, tertiary education graduates have the highest employment rates, followed by upper secondary and lower secondary education graduates. However, although general developments remain similar in all participating countries, a few differences appear as well. The employment rates in the United Kingdom and Germany have shown just very slight changes over the time, whereas in Spain, Portugal and Italy they have been much more dynamic. When considering the employment rates of people with tertiary education, almost 90% of all graduates in the participating countries have found employment. Considering the employment rates of people with an upper secondary education, marked in yellow, this percentage has almost reached the level of the first indicator, and in some countries, like United Kingdom, Portugal and Finland, except for last year, it has even become identical. Looking, at last, at the employment rates of people with a below secondary education, their curve exhibits permanent growth during the whole observed

period. Here, especially Portugal and United Kingdom have continued to maintain high employment rates of this particular group.



Graph 6. Employment rates of 25-64 year-olds, by educational attainment, % of employed 25-64 year-olds among all 25-64 year-olds, period 2014-2017, Source: Own calculations based on the Education at a glance 2015, 2016, 2017, & 2018 surveys (OECD) Note: Bulgaria and Croatia are not OECD members - no data available

Among the three ratios included in the OECD indicators on employment rates, the ratios of people with a below secondary education and an upper secondary but not tertiary education demonstrate steady improvements, while the ratio of people with a tertiary education remains well balanced.

Since all these ratios, which together compose the main indicators within the EU and OECD countries, inform policy makers and policy implementers on the goals to be set and achieved, they have at the same time an immense influence on the way young adults design and follow their life projects. This emphasis on educational attainment level as related solely to employability frames employment as a central to life, notwithstanding the actual conditions in the labour markets at local level, thus creating more pressure for young adults to construct their life courses/life projects in order to enhance job opportunities. Moreover, such normalising discourses and job-related life expectations exclude the manifold possibilities of how young adults could be supported in creating continuity along their life projects.

Thus, in YOUNG_ADULLLT we agree with the general fact that “the great majority of our population must work to sustain their existence” (Townsend & Wilkinson, 2011, p. 1). However, we share and stress the need “to overcome the predominant and prevailing narrow focus on specific economic goals” (Feigl, 2017, p. 2) and opt instead for a more sensitive and context-specific assessment of three crucial components involved in the European lifelong learning policymaking – the young adults, the existing institutional arrangements and the local structural socio-economic settings. The intended and/or unintended effects and outcomes of the interactions between these three aspects have been at the centre of attention of the comparative research reported here. The next section presents the goals and adopted strategy for comparative analysis.

Comparative Analysis: Research Objectives and Strategy

Within the project´s thematic Work Packages (WPs), the researchers have inquired into distinct analytical fields and focused on their respective research objectives, be it the mapping and reviewing of the European policymaking landscape, analysing young adult´s social and living conditions, interviewing policy implementers and young people on their experiences and life projects, understanding the governance of the supply and demand of skills within our analytical units, or conducting in-depth analyses of regional/local case studies. The common ground for these very distinct activities was laid down and framed by the underlying overall research questions. The research activities in this Work Package (WP8) aimed at bringing these different data sets and methodologies to bear on comparative analyses. The next section briefly revisits their interconnections and explains their operationalisation in a comparative analysis strategy.

Objectives and Overall Research Questions

YOUNG_ADULLLT´s primary interest is to enable a comparative perspective of lifelong learning and inclusion in education and work in Europe, focusing on young adults in vulnerable positions. To reach this goal it has set a number of objectives outlined in the State-of-the-Art-Report (WP2). The research investigated:

(1) the relationship and complementarity of LLL policies in terms of orientations and objectives to their specific target groups;
(2) the perspectives of young adults on how policies succeed in tapping into and exploiting the hidden resources of young adults; as well as
(3) the LLL policies in their embedding and interaction in the regional economy, the labour market and individual life projects of young adults.

The idea behind the *first* objective was to review and map lifelong learning programmes and measures in the countries involved (WP3). The researches had to differentiate and identify the manifold forms and meanings of “lifelong learning” across the European continent and bring about a broader concept of “policy”, one that would capture the wide range of lifelong learning measures in their distinct local and regional contexts. Applying the analytical unit of Functional Regions (FRs), the next task was to analyse their construction of orientations, objectives and target groups and research into their compatibility with and embeddedness into the local governmental structures. Adding to this, interviewing the policy experts on the specific meanings of the target group “young adults” that was put forward by each policy, has yielded important new insights into the construction of this groups and elucidated the processes of relation and complementarity of LLL policies with young adults’ life projects (WPs 5 & 6).

In achieving the *second* objective, the project conducted both quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitatively analysing socio-economic data on the most significant dimensions of labour market, social and youth policies, and education and training programmes has provided a better understanding of differences and commonalities in living conditions of young adults in their regional and local settings (WP4). By means of qualitative research, which included direct interviewing of young adults in focus groups, the researchers have assessed young adults´ views, wishes and desires that together create their social expectations and underpin their life projects (WP5). Moreover, these

analyses have provided important information on how young adults assess LLL policies' support in creating continuity and meaningfulness in their lives.

The *third* set objective was reached via conducting regional/local case studies. Based on the previous selection of two distinct Functional Regions in each participating country, as well as on the choice of two thoroughly reviewed local cases (WP3), the task was to identify regional and local policymaking networks. These were then analysed according to all actors involved in designing, formulating and implementing LLL policies and according to the various levels and forms of cooperation between them. Here, particular attention was paid to the connections and intersections between the social and economic dimensions of LLL policymaking and to recognizing promising practice initiatives and programmes, as well as existing patterns of governance (WPs 6 &7).

The research objectives of this project had a twofold role: first, they have guaranteed the coherence and intelligibility of the research findings and, second, they have constructed and guided the subsequent comparative analyses of the project. However, since all of them have led the researchers to question specific problem fields, the next step in the project implementation was to decide in favour of the most relevant theoretical perspectives. These perspectives, in turn, have enlightened the problem fields and generated the project´s main questions. Thus, the project´s objectives have been grounded in a combination of conceptual-theoretical lenses of Life Course Research (LCR), Governance (GOV) and Cultural Political Economy (CPE), which have responded to the project´s individual (LCR), institutional (GOV) and structural (CPE) analytical levels. From each of the above mentioned perspectives it was then possible to raise specific hypotheses and question exact problems. As a result, three main research questions have been constructed to guide the research work in YOUNG_ADULLLT.

First, from the *Life Course Research* perspective, the most relevant question was

> "whether LLL policies have been 'colonised' by an instrumental perspective focused primarily on short-term labour market needs, undermining the contribution of more holistic and long-term educational objectives. Related to this, are LLL policies able to resonate with young peoples' personal desires, educational and professional aspirations, thus fitting their life projects, or are they rather perceived as social and economic impositions and pressure?" (Weiler et al., 2017, p. 118)

Second, from the *Governance* perspective, the most relevant research question asks

> "whether the long observed and well documented fragmentation and inefficiency of LLL policies are less direct and linear results of the lack of coordination of actors and policy sectors (the mismatch assumption), and more a result of the tensions and asynchronities across the different levels of policy-making, possibly being exacerbated by more recent global trends that are diversifying the regional and local levels." (ibid., p. 119)

Finally, from the *Cultural Political Economy* perspective, the most relevant research question was inquiring

> "whether LLL policy decisions are being more or less directly framed by the dominant economic priorities, rather than including a contextualised assessment of the needs and taking into account the highly diverse life projects and aspirations of young adults as well as tapping their individual resources." (ibid., p. 120)

Along these central questions, the theoretical perspectives have enabled the researchers to enlarge their scope of analysis by further questioning their respective research objects. The LCR perspective, for example, turns the attention to young adults´ life projects and their relationship to the lifelong learning policies they encounter. However, it also points to the spheres of their daily life and their immediate experiences, asking questions about professional choices in education and training, desired life courses and expected lifestyles, or abilities and possibilities to realise hidden potentials. The GOV perspective turns an eye on the actors and stakeholders involved in implementing the lifelong learning policies. It opens up the space for questioning the new and emerging patterns of coordinated policymaking, the active involvement of young adults in the preparation and implementation phases of the policymaking, or the responsibility of LLL policymaking for the creation of "wicked problems" of young adults, like unemployment, paradoxically, or discrimination. The CPE perspective addresses the economic and culturally conditioned nature of LLL policymaking. But it also exposes the policies in their contexts and discursive fragments and asks how they define their objectives, what problems they give rise to and what sort of problems they exclude, what narratives and meanings they produce and what differentiating effects they cause. Therefore, the three theoretical approaches have not only informed the overall research strategy, but also supported the partial analyses and activities.

Strategy for Comparative Analysis

In YOUNG_ADULLLT, the general strategy that operationalises the comparison of the preliminary findings includes three different comparative approaches, namely *comparing*

realities, comparing visions, and *comparing functionalities/relationships*. Through these specific perspectives it is possible to grasp the nature of interactions between the chosen individual, institutional and structural levels of analysis. This is done by juxtaposing the results and findings from the participating countries and their two selected research sites in each country. Juxtaposition further involves inductively searching for unifying concepts that pave the way to comparison proper. The data and preliminary findings are ordered side-by-side and confronted with each other in such a way that differences become visible, similar or contrasting structures, processes and/or constellations come into sharper relief, thus providing 'unifying concepts/hypotheses' for further analyses.

More specifically, ***comparing realities*** represents a rather descriptive approach to comparison, one that looks into the various levels of living conditions, regional and local skills ecologies as well as immediate challenges on site, such as unemployment, poverty, or social exclusion. Even more subtle aspects are taken into account, including the prevailing discursive meanings, narratives and stereotypes that shape the formation, implementation and reflection of LLL policy measures. Thus, extracting and comparing these realities within and across the particular findings enables the researchers to better understand the local and regional specificities that determine and shape the processes of policymaking. In addition, it helps to highlight the existing mismatches, redundancies, and fits as well as their potentials for policy transfer. If, for example, the comparison shows that particular institutional arrangements result in providing manifold possibilities for young adults to cooperate in the designing and implementation of LLL policies, the next step would be to reconstruct these arrangements and formulate recommendations for policy.

Comparing visions, in turn, refers to discussing and further differentiating the results and findings by contrasting the different views and visions that various actors, stakeholders, policy implementers, experts and young adults create and exchange. Drawing on the insights from CPE perspective that acknowledge the constructed nature of meanings and understandings, the crucial task is to deconstruct the processes of sense-making that traverse the identification of problem fields and subsequent allocation and application of responsive measures. The researchers, therefore, reflect on the selective interpretations of problems, explanations of their cause, and preferred solutions and enquire into how and to what extent these meanings and understandings (which involve both construals and constructions) are shared and/or diverge among the various groups of actors. To illustrate this, one central observation refers to young peoples´ life expectations, which

vary according to the shared socio-cultural codes and traditions, and the effects on young adults that the policy-makers expect to achieve by implementing particular lifelong learning measures rather than others. The task, then, is to show how these visions emerge and what synergetic or disruptive effects they potentially cause.

Finally, ***comparing functionalities/relationships*** entails more sophisticated – and theoretically oriented – analyses that aim at more contextualised comparisons by focusing on the specific constellations in the selected Functional Regions. At this stage of comparison, all three levels of analysis merge in a three-dimensional perspective. From now on the findings are analysed according to the relationships that occur to exist between the individuals, institutions and local/regional structures. For instance, we ask whether and to what extent construction of target groups is influenced by the specific structural components of a policy landscape or Functional Region. Or, how do the different institutional settings impact on the individual interactions among policy-makers, experts and young adults? Or also, how does the process of implementation (from policy decision to delivery and take-up) of a particular lifelong learning policy depend on immanent functionalities operating in local settings and contexts?

Overview of the Chapters

The *Comparative Analysis Report* presents the findings of the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project alongside the above mentioned comparative approaches. It is organised in ten chapters, which present and discuss the results in particular thematic fields.

Chapter 1 by *Marcelo Parreira do Amaral* and *Jozef Zelinka* presents the conceptual and methodological approach of the project and its three thematic, analytical, and theoretical choices. It also describes the developed methodological framework and discusses the nature of the multi-level mixed-method approach, as well as the possibilities, conditions and limits related to the comparison of various and often contradicting research objects.

Chapter 2 by *Xavier Rambla, Dejana Bouillet, Borislava Petkova* and *Alina Boutiuc-Kaiser* analyses to what extent lifelong learning policies contribute to tackling vulnerability among the target groups in four selected Functional Regions. More specifically, the authors enquire into how LLL policies construct young adult beneficiaries as members of specific target groups and explores the possible effects of these constructions on the young adults´ life courses.

Chapter 3 by *Lukas Alexander, Mathias Lipp, Nina Görgen, Rosario Scandurra, Ruggero Cefalo* and *Yuri Kazepov* explores the contextual living conditions of young adults across Europe and stresses their relevance in building different structures of opportunities and constraints, with which young people engage and actively form their dispositions and choices. It focuses on the countries participating in the research project and, more closely, on 18 selected Functional Regions within these countries. The chapter concludes with providing remarks and policy recommendations based on the comparative results.

Chapter 4 by *Siyka Kovacheva, Judith Jacovkis, Sonia Startari* and *Anna Siri* analyses young adults' participation in lifelong learning policymaking and takes young adults' narratives of their trajectories through the institutions and social structures as its starting point. It further looks at the impact of lifelong learning on young people's trajectories as seen by the young participants themselves and places the crosscutting influence of inequalities in terms of gender, class, ethnicity and specific degrees of 'vulnerability' into the centre of analysis. In doing so, it attempts to reveal the complex relationships between individual agency and the structures of opportunities and constraints that arise from the social time/place in which young people's lives unfold.

Chapter 5 by *Hans-Georg Kotthoff* and *Juan Felipe Carrillo Gáfaro* presents cross-national analyses and comparative perspectives on lifelong learning policies for young adults in Europe. It first outlines the comparative design of the policy mapping and review phase of the project. Second, it presents international trends of LLL policymaking in Europe based on cross-country comparisons. In its third part it discusses the main findings of the cross-country analyses with particular reference to tensions and challenges of LLL policy-making in Europe.

Marcelo Parreira do Amaral and *Jozef Zelinka* analyse in *Chapter 6* lifelong learning policies in the selected sites in Europe´s eighteen Functional Regions. In reference to the conceptual lenses of Cultural Political Economy and the methodological tools of Interpretive Policy Analysis, it makes a strong case for the objectives, orientations and target group constructions of LLL policies. The authors enquire especially into how these policies perceive problems of educational policy-making and how they devise solutions, enquiring, in particular, into their logics of intervention.

Chapter 7 by *Kevin Lowden, Valeria Pandolfini* and *Marcelo Parreira do Amaral* highlights the dynamic aspect of Functional Regions (FRs) as units of analysis, which help better

understand coordinated policy-making in lifelong learning and its embedding and interaction in the regional economy, the labour market and the individual life projects of young adults. The chapter introduces the project´s concept of Functional Regions, presents the selected research sites and discusses the value-added and the challenges related to the conceptualisation of functional rather than administrative aspects of regions.

Chapter 8 by *Queralt Capsada-Munsech* and *Oscar Valiente* compares regional skill formation systems across European Functional Regions. The authors explore the diverse social and economic realities within a country, which make it difficult to propose national policies that meet the needs of the diverse range of socioeconomic contexts. Based on interviews with key regional actors and a review of relevant grey literature at the national and regional level, they identify apprenticeship schemes and employability agendas as the main skill formation policies used in five selected European countries to improve youth's employability.

Chapter 9 by *Mauro Palumbo, Sebastiano Benasso* and *Marcelo Parreira do Amaral* draws on the results from regional/local case studies in 18 Functional Regions in each participating country to identify regional and local policy-making (networks) related to LLL, with particular attention to actors, dynamics, trends, (mis)matches and redundancies. Following this, the authors identify a set of indicators and parameters for coordinated policy-making involving the diverse partners and for creating synergic effects in terms of coherence/integration of specific training or educational programs with broader social interventions for so called 'vulnerable' groups.

And finally, *Chapter 10* by *Michele Schweisfurth, Marcelo Parreira do Amaral* and *Jozef Zelinka* concludes the insights yielded by the combination of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches of the project. The chapter brings young adults into the debate asking how LLL policies construct them, how they tackle the current socio-economic transformations and to what extent can they overcome vulnerability. Moreover, the authors look into the social conditions, the consequences (for) and the impact of policies on the life course of young adults outline some general conclusions that may inspire further research as well as policy recommendations.

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1. Comparing Lifelong Learning Policies for Young Adults: Conceptual and Methodological Approach

Marcelo Parreira do Amaral & Jozef Zelinka

Introduction

Studying the complex relationships between lifelong learning (LLL) policymaking on the one hand and young adults´ life courses on the other hand requires a carefully established research approach. This task becomes even more challenging in the light of the diverse European countries and their still more complex local and regional structures and institutions. One possible way of designing a research framework able to deal with these circumstances clearly and coherently is to adopt a multi-level or multi-layered approach. This approach recognises multiple levels and patterns of analysis and enables researchers to structure the workflow according to various perspectives. It was this multi-layered approach that the research consortium of YOUNG_ADULLLT adopted and applied in its attempts to better understand policies supporting young people in their life course.

This European research project focuses predominantly on the differences between the existing lifelong learning policies in terms of their objectives and orientations and questions their impact on young adults´ life courses, especially those young adults, who find themselves in vulnerable positions. What concerns the researchers primarily is the interaction between local institutional settings, education, labour markets, policymaking landscapes and informal initiatives that together nurture the processes of lifelong learning. It is by inquiring into the interplay of these components that the regional and local contexts of lifelong learning policymaking can be better assessed and understood. In this regard, the multi-layered approach covers the wide range of actors and levels involved and secures compatibility throughout the research.

In this respect, the following chapter will present the main conceptual and methodological design considerations of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, focusing, *first*, on the current debates and research problems that informed the study as well as the thematic, analytical and theoretical choices made. *Second*, it will explain the methodological framework and discuss the nature of the multi-level mixed-method approach, including its advantages,

risks and usage in the project. *Third*, it will try to outline the possibilities, conditions and limits related to the comparison of various and often contradicting research objects.

Conceptual Considerations: Three Entry Points

The three thematic entry points of the project are the lifelong learning policies, their target groups, and the different regional/local contexts. All of them could be seen from various theoretical perspectives that furnish the lens with which the research object – LLL policies that frame young adults' transitions from schooling to work – is focused on and conceptualised. This tripartite approach underscores the intertwining of LLL policies and young adults in different living conditions throughout European landscapes. The project analyses different types of LLL policies regarding their probably competing – and possibly contradicting – objectives for young adults. In addition, the intended and unintended impact of LLL policies on young adults on the regional/local European level is brought into view. Departing from this conceptualisation, the research object requires a research strategy that combines different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches in a comparative multi-level analysis (see next section on methodology). With regard to the *conceptualisation of the theoretical perspectives*, the different entry points referred to above represent different analytical dimensions (institutional, individual, structural) of the research object. YOUNG_ADULLLT adopted three different theoretical perspectives with the idea to adequately account for the various thematic and analytical dimensions of the research object.

While capturing the effectiveness of LLL policies in meeting young adults' needs in constructing a meaningful life course is best analysed by using *Life Course Research* (hereafter LCR), the coordination of different actions and agents partaking in these LLL policies – and probably influencing young adults with their decision-making processes – is best analysed with the help of *Governance* research (hereafter GOV). *Cultural Political Economy* (hereafter CPE) is best used to describe the different objectives of LLL policies and in particular the intended impact of LLL policies at national, regional, local levels. Therefore, the understanding of the research objectives is based upon a set of assumptions provided by LCR, GOV and CPE to guide the research questions and interpret the results accordingly.

The theoretical perspectives can be described as the lens guiding our focus regarding the research object. They can be viewed as a framework, allowing us to decide to whether

include or exclude specific information, subjects, material, phenomena etc. that come in focus. Therefore, the relevance of the theoretical perspectives is twofold: *First*, they organise thoughts and ideas for approaching the research object and, s*econd*, these perspectives contain assumptions viewed as pertinent to the current state of research in the respective research field. In other words, the perspectives guide the research by framing the individual, structural, and institutional levels respectively as well as by providing insights for data collection and interpretation. Therefore, defining and discussing the theoretical perspectives sharpens the common understanding of the research object itself and increases our awareness in dealing with the different research questions in the project.

The remainder of this section is divided in three parts that together explain how the theoretical perspectives contribute to the project and discuss the resulting implications for their empirical research. By distinguishing central dimensions within each perspective, they provide the focus for identifying national peculiarities and cross-national patterns that form the background for the interpretation of the collected data and therefore are an important part of the project's research results.

The first theoretical perspective, *Cultural Political Economy* (CPE) is an analytical approach in the tradition of critical political economy theory, which highlights the relevance of the cultural dimension in understanding and analysing the complexity of social formations such as policies (Jessop, 2010, 2016; Sum & Jessop, 2013). The main contribution of the CPE approach to studying LLL policy is made by taking seriously the importance of the mobilisation of policy ideas, and the perceptions of political actors, in the explanation of education policy dynamics and policy outcomes. This implies paying specific attention to the role of a particular set of policy actors (policy advisers, knowledge-brokers, think tanks and other stakeholders) and the mechanisms of persuasion and construction of meaning (for instance, soft power, discursive practices, etc.) that they use to influence the perceptions of other actors. According to Bob Jessop (2010), institutional transformations can be explained by the iterative interaction of material and semiotic factors through the evolutionary mechanisms of variation, selection and retention. Variation refers to the process by which dominant educational policy discourses or practices need to be revisited because of the emergence of new narratives that problematize educational processes by making reference to either external (e.g., economic crisis) or internal challenges (e.g., school drop outs). Selection implies the

identification of the most suitable interpretations of existing problems, as well as the most complementary policy solutions. These solutions tend to vary from place to place due their different political economy structures and the pre-eminence of particular ideological coalitions. Finally, retention requires the institutionalisation of these new policies through their inclusion into the regulatory frameworks and governance technologies, and its enactment through the re-interpretation, acceptance and/or resistance of implementers and practitioners at different levels. Policies in general and in particular education and training policies represent public interventions that aim at bringing about preferred visions of personal and social development (Walther, 2011; Heinz et al., 2009).

The second theoretical perspective, *Life Course Research* highlights the need to consider how individual lives (the biography) are embedded in institutional macro-social framings (the life course) such as labour market, welfare and education/training programmes, but also in framings such as social inequality. A life course perspective differs from other theoretical approaches that address the different life stages. For example, it could be contrasted to the concept of 'biography', which is based on the so called 'narrated life', i.e. the way individuals subjectively make meaning of their life trajectories and how they perceive their own experienced life stages. It could be further contrasted to the concept of 'life cycle', which grasps the individual life as a linearly developing process in normative age-related stages. In contrast to these concepts, the life course concept assumes that the individual life is not linearly developing, but rather fragmented. Moreover, it is not only the institutional contexts that play a major role in defining people´s life courses, but it is the young adults themselves who actively shape and form their lives, thereby pointing to how the uniformity of linearity neglects each individual´s choice as well as their interrelation with structure and agency (cf. Walther, 2006). Regarding this, YOUNG_ADULLLT aims to examine to what extent policies recognise the vastly diverse living conditions of young adults across Europe, their plurality in terms of youth cultures, life styles, young people's life projects, professional choices and trajectories in the labour market, in particular with reference to gender, migration and other dynamics (Nilsen et al., 2012). Thus, this theoretical perspective invites us to consider the young adults themselves, their diverse living conditions, their life projects as well as whether their perceptions and expectations are taken into account by policies.

The third theoretical perspective, *Governance*, calls attention to important shifts in perspective in the political field (Rhodes, 1997). These shifts in perspective refer to using

the term to conceptualise the coordination of social activities which traditionally referenced terms such as ‘steering’, ‘governing’, ‘control’ and ‘interdependence’. In the social sciences, governance indicates a significant shift in perspective, “namely from actor-centeredness to an emphasis on regulatory structures” (Schuppert, 2006, p. 374; own translation). Renate Mayntz refers to governance as comprising all forms in which public and private actors, separately or jointly, aim to produce common goods and services and solve collective problems. For her, “Governance means the sum of all concurrent forms of collective regulation of social issues: from the institutionalized self-regulation of the civil society, through the diverse forms of cooperation among state and private actors, up to the action of sovereign state agents.” (2004, p. 66; own translation). This perspective helps us to address issues of coordination of action among the different agents within the state, the economy, the labour market, civil society, and not least young people. In other words, governance offers us a conceptual tool to understand the interactions of different actors, at the different levels, and with different mandates, competences and with different degrees of leverage power at their disposal.

It is worth noting that all theoretical approaches have their own blind spots and reflect a selective view of reality and of social relationships. For this reason, the theoretical perspectives were chosen complementarily to shed light on selected aspects and processes and help to gather information on the three thematic entry points. This, however, should not conceal that they also may gloss over other important relationships that permeate lifelong learning among young adults; for example, the role played by social media and digitalisation, popular culture, changing social structures or new spiritual movements, to name just few of them. Their relevance in the project´s design is demonstrated by the attempt to provide knowledge that is both contextualised, thereby allowing for a better understanding of the questions dealt with at local and regional level, and that opens up opportunities to go beyond the unique circumstances and to identify sustainable solutions that can inform policy-making in other places. Thus, by adopting these theoretical lenses the primary goal was to enquire into the complicated and intertwined relations that accompany the processes of formulation and implementation of lifelong learning policies under concrete local and regional conditions. By means of comparison, YOUNG_ADULLLT aims at illuminating the potentials as well as the inherent challenges, thus providing reflexive tools and provoking further reflection.

Multilevel Comparative Analysis: Methodological Discussion

This section describes how the conceptual and theoretical perspectives of the research object were translated into a methodological perspective and research strategy. The design of the research aims at answering the research questions by using a set of combined methods and procedures for collecting and analysing quantitative as well as qualitative data.

In the following part, we describe the research strategy of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project as a multi-method and multi-level approach and explain the implications for the methodology and the analysis, including its implementation. The contextualisation of each object of research in global/national/regional/local cultural traditions and conceptions was taken into account in our international comparative research approach that aimed at assessing the possibilities and limitations of comparing different research sites within the European landscapes.

Research Design: Multi-level Comparative Analysis

The focus of the project YOUNG_ADULLLT brings to attention the interrelation of LLL policies and young adults in the different everyday realities across Europe. The project looks into different types of LLL policies analysing their potentially competing (and possibly ambivalent) orientations and objectives; it also asks questions as to their impacts – intended and unintended – on young adults by focusing on policy-making at regional/local level across Europe. By framing the research object in this manner, three aspects of the issue come to the fore: LLL policies, their target groups and the different regional/local contexts. Departing from such complex conceptualisation of the issues requires a research strategy that combines different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches in a comparative multi-level analysis. In terms of theoretical conceptualisation, the different entry points illustrated above represent different analytical dimensions of the research object – individual (young adults), institutional (lifelong learning policymaking), and structural (regional/local contexts). The figure below (see Figure 1) illustrates these different thematic entry points and relates them to the different analytical dimensions of the research object at hand. In terms of methodology, adequately taking into account the various dimensions of the research object implied discerning different analytical levels – individual, structural, and institutional – that in turn entails using different – qualitative and quantitative – methods to address the different research questions. For example, capturing the young adults' perception of underlying social expectations of LLL policies is

best achieved by means of qualitative methods such as biographical narrative interviewing.

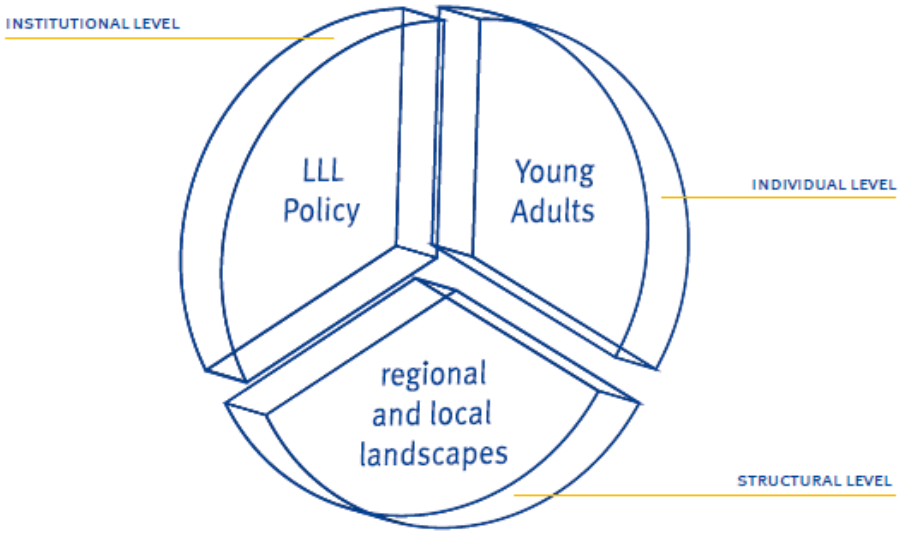

Figure 1. YOUNG_ADULLLT´s thematic entry points and analytical dimensions

Accounting for the diverse living conditions of young people in their specific regional/local living conditions is most adequately realised by means of quantitative data analyses.

Further, including this multi-level and multi-method approach into the research design of YOUNG_ADULLLT was realised as a three-phase process. As the next figure demonstrates (see Figure 2), each of the phases was additionally divided into work sections or work packages (WPs).

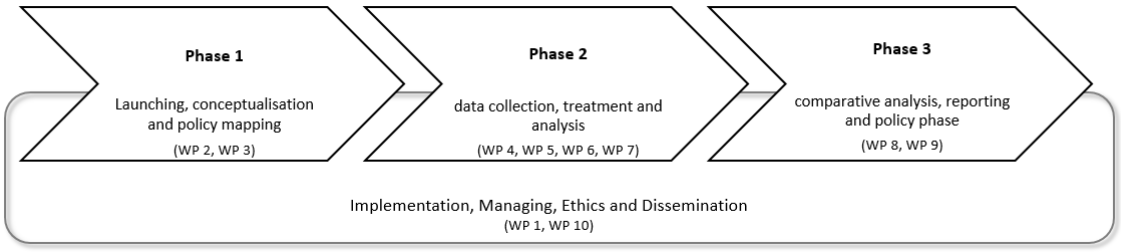

Figure 2. Phases of the research process in YOUNG_ADULLLT

All three phases were interrelated and complemented each other. In addition, they were coordinated and controlled in regard to their transparency and ethical responsibility. Thus, phases one to three incorporated the multi-level multi-method approach in a following way:

- The first *launching, conceptualisation and policy mapping phase* of the project declared the objectives and designed a common research framework, assuring its

compliance to ethical standards and codes of good conduct. In the next step, the mapping and analysing of the LLL policy fields on a regional, national and international level provided sets of indicators for the comparative analyses of diverging strategies of LLL policies.

- The second *data collection, treatment and analysis phase* comprised a quantitative analysis of young adults' living conditions, qualitative research with young adults and a comparative analysis of demand and supply of skills in conjunction with the labour market. These were followed by regional/local case studies, analysing and bringing together policies and policy-making including data and results from the previous empirical phase.
- The third *comparative analysis, reporting and policy phase* has drawn together the empirical results from the previous phases for a comparative cross-case and cross-national analyses as well as for preparing and implementing the Policy Roundtables in each participating country, in order to produce national and European briefing papers and disseminate the project's findings with a thorough communication and publication strategy.

These phases of the research process were implemented in a specific use of methods, data collection and their analysis. As the discussion on methods is central for the scope of the research object, the subsequent paragraphs discuss the applied mixed-methods approach in depth, followed by its implementation in YOUNG_ADULLLT.

Mixed-method: Development and Implementation

The development and implementation of a mixed-method approach reflects the efforts to establish an intelligible and coherent research framework. The following section describes the characteristics and advantages of the mixed-method approach and specifies its application to the research objectives and questions of YOUNG_ADULLLT.

Mixed methods combine different types of methods and different types of data (Brannen, 2005, p. 4) and are defined as a procedure of data collection and analysis by combining or 'mixing' quantitative as well as qualitative data in one single study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Johnson et al., 2007). The combination of different forms of data within one study is based on the assumption that singling out one method is not sufficient in answering the specific research questions. Hence, an

integration of methods is required when the research questions themselves are rather complex regarding the different kind of data needed in answering them (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 29). Using methods in combination, both quantitative and qualitative, means they complement mutually one another as combining their strengths leads to a more robust analysis.

Mixed methods offer a practical alternative and a logic of approach that encompasses the various strengths of qualitative and quantitative research methods for a 'needs-based' or 'problem solving' approach (cf. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). Promoted as an alternative 'third wave' or the 'third research movement' (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 3; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17) this approach goes beyond the traditional discussions of choosing research methods for designing and conducting research, as those mostly focus on the duality between the poles of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

To show the possibilities *and* advantages of methods combination for approaching the object of analyses, the premises behind the proposed shift – from an incompatibility to a compatibility of research methods – are briefly touched upon.[4] The debates follow a logic of research along a continuum with two mutually exclusive poles represented by the purist forms of positivism and constructivism. Both are viewed as the ideal form of research and endorse the incompatibility theses, premising that these qualitative and quantitative paradigms, and their specific methods, cannot or should not be mixed (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14). The differences between both approaches are in focus of these debates, not only recurrently represented as insurmountable for their realization in research, but also shaping opposing research cultures, preferring either thick description or hard generalizable data in their research (ibid; see also Morgan, 2007, pp. 53ff). As a result, specific methodologies are associated with one research tradition: the latter with quantitative research, the former with qualitative research.

[4] This is often described as "paradigm wars" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004, p. 17), these discussions draw on the incompatibility thesis between qualitative and quantitative approaches. The underlying assumption of incompatible differences between research methods is fundamental for understanding the reasoning behind mixed methods as an alternative 'third way' in elaborating and clarifying research results. For extensive description of the paradigm discussion and it methodological implications on mixed methods see Morgan (2007) and Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998, pp. 20-39).

However, as both approaches have strengths, mixing and combining their advantages for capturing phenomena in a more comprehensive way is the aim of the mixed-method approach to bridge the schism between qualitative and quantitative research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 15). Mixed methods are rooted in the tenets of pragmatism lead by the question how well the methodology works in solving given problems (ibid, p. 18). The focus on the more practical side of research emphasises the idea of finding workable solutions and the practical consequences that result out of approaching rather complex research questions with a combination of methods (ibid, p. 15ff). This 'practical enquiry' as an outcome of mixed-method research allows "to address the needs of research stakeholders and users" (Brannen, 2005, p. 4) in elucidating (mis)matches of policy strategies and their implementation on a regional/local level and providing examples of best practices.

Instead of focusing on the predominant position of *one* method – and therefore on a paradigm linked to a specific research culture – Glaser & Strauss emphasise the inevitable link between the methods *and* the researched questions: "Primacy depends only on the circumstances of research, on the interests and training of the researcher, and on the kinds of material he needs for his [sic] theory." (1967, p. 18). As a consequence from these rather complex interrelations of contrary paradigms, methods and research cultures, pragmatism offers a middle position between the opposing poles in combining confirmatory and explanatory questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 26) and, thus, a way beyond research dogmatism. It provides a practical research approach by mixing methods and focus on the "values and desired ends" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17) resulting out of research. This logic of approach stresses the importance of combining multiple approaches for answering research questions in a comprehensive manner (ibid.).

Departing from this mixed-method approach and its implementation in the different Work Packages of the project requires not only a design that encompasses different analytical levels (individual, structural, and institutional) and their respective preferred different methods. It also entails conceptualising them as multi-level. A multi-level approach allows us to recognise and account for "naturally occurring nested, or hierarchical, structures" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 156). In YOUNG_ADULLLT, the entry points on different levels are nested into another level, for instance, analysing processes of de-standardisation of young adults (micro level) is framed by socio-economic and political conditions (macro level). Therefore, from a methodological perspective, this multilevel

approach aims at accounting for the interplay of macro-structures, regional environments, local institutions and individual expectations, life plans, and informal competences of the addressees of the policies.

As a result, YOUNG_ADULLLT uses different methods on different levels to capture the complexity of the multidimensional approach with qualitative as well as quantitative data collection and analysis. It reveals the perspectives of different stakeholders and needs of young adults by means of interviewing with experts from policy, employment and training as well as young adults themselves (collecting qualitative data). Moreover, this data is embedded in context specific information on the macro- and micro-level of the participating countries, such as socio-economic conditions and specific living conditions of young adults (analysing secondary quantitative data). In this respect, YOUNG_ADULLLT adopted a qualitative-driven design, collecting qualitative and quantitative data complementarily.

The incorporation of the different methods in a complementary approach using data from the different methods results in a juxtaposition, which generates paired insights enhancing each other (Brannen, 2005, p. 12). In contrast, the often referred triangulation for mixing methods aims to validate or corroborate each other in terms of understanding the same phenomenon from different points of view (ibid). In contrast, in YOUNG_ADULLLT, the different entry points are used to understand different phenomena interwoven with our research object by approaching them from different points of view. In order to do so, the incorporation of the mixed methods on the different levels occur at two specific moments during the integration of the approach: at the experiential (methodological/analytical) stage and at the inferential stage (cf. Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 145f).

According to the multi-level mixed method approach, two stages of data integration are implemented in YOUNG_ADULLLT: *First*, an integration of different data as an exchanging process between the different sub-studies at the *experiential stage.* At this stage, complementary data that was collected and analysed separately are exchanged with the aim to ensure the different dimensions of the research object were captured. *Second*, the integration of results in the case studies and comparative analysis in sub-studies oriented by comparative case study methodology at the inferential stage. Here, the integration is implemented to show the interlinkages of the results yielded in the previous research steps. Comparative case studies aim at providing more abstract and generalisable explanations in a theory generating approach –by analysing policy patterns

in selected cases and by analysing the structural relationships, functional matching(s) and specific forms of embedding of LLL policies in regional contexts.

In sum, the multi-level mixed-method approach adopted in YOUNG_ADULLLT allowed us to explore the impact of LLL policies on young people in the participating countries, analysing the embedding of these policies in the local and regional frameworks of education, training and the labour markets with particular attention to actors and networks, dynamics, trends, (mis)matches and redundancies. Moreover, it has strengthened the ability to deal with research objects in various and oftentimes contradicting settings. For example, the perception of what counts as lifelong learning policy varies among the Functional Regions and cannot be assessed by only a single quantitative method. Applying a broader methodologically underpinned concept of LLL policy has, however, enabled the researchers to provide cross-case and cross-national comparative analyses and, based on this, to reconstruct the existing patterns of governance of European lifelong learning policymaking.

Possibilities, Conditions and Limits of Comparison

The research methods used in comparative research in education do not differ from those adopted for research in other areas of education and the social sciences. Comparativists, therefore, can draw from a vast array of well-established research approaches, both quantitative and qualitative. However, they have in turn not only to deal with the peculiar problems of methodology common to all educational and social science research, but also to cope with the challenges of ensuring propitious conditions to adequately understand and compare education across different units. This means that, to a large extent, proper methodological reflection is the one that allows for sound comparative analysis.

Three interrelated aspects will be dealt with in the sections below: *First*, a discussion on the meaning of and framework for comparison will be provided, which lays out the main parameters for the comparative design adopted. *Second*, the requirements of pursuing contextualised comparison are discussed. Here, in focus are the selected units of comparison in YOUNG_ADULLLT (LLL policies/Functional Regions), which aim at holistically analysing LLL policies as embedded in regional/local landscapes. Finally, *third*, with a view to responding to the requirements of the YOUNG-3 call as well as of the Grant Agreement, some critical considerations are offered as to the use and possibility of policy

transfer. The latter is directly related to the scope for generalisation and dissemination of YOUNG_ADULLLT's research outputs.

Contextualized Comparison[5]

A starting point for the comparative methodology is that differences exist in relation to policies, structures, experiences and outcomes, but that in an the EU context and in a more global context of policy borrowing and policy convergence, similarities will also be significant.

The broad framework for the comparison is a structure for comparative research proposed by Phillips and Schweisfurth's (2014) (see Figure 3 below). This has demanded that the researchers start by deliberating on the conceptualisation of the research questions, taking into consideration how the in-country findings can be made comparable (and when and why they cannot). For example, if we are considering 'vulnerable' youth, do these constitute the same groups in all research sites? The second phase has involved contextualisation of the policy issues against the 'local background'. This phase has entailed a narrative approach to both national and Functional Region contexts, considering the *structural, functional and cultural* equivalences emergent from the Work Packages. In the next phases, where possible, we have isolated differences in relation to key variables, including potentially different modes of governance or institutional practices, and have sought in the subsequent phase to develop hypotheses to explain these.

In the final stages, we have revisited the research questions in the light of these contextualised findings, offering both a case study/narrative approach and a variable-oriented approach. From this, in the final stage of the comparison we have further sought to develop a *reflexive tool for policy-makers* to assist them in considering the implications of the study for their own contexts. It was not a simple question of generalisable good practice, but about *good practice itself*, i.e., this was a question as to under which constraining or facilitating circumstances, and to which ends and for which groups of young adults, LLL policies succeed in supporting young adults in their life courses.

[5] We thank Michele Schweisfurth for her useful insights on which this section is based.

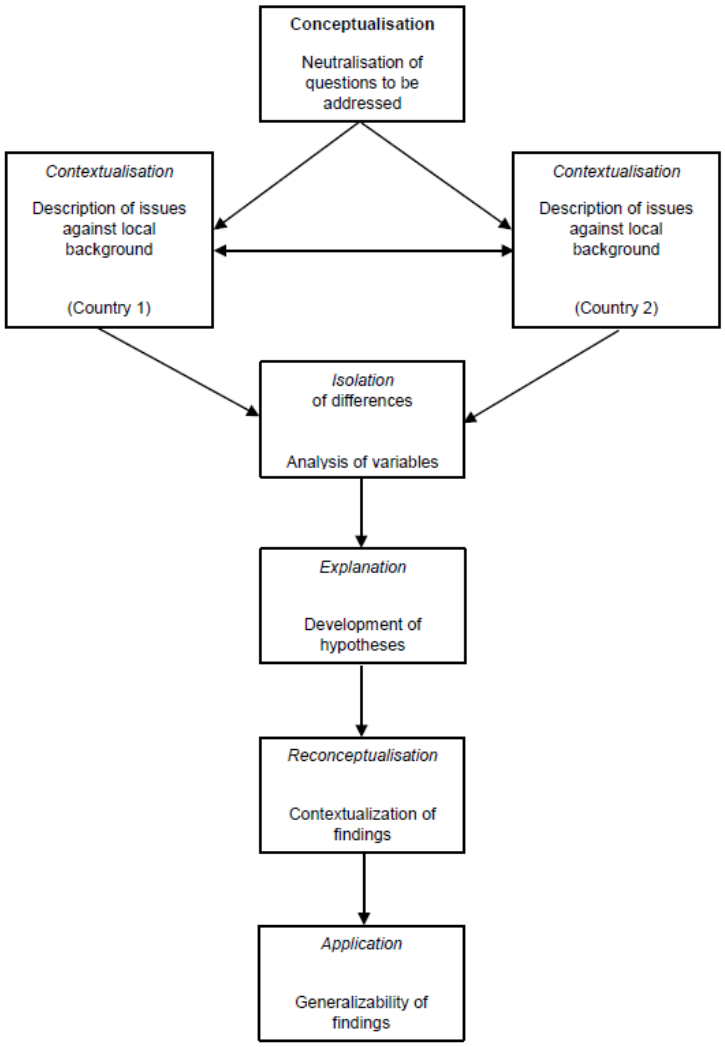

Figure 3. Structure for comparative inquiry, from Phillips and Schweisfurth's (2014, p. 119)

In the light of the questions addressed by the project, and the theoretical frameworks underpinning it, we have identified three comparative 'moves' requiring particular approaches. Traditional research oriented by methodological nationalism would focus the comparison of national units (usually states) in framing research on education and work. In YOUNG_ADULLLT we go beyond and suggest also comparing *realities*, *visions*, and *functionalities/relationships*, as experienced by participants, embedded in policies and the aspirations of policymakers at European, national and local levels, and reflected in structures whose function is to help to realise those visions and control experiences. Throughout the work, we have used both inductive and deductive approaches to ensure that we address the research questions from within the project aims, while respecting

context and keeping open minds to the nuances and unintended consequences it shapes. Given the rich theoretical framework of the study, where the comparison is also refracted through three different theoretical lenses, a number of intriguing questions have emerged. We have hypothesised, for example, that the different theoretical frameworks applied comparatively might reveal contradictions: governance and politically-conceived outcomes in some regions may appear positive, for example, but the lived experience of young people's life course may tell a very different story. The degree of articulation between national and Functional Region policies may or may not be a prerequisite for good practice. And it could be that the 'ideal types' often used to categorise countries – Finland, for example, as a 'universalistic' country and Italy as 'sub-protective' – may or may not stand up under close comparative scrutiny, particularly in the post-recession context.

Functional Regions as units for coordinated policy-making

In YOUNG_ADULLLT, the assumption that the implementation of lifelong learning (LLL) policies is best studied at the regional/local level invited us to take a more differentiated glance than the national level allows for. By adopting the concept of 'Functional Region' (FR), we aim at conceptually taking into account not only its administrative aspects, but also its functional dynamics, its interrelations with other units as well as the interaction of its different sectoral policies.

However, it is not simply a matter of choosing smaller units of analysis than the nation-state (for instance, NUTS 3 instead of NUTS 1), since all other sub-units could also provide a rather static picture of the different realities as they are equally based on administrative units. For this reason, research work has implied integrating data available, for instance, at one level, and other data sources/types in order to sharpen our understanding of the chosen research sites. Most Functional Regions selected in YOUNG_ADULLLT encompass more than one NUTS-3 level unit, yet are also substantially smaller than NUTS-1 and often even smaller than NUTS-2 level units. The pragmatic solution adopted is to complement NUTS-2 level quantitative data – for which availability is greater than for NUTS-3 level data – with qualitative data for the respective Functional Regions collected in the different Work Packages in the project. In the course of the project, and in particular in WP7 (cross-case and cross-national comparative analyses of regional/local case studies), empirical fieldwork has recurrently involved developing the necessary adequate

methodological and analytical steps to depict and analyse the different – sub-national – realities in terms of education and training, welfare, labour market, and policy-making in the Functional Regions studied.

The FR approach chosen in YOUNG_ADULLLT purports to overcome a common shortcoming of comparative research, in that it neither takes for granted the units of comparison nor 'their' contexts. To be more precise, this conceptualisation of contextualised comparison aims at accounting for the fact that both the units (for instance, the policies, the regional/local cases) and their contexts are culturally constructed rather than being 'natural' entities that just need to be compared to each other. Instead of researching a 'place' and describing and comparing a 'case', we have rather aimed at reconstructing LLL policies as "a deeply political process of cultural production engaged in and shaped by social actors in disparate locations who exert incongruent amounts of influence over the design, implementation, and evaluation of policy" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 2). By doing this, our intention was to arrive at different regional and local policy-making (networks) related to LLL, with particular attention to actors, dynamics, trends, mismatches and overlaps. By distinguishing regional/local types of networks and patterns of LLL policy-making, the analyses aimed at identifying the necessary parameters for better coordinated policy-making and more effective delivery of LLL policies in European countries and regions. This last point brings us to the third aspect related to the approach/logic of work adopted.

Contextualised comparison and policy transfer?[6]

As discussed above, in YOUNG_ADULLLT, over 180 LLL policies in 18 FRs have been chosen as regional/local case studies to analyse the LLL policies' embedding in and interaction with the regional economy, the labour market and individual life projects of young adults in order to identify best practices and patterns of coordinated policy-making at regional/local level that can potentially be useful in other contexts. This has raised questions as to the feasibility and desirability of transferring these practices and patterns of policy-making.

[6] We thank Hans-Georg Kotthoff for useful insights on which this section is based.

The process of borrowing and lending of policies can be summarised as ‘policy transfer’. Thus, the term focuses on the exchange process, the sender and the recipient of the policy as well as the structures that facilitate transfer. Seen from this perspective, “policy transfer would be”, as Jacobi puts is very succinctly, “the outcome of a purposeful adoption of policies that have succeeded in other places. In particular the notion of ‘policy learning’ is linked to such a framework, since it presupposes a more or less rationalist learning process” (Jacobi, 2012, p. 393). If, as we suggested above, LLL policies are highly context specific and are therefore best understood in their regional/local context, the notion of ‘policy transfer’ is at least questionable, since LLL policies have been devised for specific contexts and from this it follows that it is highly likely that LLL policies will have a very different impact, or even unintended effects, if they are ‘transferred’ into different settings.

In addition, and seen from the perspective of the policies’ recipients, rather than viewing local/regional policy-makers as helpless recipients of ‘successful’ LLL policies that have been developed for different contexts elsewhere, the YOUNG_ADULLLT project is based on the assumption of ‘active agency’ of local decision-makers, which is reflected in their ability to selectively borrow and adapt LLL policies according to their regional/ local needs and preferences. Finally, important stakeholders such as the young adults who are participating in a regional/local LLL policy programme may feel that they are losing significant and legitimate influence on LLL policies, if most ideas are actually transferred from external contexts and are not developed on a case-by-case basis in a local context.

If ‘policy transfer’ or even ‘policy learning’ is rather difficult in general and particularly in the area of LLL policies, what has YOUNG_ADULLLT attempted to achieve in terms of supporting intelligent decision-making on the regional/local level, which is one of the major aims of the project? YOUNG_ADULLLT project did not aim at identifying one-size-fits-all ‘best practices’ with regard to LLL policy-making that might be ‘transferred’ across Europe. Rather, through its focus on regional and local policy-making related to LLL at functional region level, the project aimed at detecting different patterns of policy-making. The interpretive analyses have focused, above all, on the orientations, objectives and target groups of the LLL policies in each FR and have tried to identify *specific* conditions, strategies and necessities for LLL policies to become effective. In addition, the comparative cross-case and cross-national analyses of mismatches, dysfunctionalities and redundancies aim at providing new *general* insights into the structural relationships, functional matchings and specific forms of embedding LLL policies in the regional

economy and labour markets. Thus, the focus of our analyses has been on identifying parameters for coordinated policy-making and more effective implementation of LLL policies rather than on identifying features of 'successful' LLL policies that can be transferred into different contexts. Also, the project has helped to identify 'good practice' initiatives and programmes in each local context. This 'local and contextualized good practices' are useful in developing a set of more general indicators and parameters – in the sense of a reflexive tool (instead of an 'intelligent' but technocratic one) – for policy-makers, which will help them improve coordinated LLL policy-making in their regional/local contexts.

Discussion and Conclusion

The well-elaborated conceptual and methodological choices have smoothed the work-flow in the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project and eased the communication and coordination among the research consortium. They have further enabled researchers to sharpen their focus on relevant aspects of the analyses and have helped to avoid doubling and redundant work. Importantly, beyond the intended effects, they have also indirectly stimulated further theoretical and methodological considerations. This section, therefore, discusses the implications regarding the theoretical choices and the methodological concepts of the project.

Since the theoretical perspectives do not remain constant over time, but continuously re-design their argumentation, the research done has a reciprocal influence on them, too. In this respect, the Cultural Political Economy perspective needs to be confronted with the new wave of nationalism and populism that the EU member countries and project´s participants (including Scotland) are facing in the light of the Brexit campaign and the recent refugee 'crisis'. These processes shape the way that lifelong learning is transformed in new political and intercultural settings and how its implementers and recipients perceive the problems on site and devise appropriate solutions. In terms of Life Course Research, one central observation that needs to be further debated is the extension and normalisation of vulnerable positions, especially against the background of rising levels of psychological disorders such as depression, burnout syndrome or borderline. Young adults are experiencing these circumstances earlier in their lives, which affects their planning and structuring of their life projects. Regarding the Governance perspective, it has to be questioned, how the processes of digitalisation influence the

possibilities to participate in local/regional and national settings and how they enable young people to actively co-operate in the production of lifelong learning policies.

Looking at the operationalisation of the multi-level mixed method approach it could be concluded that it has inspired researchers to explore new connections between lifelong learning and the more global institutional and structural contexts. It was, for example, intriguing to compare the modes of governance inside and outside the cities and/or Functional Regions and to ask what happens on other geographical sites. Also, inquiring into the tension between agency and structure has raised questions, as to what extent young adults really interiorise the values in their agency, and to what extent, on the other hand, this agency is shaped by the structures. Looking at the individual level, it was important to further debate the gender bias and to consider the differences between men and women in regard to their social roles and responsibilities, especially their impact on the decision-making in their life courses. All in all, adopting a mixed-method approach has proved the thesis that their complementarity strengthens the chances to unearth more context-specific knowledge.

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2. Do Lifelong Learning Policies Contribute To Tackling The Vulnerability of The Target Groups in EU Regions?

Xavier Rambla, Dejana Bouillet, Borislava Petkova & Alina Boutiuc-Kaiser

Introduction

This chapter of the YOUNG ADULLLT WP8 Report analyses to what extent lifelong learning policies construct young adult beneficiaries as members of specific target groups. The chapter also explores the possible effects of these constructions on the life courses of young adults. Starting with the perspective of Life Course Research (LCR), the chapter also draws on some ideas from Governance (GOV) and the Cultural Political Economy (CPE) in order to spell out some clues as to the institutional dimension of biographies.

The analysis focuses on four Functional Regions, namely: FR Bremen, FR Girona, FR Istria and FR Plovdiv. These cases are significant to the extent that, in each region, young adult interviewees narrated different stories of their circumstances. In Bremen, they experienced particular situations that lifelong learning programmes explicitly expected to tackle. In Girona, although the Youth Guarantee Scheme was formally addressed at all the youth, the beneficiaries shared previous experiences with early school leaving and unemployment. In Istria and Plovdiv a varied array of young interviewees — even those coming from middle-class families - felt they were somehow vulnerable. Remarkably, the subjects of these biographies used the services delivered by programmes that drew on different policy approaches in these four regions. Bremen experts relied on a general theory of change much more explicitly than their colleagues from the other three Functional Regions. In addition, the interfaces between bureaucracies and markets were also diverse in the four Functional Regions.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section outlines the theoretical lenses that guided the analysis. A second section portrays the main characteristics of the four Functional Regions as well as the significant variations in the construction of the target groups, the definition of the policy approaches, and the coordination between bureaucracies and markets in the four cases. Then, two further sections report on the findings of the interviews with young adults and experts. A final section discusses the findings in the frame of the theories presented in the first section.

Vulnerability and lifelong learning policies

In this chapter, the term 'vulnerability' indicates exposure to circumstances that may damage people's well-being. These circumstances are normally conceived as risks. Persons, functional regions and even whole countries become vulnerable when they experience a high risk of deterioration in (either individual or collective) autonomy, health, learning, security or other basic aspects. Certainly, many risks are inherent to life, as the very frailty of young children continuously reminds. However, natural hazards, environmental degradation, economic shocks, institutional failure, social divides and many other circumstances posit notable risks to most of us. These risks are transformed into stronger or milder loss of well-being depending on individuals' ability to cope with these threats as well as on the assistance they receive (UNDP, 2014, p. 15).

The academic and political traditions that have so far inspired policy-making in the European Union have associated lifelong learning with vulnerability to the new social risks that emerge from recent social transformations towards a post-industrial society (Taylor-Gooby, 2004). These changes affect societies inasmuch as most youth stay in education until their twenties, a growing share of the labour force does not work in full-time and long-term positions, and life expectancy increases to about 80 years. At the same time, the social norms that compel women to be the exclusive agents who take care of either children, the sick or the elderly have significantly eroded. These new risks have appeared at the same time as most people's life courses departed from a standard sequence of a dependent under-age stage, an independent mature period starting with the age of majority, and finally a short retirement. That was an extremely gendered pattern that labelled all male adults as bread-winners and all female adults as housewives. Currently, the thresholds that separate the three main ages are blurring because people's biography does not reproduce those roles. Women have become bread-winners too. Many people do not experience a linear sequence of education, employment and marriage. Additionally, the period of average retirement extends to about twenty years at least (Esping-Andersen, 2002). The very emergence of young adults as a social category posits a further illustration of this transformation. No longer is it plausible to equate legal maturity with school leaving age and entry into the labour market. A more complex array of pathways situates most people in hybrid positions. Simultaneously, variable institutional regimes of youth transitions have been observed across the European Union. The strand of Life Course Research (LCR) has convincingly argued that youth are active subjects who muddle

through these pathways in quite diverse ways. It has also found that biographies are not only subjective experiences but also webs of agency that individuals enact amidst structural constraints and enablers (Walther, 2006).

When social and educational policies acknowledged these new risks, states lost some of their previous capacities. In fact, people started to experience de-standardised life courses at the same time as deep socio-economic changes were debunking the Keynesian welfare state. Unemployment and child poverty came back on the social agenda at the same time as governments were incapable of raising internal demand by maintaining fiscal deficits and controlling currency exchanges (Esping-Andersen, 2002). These predicaments significantly recalibrated the range of available policies. While massive social benefits could hardly be expanded, new policies were designed to cater to children in poverty and train middle-age people with outdated professional skills. Notably, Governance studies (GOV) have scrutinized how public attention moved towards lifelong learning policies while governments became aware of such recalibration (Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

For policy experts, the endeavour to develop innovative instruments also coincided with the linguistic turn. While previously educational and social policies had consisted of quite stable institutional arrangements that simply changed with the population pyramid, in the second half of the twentieth century many policy actors attributed other meanings to these policies. Education policies became the driver for international competition, the leverage of economic growth and the new frontier of quasi-markets. Simultaneously, the script of social policy was deeply re-written in order to introduce individualisation and responsibility into the scope (Castel, 1995; Popkewitz, 1991). This movement opened room for new symbolic politics and new struggles on the social construction of the collective will. States and international organisations became active producers of sophisticate discourses that narrated their own activity within floating but influential discursive frames. These discourses expressed new patterns of strategic selectivity inasmuch as decision-makers had to bear variable costs depending on which of the available options they chose. For instance, the political cost of ‘active’ measures decreased in contrast with the political cost of fiscal redistribution. Similarly, when decision-makers sponsored a humanistic reading of lifelong learning, they faced deep predicaments in meeting statistical targets and complying with the rules of accountability. Thus, the reading that identified lifelong learning with short-term placement in jobs gained momentum. These discourses also conveyed new combinations of bureaucratic hierarchies, markets and quasi-markets as well as

policy networks and communities. The outcome was an innovative matrix of meta-governance, whose components were enacted in varying ways in different places. Cultural Political Economy (CPE) has provided insightful theoretical tools to analyse strategic selectivity and meta-governance (Jessop, 2007).

In sum, young adults are not exposed to vulnerability as a consequence of some intrinsic factors. Rather, vulnerability is an effect of at least three complex social changes. The first one is the de-standardisation of the life courses, as Life Course Research (LCR) has documented. The second change has to do with the emergence of new risks in the domain of educational and social policies, spelt out by the Governance studies (GOV). Finally, the third complex social change consists of the growing importance of discourses for political players. Their abilities to frame options as more or less costly and to justify different modes of governance are now strategic power resources. Analysts of the Cultural Political Economy (CPE) provide very relevant insights in this vein.

How do lifelong learning policies cope with vulnerability in four functional regions?

This chapter analyses how lifelong learning policies cope with the vulnerability of young adults in FR Bremen (Germany), FR Girona (Spain), FR Istria (Croatia), and FR Plovdiv (Bulgaria). Certainly, it would be interesting to explore these questions in the eighteen regions where YOUNG ADULLLT has conducted fieldwork. However, this plan of analysis is not possible because a multi-dimensional comparative analysis would not be feasible if each theme is so wide in scope. Four regions configure a significant sample that a small team of analysts can manage.

The sample was constructed in order to underpin conclusions on similar patterns that were distinguished in diverse settings. The following list summarises the main contextual differences between the four regions:

- According to Scandurra et al (2017), the four Functional Regions illustrate variable levels of educational attainment and labour market insertion. In FR Bremen, access to the labour market and educational level are higher. Compared to the other regions sampled by YOUNG ADULLLT, in FR Girona (NUTS 2: Catalonia) and FR Istria (NUTS 2: Jadranska Hrvatska), the educational level is average but access to the labour market is much weaker in FR Istria. Finally, in FR Plovdiv (NUTS 2: Yuzhen Tsentralen) both the educational level and access to the labour market are low.

- While industry is an important economic sector in FR Bremen, FR Girona and FR Plovdiv, hospitality is particularly significant in FR Girona and FR Istria.
- Obviously, political traditions differ. Germany has been a democratic country since the late forties. Spain underwent a democratic transition in the seventies. Bulgaria and Croatia became democratic in the nineties.

	Target groups	**Policy approaches**	**Bureaucracies and Networks**
FR Bremen	Tailored programmes according to the needs of young adults in the region	The rationale consists of underpinning the flow of students, apprentices and job seekers.	Strong network of corporations and local authorities
FR Girona	YGS funds general vocational training that is implicitly targeted to low-skilled youth	Narrow vocational training since 1980s. Incipient, weak signs of wider approach	Informal networks among street-level professionals
FR Istria	New YGS programmes are expected to cater to the needs of all youth	YGS aims at delivering guidance and vocational training to wide sectors	NGOs complain of insensitive bureaucracy
FR Plovdiv	New YGS programmes distinguish job search from entrepreneurship		Networks were hardly mentioned in the interviews

Table 1. Target groups, policy approaches and meta-governance in four FRs

Table 1 maps the main features of lifelong learning policies in the four Functional Regions. A first theme is a comparative analysis of targeting in the four FRs. It is relevant to inquire whether policies conceive addressees in terms of the new social risks that shape vulnerability nowadays. The table shows that the array of groups is not the same, but policies are not fully sensitive to the complexity of life courses in contemporary societies. In addition, the other two criteria for comparison are policy approaches and the articulation of bureaucracies with network governance. In FR Bremen, lifelong learning policies follow an encompassing rationale, but this feature is much weaker in the other three FRs. Governance arrangements use both modes in FR Bremen, but the predominance of bureaucracy overwhelms networks in the other three regions. With a caution, it is interesting to observe a few intermediate characteristics in FR Girona, but this point will qualified in the analysis below. The table also captures a general finding of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project. Kotthoff et al (2017) report that local and regional authorities

are currently running lifelong learning policies everywhere, in spite of multi-dimensional disparities between regions and variable patterns of governance. It is quite intriguing to explore how these policies are implemented in such heterogeneous contexts as the four selected regions. Table 1 selects a few regions where these policies have been launched in order to investigate some institutional variations. Notably, despite sheer differences with regard to the policy approach, the definition of target groups and the use of bureaucracy indicate important commonalities.

Whose vulnerability do lifelong learning policies address?

This section explores the modulation of vulnerability depending on the variable definitions of target groups. Generally, lifelong learning policies cater to very specific target groups in Bremen but to a more heterogeneous group of youth in Girona, Istria and Plovdiv.

FR Bremen

In FR Bremen, YOUNG_ADULLLT interviewees participated either in a vocational training programme (*Werkschule*), or in other programmes with a stronger component of career guidance (*Bleib Dran, Jugend Stärken,* and other independent providers). The vocational training programme emulates how schools work. Students take courses two days each week and then do some practical training in the school workshop three days each week. While one guidance programme (*Bleib Dran*) targets apprentices who are at risk of dropping out, the other ones (*Jugend Stärken* and independent providers) are open to any youth who are sent by the Job Centre or are supported by some neighbourhood offices for support to overcome problems with apprenticeship applications, legal and financial matters or other issues (Verlage et al., 2018).

Most students of the *Werkschule* have received a *Lernbenachteiligung* diagnosis that certifies their ‘disadvantages in terms of learning’ – although the label is an umbrella concept that roughly indicates any kind of disadvantage. In *Bleib Dran,* at-risk apprentices are uncomfortable with their placement for a number of reasons, namely: lack of accommodation, high travel costs from home to the company, unsuitable time schedule, frustrated preferences for a part-time apprenticeship, and pregnancy. Pregnancy is a poignant problem to the extent that young mothers seldom find a place to follow their apprenticeship. In regards to *Jugend Stärken*, beneficiaries come from families with a low socio-economic status and suffer from an array of deprivations. In addition, the share of them who struggle with psychological problems has recently increased dramatically up to

almost half the group. That is why the Jobcenter and the Federal Employment Agency currently employ psychologists and social workers in all their financially supported policies. Most of the young adults receive the minimum welfare support (which is normally labelled Hartz IV).

In the conducted interviews, young adults endeavoured to define their life projects. Although some paid close attention to their parents' advice, particularly if financial dependence was the case, many had developed an autonomous project that drove their strategies with regard to training. For example, interviewee Y_GER_B_1 portrayed himself as a hard-working boy who was able to cope with school and the labour market because he did not like to be idle: in his words, "one has to do something, otherwise a rolling stone gathers no moss". Other examples of autonomous planning were centred on future employment:

> As soon as I finish my apprenticeship I go to [city] for six months to do a certified course as jewellery and stone setter, this is a further training and that is the person who fixes the stones in the rings and necklaces, so to say. This is a separate profession and it is quite good and there you earn a bit more money as a goldsmith (Y_GER_B_1).
>
> Now I would like to study in the field of mechanical engineering, in any case in the technical field, I applied at the university in [city] and in the [city]. In the [city] I would like to study at the university Mechanical engineering, development and design (Y_GER_B_4).

A handful of the respondents linked these prospects with completing some formal education, as they were still struggling with psychological problems caused mainly by drug consumption, consequences of bullying and loss of children. On the other hand, female young adults were more explicit about family plans. One of them viewed entrepreneurship as the best option in order for their children to "have a really beautiful childhood, which I did not have" (Y_GER_B_7).

In contrast, the life course of the interviewees who received support from *Jugend Stärken* and the independent providers departed quite significantly from the standard patterns of transition from school to work. These young adults dreamt of stable jobs and relied on the potential of apprenticeships, but were hesitant on how much their "future" would be "good" (Y_GER_B_3).

FR Girona

In FR Girona, YOUNG_ADULLLT researchers interviewed the beneficiaries and the professionals of two programmes that delivered vocational training to low-skilled youth. Both of these initiatives delivered some guidance as well as specific courses including short traineeships. The very design of the policies entailed that the youth suffered from the problems that are normally associated with low skills in Spain, namely: they had left school without any academic credential, faced unemployment and could not afford a dwelling (Rambla et al, 2018).

The young adult interviewees presented their own life projects quite spontaneously. Almost all of them mentioned this theme when they depicted a self- portrait as a reaction to the open introductory comments of the schedule, which in fact invited them to talk about their experiences. For them, life projects mostly had to do with education, work, family, housing and settling in the country.

A number of these youth elaborated on their priorities and strategies. For instance, one of them wished to become a software developer, another one aimed at promoting himself as a car seller, and a third one expected to open a restaurant. Interestingly, these respondents had high expectations of social mobility. In the following excerpts, a male young person outlines a line of job promotion while a female young person foresees herself as the owner of a restaurant.

> I will work to save and then get a flat or a detached house. I will keep looking for a job. The more you are in a firm the more they increase your wage. That's what they told me. You can improve (Y_SP_G_9)

> In ten years' time…. I want to find a partner. If I complete my current training, I want to start a business. I want to open a multicultural restaurant. I wish. Let's see if I can achieve it (Y_SP_G_11)

Other interviewees not only sketched ideas about their life projects. Recent experiences of early school leaving, inconsistency between migration status and academic prospects and motherhood were the focus of their self-portraits. They were thinking about their future but did not have a plan yet. Thus, a male young adult was frustrated because his previous education in Senegal had not been recognised. This aspect of his life had convinced him that destiny eventually leads the course of life. A young mother wanted to associate her interest in sewing with a possible professional vocation.

> [How do you see yourself in ten years' time? Will you be here or will you be in Senegal?] It is hard to know how life comes. Nobody knows his destiny. I may say I will stay here but destiny is what comes. It depends on your situation (Y_SP_G_7)

> [What do you want to do when you finish your current training?] Sewing. I love sewing at home. But I don't know. Now I am looking for a job. Afterwards we will see (Y_SP_G_12)

FR Istria

In FR Istria, YOUNG_ADULLLT interviewees participated in an open university, in a project for improving the IT skills of youth, and in a vocational training programme. It is hard to describe the target groups of these policies in full detail, since all of them assume that the addressees form a group defined by very general and vague criteria. Thus, the official rhetoric eventually assumes that all the youth are potential beneficiaries of the programmes (Bouillet et al, 2018).

Experts were quite concerned with surveying the main problems. Services and information are so scarce that they cannot make well-grounded judgements on priorities, targets, and expected results. In addition, when dealing with this kind of needs analysis, an array of expert interviewees who were based at different institutions formulated another general problem. Since the divides between Roma and non-Roma population affect many aspects of social life, it is not surprising that these very divides complicate the interpretation of the available very weak pieces of labour market intelligence.

> We took into consideration the fact that we have to investigate what vulnerable youth groups are and to encourage their involvement with society. The problem is that those young people don't gather, they are in the Roma People Council of Pula and the Roma People Council of the Istria FR, they are followers of the older, their involvement doesn't get noticed (Local authority, Istria).
>
> When I wanted to include Romani people in the education of adults, a colleague from CES found all of them who were in their records and said they didn't have adequate education. From those say 50 people, 10 of them came, from those 10, 5 had already been here, and from those 5, 2 you could not keep in school in any way. The society doesn't understand that it needs to cooperate, work. The prevailing mentality here is 'Better 100 days in shade, than one at work' (advisor at Open Public University, Istria).

While talking about their plans, young adults highlighted their will to find a job and have a family in the future. Most of the young adults were negative about the nepotism in the labour market. All of them said that being a part of a political party would help a person to get a job.

> I could stay and work there, but I didn't want to be in the black economy (Y_I_F_1).
>
> There was this one job, after first testing they told me that there are 99% chances that I will get a job if I pass one exam in Rijeka. So I`ve had 3 days to study, and I went to Rijeka. I passed the exam and went to the interview with other two

> candidates. At the end, they took one candidate that wasn't even at the list of people who passed an exam. I was feeling angry, nervous, disappointed… (Y_I_F_2).

One interviewee was a 28 year old female who had finished secondary school of economics. She was an only child, and lived with both of her parents. She was long-term unemployed. She had epilepsy, diagnosed when she was in the 4th grade of elementary school. She believed she had a supportive family. Even though she considered herself as hard worker and fast in doing given tasks on a job, she had been unable to find a job for two years. Because of that, she was quite negative about labour market situation. She interpreted that employers rejected her because she did not have a driving license to drive from one place to another (Y_I_F_3).

Almost all of the interviewed young adults pointed out supportive family environments as an important factor in the construction of their life stories. Most of the interviewed young adults said that they were dissatisfied with their life at that moment. That statement was connected with their inability to find a job. The young adults from FR Istria who had not yet finished their education, and still had not entered the labour market, expressed a more positive and affirmative mood. They all expected to find a job in their profession.

> My parents give me everything I need. They are always here for me. I have good parents. The only flaw in that is that I never realized I should take care of myself to get what I want. I knew that in theory, but not in practice (Y_I_F_7).
>
> I have a great fear. In September I am planning to graduate and I am afraid of what is waiting me after (Y_I_F_4).

FR Plovdiv

In FR Plovdiv, YOUNG_ADULLLT interviewees participated in higher education and vocational training initiatives. Some of them were taking a traineeship at the end of their Bachelor's or their Master's degrees. The Youth Guarantee Scheme provided training and guidance mostly to those in a NEET situation. Another programme aimed at improving the skills and the income of the Roma population by helping them to become independent farmers (Kovacheva et al, 2018). The Youth Guarantee is a specific programme that treats young people as having insufficient skills, education and motivation. The construction of the target group and the skill requirements of the young people eligible for the project depends on the judgement of the participating companies. They rely on what they need to be able to develop their own business through training and subsequent recruitment of young people. It is noticed that young people who have communication skills and good

performance skills are a priority group in the selection by the Labour Office. According to an expert, young people

> gain confidence when participating in the project, especially when they work on what they want and what they have learned (E_BG_P_1)

According to the view of professionals, through the experience gained, participants allegedly became more competitive in the labour market and thus lifted their social status. However, some beneficiaries struggled with the requirements of the programme because they lacked a close family support.

> There are young people whose grandparents lead them to register because their parents are abroad, for example. And they lead them here to get them to work (E_BG_P_1)

Experts saw the program as a means of overcoming discrimination and inequalities in the region through the opportunity for everyone to reach a job. In their view, this was achieved with the help of case managers, which help the youth to contact employers. In addition, mediators worked hard to overcome the rejection of young people from different social groups. However, low wages and weak incentives also discouraged many beneficiaries (E_BG_P_1).

The participants of the Youth Entrepreneurship programme also answered the interviews. In this case, professionals choose the candidates with the best skills to become entrepreneurs. Participants were mostly younger youths and those who had business ideas and desire to realize them. The main view associated this programme with achieving equality.

> Between people from different ethnic groups, people from different neighbourhoods, people from different cities (...). There is generally no distinction between gender, religion and social status. Everyone is welcome to apply (E_BG_P_7)

The expected effects of involving young people in the initiative lay in the acquisition of different skills that helped them in future professional and personal development. In addition to professional experience, young people also received social and life experience (E_BG_P_6).

In fact, young peoples´ life projects met an adverse labour market and unresponsive training institutions. Those from more privileged backgrounds often accumulated various forms of training while searching for adequate job opportunities. Most vulnerable in their learning trajectories were the young Roma and other ethnic minority groups who suffered

from various disadvantages from early childhood such as poverty, school dropout and early parenthood. However, they were also discriminated against in the labour market. Individualized and flexible approaches to the training of such groups were rare, as was the consideration of the personal needs of all young people in the implementation of the training programs.

Young people described their life projects in two directions: professional and personal development. Four young people (Y_BG_P_4, Y_BG_P_9, Y_BG_P_11 and Y_BG_P_12) had a clear career strategy with a more or less fixed plan. The other eight young people did not have a clear plan and said they would rely on chance or help from friends and parents in finding a job. Eleven of the young people intended to work and develop in Bulgaria, but Y_BG_P_2 planned to leave the country and look for work abroad. He was firmly convinced of his professional qualities. Regarding personal development plans, all young people emphasized that they would like to have a family with children in the near future. One already had two children. But their expectations were not very high:

> Like any normal person, I want to build a family, but I just do not know (...) whether I will handle the payment I have to raise a child. This is something that actually stops me from thinking about these things (Y_BG_P_2)

It was interesting that most young people presented themselves as autonomous actors despite living in their parents' homes, and that, in most cases, they were financially dependent on their parents. Most young people tried to conform with the 'normal' paths through the educational system. It was only one man from ethnic minority who dropped out of school after finishing primary school and enrolled back in the educational system to receive secondary education at the age of 29. Reflecting on his choice to leave school, he blamed himself (his wish to buy a car) and not 'the circumstances' – his choice was not to stay alone trying to study while his parents were working in Greece:

> I left the school because there was a lot of work there (in Greece), people were earning good money, so I left the school. And now I study in part-time... I want to have a secondary (education) because that is good, if I want to get work elsewhere. It is now that they all want secondary education everywhere... So, I tell my children what we learn is important and it's good to ... go to school (Y_BG_P_11)

Our data display two new trends in the working careers of young people in Plovdiv. First, many started working while still at school or university and in jobs completely different than the speciality for which they were studying. This is a radical break from the communist past and their parents' experiences. Second, they faced high job insecurity working

informally, without labour contracts, and quickly switching from one job to the other. This is again a significant change since communism when 'informal' work was almost impossible as the state controlled the 'right and obligation' to work and job mobility was strongly sanctioned as 'negative job turnover'. Many had internalized this stance of negative evaluation of having a 'fragmented career' and felt uneasy to show the numerous short-term jobs in their CVs.

> Now I am a little bit ashamed to submit my CV because it has been torn, torn, torn with these (LLL) programs ... (...) I did not imagine my career like this or at least I did not want it. It's like a history, I cannot hide it (Y_BG_P_5)

As Table 1 suggests, lifelong learning policies address quite diverse target groups across countries, but policies add some connotations to these groups. Thus, in Bremen the programmes define the beneficiaries according to their probability to complete an apprenticeship. Young adults widely share this type of classification. In contrast, the official definition of target groups entails some implicit assumptions in Girona, Istria and Plovdiv. Although the official approach draws on the universalistic tenets of the Youth Guarantee Scheme, in Girona lifelong learning policies are ultimately delivered to the youth who are weaker in terms of their previous academic performance. In Istria and Plovdiv a very general concept of youth outlines the target groups. In these three cases, the interviewees intermingled references to the official target groups with references to either migration or ethnic classifications.

How do lifelong learning policies face vulnerability on site?

This section explores the rationale of lifelong learning policies in Bremen, Girona, Istria and Plovdiv. Experts reflect on the underlying expectations about the outcomes of their work, but in Bremen they also use some literature on programme evaluation.

FR Bremen

As in the whole of Germany, in FR Bremen the institutional core of lifelong learning policies expects that young people must progress smoothly from schools to apprenticeships and then to the job market. Federal, Länd and local authorities launch specific programs in order to support the groups who cannot follow this pathway easily (Verlage et al, 2018).

In FR Bremen, the *Werkschule* teaches and provides guidance to low-performing school leavers in both school classrooms and school workshops. *Bleib Dran* is tailored to the needs of apprentices who are at risk of dropping out. This programme articulates guidance

with other measures sothat these youth do not make up their minds without careful reflection. *Jugend Stärken* aims at strengthening the role of the vulnerable youth in the community as well as to co-ordinate counselling services for them. So, simultaneous theoretical and practical teaching and career guidance are the main instruments of lifelong learning in this functional region. Since experts account for the linkages between these instruments and the goal of improving the social conditions of the beneficiaries, it is plausible to interpret that a coherent theory of change articulates all these components into a system. Actually, the *Werkschule* and *Bleib Dran* were drafted from scratch in order to improve support for low-skilled youth. "All the policies follow directly or indirectly the same agenda: labour market integration and avoidance of unemployment and living on welfare. In order to achieve this, three different strategies like stabilization, empowerment and training are used and engaged" (Verlage et al, 2018, p. 59). This professional and political interest in building a coherent approach is clearly illustrated by the *Werkschule*. Experts inform that the initial activities aim at 'setting students on track', that is, committing to the time table, gaining confidence with the staff, and then learning how to do the basic academic activities. Some of these students are exposed to harsh stigmas associated with migration, low social status and poor school performance. Many of them also lack the conditions to do homework at home. However, "they see school as a necessary evil, where it is warm and dry" (E_GER_B_1). Evaluation studies find out that the *Werkschule* has been relatively successful:

> Students whose graduation was rather unlikely a few years ago regained interest in school and finally received their degree. Others, who had social problems at former schools or had to leave their former school due to several problems strengthened their social competencies and identified themselves with the concept and the institution (Gessler & Kühn, 2013, p. 2-3).

The stakeholders of lifelong learning policies coordinate their actions in the city. Their contacts have woven a dense network of interlocking institutions that is based on VET schools, training and companies, the Job Centre and the Youth Employment Agency. First, VET schools closely cooperate with about 600 companies to align teaching with apprenticeships. Significantly, the *Werkschule* started as a pilot programme but afterward was integrated into the German educational system, especially in the vocation-oriented schools. *Bleib Dran* contributes to the normal functioning of apprenticeships. Second, most of the programmes are accountable to the Job Centre and ESF, who carefully monitor entry and dropout rates as well as further insertion in the labour market.

Apparently, the Job Centre is the carrier of ministerial authority in FR Bremen in matters of unemployment, consultation and job placement. Since the institution uses the standard criteria of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB, in German) to monitor all the programmes, some independent providers expressed concern with the accuracy of impact assessments of actions targeted to the most vulnerable youth. In addition, some experts complained that public calls are not attentive enough to the real trends of the labour market.

> We had this topic, upon what criteria is decided, which professions are publicly called for tender; from time to time we really couldn't understand why apprenticeships as bike fitters were offered as there was no demand for the bike industry and lots of shops closed down. Since three or four years it has been a boom in the field and the demand also increased, so we can say, now is okay, we really train to supply the demand. This was a long digression on the sense and nonsense of some decisions made by the funders (E_GER_B_2).

Third, the Youth Employment Agency (*Jugendberufsagentur*) coordinates all stakeholders by means of consultation and mutual support. These discussions voice the views of experts. In this context, independent providers present their worries regarding the evaluation and the future of the programmes where they work.

FR Girona

In the interviews conducted in FR Girona, street-level professionals were quite reflexive about the impacts of vocational training on the life conditions of the beneficiaries. Some kinds of training policies had been in place since Spain had entered the European Common Market in the eighties. Since the prevailing approach of these policies had consisted of supplying short-term courses, at the time of the interviews in 2017 professionals wanted to emphasise their action had improved in some aspects. Although these observations revealed something of the underlying rationale of the whole policy, their points were too vague to conclude that professionals shared an explicit theory of change (Rambla et al., 2018). The officers of a relatively longer, two-year vocational training programme (TP24) were particularly adamant about noting to what extent their approach was personalised. Besides courses, the programme provided wide support in the area of career guidance, which induced the beneficiaries to choose specialised training and short traineeships on sounder grounds. Further, they became able to take an explicit decision on their preference to either enter the labour market or enrol on vocational education after the two years.

> We help them a little to see, to be empowered on what they have to do, we do it through some working plans, we look to which life objectives they have, which professional aspects can we work in, which training we think is better so they can go ahead (E_SP_G_2)

Interviewees also commented on the implications of their own labour conditions. Thus, a 12-months training programme (TP12) availed of a relatively stable staff. In the view of professionals, that stability built on the capacity of the programme to attend to the beneficiaries over longer spans of time. (However, one year later many street-level professionals were dismissed because of delayed funding).

> TP12 has this positive thing. Since the street-level professionals have been working in the programme for long, they have been providing continuous counselling to those youngsters who have been catered for since 2012. We track the results, what is going on, if they are employed or not, if they have continued or not. They pass through here, they visit us and even when there is a municipal employment agency in the locality. For them their job bank is here (E_SP_G_11)

Since expert interviewees struggled with prejudices against vulnerable young adults in the region, on the ground the delivery of lifelong learning eventually balanced a deficit approach and some criticism of employers' practices. On the one hand, a majority of them shared a common professional judgement on the individual deficits of the beneficiaries of lifelong learning. Since many of these youth had a previous experience of early school leaving, for professionals it was natural to insist that they had to recover from the mistakes they had made in the past. A quite operational instrument consisted of teaching soft skills such as planning, motivation and awareness of the relevance of credentials.

> We help them a little to see, to be empowered on what they have to do, we do it through some working plans, we look to which life objectives they have, which professional aspects can we work in, which training we think is better so they can go ahead (E_SP_G_2)

> I explain him/her the things. I explain him/her where to go, but I'm not going to call, "listen, have you been here or have you been there?" There is this weak motivation, they cannot see, maybe they don't know how the world is. They are not aware of how necessary the Secondary Education Certificate is (E_SP_G_10)

On the other hand, some street-level professionals attempted to challenge the stereotypes of employers. They argued that school failure should not become a stigma, because many early school leavers were eventually resilient in their projects. They added that the regional labour market could certainly avail of cultural diversity, thus enrolling young immigrants who could speak in English and French to the customers of the important hospitality sector.

> There are companies that say, “no, I’m not going to interview this [youngster] because s/he has bad references”, that someone else has told them and they have believed and they don’t call no matter how much you tell them, “listen, the kid has made a process, first look at him and let’s see what you think”, “no, no”, I mean, it is a very closed mentality, they label them and that’s all (E_SP_G_9)

> In the visits we try to change these perceptions the companies have, explaining the competences [name of the city] youngsters’ have, yes, even with all this intercultural difference, racial and of religion, this youngster has born here and they have linguistic competences that maybe the rest don’t have, that they are youngsters that have adapted themselves to an environment, to a life-style, to peers with different nationalities, life-styles and religions, that has become accustomed to coexistence with all these differences, that is a youngster who speaks languages, that is a youngster that respects rules, that is a youngster that wants to give positive things (E_SP_G_11)

Expert interviewees reported on their endeavours to network training programmes with companies as well as to foster cooperation among case-workers. Some of them called employers quite regularly in order to discuss the recent trends in a given economic sector. Others visited companies to inquire about their particular needs, and, if possible, to suggest that some beneficiaries of their programme were capable of being efficient apprentices. In fact, although apprenticeship schemes were quite scarce, the representatives of the Chamber of Commerce remembered their role in the old times before more powerful machinery had suppressed this job. These interviewees also discussed how they cooperated with their partners in other organisations. Actually, municipalities, the supra-municipal county, unions and the Chamber of Commerce had their own case-workers. These professionals were in close contact to distribute their action as well as to improve their guidance services. In their view, if they knew about the activity of their colleagues, they could coordinate priorities and deliver comprehensive information on the real opportunities to the youth. However, an underlying concern with underground competition between public and private providers also appeared. Since private providers depended quite directly on the sheer number of people who enrolled in their courses, some of them disguised marketing with guidance. Finally, in Girona YOUNG_ADULLLT fieldwork hardly captured references to the participation of the youth in policy design. At most, a local government had convened some meetings to discuss its youth plan with the local beneficiaries. But that one had only been a single consultative exchange that had no direct influence on any real policy.

FR Istria

In 2017 in FR Istria only one person was responsible for the local youth policy. The point is that young people in vulnerable situations are not in the focus of any regional or local institutions. In Croatia, social welfare is highly centralised and there are no local and regional initiatives to improve the opportunities for participation in education, labour market or active citizenship. The NGOs try to overcome this problem, but they do not have enough resources to provide aid to all young people in vulnerable situations. Moreover, the communication and connection between local institutions and social welfare centres is not developed. That is why most young people in vulnerable situations are not aware that some programs in which they can participate exist or are available in their community (Bouillet et al., 2018).

In FR Istria, the bulk of institutions, organisations and services is directed to increase the employability of beneficiaries. As a rule, policies expect to improve the skills, qualification and level of information given to the youth, but pay less attention to societal changes that may improve their living.

> The goal is to enable people to find work immediately, to be able to navigate the labour market more easily (…) Projects enable people who are unemployed to get some kind of an education, to enter the education system, to improve their competencies. Because people will pay for regular programmes themselves if they want to finish, and projects give the opportunity to those who can't afford that (advisor at Open Public University, Istria).

In the interviews, street-level professionals did not depict a clear picture of the expected outcomes of their activities, because they were mostly oriented towards the general expectations and the purpose of their work. To the extent that experts simply complied with the particular interests of their institutions, the broader picture of lifelong learning was absent.

> No, no, they (local and regional authorities) do not have a vision. There is also a great amount of misunderstanding of what civil society organisations are and what they do. The state administration is slow, inert and there are very many people who don't even want to get informed, but that passivity also stems from the fact that there is nothing and nobody that will motivate them to be a bit more innovative and proactive (manager of NGO, Istria).
>
> There is no strategic thinking on the level of the Pula city, it is an entirely ad hoc political situation. By the change of priorities, these types of decisions change as well. Young people are becoming decorations (manager of NGO, Istria).

The culture of evaluation of LLL policies does not exist. According to the interviewed experts, some institutions (especially NGOs) tried to change this fact, but real evaluation

of the impact of their activities was unknown. It remains unclear whether the financial and human resources that are invested in those activities and programmes can achieve their purpose or goals.

> I don't have any feedback. I think it would be good if I called them a few months after they have graduated and ask how they have been progressing in their workplace because 90% of our attendants have a job or found it if they did not have it already (Advisor at Open Public University, Istria).

Some experts realised that local coordination was far below the acceptable standards. Networking was a faraway goal that was really difficult to meet. Besides the absence of a general vision, budgeting, statistical information and selection criteria, among other problems, were so obscure that many initial and potential exchanges between professionals did not lead to stable cooperation.

> We are not content. Maybe the situation is not as bad on the national level considering procedures, criteria and transparency. On our local level the criteria according to which resources are assigned are helter-skelter, oranges and apples mixed. Young people are in the category 'the youth and others', so in the same category resources for the youth and organisations for preservation of the memories of Josip Broz Tito get assigned. It is just a big mess. Local authorities are not really clear on the categories of users or what the priorities within those categories should be. On the national level criteria is clearer and there is more transparency (manager of an NGO, Istria).

In coherence with these accounts, it was hard to find any reference to the participation of the youth in the interviews. In fact, many experts openly declared the youth were completely side-lined. Some of the previous quotations are quite expressive of this point.

FR Plovdiv

In FR Plovdiv, the Youth Guarantee provides vocational guidance and training in professional qualifications or key skills to the youth. Employers benefit from subsidies for temporary employment as well as support for recruitment and other services provided by networks operating at the EU level. Expert interviewees expected the impact of the Youth guarantee programme to be positive and to consist in involving a very large part of the young people in the territory of FR Plovdiv and to be able to direct them to jobs, as well as to satisfy the needs of the local businesses. In their view, the youngsters who participated in the programme would continue with their employer after the term of their subsidized employment, thus entering into a permanent contract in the firm in which they have gained an internship (Kovacheva et al., 2018).

> The European guarantee is the aspiration for all young people to be activated ... to overlap. These young people who do not study and have not completed their education, we have to activate them, enrol them in schools, at least not to have illiterate people, the other part who have graduated to help them find a job and encourage employers to recruit the young people who have come to us (E_BG_P_1).

As to Youth Entrepreneurship, interviewees portrayed the programme as the most innovative measure. It became possible when the city of Plovdiv was chosen for the first time to be the European Capital of Culture in 2019. Experts stated that one could consider as antecedents of the project previous initiatives involving volunteers. In the past there had been different types of information workshops targeting diverse target groups and youth were one of them. The main objective was to involve young people in social entrepreneurship for public causes in the city. Through this participation in the initiatives of the Foundation Plovdiv 2019 and the partner organizations, they would acquire the necessary experience, social skills and professional experience. The programme had to instil a 'business orientation' on young people living in Plovdiv Municipality. It consisted of a competitive prize that stimulated the youth and allegedly would endow them with public recognition. Thus, participants would acquire a variety of skills that would help them in the future in their professional and personal development. Finally, in Plovdiv interviewees did not discuss the participation of the youth in the making of lifelong learning policies at depth. Some programmes were attentive to their specific needs, but their general views on the city and the labour market were not taken into account.

As Table 1 suggests, in Bremen lifelong learning policies are designed to fix some leaks in the apprenticeship system. A dense network of stakeholders are openly interested in solving this problem. In the other regions the rationale is not so straightforward; at most experts draw on general comments on guidance and training. In these regions, stakeholders are not either involved in so interlocking connections as in Bremen.

Discussion: Whose vulnerability? How do lifelong learning policies face this vulnerability?

The description of lifelong learning policies in FRs Bremen, Girona, Istria and Plovdiv presents a qualified portrait of which youth are exposed to vulnerability and how their condition is construed in a variety of Functional Regions within the European Union. This section draws on the patterns that Table 1 maps out and the two previous sections analyse more systematically.

In general, the subject (the 'who') of vulnerability is composed by heterogeneous types of people. Although the concrete impact of the policies remains quite unclear, it is sensible to conclude that lifelong learning can compensate at least for school failure at the same time as it instils some optimism into the beneficiaries of social welfare. But these are only tentative points, since the evidence does not support many conclusive observations on impact. In spite of the uncertainties of the big picture, a comparative analysis of lifelong learning policies in FR Bremen (Germany), FR Girona (Spain), FR Istria (Croatia) and FR Plovdiv (Bulgaria) reveals a number of interesting processes. The theoretical lenses of LCR, GOV and CPE are fruitful to make sense of these processes. Further discussions can also take stock of them to set out some lessons to be learnt. Lifelong learning addresses the vulnerabilities of particular social categories. The third section of this chapter suggests some relevant insights on the target groups, the perception of the policies and the life projects of the youth. The following paragraphs report to what extent target groups complicate the picture and perceptions are not satisfactory, but life projects indicate some potential of the current policies.

In FR Bremen, a scheme caters to the needs of low-performing students at the age of leaving school, another scheme takes care of apprentices in a vulnerable position, and finally a wide service is open for the youth who feel in need. In FR Girona, vocational training programmes are tailored to the circumstances of low-skilled youth. In FRs Istria and Plovdiv, the local authorities assume that all the youth are in a potentially vulnerable position. Although in FRs Girona, Istria and Plovdiv lifelong learning programmes are piloting possible strategies that may be scaled up if proved successful, this outcome remains quite uncertain. The perception of the programmes is mixed in FRs Bremen and Girona. The young beneficiaries of these lifelong learning policies are certainly thankful to be taken into account, but they are also anxious about their actual potential in the labour market in the middle term. In FRs Istria and Plovdiv, many interviewees feel very sceptical about the contribution of lifelong learning to their future. Despite social divides, the recent financial crisis and the bleak perspectives of some regional economies, the young adults endeavour to outline their life projects and eventually to carry them out. Unsurprisingly, their projects deal with both family and professional issues at the same time. The main potential of lifelong learning policies lies in this point. Young people really want to do something with their lives and actively look for instruments to become the protagonists of their project. Lifelong learning can certainly render these instruments.

However, the previous observations posit two crucial caveats to the realisation of this potential. On the one hand, the official definition of target groups inevitably intermingles with the common use of social categories out there in the domain of everyday life. The section on these groups provides enough evidence to conclude that the target groups of lifelong learning policies easily overlap with social stratification based on class, migration and ethnicity. On the other hand, mixed and pessimistic perceptions cannot be easily dismissed. Young adults welcome lifelong learning inasmuch as they want support, but the breadth and depth of their frustration entails sizable threats not only for future lifelong learning but also for future democratic discussion. In other words, our initial conclusion retrieves the seventh recommendation of the European Council on the Youth Guarantee Scheme, since this goal is far from being met:

> Ensure the consultation or involvement of young people and/or youth organisations in designing and further developing the Youth Guarantee scheme to tailor services to the needs of beneficiaries and to have them act as multipliers in awareness-raising activities (European Council, 2013: 120/4).

In analytic terms, this evidence points to discursive effects on which both LCR and CPE shed some light. The point is that lifelong learning policies may become capable of mitigating the harm that new social risks produce on the well-being of the youth (i.e. vulnerability) provided the official designs of these policies are explicitly aware of the de-standardisation of the life course. Crucial to this argument is a key contribution of LCR to enhancing the visibility of changes. Actually, both education and labour market policies are based on indicators of stocks that stick to measuring stocks and hardly capture flows. By knowing how many NEETs and early school leavers live in a region, policy-makers cannot figure out whether the life course of people is changing or the economic cycle is simply proceeding through expansion and contraction as usual (Furlong, 2006). However, a paramount thesis of CPE is also crucial to understand this point. In this vein, politics take place at different geographical scales where actors pursue their interests drawing on different power resources. The outcome of these politics is normally a ranking of easier and costlier options, with market-driven courses of action taking precedence on any other ones (Jessop, 2007). Thus, it is much easier to think of lifelong learning in terms of fitting people into the market than in terms of helping people to develop and carry out their life projects. The section on tackling vulnerability indicates that the German system probably makes some difference, but the evidence presented in this section also unveils two factors that are likely to curtail the potential of lifelong learning policies.

Looking at the potential of lifelong learning policies in FRs Bremen, Girona, Istria and Plovdiv, the articulation of bureaucratic with network governance reveals key factors. In fact, although welfare states lost some institutional capacities in the last decades of the twentieth century (Taylor-Gooby, 2004), simultaneously governments learnt how to deal with networks strategically (Rhodes, 2007). In line with this argument, it makes sense to notice the synergies of bureaucracy and networks in FR Bremen. However, it is plausible to observe that some policy actors are experimenting with institutional arrangements that align bureaucracies and networks in the other regions. Particularly, street-level professionals play this role in FR Girona while NGOs are insinuating the same in FR Istria. Professionals are becoming aware that networks provide indispensable instruments to lifelong learning, not least because counsellors really must use networks if they are to provide high-quality guidance that is really rooted on the ground. However, we must tame that optimistic spirit with two qualifications. First, even in FR Bremen the extensive use of networks challenges the accountability of lifelong learning policies. Some partners struggle to report on their contribution to the Job Centre and eventually to the Federal Government and the European Social Fund. Clearly, a clear-cut list of the stakeholders is a condition of accountability in most countries, but networks inevitably blur this list. Second, a set of intangible factors have to underpin networks if this form of governance is to yield its whole potential in the area of lifelong learning. Trust between central and local governments and a culture of decision-making grounded on dialogue would be telling illustrations. Remarkably, evidence from the four functional regions not only shows the limits of networks in FR Bremen, but also that these intangible factors are weak in FRs Girona, Istria and Plovdiv.

In this vein, the variation of understandings of lifelong learning requires an important qualification. In FR Bremen it has to do with reviewing the apprenticeship system. In FR Girona many voices are interested in improving the old course-based training policies. In FR Istria lifelong learning sets new frontiers for local politics. In FR Plovdiv, this concept has equipped the local authorities with new tools to cater to the needs of all social groups. Apparently, open consultation among stakeholders that also allows for the participation of the youth posits sound arguments in favour of lifelong learning (Biesta, 2006). However, as CPE has widely documented, politics operates a powerful selectivity on the available political strategies (Jessop, 2007). The main problem is that the majority of the policy actors that envision this potential are not powerful enough to carry it out. The costs of

departing from mainstream approaches focused on promoting employment seem to be paramount for most of them.

Conclusion and Outlook

This chapter attempts to explore whether lifelong learning policies contribute to tackle vulnerability in a sample of four Functional Regions in the European Union. Since FRs Bremen, Girona, Istria and Plovdiv are experimenting with a common matrix of policies, the sample may suggest some insights to the extent that some conclusions are relevant for all of them. Despite many differences between these settings and many undeniable particularities, some commonalities emerge from the comparative analysis that this chapter presents.

Remarkably, in all of these places, young adults endeavour to elaborate and carry out their life plans, but employment-centred policies are not fully capable to respond to the corresponding demands. In the four regions either authorities, professionals or NGOs struggle to align bureaucracy with network governance. Additionally, the salience of lifelong learning in the local political agenda opens new horizons for political action. The discussion section has drawn on this evidence in order to figure out both the opportunities and the threats that lifelong learning policies currently face in the regions of the European Union. The conclusions eventually lead us to ask further research questions. Can lifelong learning policies make the most out of the youth life projects? Can they cope with the frustration that many undergoing social transformations provoke? Can decision-makers and the civil society build a stable and participation-friendly institutional scaffolding?

One observation is noteworthy concerning the processes of framing of young adults as vulnerable in terms of their position in the labour market, educational credentials, or their socio-economic status, etc. Since linear life courses are still seen as a norm, they take on the function of a socio-political interpretive frame, ambivalent in nature and potent in its implications. Socio-political interpretive frames, according to Axel Pohl (2015, p. 57) derive their efficacy from both their normative currency and their factual dissemination. Vulnerability as a socio-political interpretive frame imbued in LLL policies promotes a ‘normal’ life course and biography along institutionalised, more or less linear, trajectories from school to work. Young adults are expected to develop life projects that comply with such legitimated narratives. Those seen as ‘unable’ or ‘unwilling’ to pursue linear life courses are then perceived as ‘disadvantaged’ and/or ‘vulnerable’ (cf. Pohl, 2015). This

socio-political interpretive frame is of ambivalent nature since while it allows policy-making to justify integrative interventions, it also risks producing stigmatising effects. The latter is not only a potential but an actual effect, since many LLL policies ascribe structural problems to individual inefficiencies (cf. Chapter 6, in this Report).

In terms of an open conclusion: Lifelong learning policies are effective instruments to tackle vulnerability, for example, by alleviating the effects of new risks on well-being. Nevertheless, two conditions are indispensable for these policies to cope with vulnerability properly. On the one hand, it is necessary that stakeholders learn to make sense of the life projects of youth amidst the growing complexity of de-standardised life courses. On the other hand, it is crucial that bureaucracies learn to cooperate with networks in order to lifelong learning policies to be successful in this endeavour.

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3. Cross-regional measures of contextual living conditions of young adults in Europe[7]

Lukas Alexander, Mathias Lipp, Nina Görgen, Rosario Scandurra, Ruggero Cefalo & Yuri Kazepov

Introduction

Life-long learning (LLL) policies for young adults are the result of a complex interplay between economy, society, labour market, and education and training systems at national, regional and local levels. The work package four (WP4) explored systematically how these effects are enacted in the circumstances of young adults in the selected states and regions, by collecting and analysing quantitative data on the specific living conditions of young adults. This was guided by two main research questions:

1. What data is available at a regional level about the living conditions of young adults and what are the gaps in data coverage?
2. What can available data reveal about the living conditions of young adults and the identification of risks profiles at regional level?

This research provided further quantitative context by drawing on indicators available at the regional level (NUTS 2), about the mediating role of LLL policies in the configuration of individuals' living conditions (see **Figure 4** below). The approach focuses on the contextual living conditions in 18 selected regions, according to a multidimensional approach that considers the level of economic development and material living conditions, demographic trends, the interaction between education systems and labour markets and the health coverage within a region. This does not imply a deterministic view where the context and structural factors completely prevail over individual agency and self-determination. However, it stresses the relevance of contextual living conditions in building different structures of opportunities for young people, in terms of complex mixes of enablements and constraints, according to the place where they live. The results

[7] This chapter relies predominantly on the following reports and papers: "International Report" and "Policy Brief" of Work package 4 (YOUNG_ADULLLT Project, see Scandurra et al., 2017a, 2017b), and the conference paper "Constructing cross-regional measures of contextual living of young adults in Europe" (see Scandurra et al., 2018).

contribute to identifying the contextual structure of enablements and constraints with which young people engage and actively form their dispositions and choices.

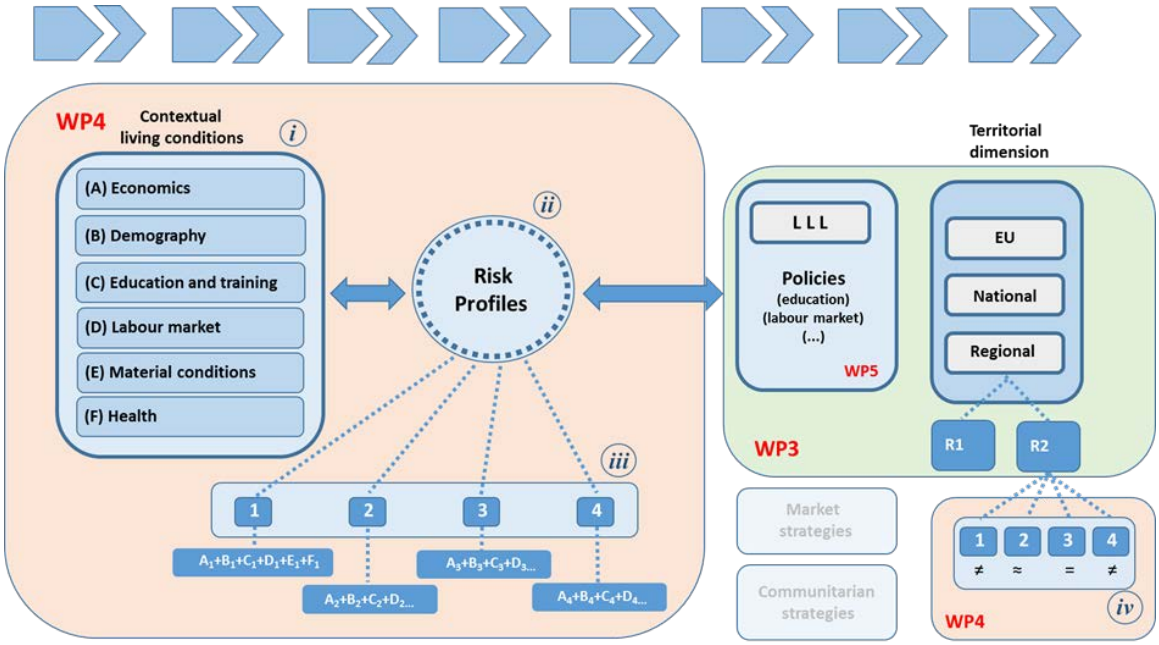

Figure 4. Living conditions and risks

The data collation draws on databases from national administrative sources and comparative surveys compiled by international organizations such as EUROSTAT and the OECD. It is divided into six dimensions: economic structure, demographics, education and training, labour markets, material conditions, and health. Data was collated for a 10-year span, from 2005 through 2014, the latest available data. This enables comparability across countries and regions, before and after the Great Recession. Young adults are defined as individuals aged between 18 and 29 years. However, a plurality of age ranges was used pragmatically to overcome data limitations. The chapter is organized as follows: in section 2, we provide empirical evidence on the countries participating in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project and on 18 selected regions (representing the closest approximation to the functional regions identified by the partners). The comparison is carried on across countries and across regions, also comparing the living conditions before and after the economic crisis, by focusing on single relevant indicators and on more comprehensive composite indicators on young adults' contextual living conditions. In section 3 we provide conclusive remarks and policy recommendations based on our results.

Data, Evidence and Analysis

There are substantial limitations in the availability of complete information of young adults' living conditions at sub-national and regional level. The EUROSTAT statistical information system, like most data sources, relies on limited administrative records with territorial disaggregation, mainly on the economics, demographics and health system. Few micro-data sources provide a scattered figure on territorial differences of young adults' living conditions, two important information sources being the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Despite this substantial limitation for the production of regional indicators on young adults living conditions at regional/local level, YOUNG_ADULLLT explores the possibilities of modelling risk profiles at the level of Functional Regions (FR) as they partially correspond with the NUTS2 classification and some indicators are available at this level. However, deriving finer contextual-based measure of young adults and LLL policies in the European territories is particularly challenging, as few data are available at the NUTS3 level.

International comparison

In order to provide some background information on the living conditions in the countries involved in this study, we will use four crucial indicators: Gross Domestic Product (GDP); Early school leavers population 18-24 years; Population 30 and 34 years with ISCED 5-8; and Employment rate of the population 25-34 years. These indicators will be later used – in conjunction with a range of further data – to give more refined accounts of young adults' living conditions across selected regions.

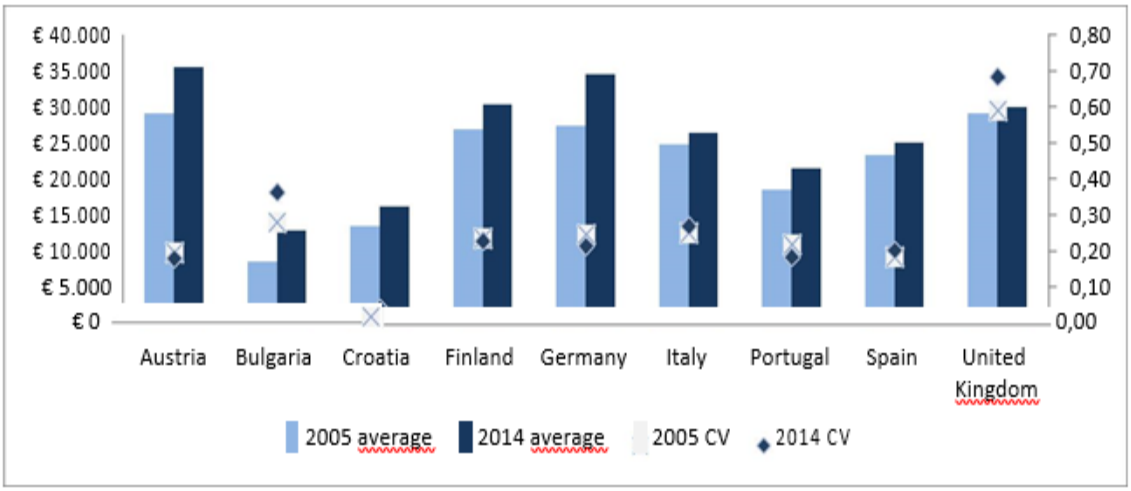

Figure 5. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current market prices, Euros per inhabitant, country average (left axis) and coefficient of variation, 2005-2014 (right axis). Source: Authors own elaboration

on EUROSTAT data. Note: The bars represent the average GDP at current market prices, Euro per inhabitant in standard units. The dots indicate the coefficient of variation, which is a measure of entropy. It represents the variation across territorial units in the countries selected.

Figure 5 plots the GDP per inhabitant for the nine countries selected in YOUNG_ADULLLT. GDP shows important cross-country differences, but there is also an important territorial variation at the national level in the single countries. The coefficient of variation reached 0.68 in UK in 2014, while for Croatia it was 0.04 in the same period. For the case of UK, there is high variation in economic prosperity at territorial level. Moreover, the UK was, alongside Austria, the country with the highest GDP per inhabitant in 2005. Whilst the UK grew 3% over the period, GDP per inhabitant in Austria grew 22% in the same period. All the participating countries have experienced GDP growth; however, Austria, Finland, Germany and Portugal have also slightly reduced inequality across their territories.

Figure 6 plots the national shares of early school leavers and the corresponding inequality across the regions of the YOUNG_ADULLLT countries. This is a widely used measure and one of the key indicators of Europe 2020. Spain, Portugal, Italy lag behind EU partners with more than 15% of the population aged between 18 and 24 having left education. The share of school leavers in Portugal is still high in 2015, but much reduced by 21 percentage points from 2004.

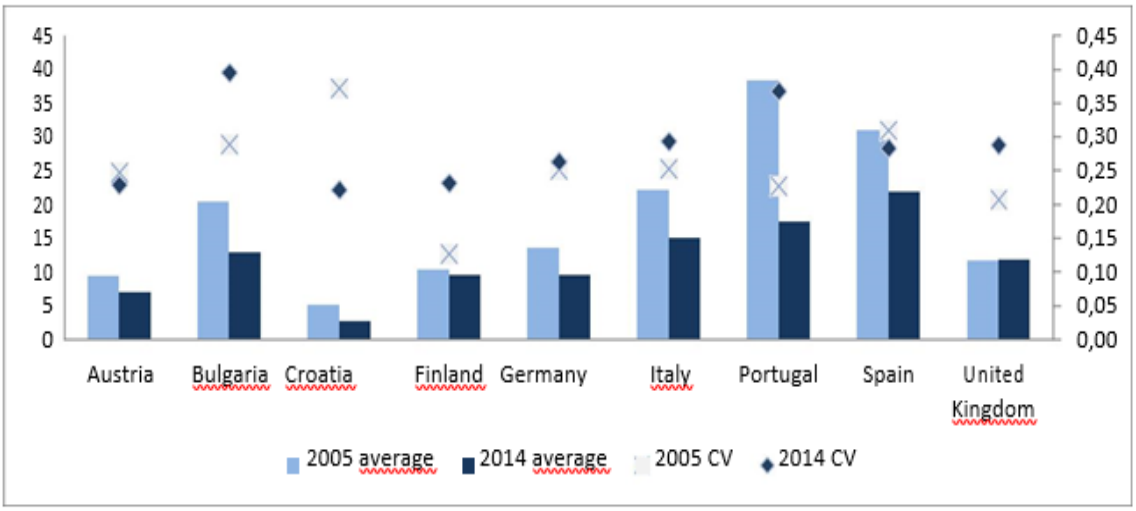

Figure 6. Early school leavers, 18-24 years, country average and coefficient of variation, 2005-2014. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data. Note: The bars represent the average percentage of early school leavers. The dots indicate the coefficient of variation, which is a measure of dispersion. It represents the variation across territorial units in the countries selected. When

reference year data were unavailable, data on closer year were used. This is the case for Croatia in most of the results showed in this report.

Similarly, in Spain the share of school leavers dropped by 9 percentage points. The only countries where this indicator remained almost stable (at a relatively low level) are Finland and UK. However, there is relevant variation across regions, which ranged between 0.23 in Austria and Finland to 0.4 in Bulgaria. These differences increased over the last decade in most of the countries; it decreased slightly in Austria and Spain, but only in Croatia it was reduced by 60%, reaching 0.22 in 2014. Territorial differences in early school leavers increased substantially in Bulgaria, Finland and Portugal with more than 0.11 increase in the coefficient of variation in the last decades.

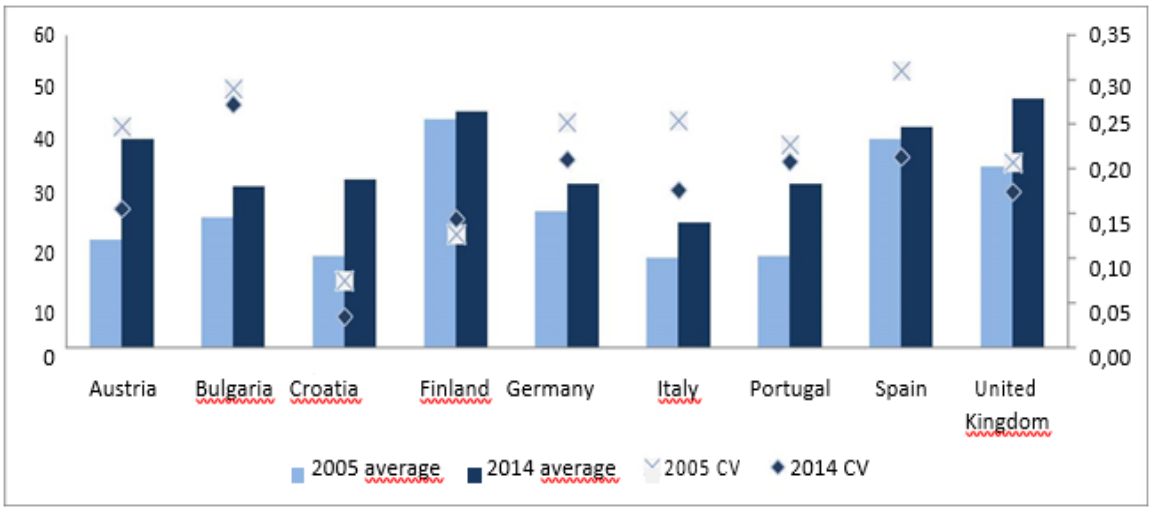

Figure 7. Population with ISCED 5-8 (30-34 years), total %, country average and coefficient of variation, 2005-2014. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data. Note: The bars represent the average percentage of population, which has attained ISCED 5-8. The dots indicate the coefficient of variation, which is a measure of dispersion. It represents the variation across territorial units in the countries selected. When reference year data were unavailable, data on closer year were used. This is the case for Croatia in most of the results showed in this report.

Figure 7 plots the percentage of population aged between 30 and 34 years that have attained tertiary education (ISCED 5-8) and the corresponding inequality across the regions of the 9 countries selected. This proxy is a measure of the attainment and level of education of the population in the territorial units. This is a widely used measure included in the key indicators of Europe 2020, targeted to the age group, which is likely to have achieved the highest education level.

In 2014, in UK, Finland, Spain and Austria more than 2 out of 5 people aged between 30 and 34 attained tertiary education, while in Italy it was slightly higher than 1 out of 5 young people. There is a general increase in the tertiary education attainment of the countries examined. Over the period, the increase was modest in Finland (+1.6%) and larger in Austria (19.3%). However, there is some sign of reduction of inequality in 7 out of 9 countries, Croatia and Finland excluded, the coefficient of variation ranging between 0.03 in Croatia until 0.27 in Bulgaria.

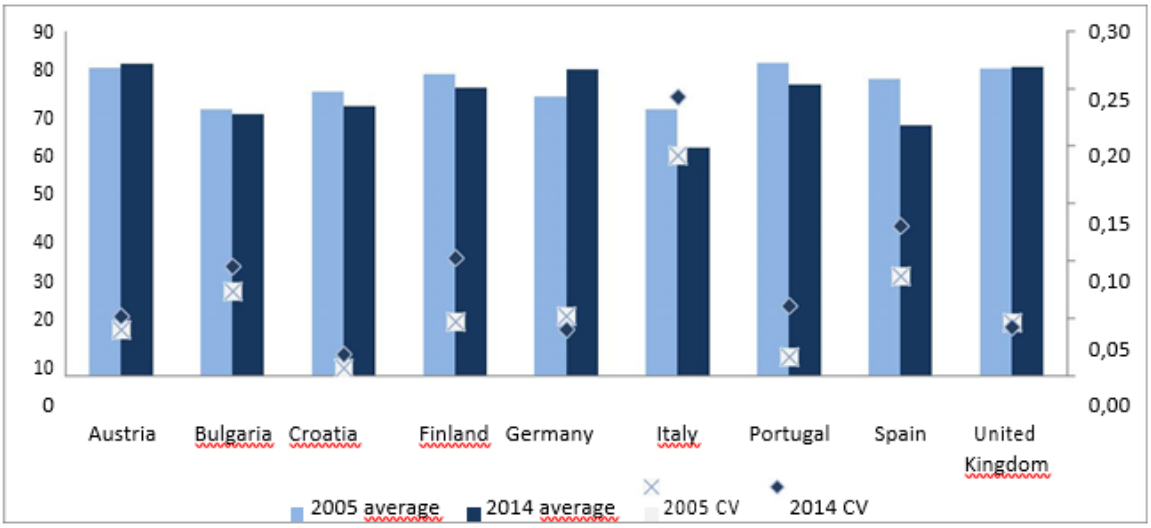

Figure 8. Employment rate of 25-34 year olds (left axis) and coefficient of variation (right axis), 2005-2014. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data. Note: The bars represent the average percentage of population employed aged between 15 and 24 years. The dots indicate the coefficient of variation, which is a measure of entropy. It represents the variation across territorial units in the countries selected. When reference year data were unavailable, data on closer year were used. This is the case for Croatia in most of the results showed in this report.

Figure 8 plots the percentage of employed population aged between 25 and 34 years over the last decade and the corresponding inequality across the regions of the 9 countries selected. This proxy is a measure of the labour market conditions in the territorial units, proxying the degree of access to employment for the young adults.

In 2014, in Austria, Germany and UK 4 out of 5 people aged between 25 and 34 years were employed, while in countries such as Spain, Bulgaria or Italy slightly more than 3 out of 5 were employed. Over the period, the consequences of the Great Recession were evident for countries such as Italy and Spain (-10% approx.), and less for Portugal (-5%) while positive trend was registered in Germany (+7%). However, over the period there is

evidence of increasing territorial variation in employment rate except for the case of Germany (-0.1).

Figure 9 shows the relationship between education attainment and employment rate of the young adults during the time-span 2007-2014. A general increase in tertiary education attainment among young adults aged 30-34 is particularly pronounced in the regions of Wien and Darmstadt, but it is also present in the regions of South Western and Eastern Scotland, Bremen, Continental and Adriatic Croatia and Catalonia. On the other hand, due the impact of the economic crisis, many regions experienced a steep increase in unemployment and lower employment among youth. This was more pronounced in the South and East European regions. A decreasing trend can be observed in the German regions of Darmstadt and Bremen and in Upper Austria, while youth unemployment in the Finnish region of Pohjois-Suomi and in the Austrian regions of Wien remained stable or slightly decreased.

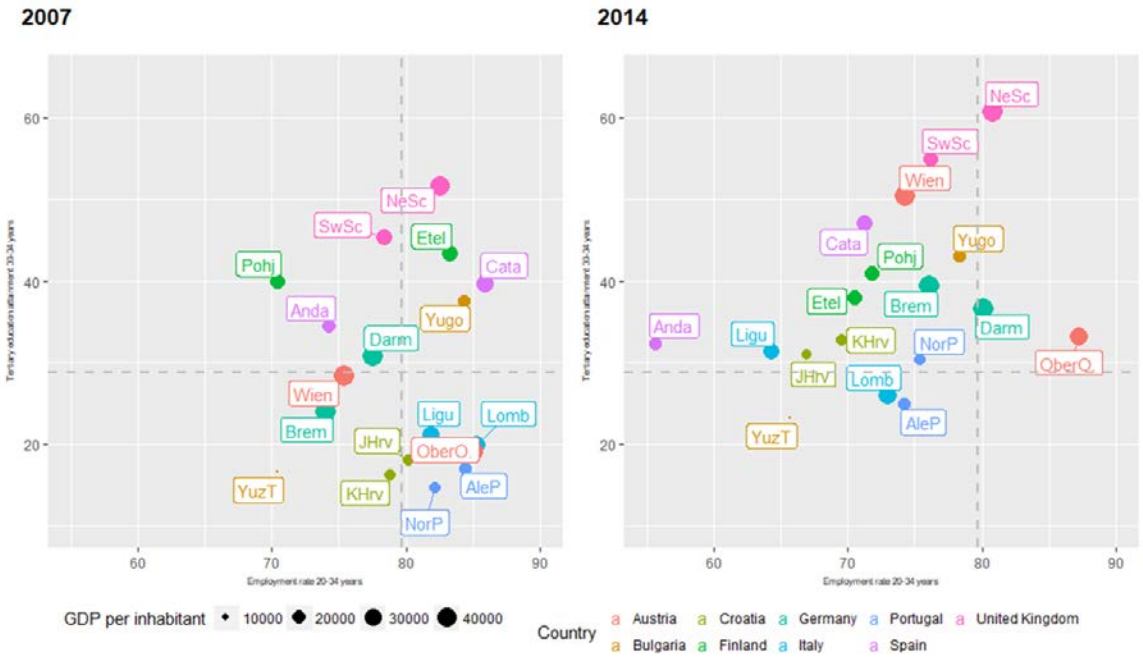

Figure 9. Tertiary education attainment, employment rate and GDP between 2007 and 2014. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data. Note: Figure 6 shows the relationship and the evolution of the selected regions between 2007 and 2014. Both axes in the graphs are centred at 2007 values, this means that the origin of the graph represents the mean both for education attainment and employment rate. The size of the dots represents the values of the GDP at regional level in PPP.

As a result of the trends described, **Figure 9** shows that some regions combine a low level of youth employment coupled with a low educational attainment. This is the case of

Andalusia, Liguria, Continental and Adriatic Croatia and Yuzhen Tzentralen. Lombardia and the two Portuguese regions (Alentejo and Norte) share with this group a similar level of educational attainment, but show more favourable labour market conditions, as youth employment is higher. A second major group is made up by regions with medium-high levels of educational attainment coupled with medium employment rates. Some of these regions have been affected by the economic crisis, but still the youth conditions on the labour market are comparatively favourable. It is the case of the Scottish, German and Finnish regions, together with Catalonia and Yugozapaden. Upper Austria is characterized by low levels of youth unemployment going together with high employment but also a comparatively medium-low level of tertiary education attainment. Regions with a higher GDP per inhabitant show better employment conditions for young adults, while the level of tertiary education appears to be less relevant. This shows that the outcomes of the education system do not have a direct link to economic growth and are connected to long-term trends and institutional structures. For instance, the region of Lombardia combines a medium-high GDP with medium-low employment and low educational attainment; while the Yugozapaden region combines less favourable economic conditions with a higher diffusion of tertiary educated among young people and higher labour market integration for youth. Conversely, the youth unemployment rate is more sensible to the economic cycle, as it is generally higher in countries where the economic crisis had a major impact.

Regional and country profiles

The complexity and multidimensionality of the phenomena analysed requires an integration of different methods of research across working packages. This approach informs about the contextual dimensions that impinge on different risk profiles. We identified six dimensions of contextual living conditions (**Figure 10**), as already discussed in the introduction: economics, demography, education and training, labour market, material conditions, and health and well-being. For every dimension, we collected data aggregated at NUTS 2 level and calculated a composite indicator.

The dimensions represent different aspects of young adults' experience and are strongly correlated. In order to identify these dimensions, we draw extensively on literatures on composite indicators, on social vulnerability, social inclusion, social justice and quality of life (Ranci, 2010; OECD, 2008, 2013), as well as on welfare policies (Kazepov & Ranci, 2016; Morel et al., 2012), and lifelong learning, life course and school to work transition

(Blossfeld et al., 2014; Walther, 2006; Verdier, 2012). In what follows, we present the composite indicators on young adults' contextual living conditions for the 18 selected regions comparing them with the respective country average. The specificities of the selected regions across the multiple dimensions represent the main objectives. The regions are put in relation and compared among them and in the light of the country-level conditions by using standardized indicators going from 0 to 1. High values of the indicators are related to favourable living conditions and structures of opportunities for young adults in the region.

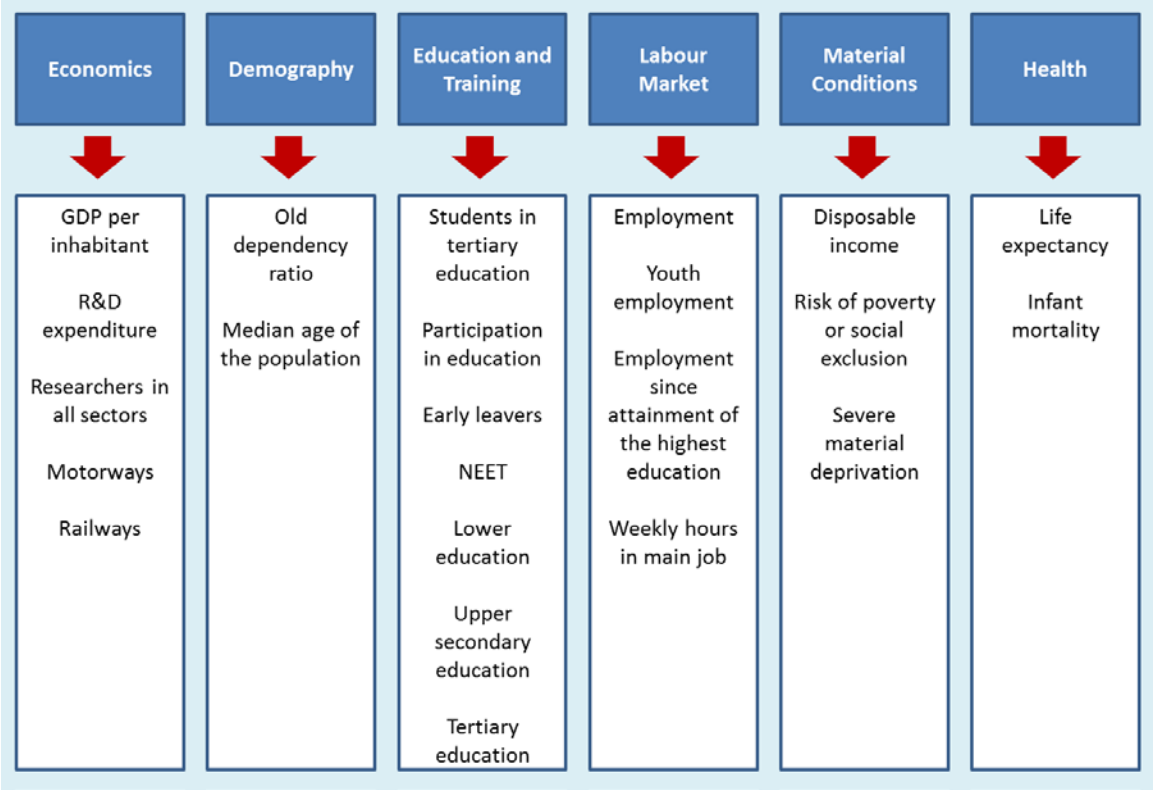

Figure 10. Dimensions of young adults' living conditions. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

Austria

The contextual living conditions of young adults are analysed focusing on the regions Wien and Oberösterreich.[8] The two regions are in the same federal regulatory framework, but they present differences in the socio-economic structure, political tradition and degree of

[8] In following referring to FRs Vienna and Upper Austria.

urbanization as well as in the way they react to common challenges like youth unemployment. According to our indicators, the two regions of Wien and Oberösterreich show high values in the dimension material conditions (0.74 for Wien and 0.92 for Oberösterreich in 2014). Both regions have relatively low levels of poverty and social exclusion and a relatively high disposable income, compared with the country-level scores for Austria in the same domain. Wien is characterised by medium-high scores in education and economics (0.66 and 0.69), and its labour market conditions have improved from 2007 to 2014 (from 0.43 to 0.58). Oberösterreich has high values in the labour market dimension (with a strong increase from 0.53 in 2007 to 0.73 in 2014).

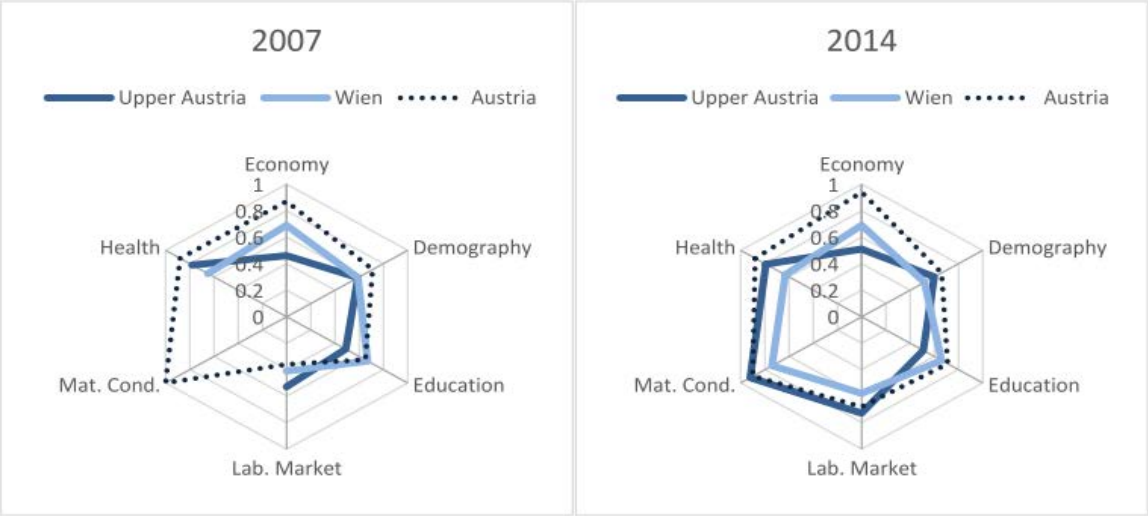

Figure 11. Profile of Austria, Vienna and Upper Austria. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data.

The two regions, like Austria as a whole, were not as affected by the economic crisis as many other selected regions were. Furthermore Oberösterreich, has a higher score in the Demography dimension (0.59), together with a higher score in health dimension (0.78) and life expectancy. Among the countries, Austria scores high or very high in all the dimension of contextual living conditions considered and especially in the economics and material conditions dimension.

Bulgaria

The contextual living conditions of young adults are analysed focusing on the regions Yuhzen Tsentralen and Yugozapaden.[9] The two regions show considerably different patterns of contextual living conditions: Yugozapaden scored medium-high on the education dimension (0.64) in 2014, implying a high level of participation and attainment in the education system and medium along the labour market dimension (0.45); while Yuhzen Tsentralen scores low or medium-low on all the dimensions considered, and especially in economics and material conditions (0 and 0.3). Both regions score highly on the demography dimension, implying an advanced process of population ageing. While the profile of Yuhzen Tsentralen is coherent with the factor scores at the national level for Bulgaria (high score on demography and low or medium-low in the other dimensions). Yugozapaden is characterized by better contextual living conditions within the Bulgarian context, even if with low scores along the economic dimension (0.19 in 2014).

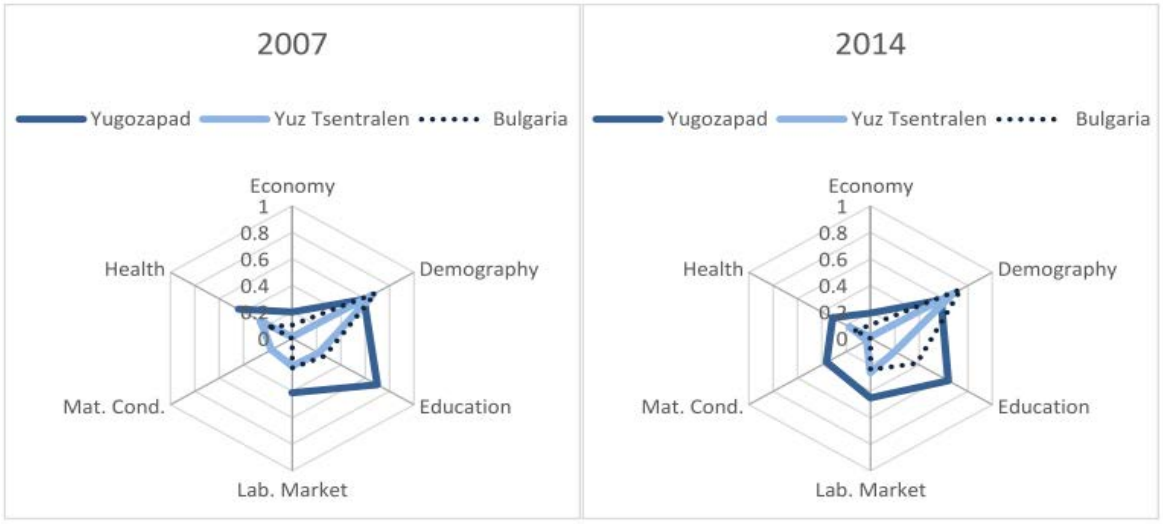

Figure 12. Profile of Bulgaria, Yugozapaden and Yuhzen Tsentralen. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data.

Croatia

The two Croatian regions of Jadranska Hrvatska and Kontinentalna Hrvatska are characterized, according to the factor scores, by similar living conditions, which are closely aligned with national level scores. The scores are low along the economic dimension (0.12

[9] In following referring to FRs Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad.

for Jadranska Hrvatska and 0.13 for Kontinentalna Hrvatska), indicating a weak performance of the economic system relative to most of the other countries participating in the project, with the exception of Bulgaria. On the other hand, population ageing seems to be a quite established trend (medium-high scores of 0.69 and 0.62 along the demographic dimension). Education opportunities and labour market integration are not favourable from a comparative perspective, as demonstrated by medium and medium-low values for the education (0.45 and 0.38, 0.42 at country level) and labour market dimension (0.31 and 0.36, 0.27 at country level) in 2014. Data on material conditions are missing at the regional level, while the country scores medium-low in comparative perspective (0.39 in 2014).

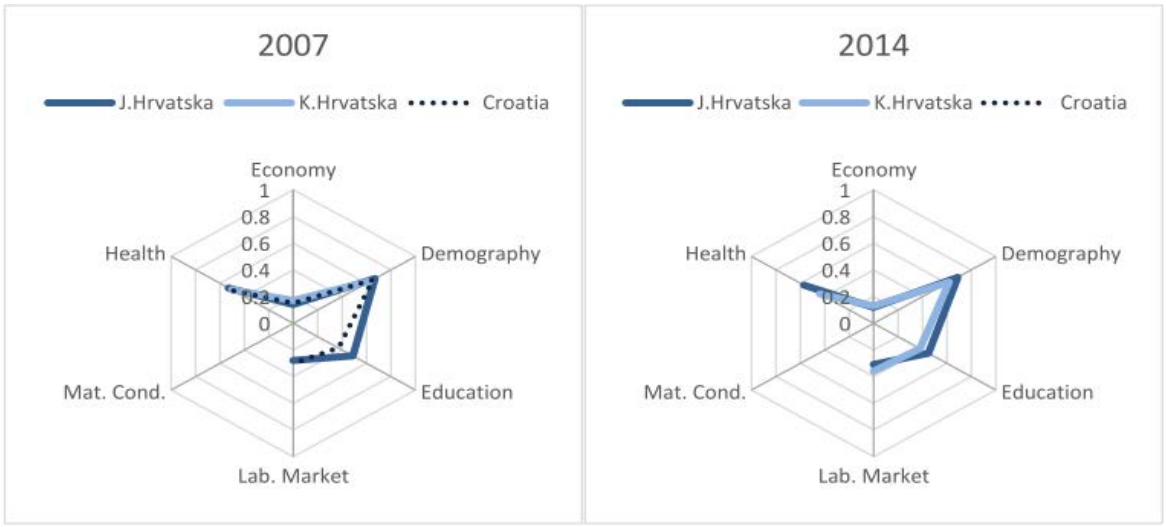

Figure 13. Profile of Croatia, Jadranska Hrvatska and Kontinentalna Hrvatska. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data.

Germany

Among the regions selected in YOUNG_ADULLLT, the two German regions of Bremen and Darmstadt are joint high scorers on the labour market dimension.[10] In both cases the scores have improved since 2007 (Bremen went from 0.62 to 0.7, Darmstadt went from 0.57 to 0.68). In terms of contextual living conditions, it is therefore clear that labour market integration was not negatively affected by the crisis.

[10] In following referring to FRs Rhein-Main and Bremen.

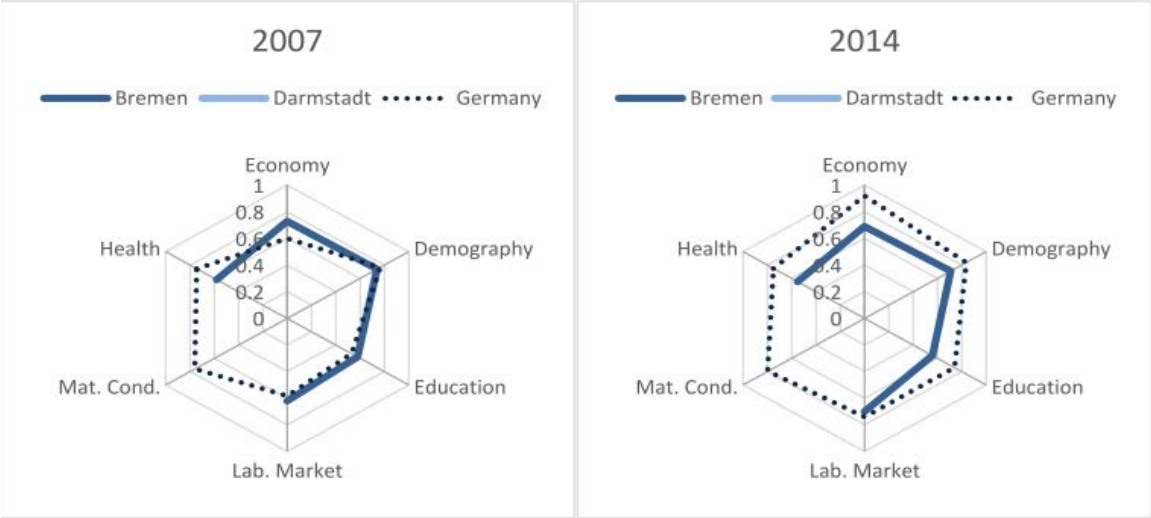

Figure 14. Profile of Germany, Bremen and Darmstadt. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data.

This is line with overall scores for Germany at country level (0.72 in 2014). Medium-high scores on health and demography are indicative of an ageing population with a high life expectancy (respectively 0.71 and 0.55 for Bremen, 0.68 and 0.74 for Darmstadt). This is also a strong characteristic for Germany at country level. Bremen shows medium-high scores along the economics dimension (0.69 in 2014), in the wake of the strong economic performance of Germany after 2007 (from 0.82 to 0.92). Unfortunately, key data are missing for Darmstadt on education and economics, as well as for both regions on material conditions. In this domain, we can also look to country level as a wide proxy: Germany shows very high scores on material conditions, driven by low social exclusion and poverty together with high disposable incomes.

Finland

The contextual living conditions of young adults are analysed focusing on the regions Pohjois-ja Itä-Suomi and Etelä-Suomi'.[11] The Finnish education system, especially the comprehensive school, is characteristically intertwined with the Scandinavian notion of the welfare state. However, still an approximately 5-10 percent share of young people in each age cohort do not continue in education or training after basic education. Being at risk of

[11] In following referring to FRs Kainuu and South-West Finland.

poverty and social exclusion is lower in Finland than it is in other European countries but the gap between different parts of the country has been growing during the past decade. Comparing indicators between time periods representing before and after the economic crisis does not show significant worsening of conditions.

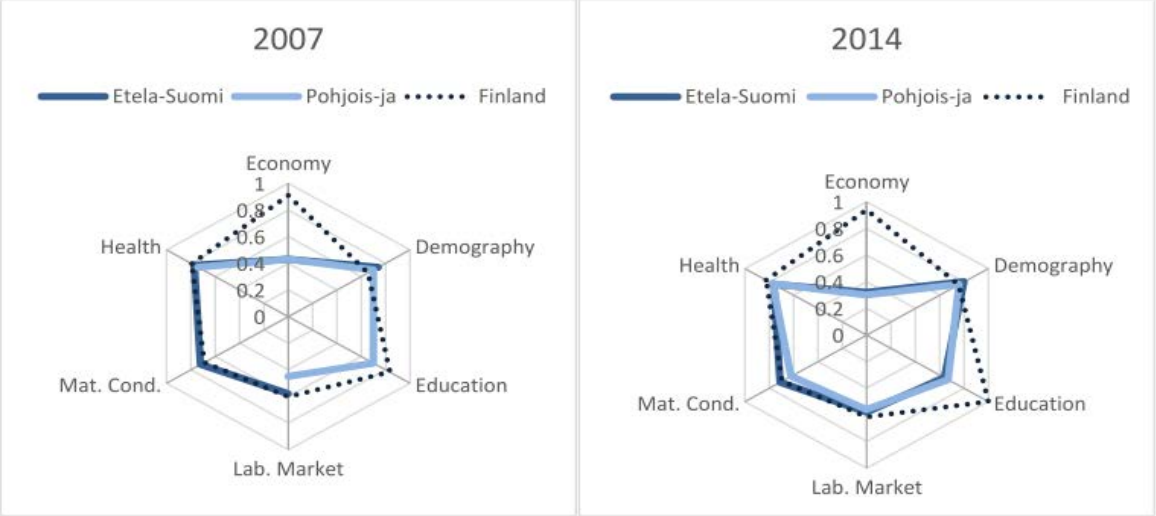

Figure 15. Profile of Finland, Etelä-Suomi' and Pohjois-ja Itä-Suomi. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data.

Scores are very high on the demographic and health dimension (respectively 0.8 and 0.76 for Etelä-Suomi and 0.76 and 0.77 for Pohjois-ja Itä-Suomi), reflecting both population ageing and high life expectancy. Scores are also high for material conditions (0.71 and 0.62), indicating low levels of poverty and exclusion, and medium-high when it comes to education opportunities and labour market integration (respectively 0.64 and 0.58 for Etelä-Suomi and 0.67 and 0.56 with a relative increase from 2007 to 2014 for Pohjois-ja Itä-Suomi). The economic dimension is the only one where values are medium-low (0.32 and 0.3) revealing a relative distance, especially from German and Austrian regions, and deteriorating after 2007. On balance, both the Finnish regions represent context characterized by quite favourable living conditions, compared to the regions selected in YOUNG_ADULLLT.

Italy

The contextual living conditions of young adults are analysed focusing on the regions Liguria and Lombardia. Italy is one of the oldest countries with the lowest replacement rate. This makes the demographic stability and the same system of social security more

and more dependent on migrants. The data shows that in Liguria the risk of poverty and social exclusion is higher than in Lombardy. In general living conditions in Lombardia are better, as we must consider that Liguria is the region with the oldest population, heavily affected by the economic and demographic crisis. To summarise, the current problems of the Italian economic and social context (low productivity, high public debt, inefficiencies in some sectors, poor innovation, population ageing, overcrowded social policy costs, often passive) do not favour the opportunities of young adults. The two Italian regions show considerable differences with the country level profile, confirming the existence of strong territorial based inequalities in Italy. This does not hold for the demographic and health dimension, confirming an advanced process of population ageing (especially in Liguria, with a factor score of 0.96 in 2014) and a high life expectancy; and for the economics dimensions, where Liguria shows medium-low scores (0.35 in 2014) and Lombardia medium scores (0.44 in 2014). What is important in terms of contextual living conditions of young adults, is that these two northern regions show a medium level of labour market integration (0.48 for Liguria and 0.55 for Lombardia) and a medium-low level of educational opportunities (0.33 for Liguria and 0.35 for Lombardia). This is in contrast to low or very low scores at the country level. Scores on material conditions have been deteriorating in both regions in the last years, but remain high especially in Lombardia (0.83 in 2014, against 0.69 in Liguria and 0.59 at country level).

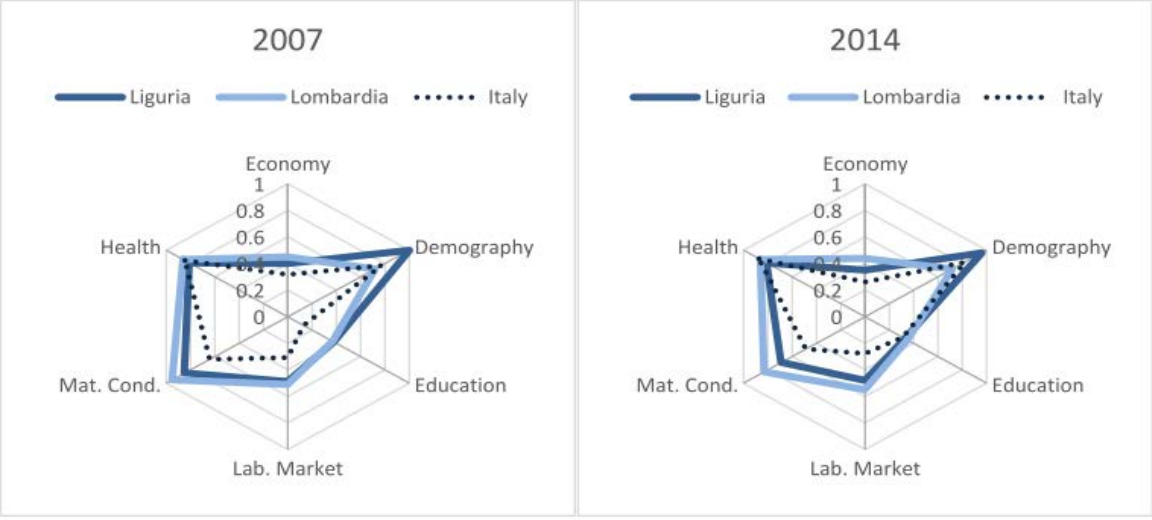

Figure 16. Profile of Italy, Lombardia and Liguria. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data.

Portugal

The contextual living conditions of young adults are analysed focusing on the regions Alentejo and Norte.[12] The main demographic trends show the growing ageing of the Portuguese population both at national and regional levels, and the high percentage of young adults aged 20-29 living with their parents. The performance of the Portuguese economy measured by GDP per inhabitant and labour productivity is still considerably lower than the EU28 average.

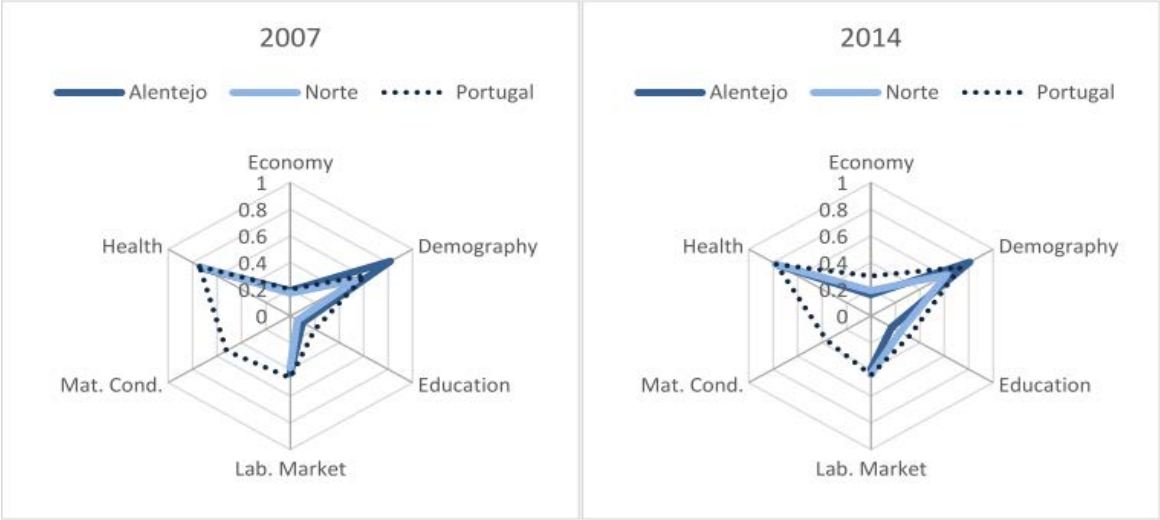

Figure 17. Profile of Portugal, Alentejo and Norte. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data.

Between 2005 and 2016, the educational attainment of the Portuguese population has improved significantly both nationally and regionally. The NEET rate decreased both at the national and regional level. However, the NEET national average is higher than the European average, it is slightly lower in both Alentejo and Norte. Once again, significant regional differences can be found. Generally, the Norte labour market seems to be more youth-friendly than the Alentejo one. The income inequality started to increase strongly after 2011, transforming Portugal into one of the most unequal countries in the EU. The two Portuguese regions of Alentejo and Norte show quite similar profiles of contextual living conditions, with high and medium high scores along the dimension of demography (0.81 for Alentejo and 0.62 for Norte in 2014) and health (0.76 for Alentejo and 0.78 for

[12] In following referring to FRs Alentejo Litoral and Vale do Ave.

Norte in 2014). This is in line with the national profile for Portugal. However, the indicator for economic performance is low (0.16 for Alentejo and 0.19 for Norte in 2014). Similarly, the scores for educational opportunities are low. However these appear to be improving, albeit from a low base in 2007. Specifically, Alentejo went from 0.1 to 0.17, while Norte went from 0.06 to 0.24. The weaknesses of the education system and of the connection with the labour market coincide with a medium score for employment (0.4 for Alentejo and 0.44 for Norte in 2014). As for material conditions, data is unfortunately lacking for both the regions but the scores at the national level reveal deterioration in conditions, manifested in lower disposable income and higher poverty and exclusion. On this dimension, Portugal fell from 0.69 in 2007 to 0.44 in 2014.

Scotland

The contextual living conditions of young adults are analyzed focusing on the regions North Eastern Scotland and West Central Scotland.[13] It is well-known in Scotland that risk profiles of young adults correlate with socioeconomic background, as for instance manifested in the education attainment gradient and access to universities. Fortuitously, the four NUTS2 statistical regions in Scotland represent an approximate fit with major metropolitan areas of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, in addition to the Highland and Islands. However, many policies operate at a smaller spatial scale and therefore such aggregate data is often unsatisfactory. Youth employment in Scotland on average is slightly stronger than in the UK as a whole and markedly so in North Eastern Scotland. On the whole, the UK compares favourably to an EU average. In terms of the share of tertiary education in the working age population, Scotland is the most educated country in Europe. The two Scottish regions of North Eastern Scotland and South Western Scotland present quite similar profiles, with medium or high scores that are representive of comparatively favorable contextual living conditions. These are in line with the country-level scores for the United Kingdom in 2014. The demographic pressure is medium and less than several European countries (0.52 for North Eastern Scotland and 0.6 for South Western Scotland in 2014). The same holds true the health dimension. Scores on the key dimensions of labour market and education are medium or medium-high. North Eastern

[13] In following referring to FRs Aberdeen and Shire City Region and Glasgow City Region.

Scotland scores 0.63 on the education dimension and 0.58 on the labour market dimension. South Western Scotland scores 0.53 on education and 0.67 on the labour market, showing a strong imrpovement after 2007. Data on economic and material condition dimensions are unfortunately missing, so that we can only refer to national level scores: In 2014 the United Kingdom scored comparatively high on the economic dimension (0.72) and also on material conditions (0.69), even if both have deteriorated slightly since 2007.

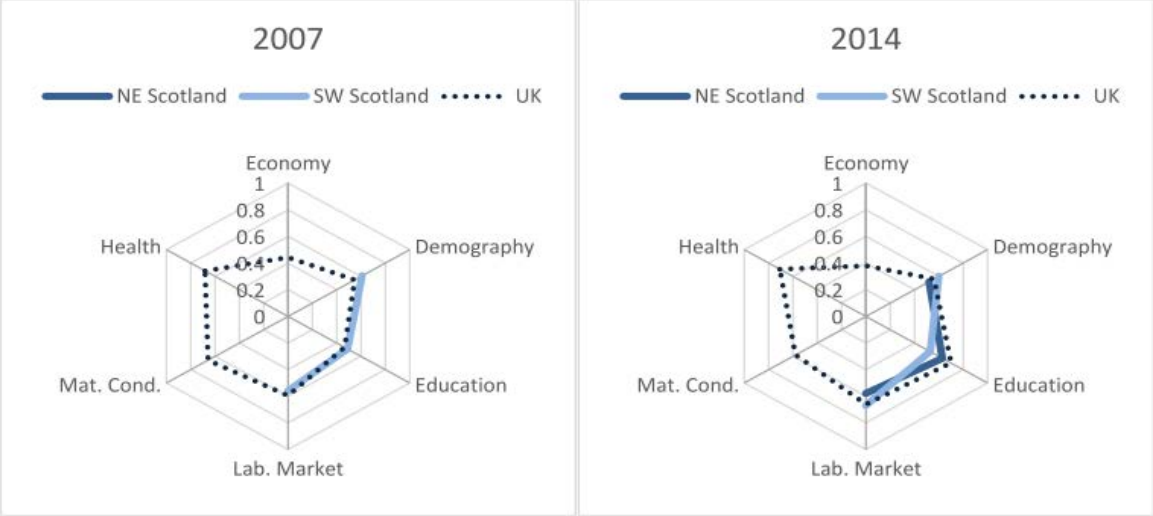

Figure 28. Profile of Scotland, North Eastern Scotland and South Western Scotland. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data.

Spain

The contextual living conditions of young adults are analysed focusing on the regions Catalonia and Andalusia.[14] The impact of the economic crisis has strongly hit the contextual living conditions in Spain, and especially the economy of the country was heavily affected by the recent recession. Spain still lags behind its European partners with regard to educational attainment of the total population, but this is the result of strong differences across age cohorts.

In Andalusia tertiary education attainment remains below the national average, while in Catalonia it is higher. The labour market has traditionally suffered from very high

[14] In following referring to FRs Girona and Malaga.

unemployment, but this was gradually reduced in the 20-year period up to 2009. The economic crisis has hampered the access to the labour market, and the transition between education and the first job is especially precarious. The scores of the two Spanish regions of Andalusia and Catalonia reveal a divided picture on many dimensions of contextual living conditions.

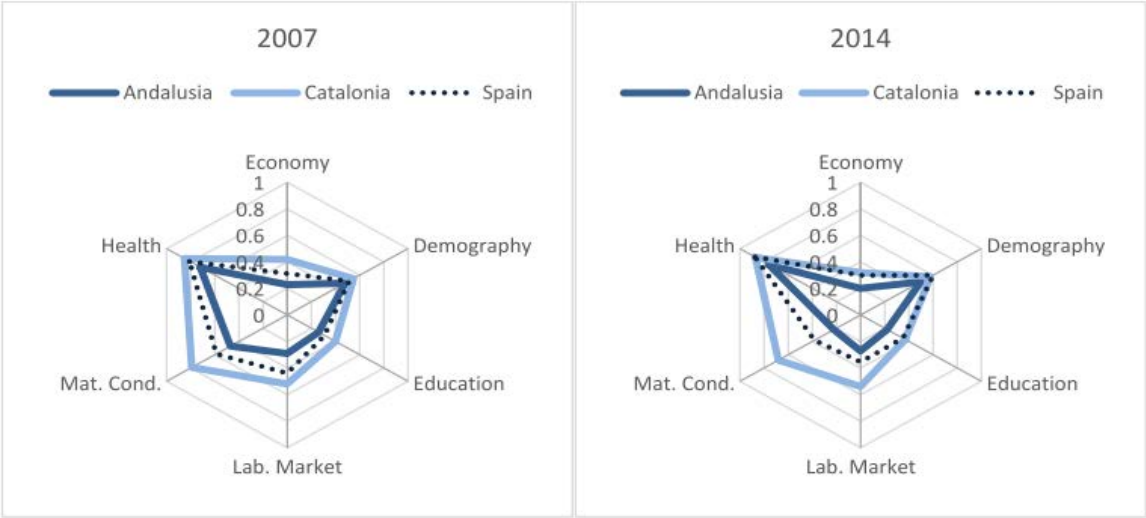

Figure 39. Profile of Spain, Catalonia and Andalusia. Source: Authors own elaboration on EUROSTAT data.

In general, when benchmarked against national scores, Andalusia is usually characterized by worse conditions, while Catalonia performs better. This holds true for the level of educational opportunities, with Andalusia scoring 0.22 and Catalonia 0.37; of labour market integration, with Andalusia scoring 0.27 and Catalonia 0.54; and of material conditions, with Andalusia scoring 0.22 and Catalonia 0.68. For Catalonia in particular the data reveal a deterioration from 2007 to 2014, which is in line with findings for Spain as a whole and is indicative of a strong impact of the economic crisis on resources, poverty and exclusion. A similar trend holds true for the economic dimension, especially for Catalonia (the respective score fell from 0.42 to 0.32). The demography and health dimension show, instead, a common pattern made up by high life expectancy and low infant mortality, together with a process of population ageing that appears to be less pronounced than many other European countries (scores of 0.5 for Andalusia and 0.58 for Catalonia in 2014).

Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter emphasizes the relevance of contextual living conditions as shaping the structures of opportunities for young adults in different regional settings. It provides synthetic and systematic information on different dimensions that can be usefully related to LLL policy-making and to the impact of such interventions.

The findings show that there are huge differences both in the level and dispersion of young adults' living conditions across European territories. However, this evidence is partial and relies on limited and aggregated information about the living conditions young adults are experiencing. The regions selected show a trend of general but differentiated increase in tertiary education attainment among young adults that are therefore becoming more qualified, when trying to access the labour market. On the other hand, due the impact of the economic crisis, many regions experienced worsening labour market conditions, especially in the South and East European regions that were more affected by the economic crisis. Regions with a higher GDP per inhabitant show better employment conditions for young adults, while the level of tertiary education appears to be less correlated, showing that economic growth does not have a direct impact on the outcomes of the education system, which are connected to long-term trends and institutional structures. However, this is marked by strong regional variations. Some regions present more favourable structure of opportunities in young adults' school-to-work transitions: the German regions of Darmstadt and Bremen, the Austrian regions of Oberösterreich and Wien, the Scottish regions of South-West and East-West Scotland, together with the Finnish region of Pohjois-Suomi and partially also the Spanish region of Catalonia and the Bulgarian region of Yugozapaden. On the other hand, the regions Andalusia, Liguria Continental and Adriatic Croatia and Yuzhen Tsentralen combine an above-the-average level of youth unemployment with a low educational attainment. The regions of Lombardia and the two Portuguese regions (Alentejo and Norte) share with this first group a similar level of educational attainment, but show more favourable labour market conditions, as youth unemployment is lower. The overall picture is quite differentiated. Some regions show a mismatch between a growing supply of higher qualified young people and a demand affected by the economic downturn, resulting in a difficult integration of young people into the labour market, while other couple increasing educational attainments with a higher labour market integration. German, Austrian, Scottish and Finnish regions have both higher values in 2014 and they show better scores compared to 2007. On the other hand, Andalusia, Yuzhen Tsentralen, Alentejo and Norte score low in 2007 and they

remain stable. Pohjois-Suomi, Wien, Yugozapaden and Oberösterreich strongly increased their labour market integration, while it decreased slightly for Andalusia and Alentejo (see **Figure 9**). In 2014, there are only three regions that maintained higher education opportunities and high labour market access compared to 2007: North East Scotland, Darmstadt and Oberösterreich, three out of the four richest regions which also show more stable labour market conditions. These regions coupled overall economic conditions with smoother labour market integration more successfully. However, German, Austrian, Finnish and Scottish regions seemed to better maintain educational opportunities and high overall material conditions for young adults. More complex composite indicators on youth opportunities confirm the relevance of a research approach focusing on sub-national levels of analysis, bringing local contexts to centre stage.

In conclusion, some regions show a mismatch between a growing supply of higher qualified young people and a demand affected by the economic downturn, resulting in a difficult integration of young people into the labour market, while others couple increasing educational attainments with a higher labour market integration mainly driven by reduced youth unemployment.

Policies are the result of a complex interaction with the social and economic contexts in which they are implemented, and with the respective social actors. The success of any political reform depends largely on how these aspects are structured. Our results show that GDP, educational attainment and employment rates are strongly associated to different patterns. Similar levels of GDP per capita correspond to varying levels of attainment at regional level. There seems to be some correlation between educational attainment and employment rates, but Andalusia and Upper Austria are clearly two outliers among the selected regions. There are huge differences both in the level and dispersion across European territories in young adults' living conditions. Moreover, the economic downturn has reinforced these differences for the regions analysed. Unfortunately, this evidence is partial and could rely on very limited comparative information.

To better inform policies, an intense effort is needed in order to develop richer context-based information at the different territorial levels (both and NUTS2 and NUTS3). A comprehensive integration and analysis of multi-source data at the different levels of analysis is a hard goal to accomplish. However, the need and relevance of contextualised data at regional and local level could produce a full picture of the risk profiles related to

the living conditions of young people in different European regions. This is the approach used in the WP4 of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, where many regional indicators on the six dimensions we identified (see **Figure 4**) are combined in order to produce synthetic measures of living conditions of young adults.

Highlighting existing data gaps and improving the availability and accessibility of territorial information for better targeted policies are crucial steps also to improve nation-state based measures and their territorially differentiated impact. Due to changing realities, such as internationalisation, Europeanization and globalisation processes, the use of the national-level as a representative unit of account should be questioned and more context-sensitive localised proxies could be useful tools to describe changing social contexts.

Indeed, there is the need for increasing our understanding of the contexts within which measures are implemented. This calls for more contextualized information which is a prerequisite for regional comparative analysis and a more targeted and evidence-based policy. Moreover, in order to develop a broader interpretative framework, it is necessary to tap new data sources that are not strictly based on existing measures of education and labour market status. The availability of information related to dimensions such as housing, social and political participation, individual well-being, relational and vital space and skills are needed for the construction of a more fine-grained analysis of the indicators of contextual living conditions. A holistic approach to living conditions is essential particularly in a time of socio-economic changes and reconfiguration of young adults' motivations and aspirations.

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4. Young Adults' Participation in LLL and Its Impact on Their Life Projects

Siyka Kovacheva, Judith Jacovkis, Sonia Startari & Anna Siri

Introduction

Youth unemployment and labour market insecurity have increased significantly in Europe in recent years and have created new forms of vulnerability and exclusion (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Austerity measures implemented in several European countries after the economic crisis, such as labour market reforms to promote flexible labour markets and cuts in state support for higher education students, have exacerbated the risks that young people face (Hamilton et al., 2014). According to recent studies, young adults are the group most affected by the effects of the crisis and the associated austerity measures (Theodoropoulou & Watt, 2011; McKee, 2012; Busch et al., 2013; Dietrich, 2013). Difficulties in finding and staying in employment have increased youth exposure to the risks of poverty, material deprivation, lack of autonomy and social exclusion.

Before the 2008 crisis a main focus of expanding the field of the youth policy in Europe was explicitly on NEET (Yates & Payne, 2006), now, instead, there is a growing policy concern with the "young" as a whole, seen as a cohort at risk of precarity (Standing, 2011), and in young adulthood as a new age group that needs targeted social policies. The political challenges to manage youth transitions more effectively emerge in part from the de-standardisation and increasing non-linearity of educational trajectories in present-day European societies (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000; Cuconato, 2017), together with the individualisation and complexity of many life course transitions (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992).

The challenges facing young people as they live through their transition to adulthood are therefore unprecedented in European societies. For that reason, it is necessary to reflect deeply on the effectiveness of social policies for young people in times of crisis and the underlying assumptions in order to identify strategies that can mitigate or even reverse the effects of these new risks.

This chapter has young adults' narratives of their trajectories through the institutions and social structures as its starting point. Its objective is to add to and juxtapose young people's perspectives to that of the experts in LLL, when defining the learning needs, deficiencies and resources of the participants in learning programmes beyond school in

their transitions to adulthood. Our focus is on the subjective interpretation of the individual life and the ways in which this participation shapes their aspirations and life projects. We look at young people's motivation to join LLL programmes and their expected relevance to their life projects, then proceed with examining their experiences during the training including relations with trainers, employers and other professionals and finish with young adults' own evaluation of the results from the training and how these impact on their future life projects. Inquiring into the role of LLL on young people's trajectories as seen by the young participants themselves we take into consideration the crosscutting influence of inequalities in terms of gender, class, ethnicity and specific degrees of 'vulnerability' and in doing so, we try to reveal the complex relationship between individual agency and the structures of opportunities and constraints arising from the social time/place in which young people's lives unfold.

Understanding young adults' participation in LLL

In most EU countries access to education is no longer a guarantee of educational success. Many students are excluded from meaningful and satisfactory educational experiences and trajectories regardless of their enrolment in formal education. As Tarabini et al. (2018) have recently analysed, there are risk situations for many youngsters that are neither experiencing inclusive education nor being totally excluded from education. The various groups of young people involved experience and narrate these situations differently. However, all of them raise some common elements. On the one hand, being excluded from education is not a direct consequence of being socially excluded, although both processes are closely linked. In this regard, education system (policies, schools, classrooms) can be spaces of production of educational exclusion. On the other, and additionally, it affects unevenly different social profiles such as gender, class and ethnicity (see, among others, Bonal, 2012, Gazeley, 2010, Kane, 2006).

In any case, the definition of normality set at the political level, in Dale's terms (1999), is a central element of the school order, which establishes an image of an "ideal pupil" that crosses all education stages and institutions. According to what "failed" students from very different contexts say (Tarabini et al, 2018, Smyth & Hattam, 2004), the lack of sense of belonging, the feeling of failure and the discrimination and pejorative labelling are shared experiences that contribute to set the line that distances them from their "normal" peers. In fact, it is at second-chance schools where they finally feel that they are part of the whole,

that they are regular, common people. In these spaces they participate more intensively in their learning process, learning by doing and having their potentials recognised, regardless of their fit in the frame of prestigious (and academic) knowledge and interests.

Although the abovementioned research is focused on the school period, there are some elements that we consider that can be also taken into account when approaching the impact of the LLL programmes in their participants' experiences and trajectories. How do they include the addressees' opinions, concerns and interests? Do they provide alternatives to a school order that has already failed for many of their participants? Do they consider current and past learning experiences of the trainees when proposing training schemes and teaching practices? Do they ultimately include the voice of the youth in their design, implementation and evaluation stages?

When measuring the effect of LLL programmes, policymakers are usually concerned with the take-up and completion of the courses, then, at best, with the insertion of the trainees in the labour market, employing documentary analysis and interviews with practitioners and instructors. Rarely are young people's views asked for and analysed and even rarer are the participants consulted either at the preparation or the evaluation stage of the policy. Another major deficiency of conventional policy analysis is the neglect of the degree to which the program has provided the young participants with subjectively meaningful experiences and increased their capacity to successfully accomplish the multiple transitions that the life stage of youth involves.

Our approach in YOUNG_ADULLLT builds upon two main propositions: embedding youth involvement in LLL in a life course perspective and understanding participation as an expression of young people's agency in becoming active learners capable of making choices and mobilising resources to manage their own lives.

First, we argue that the life course perspective best captures the role of LLL programmes in the life projects of young adults. Life course research is an inquiry into the life course transitions of individuals 'through institutions and social structures and is embedded in relationships that constrain and support behaviour – both the individual life course and a person's developmental trajectory are interconnected with the lives and development of others' (Elder, 1998, p. 5; see also Weiler et al., 2017). The focus of this perspective is on the dynamic interplay in human lives between social structures, institutions and individual action. Unlike the psychological lifecycle approach, this perspective employs a

contextualist approach linking individual lives to social time and place (Elder et al, 2003; Heinz, 2009). The timing of key events in the life course is studied in relation to the historical period in which the life is lived and acknowledges the interaction of multiple layers of milieus: the *macro* social structures in terms of global and national economic developments, political and demographic processes, dominant cultures, trends in the educational system and welfare policies; the *meso* level of the regional and local institutions, educational and labour market opportunities, local government and provision of social services, civil society organizations, social networks; and the *micro* level comprising of the individual actors themselves, with their own abilities and biographical perspectives, and their relations with family members, close friends and practitioners. Faced with a multi-layered structure of opportunities and constraints, individuals actively construct their biography (Heinz, 2009; Biggart et al., 2015; Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015). In their life trajectories, young adults make more or less informed choices, attribute meanings to their actions and reflect upon them thus creating their understanding of the sequence of the events in their life story (Rosenthal, 2004).

Second, we contemplate that a fuller understanding of the role of LLL policies in young people's life transitions is possible when treating the young participants not as passive 'beneficiaries' but as co-creators of their learning experiences. Youth participation in LLL as a concept is much wider than attendance and successful completion of the program (with success measured by institutional criteria). Social work studies have developed concepts of user involvement and empowerment (Askheim, 2003; Payne, 2005) but this approach has usually limited users' participation to particular aspects – such as personal access to budgets in adult service provision or to extracurricular activities of youth after school (Duffy et al., 2010; Walther, 2012). The analysis should search for the ways of young people's active contribution to the governance of LLL policies, in terms of autonomy, subjectivity, and enablement of young people to manage their learning experiences and integrate them meaningfully in the individual biography.

Data and Sampling

In this paper we examine the experiences of young adults of participation in diverse LLL programmes run by various governmental and private institutions across 18 functional regions (FR) in nine European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom) which have been studied in the

YOUNG_ADULLLT project (cf. Rambla et al., 2018). The analysis builds upon 168 in-depth interviews with young people conducted in 2017. Interviewees aged between 18 and 30 years were selected from current or former participants in programmes developed in three main LLL policy sectors: education, employment and youth/social policy. Gender, ethnic or migrant family background and educational level were also taken into consideration to achieve a maximum diversity of the group in each region. The interviews followed a common strategy starting with young people's stories about their own lives and then proceeded with more focused questions about their learning trajectories, biographical turning points, encounters with LLL programmes, employers, state and private training institutions and life projects in the near future. The interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed supplemented with two-page English summaries. The full narratives were coded by the local teams who had conducted the interviews creating both common and locally specific codes and categories.

The research project generated a rich qualitative data base that demonstrates the diversity of the young adults' life trajectories, significantly deviating from the dominant expectations about standard life courses, in which life events appear in a uniform timing (Brückner & Mayer, 2004, p. 32). The interviewees who were all in a vulnerable situation deviating from the normal school career through stages of the formal educational system were not a homogeneous group of under-achievers lacking basic skills. They displayed a wide range of differences in terms of gender, ethnicity, family background, and learning biographies before joining the programmes. Some had a linear upward trajectory in the formal educational system up to the university level and then experienced a crisis and were unable to access employment before enrolling in a LLL measure. Others were early school leavers who did not have the educational credentials to take on vocational training in the formal educational system. While some were from privileged family backgrounds, others had fractured learning biographies, early parenting responsibilities or physical and psychological problems. The policy measures in which they had enrolled were also very diverse with varying definitions of the target group, pursued objectives and implementation methods (cf. Chapter 6, in this Report). In the analysis that follows we do not present programmes that could serve as good practice examples in their narrow field of policy sector but attempt to highlight young participants' perspectives on their involvement in the LLL and whether and in what way these learning experiences were meaningful to them.

The paper looks into young people's participation in LLL from three main points of view:

- young adults' life projects and motivations for enrolling in LLL
- their learning experiences in the program
- the effect of the program as seen by the young themselves

Getting involved: the relevance of LLL to young adults' projects

The data from the qualitative study clearly demonstrates the complexity of their life paths and the difficulties the young face in constructing their life projects. The initial examination of the narratives of the young participants showed that less than a third had a concrete life project while most interviewees had somewhat vague ideas how to achieve autonomy and more generally the status of adults. The findings confirm the observation of many scholars who claim that in late modernity the relationship with the future changes radically and people abandon attempts to plan for the future which were at the heart of one's biographical construction in early modernity (Leccardi, 2008; Feixa et al., 2015). Coping with the accelerated pace of social life results in reframing one's life strategy towards living in an 'extended present' (Nowotny, 1994) and replacing planning for the future with flexibility in the present, keeping your options open. The young adults interviewed in the project who did not have a future life plan tried to cope with the increasing uncertainty by focusing on the present. While such a strategy is often interpreted as liberating one's subjectivity through developing a link with time not conditioned by a market logic (Leccardi, 2015), many of our interviewees expressed concern with their inability to make plans and to delay decisions for their major life transitions such as leaving the parental home or starting a family for an undetermined future. In addition, many in the group of interviewees with definite life projects felt forced to redefine them as they had experienced a rupture in their life trajectories due to illness, family breakdown or violence or had failed to meet the school requirements and left school early. Often they hoped that the training would serve as a remedial pathway and an opportunity to return on the path towards their life projects.

The interviews provide a fruitful ground for studying young people's motivations to join a LLL policy programme. Itself a multi-dimensional phenomenon, motivation is a deeply personal consideration of the needs and opportunities related to the individual value system and evaluation of the situation for the choice. Motivation arises not only from the individual decision making but also from the contexts in which the personal lives unfold (Katznelson, 2017). Studying the meaningful choices that young adults make about training and future jobs and their subjective interpretations, we should not underestimate

the wider social processes in the different societies the young are not fully aware of (Cieslik & Simpson, 2006).

In the Southern European countries Portugal, Italy, Spain, as well as in Croatia and Bulgaria – as countries hit hard by the 2008 economic crisis – participation in LLL was highly motivated by desire to improve employment prospects. Many young adults talked about their expectation to obtain a formal certificate which could increase their educational credentials and allow them better access to the labour market:

> Very honestly…in 2017 on your CV you must have at least a high school qualification, even if maybe your qualification does not have anything to do with the job you are applying for, at least you can prove that you had the goodwill to complete the primary, lower secondary and high school, you can anyway prove your effort. [Y_IT_M_1]

Getting a formal educational certificate was even more important for recent immigrants who did not have recognised school diplomas from the country of arrival:

> I went to the adult school to have the Compulsory Secondary Education Certificate. In Senegal, I went to post-compulsory secondary but when I arrived here with 17 years old my certificate wasn't recognised. [Y_SP_G_7]

Many young adults from the national majorities also lacked formal education and labour market credentials as they had left school early and their only working experiences had been from undeclared jobs.

Finishing a training program opened the way to return to the upward educational route – to a post-compulsory-school degree or university in the more differentiated LLL systems like the UK, Germany, Austria and Finland. Many young adults enrolled in the programmes seeing them as an easier springboard into higher education in the desired field in which they had not been accepted despite several attempts to pass the regular entrance exams. For example, a 21-year old man in Scotland who had applied unsuccessfully many times to university enrolled in a course offered by the Training Centre in Aberdeen:

> ‘So I was thinking about, after finishing the NC (course) itself, I’ll do the HND (second level course), and maybe after the HND, if I still feel like it, might apply to unis again and get a diploma’. [Y_UK_A_1].

For young people with undecided or blurred life projects who felt at a loss vis-à-vis the structural constraints they are facing, the participation in LLL was an opportunity to avoid making plans and go on ‘living day by day’. The training was seen as a waiting loop which

was socially acceptable and approved by parents. Personally, they appreciated the fact that the training schedules provided structure in their daily lives. In almost all countries some such young people made the choice to enrol in the training schemes to have something to do and keep themselves occupied.

> But I thought, yes, instead of just sitting at home and doing nothing and doing whatever, I come here. Because, first because of getting up early, that's great. Because if I find a job, I will already be in that rhythm. [Y_AT_V_8]

Most of the above narratives highlight how young people's motives for engaging with LLL are largely instrumental, conditioned by a market logic to increase one's chances of getting a job. Rarely did we find expressions of more 'intrinsic' motives linking between the personal needs and the content of the training. Still, some young people talked about being attracted by the opportunity to develop particular skills offered by the concrete program and be able to apply them in a future job that they would love to do. In all countries, the interviews included narratives about young people's aiming at specific skills. Thus, a Roma man [Y_BG_P_11] interviewed in Plovdiv FR had a project to establish his farm and enrolled in the program of an NGO in order to learn how to cultivate vegetables. A 20-year-old female interviewee from Glasgow [Y_UK_G_5] took an apprenticeship in a small digital marketing company to learn to work in what she aspired to and considered essential for her personal development. In Italy, some participants felt motivated to join a training program involving volunteering by the value of helping others and offering a useful service to the community:

> Volunteering... is an element that one does because one feels to do it… but also for a selfish aspect that I think is natural, not only for personal satisfaction but, at the same time, also for the search for skills, because they can be spent elsewhere and I think this is an absolutely useful thing. [Y_IT_G_7]

However, many more were those participants who felt pressured to join a program by the lack of labour market opportunities in their region and often framed this pressure in a generational discourse ('*there are no jobs for the present-day youth'*), sometimes mentioning 'nepotism' in the access to good education and jobs in the context of South and East European countries. Young people stated that they had to enrol in training programmes which did not fit with their plans and aspirations. In Portugal, the interviewees in the functional region of Alentejo Litoral complained that they were forced to choose from a very narrow range of courses – either gardening or welding. When asked how he

decided to enrol in this course, a young man with a working-class origin put it briefly: "*Because it was the only one*" [Y_PT_AL_4]. In Girona FR (Spain), the few numbers of places in each programme was added to the narrow range of offers "*More people and more teachers and more things to learn, because there are many youngsters [who cannot access the programme]."* [Y_SP_G_7]. In Croatia and Bulgaria, the young complained of the poor career guidance which to inform them about the ability requirements for and the employment prospects after the training. What is more, some young adults revealed that their actual or potential employers made the young sign on to a program offered by the Labour Office instead of providing an employment contract:

> As I decided to apply for the job, the boss mentioned that he had participated in this (LLL) program (...) And if I want to start with them, this is the condition because the program actually requires it. [Y_BG_P_2]

A major drawback for the young to make an informed choice of the LLL programmes and schemes was the lack of adequate information about the courses. Many found that the training did not suit their expectations. Some even felt that the counsellors intentionally misled them. One young man from Vienna was very critical about the information he was provided by the program officers and he felt that the participants had been intentionally deceived:

> We were sort of surprised, among the employees, yes. We were wondering a lot, that we actually have been lied at quite boldly, that, that at the beginning, that they said, that the people will take care of us, will help us, really help us, to find something else. But in the end, it feels more like they are happy, that they have a cheap workforce now. [Y_AT_V_6]

In general, many of the expectations of the interviewed young adults were in line with the official objectives of the LLL policies – to receive the necessary formal certificates and to acquire the skills that would allow them to continue studying or improve their chances for insertion in the labour market. In some cases, however, employers use the programmes to avoid employment regulations and get employees at a lower price. More often, the young people receive insufficient information about the courses before enrolling which, matched with a lack of adequate career orientation, reduces participants' opportunities for and satisfaction from experiences. In the next paragraph we examine whether and to what extent the young adults are allowed and encouraged to engage actively in the process of

learning. Their participation in LLL as autonomous learners is a precondition for achieving a sustainable impact from the view of both policy objectives and individual life aspirations.

Experiences of (non)participation in LLL

The interviews with young adults who were currently or had been recently attending training programmes provide evidence about positive experiences in the LLL. For many young people, the policy measures met their expectations offering support and understanding:

> I think in general that this a chance and a very good project, which could help many people and I hope that more people can participate in such things, that such things get more funding, because I know exactly and have seen that there are enough young people who could not see the light at the end of the tunnel and who need help. [Y_GER_F_3].

The young had come to the courses/schemes expecting '*practical training'*, '*practice-based approach*' and most were highly satisfied with the type of learning they received contrasting it to the 'theoretical' and 'abstract' teaching in the formal school system. This type of learning was made possible by the personalised style of the practitioners and the flexible and individualised support coming with it. The satisfaction with trainers' '*understanding*' and '*psychological support*' most often came from the narratives of young people in Finland who were enrolled in programmes of the well-developed youth sector of the Finnish LLL policy system. An appraisal of the individualised approach was also present in the mid-European countries of Austria and Germany:

> I would say it is really good that I am here because the people just support you. They talk stuff through with you. Also, personal stuff. (…) I think it helps. But I think you have to engage in it. (…) I think you can get really far, but you have to engage, to engage with the people, with the coaches. [Y_AT_UA_2]

> I have learned that I can come to them with a very simple and trivial question and I get an answer. And I really found hope here and I have the feeling that I got a perspective. […] I have the feeling that here are human beings who really support special cases like me (laughs). Yes, and it is the first time I feel safe. Y_GER_F_1].

The figure of the trainer/practitioner in the training course or the policy scheme was also identified as important in young adults' experiences in Spain. The trainees found the trainers' advice and attention highly supportive and gave ample evidence of the close relations between the young adults and their trainers:

> So much companionship, then... the teachers, very close to us. It's not like a high school. I did the courses with less people, because we were ten per module like they are closer to you, they help you more, you... They reinforce you more... I do not know, like that... You learn more, okay? In my opinion. [Y_SP_M_7]

The individualised approach of the training was much enhanced when the program was flexible, and this was another source of positive experiences for the participants. The teaching in many programmes was adapted to the needs and abilities of the young adults. Such stories came most often from Austria, Germany and Finland. Where such adaptability was missing, negative evaluations prevailed. In all other countries, the lack of flexibility was the leading narrative.

Peer support was also highly valued, and the young spoke about being with people sharing the same enjoyment of working with their hands and also having similar problems. In the Finnish Kainuu FR, peers proved important not only when making educational choices but also in coping with the demands of life both inside and outside the training. If one's family relationships were unstable, the role of peers and friends as significant others strongly affected one's life decisions. In Spain the young appreciated the social relationships with the trainees in the program: "*I found out I enjoyed socialising. That's what this training gave me.*" (Y_SP_G_6). In all countries family members, friends and relatives were also a significant source of support for the young adults.

In contrast to the positive experiences above, some of the young participants were confronted with a lack of personal support and recognition of their individual circumstances. The role of counsellors/trainers in some of the programmes was perceived as challenging or even disturbing. Thus, despite the well-established rules and regulations in the highly differentiated LLL system in Germany, there was a case of a young man (Y_GER_B_8) who had been bullied by his peers and the instructor made him leave the program. Another young person with a similar experience was interviewed in Austria (Y_AT_UA_1). In the UK some participants complained about the lack of sensitivity to young adults' insecurity at the start of the training. The lack of attention to and care for the personal needs of the young participants was more familiar to the young participants in the three Southern European countries. In Portugal, the typical situation was having only formal relations with the professionals. Thus, a 22-year-old man in Alentejo Litoral (Y_PT_AL_6) described his relationship with the counsellor in the Employment Office as

very formal and distant. It was reduced to *'receiving the usual postcard'* inviting him to the office to see the existing offers.

Similar experiences were reported in Bulgaria and Croatia. A young woman in Istria FR (Y_CR_I_3) explained she had '*no expectations whatsoever'* from the counsellor in the Croatian Employment Service. She wished to get extra training in IT, but the counsellor told her that there were no places left and that she should start training as a cook. Some of the young adults in Bulgaria who were enrolled in the Youth Guarantee program criticised employers for not being willing to provide them adequate training. Instead at the workplace young trainees were expected to start off immediately doing all tasks:

> Most employers think that when you go, you have to know everything. And there is no way that you have this knowledge, at least from higher education. (...) Employers do not understand that this is an internship program and they have to teach you. [Y_BG_P_3]

This experience is not shared by all the youngsters in all the analysed regions, as these quotations from two young women in Girona (Spain) show:

> Yes, each restaurant is as it is but in the place where I went, they taught me quite well, yes. [Y_SP_G_11]

> Well, they [in a hotel] always observe you and if you do something wrong they explain it to you for doing it better and as they do it. (...) They have more work, and if they see your mistakes, they always explain it to you, when they have time when they have some minutes to tell you. [Y_SP_G_12]

The interviews showed that the young adults did not have a wide scope of training programmes suited to their interests or specific needs. Very few were the programmes taking into consideration the special mental or physical needs of the trainees or their responsibilities in other life domains, for example, caring for very young children or sick parents. The schemes that provided better conditions for such specific situations were the most difficult to get access to by the young due to high requirements and bureaucratic procedures. Once in the program, in general, the participants shared positive experiences and enjoyed the support of counsellors and peers. Yet, young adults in all countries described cases of unresponsive attitudes of the officers in the Job Centres, detached and distanced trainers and employers who took up training programmes without caring for the adaptation and coaching of the new recruits.

Looking from a participatory perspective, the individualised approach of trainers is a precondition for empowering young adults. Practices allowing the young to choose the instructor or influence the working schedule are elements of a participatory learning process. Even such positive experiences do not give enough grounds to conclude that the young are treated as active participants in the training, allowed to make claims to the forms in which the training was implemented or that their rights as learners are recognised.

The effect of the LLL programmes

Our interviewees elaborated with readiness what they had gained from their experiences in the LLL. Their narratives usually started with the types of capabilities they managed to develop or not and proceeded with the wider impact on their personal development.

The analysis showed that the young participants did not adopt the concept of skills, so central for the LLL policymakers in all countries and the term did not appear in their discourse. In Portugal, the interviewers had to translate the questions about skills as to "*whatever you have learned during the experiences in your life*" or "*what an employer values in an employee*" and the same happened in Spain. In Bulgaria, instead of listing concrete (narrow) skills, the young seemed to share an understanding of more general expertise and spoke about '*becoming ready to work'* or '*capable of doing the task'* rather than about specific competencies.

In the UK, Austria, Germany and Finland, the countries in the project with more differentiated LLL policy systems, the interviewees enumerated the skills that they had developed and many claimed that their expectations from the courses were met. They easily distinguished between basic and occupational skills. Many programmes targeting early school leavers placed the focus on developing basic skills such as maths. Learning the local language was also a competence that was directed towards young adults from immigrant backgrounds. For those with severe health problems achieving functional abilities was the most appreciated result. Nevertheless, most participants felt that they were building upon the skills they already possessed and saw a sign of progress in their learning trajectories up towards acquiring competences on more complex levels. Some young adults raised the issue of the transferability of the practical skills developed in training. The programmes were valued not only for the perspective to be retained in the company where the training took place but mostly because they could be young people's

assets to work in other companies as well. A young man in the Bremen FR saw the most positive result from his training at the *Werkschule* in the following way:

> I learned far more than basic skills because we really learned a lot and lots of processing methods that can be transferred one to one to almost all crafts and trades and I think this brought me very fast forward in the craft of the goldsmith. [Y_GER_B_1]

In Croatia and Italy, the interviewees stressed the acquisition of communication skills which were highly valued and used interchangeably with the terms of 'soft', 'interpersonal' and 'relational' skills and 'social competences'. Mastering foreign languages, first-hand experiences from different cultures and teamwork were highlighted by the young across FRs in other countries as well.

In many narratives, it was clear that the young trainees have accepted the rhetoric of employability and many of the skills they underlined were normatively assigned to the 'good worker' in the local labour market and listed productivity, tidiness, responsibility, respect, and commitment to the job. A young trainee in Girona, Spain put it simply: "*What they have valued from me? That I did the things when they asked me for it, that I obeyed. Yes, submission*" (Y_SP_G_6). The effect of the experience from working in the civil service in Genova, Italy, was summed up by a young participant in the following way:

> Being proactive, being enterprising, another ability is to know how to be a bit 'multitasking, that is, to know how to do many things together, because now there are many inputs and... you need to know how to manage them. To be organized to be a little flexible, flexible at the level not only of movement, because that is not a competence, that is more a personal availability... flexible just in the sense of being able to understand how you can solve a question quickly […], almost as a sort of problem solving. [Y_IT_G_7]

In contrast to those positive evaluations, the young participants in some of the LLL programmes gave a negative assessment of the results from their participation. Some interviewees found the training in occupational skills not enough, and the course was too short to provide with adequate professional skills (Y_SP_G_11). In Spain there were also some accounts that the young felt overqualified for the scheme they were in (Y_SP_M_1). Even those young people who appreciated some aspects of the training and gave an overall positive evaluation of their experiences in the programmes underlined that they had skills developed outside of the programmes which the counsellors did not recognise and appreciate.

> We-e-ell, in this field it is pretty much like you learn most of these things by yourself, there is so much new information coming all the time. I've pretty much been learning these things in my free time. There wasn't really anything special that I would have learned at the vocational school either. [Y_FI_M_1]

In the Osijek-Baranja FR in Croatia, a 20-year-old woman considered that "*More of my skills I have developed with the help of my sisters then in elementary and secondary school*." Similar accounts were given by young participants in Italy, Spain and Bulgaria who perceived that they had acquired competencies in accounting, farming, steel processing and car repairs through the Internet or from previous undeclared jobs:

> I have administrative and accounting office skills, since until I attended school (where I got excellent evaluations), I've learned everything I could, afterwards [her drop-out] I've learned by myself, by making undeclared services of tax returns compilation for some friends. [Y_IT_M_3]

Other unmet expectations of the trainees were shared by the young participants in the Youth Guarantee in Croatia and Bulgaria who awaited to proceed from the program into employment. Instead, after the training ended, they had to register with the Employment Office again or take another course. They felt that such fragmented experiences would give negative signals to employers and most importantly their life course transitions were put on hold.

Besides acquiring or not the expected occupational skills and employment prospects, the interviewed young adults anticipated that the experience contributed to their identity development. As a participant in Portugal put it: '*We not only learn the necessary skills to apply in the labour market but we also learn on a personal level (Y_PT_VdA_3).* In Spain one participant associated the wider effects of the training with becoming able to make decisions on his own (Y_SP_G_2). For a young Roma man in Bulgaria, the program gave him not only the skills but also the knowledge '*how to become a better person*' (Y_BG_P_11). For many, the experience was associated with increased self-confidence and self-esteem, fun and love for learning and working:

> It's so much fun. I enjoyed it. I really did. They really make you bring out the person you didn't think you were. Like, you feel a lot more confident, speak a lot better. It just really brings out the true you. They try to focus on making you come out of your shell. Really good. [Y_UK_A_3]

Many young people discovered that they gained not only higher self-confidence but also recognition in the eyes of their parents and friends. A 23-year-old woman in Italy explained

that her parents who had been very disappointed by her dropping out from school, felt '*happy'* for her traineeship, saying *"You are finally awake!" (Y_IT_M_3).*

The interviews demonstrated that the youngsters in the participating countries talked about their skills in varying terms and length but all could list what they had learnt in different settings, not only from the LLL policy schemes and initiatives in which they were or had been taking part. All reported valuable gains even if just in basic skills or functional abilities. Some participants found that they had gained a lot of practical knowledge and competence in the occupational field which they aspired to find a job in. Many considered that they had developed the social skills they needed to raise their employability. The interviewees also pointed at the useful contacts with employers and knowledge of the labour market.

The young also reflected on the effects missed or not achieved to a full extent. Dissatisfaction with the learning outcomes was common among those LLL policies participants whose previous skills were not recognised and built upon in training. Instructors' indifference to individual learning needs, occupational aspirations and wider personal responsibilities also were considered as reasons for 'lost gains'. Most of all, the young adults disliked the lack of trust and recognition of their abilities to learn and to become responsible productive workers. Definitely, the young did not consider themselves incapable and unsuited to the labour market. They saw and appreciated the much wider effects of their enrolment in the schemes besides the hard-occupational skills – soft skills, abilities to plan and manage the course of their lives to a better degree.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have argued that young people in different localities in Europe were commonly willing to take the challenge of further studies and training for their successful integration in the labour market. They evaluated their experiences from the schemes/programmes positively and considered that they had developed new skills and abilities that would be useful in the pending phases of their life course. Our analysis also showed that there were mismatches between young adults' life projects and the learning experiences in the programmes.

First of all, due to a lack of enough information about the programmes, there were disparities between young people's expectations and the objectives of the LLL policies. When applying for the programmes, many young people had expected to get an

employment contract after the training, but this was a rare occurrence. Furthermore, the lack of adequate career orientation created mismatches between young adults' interests and the skills provision in the programmes. In some schemes, the young considered the training poor and claimed that they had not learnt anything new. Many felt that their skills from previous experiences were not appreciated and not upgraded by the program. The young disliked being stigmatized and their abilities devalued.

What came out of the analysis is that young adults' participation as active learners in the policies was not planned or desired. The young did not participate in the policy design or evaluation and neither policymakers nor the young themselves expected them to do so. Generally the young felt that they were considered incompetent to influence the process of learning to fit better with their life plans. In many cases, the interviewees felt that their individual needs were not catered enough during the measures and the programmes did not achieve the projected effects. Most programmes were not flexible and did not allow young people's participation in their design and implementation which resulted in young people's demotivation and drop out. Young people's competencies acquired informally in their various activities were not enough appreciated by the practitioners as valuable and were not used in the learning process. Previous research has found that the EU Structured Dialogue acts as a mechanism of consultation between young people and policy makers through which 'youth are pursued and encouraged to make them active citizens capable, as both individuals and communities, of managing their own risk' (Banjac, 2017, p. 471). Examining only official documents, the author has found a proliferation of new modes of governance (p. 483). In our research on youth participation in LLL policies, however, the voices of the young attest to the fact that the process has not reached all groups of youth in vulnerable positions, at least in the domain of LLL.

In countries such as Bulgaria and Croatia where youth transitions to employment were clearly structured and strictly controlled during the communist regime (Kovacheva, 2001), at present they found that they had to pass through a whole new life stage of training and insecure jobs before settling down in more stable jobs allowing them to make the other significant life transitions such as moving to independent housing and forming an independent family. Youngsters' voices in Spain and in Italy also show this willingness to return to what they still consider a "normal path" that leads to "normal trajectories" and significant life transitions. In these countries, though, traditional schemes of working and living are combined with the trend toward activation of the young, which puts the emphasis

on self-responsibility - including blame upon the young for lack of motivation. In those countries with long traditions of LLL policies this trend is the main feature. The individualizing policy approach to young adults is perhaps most strongly implemented in the two Scottish regions where the neoliberal traditions have the longest roots.

The study also shows the importance of creating common ground for the formal and non-formal learning processes in order to increase the value of lifelong and life-wide learning: less emphasis on the teaching methods and on the structural context in which one acquires the skills, and more on the "learning achievements" by individual participants. This requires careful consideration of the mix of knowledge, competence and attitude that is needed for the young in order to perform a specific task, enhancing the valorisation of informal and non-formal skills. This represents a very important challenge for the governance of the skills ecology. All in all, LLL policies in present-day Europe have not found the form of learning that meets the diverse needs of the current young generation and that contributes to developing the participant as a competent and autonomous learner.

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5. Policy Mapping, Review and Analysis of LLL Policies for Young Adults in Europe: Cross-National Analyses and Comparative Perspectives

Hans-Georg Kotthoff & Juan Felipe Carrillo Gáfaro

Introduction

In the last 15 years, a vast number of lifelong learning (LLL) policies for young adults have been designed and implemented in Europe in the framework of overall strategies to meeting the challenges of creating and improving economic growth and at the same time guaranteeing social inclusion (EC, 2010; Kotthoff & Moutsios, 2007). Among the numerous LLL policies and initiatives targeting young adults at secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary education levels there are substantial differences in scope, approach, orientation, and objectives; there is also much variation in the way they understand and construct their target groups, namely young adults. However, while essential progress has been made towards improving LLL policies in Europe in terms of scope and orientation, there is still considerable lack of knowledge on how LLL policies interact between the European, national and regional/local levels as well as on the extent to which they cater for the needs of young adults. Therefore, the idea of conducting a thorough review of policies and programmes in order to study the potentially competing, and possibly ambivalent, orientations and objectives of LLL policies in Europe has been a major concern for both researchers and policy makers.

However, although there is a noticeable interest in the different orientations and objectives as well as the impact of LLL policies, a close analysis of the available scientific literature on LLL policies in Europe reveals three limitations in particular, which have also been identified by other researchers in the field. A *first* limitation is pointed out by Holford & Milana (2014) in their publication on 'Adult Education Policy and the European Union', in which they stress "the empirical literature on EU lifelong education and learning policy remains modest. The complexity of policymaking as a co-production process remains largely unexplored" (op. cit., p. 6). Although the number and scope of empirical studies on EU LLL has been growing in recent years (Riddell, Markowitsch & Weedon, 2012; Saar, Ure & Holford, 2013, Milana 2016), research in educational policy studies has, according

to the overview on scholarship on the European Union and its policies provided by Holford & Milana, been dominated by discourse analysis:

> This approach can be fruitful, […] [b]ut some of its appropriations can seem a matter of fashion, or even convenience: discourse analysis of published texts – which too often passes for policy research – is a great deal cheaper and less time-consuming than, for example, participant observation of policy processes, and sometimes results in conceptual speculations that say little about the lived realities of people involved in or affected by policies, how they are made, and the practices that come with them. (ibid., p. 6)

A *second* and *third* limitation of current research on LLL policies in Europe has been identified in the Background Paper commissioned for the Global Education Monitoring Report 2016 (*Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all*) and titled 'Conceptions and realities of lifelong learning' (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016). According to the authors of this paper, who provide a very useful first multidimensional matrix to classify LLL policy documents, "an in-depth comparative study of features across regions would be of great value" (ibid., p. 19) to develop an 'elaborated typology of educations systems oriented towards LLL'. The *third* limitation, following the authors of this background paper, is the apparent lack of multilevel approaches that take account of the governance, implementation and monitoring of LLL:

> Such research should go beyond the analysis of policy documents by reaching out to various stakeholders – including experts from government, the private sector, non-governmental organisations, civil society and educational institutions - involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies. (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016, p. 19).

The YOUNG_ADULLLT (YA) project tries to address the above mentioned limitations in LLL policy research with regard to the functioning and the impact of LLL policies in different contexts and go beyond the current research by focusing on LLL policies for young adults and by enquiring into the specific embeddedness of these policies in different regions across the European Union. The point of departure is the assumption that it is by looking into the specific regional and local contexts that policies are best understood and assessed. By approaching the issue in this way, the project aims both at providing a systematic overview of the highly heterogeneous policies across the nine participating countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Scotland and Spain) *and* at yielding new knowledge about the specific local/regional forms of embedding of LLL policies of these policies in the regional economy, the labour market,

the education/training systems and the individual life projects of young adults, thus assessing these policies' ability to be effective and enquiring into their potential impact on young adult life courses.

One essential step and cornerstone of the YOUNG_ADULLLT (YA) research project towards achieving these ambitious objectives was to map, review and analyse the European policymaking landscape, in particular with regard to lifelong learning (LLL) policies. Mapping and reviewing these LLL policies played an essential role in establishing the common research base for the following sub-studies or work packages of the YA project, which could then continue their analyses and add their specific results to the cumulative research base. Situated within Work Package 3 (WP3 - Policy Mapping, Review and Analysis), the research contribution consisted in carefully designing and mapping the various forms of LLL policies within specifically chosen settings ('Functional Regions'[15]).

The research in WP3 involved three main activities: "first, *mapping* the policy field related to LLL in two functional regions in each participating country; second, thoroughly *reviewing* the policies with reference to their orientations, objectives and success criteria; as well as, third, *analysing* issues of (mutual) compatibility and integration with other social policies at local level, questioning their potential impact on young adults" (Kotthoff et al., 2017, p. 7). The results of these comprehensive research activities in WP 3 will be reported in two chapters. While this chapter focuses on the general results of the cross-national analyses of all LLL policies mapped in this project with regard to common issues, diverging developments and tensions and contradictions, the subsequent chapter will report the findings of in-depth interpretive analyses which were performed on a selected number of LLL policies (see also Chapter 6, in this Report). Following this allocation of tasks, the present chapter will *firstly* outline the comparative design of the WP 3 research work, which means meeting the challenge of developing a research framework that was capable of capturing the various and oftentimes contradicting meanings of what counts as 'lifelong learning'. *Secondly*, international trends of LLL policymaking in Europe based on cross-

[15] For the project´s understanding of the term 'Functional Regions', as well as other relevant research categories applied in YOUNG_ADULLLT project, see the following section of this article as well as the Glossary on the project´s homepage (http://www.young-adulllt.eu/glossary/index.php).

country comparisons will be presented. *Thirdly,* in the final section of this chapter we will discuss the main findings of the cross-country analyses with particular reference to tensions and challenges of LLL policy-making in Europe.

Comparative design of the WP 3 sub-study 'Policy Mapping, Review and Analysis'

This section outlines and discusses the methodological questions involved in developing the comparative design of the sub-study, which implied developing a research framework that was able to capture the multiple understandings of 'LLL policies' in the different research sites, defining our main unit of analysis (i.e. 'Functional Regions') and identifying useful criteria for the selection, mapping and analysis of LLL policies in the nine participating countries.

Starting with the main concept of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, i.e. 'LLL policies', we have to point out at the outset that the definition and usage of the term 'policy' in this research project varies slightly from its use in political science. Compared to the traditional use of the term policy in political science, the use of the term policy in YOUNG_ADULLLT is based on a much broader definition, in order to be able to capture the wide scope of the leading research questions of the project (cf. Chapter 1, in this Report). Thus, policies in YOUNG_ADULLLT do not only include different forms of policies ranging from a low level of materiality and concreteness, such as discourses, to very concrete measures. In addition, our understanding of 'policies' includes measures, which are formally initiated and run by a single institution or a group of institutions (e.g., Ministry of Labour and/or Ministry of Education) and also those measures which are more informally initiated and run by networks, which are justified by broader societal interests.

On the basis of this broad understanding of the term 'policies' outlined above, a 'coordinate system' was developed that can be used as a heuristic device to map different types of policies. The coordinate system below shows that policies can vary in at least two dimensions. In the first dimension (y-axis), policies can be understood as an aggregation of different forms of action ranging from a low level of materiality and concreteness, such as discourses (e.g., the 'knowledge-based economy') to very concrete measures (e.g., a two-week course of vocational education for disadvantaged young adults in a single school). In the second dimension (x-axis), policies can be formally initiated and run by a single institution or a group of institutions (e.g., Ministry of Labour and/or Ministry of Education) or they can be more informally initiated and run by networks of various actors

and stakeholders. The mapping of LLL policies in the nine participating EU countries took account of both of these dimensions and tried to include 'policies', which are located in different sections of this coordinate system.

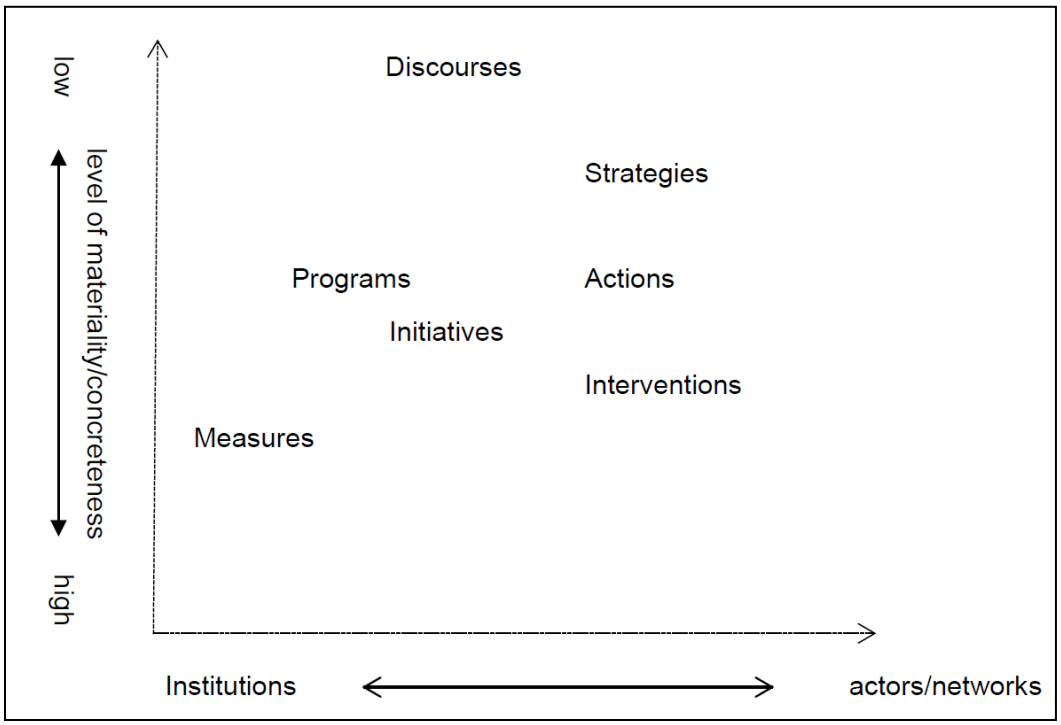

Figure 20. Coordinate system for the identification of LLL policies

This broad definition of 'LLL policies' led to a potentially overwhelming number of LLL policies in the participating countries and in order to allow for a later comparison of the mapped policies, we defined the LLL policies more closely with regard to the age range of their addressees, the timeframe and the target groups of the LLL policies. With regard to the age range, which is covered by the term 'young adult', the partners agreed to focus on minimum 18 and maximum 29 year-olds in order to accommodate to the different definitions and understandings of young adults in the participating countries. With regard to the timeframe of the LLL policies that had to be mapped by the project partners, the consortium decided to focus on policy documents and initiatives between the years 2010 and 2016, primarily because this period can be classified as a 'post-recession period'. Finally, with regard to the focus of LLL policies on specific target groups, especially those in vulnerable positions, the following groups were defined as the project's core target groups: young adults neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET); Early School Leavers (ESL); young immigrants; young entrepreneurs and business people; and

young adults who formerly were NEET. When identifying target groups in a given policy, partners were also aware of those groups which were not targeted in LLL policies. Thus, the identification of absences of certain target groups in a particular country or region as well as the construction of target groups by policies and researchers, was also part of the review and analysis of LLL policies in each country´s 'Functional Regions', which takes us directly to the definition of our main unit of analysis.

Rather than taking 'countries' or 'nation states', which are traditionally the main units of analysis in international comparative studies, the YOUNG_ADULLLT research consortium decided to take 'Functional Regions' as its main unit of analysis and thus focus on a dynamic rather than an administrative unit as research site[16]. A 'Functional Region' (FR) refers to a sub-division of territories that result from the spatial differentiation and organisation of social and economic relations rather than to geographical boundaries and particularities or to historical developments. Although the conceptual base of the term is heterogeneous across Europe, FRs are, according to the OECD, in most countries defined in terms of labour markets delineated around a given (metropolitan) centre (OECD, 2002; see also EC/OECD, 2015). Thus, a FR can be described as a territorial unit which may be characterised as a central place and the surrounding places affected by it defined by business or economic activities. For instance, the principle of commuting conditions, i.e. that of labour mobility, or the size of the population as well as the level of employment are taken as central elements. FRs usually show a relatively well-functioning match between labour supply and demand which makes labour mobility towards the exterior not necessary as workers find jobs within their own region's limits (OECD, 2002). Even though there are some incompatibilities with territorial and/or administrative regions, in most cases FRs do provide the basis for understanding regional disparities, planning and implementing labour market and economic policies (ibid.).

On the basis of these conceptual considerations, the project partners selected two FRs per country, which were identified as 'contrasting cases' with regard to socio-economic

[16] In the context of this chapter we will only provide a basic description of the term 'Functional Region'. For a more elaborate discussion of the pros and cons of using 'Functional Regions' as units of comparison in this project, please refer to Chapter 7, in this Report.

indicators and/or labour markets and/or infrastructure. The following map shows the selected 18 FRs in the nine participating countries of the research project.

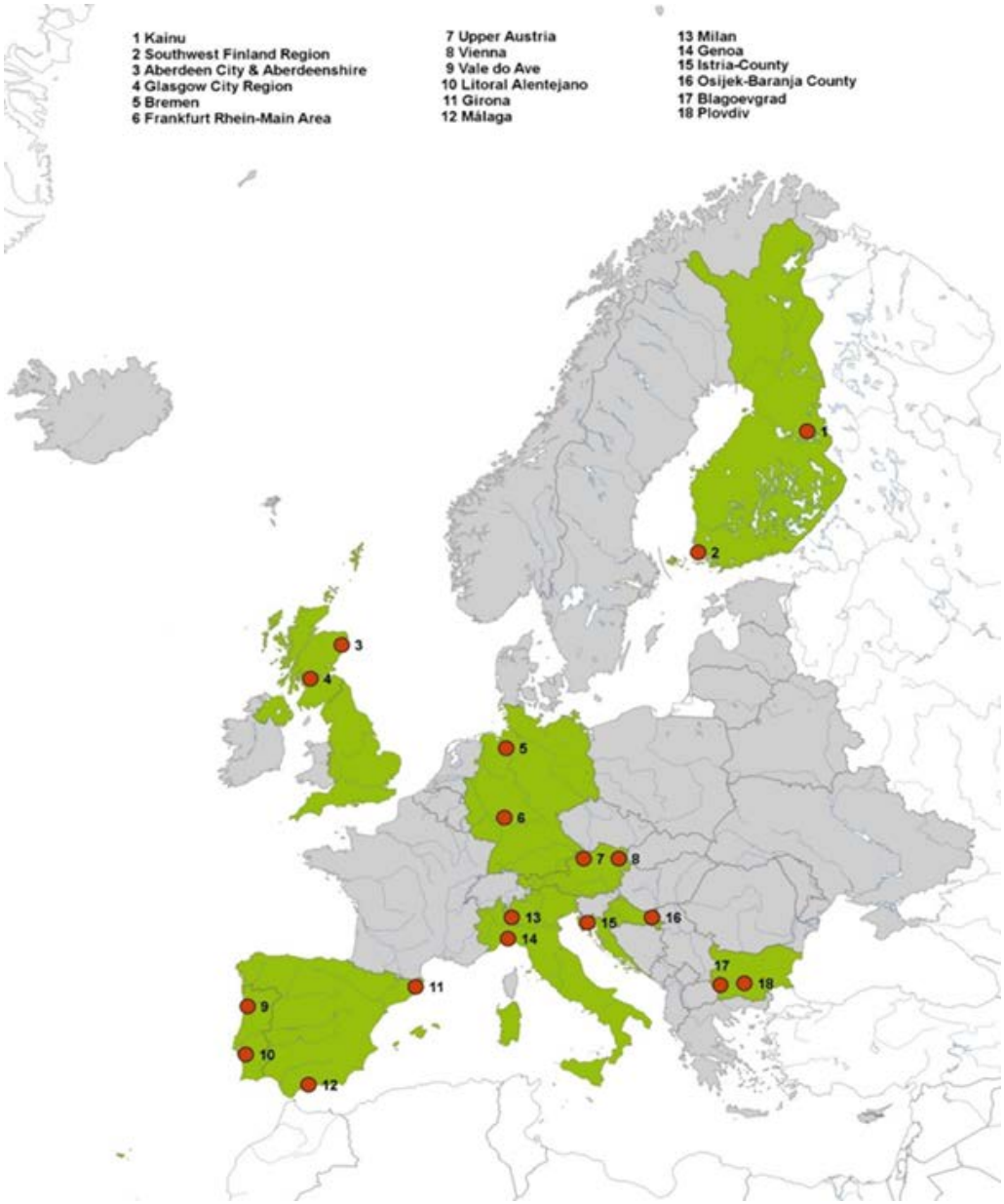

Figure 21. Overview of selected Functional Regions in YOUNG_ADULLLT

Having defined the main concept of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project (i.e. 'lifelong learning policies') and identified its main unit of analysis (i.e. 'Functional Regions'), it is finally necessary to explicate the criteria according to which the research partners selected, mapped and described the LLL policies in their FRs. With regard to the *selection* of LLL policies, national partners were asked to identify the most important policies (for instance

with reference to perceived relevance in public discourse, with reference to the political actors/stake-holders involved, etc.) in each FR. In addition to the criterion 'importance', the theoretical perspectives and the leading research questions served as a valuable orientation, which helped to guide the selection process and to limit the number of selected LLL policies to a manageable number.

With regard to the *mapping* and *description* of policies, partners systematically mapped, categorised and concisely described within each FR LLL policies according to the coordinate system suggested above (cp. Figure 20). As the main concept in the project, the 'LLL policy', goes beyond the field of education and encompasses other related policy sectors, the research process required partners to map and review different policy sectors. Policy sectors may be logically distinguished along a number of dimensions that make specific policies 'characteristic' of a sector. For instance, LLL policies tend to be oriented towards different sectorial problems or objectives such as reducing unemployment among specific groups (e.g., 18-29 year-olds), preventing or reducing levels of young people leaving schools with low certifications (e.g., ESL) or preventing social exclusion more broadly or among specific groups (e.g. young people). Thus, it is possible to distinguish analytically between the following three policy sectors: Labour Market Policies (LMP); Educational Policies (EDP); Social and Youth Policies (SYP). Moreover, based on their specific sector orientation, LLL policies can differ in terms of their objectives (i.e. the problems which LLL policies intend to tackle), the target groups they address, the types of solutions they put forward, the time horizons (short-, medium, or long-term) for tackling/solving the problem, and, not least, the different criteria with which the success of a given policy can be detected. Finally, LLL policies in different sectors can be distinguished along the actors/stake-holders involved and the mechanisms used to coordinate action (i.e. the governance regime), but also in terms of their funding schemes.

Having defined the criteria for the selection and mapping of the LLL policies the research process can be divided into two interrelated phases: In the *first phase* the project partners were requested to map and describe LLL policies, taking account of the above mentioned analytical distinctions. This research work resulted in 183 LLL policies in the nine participating countries, which were described concisely according to the identified criteria. After the mapping the research partners were asked to select three LLL policies per FR (N: 3x18=54) and to provide a 'thick description' of each policy and of its embedding in its specific context. The results of the first research phase were assembled in nine national

reports on LLL policies, which provided a basis for the 'International Report on LLL Policies and Inclusion in Education and Work' (Kotthoff et al. 2017). The International Report provided cross-national analyses of LLL policies, the results of which will be presented in the following section.

While the first phase of the research process aimed at identifying international trends with regard to common issues and diverging development of LLL policies in Europe, the *second phase* of the WP3 research process aimed at deepening the analysis. On the basis of the 54 LLL policies identified and described in the first phase, further interpretive analyses were conducted with regard to the objectives, orientations and target group constructions of the policies. The findings of these in-depth interpretive analyses of the 54 LLL policies will be presented in the subsequent chapter (cf. Chapter 6, in this Report).

Cross-National Analyses and Comparison of LLL policies in Europe

As pointed out in the introduction, the aim of this section is to report the findings of the cross-national analyses of the 183 LLL policies performed in the first phase of the WP3 research activities. The findings will be presented in two parts: in the first part we will present common issues, while the second part will report diverging developments of LLL policies in the participating countries.

With regard to common issues, the cross-national comparison of LLL policies suggests that there are three main common issues of LLL policy-making across Europe: the definition and understanding of LLL, the relation of LLL policies to processes of de-standardisation and individualisation of young adults' life courses and the role of the European Social Fund (ESF) as the main funding agency of LLL policies in Europe.

The cross-national comparison of LLL policies shows a clear dominance of a 'utilitarian' vision of LLL in the participating countries, which is focused on employment, the development of work capacities and labour competitiveness rather than a 'humanistic' vision of LLL, which promotes a series of values strictly related to the personal development of human beings. The tendency is confirmed by several national reports on LLL policies (e.g. Bulgaria, Italy, Finland, Scotland and Germany) and is summarized by the Scottish report on LLL policies, which states that LLL policies are "more focused on providing opportunities that encourage economic development and create new employment" (Lowden, Valiente & Capsada-Munsech, 2016, p. 43). Although only five of the nine national reports refer explicitly to this fundamental change in the way LLL policies

are perceived today, the four remaining reports evoke a similar impression by relating LLL policies to the employment situation of the target population. For example, the Croatian report affirms how youth attention “is particularly visible in the measures of active youth employment policy” (Bouillet & Domović, 2016, p. 37). In the same way, the Portuguese report maintains that social integration could be reduced to labour market integration (Alves et al., 2016, p. 44).

With regard to the second common issue, i.e. the relation of LLL policies to processes of de-standardisation and individualisation of young adults’ life courses, the cross-national comparison of LLL policies clearly reveals a tendency that LLL policies are more likely to define standardized rather than de-standardized life courses, because, as the Finnish report suggests, "deviation from this standardized trajectory is seen as a threat to both the individual and the society" (Rinne et al., 2016, p. 38). Although it is not possible to iderntify this tendency in all particpating countries, the national reports on LLL policies from Bulgaria, Finland, Portugal (and to some extent also Germany) clearly identify that LLL policies “represent not only societal expectations but also public interventions that aim to bring about preferred visions of individual development and ‘normal’ life courses” (Rinne et al., 2016, p. 38) and that LLL policies “are still directed at a standard life course involving full time education, mostly academic, and from then on toward full time employment” (Kovacheva et al., 2016, p. 41).

However, despite the apparent resistance of most participating countries to deal with de-standardization, a large majority of the 183 LLL policies tend to handle a general discourse that paradoxically responds to a comprehensive view of the different changes in the lives of young adults. It is precisely because of this apparent paradox that we can perceive a tension between the idea of developing ’standard’ LLL policies on the one hand and the increasing social recognition of ‘de-standardisation processes’ on the other hand throughout the national reports. In the Finnish case, for example, criticism about the idea that life courses of young adults should follow a linear and unique path in LLL policies is very evident. However, this does not exclude differences between the two Finnish FRs: while Southwest Finland confirms this idea by focusing more on “giving individuals responsibility and helping them become productive in the labour market” (Rinne et al., 2016, p. 46), the Kainuu region (following what it is known as the *Kainuu model*) is committed to a policy that includes more human and social perspectives, looks more to

improve the well-being of each young person and therefore tends to think more about biographical and de-standardised life experiences.

The third common issue refers to the wide-ranging participation of the European Social Fund (ESF) in the different LLL policies. With very few exceptions (particularly in some Austrian programmes in the FR Vienna Austria) almost all the programmes are at least partially funded by ESF as part of a holistic set of aspirations. The latter include "making the learning attractive to young people through initiating extracurricular activities; establishment of intercultural learning environment; [or] pre-qualification of teachers for working with bilingual technologies" (Kovacheva et al., 2016, p. 46). However, the overall presence of ESF funding leads to two significant observations, which are partially presented in some national reports. On the one hand, as for example in the case of Germany:

> Legal regulations ask all *Länder* to develop an operational programme for the use of ESF funds […] and to carry out regular evaluations […]. The evaluations should focus on efficiency and effectiveness of the programme […] and show the project's efforts to attain objectives set by the European commission's 2020 strategy (Kotthoff et al., 2016, p. 39).

The fact that LLL policies are mainly funded by the ESF could therefore be detrimental to their relevance in the regions for the sake of achieving EU priorities. Thus, instead of following patterns directly related to local or regional problems, general European directives could be far from the specific realities followed by each country leading to a weak relation "between regional LLL policies and European LLL policies" (op. cit., p. 43). On the other hand, as the reports from Bulgaria and Portugal suggest, the absence or fragile participation of other types of funding apart from the ESF could weaken the continuity of LLL policies. For example, while Bulgaria mentions the "lack of sufficient funding" (Kovacheva et al., 2016, p. 36), Portugal states how the "lack of public and private investment had substantial consequences not only on national policies, but also on local initiatives and projects, particularly in peripheral regions like these two functional regions" (Alves et al., 2016, p. 12).

Apart from the above mentioned common issues the cross-country comparison of LLL policies also reveals significant diverging developments. The first difference that can be identified through cross-national analyses and comparison is related to the evaluation of the different LLL policies. The evaluation made by national reports on LLL policies unveils

two major trends. On the one hand, we find some reports that do not hesitate to reveal the deficiencies of LLL policies for different reasons ranging from administrative problems to communication issues, going through to specific conditions of social and cultural order. The Croatian report on LLL policies gives a general overview of these deficiencies asserting that "[…] public policies are not sufficiently harmonised with the actual needs of different youth in different local communities" (Bouillet & Domović, 2016, p. 3*)*. To a lesser extent but in the same direction, at least four more countries report similar deficiencies. The Bulgarian report also recognizes "insufficient administrative capacity" (Kovacheva et al., 2016, p. 45) accompanied by a lack of information mechanisms; The Scottish report stresses how "strategic coordination of LLL policies is more discursive than material" (Lowden, Valiente & Capsada-Munsech, 2016, p. 46); the Portuguese report points out the difficulty "to assess the effects of the lifelong policies [because] the national available data presented just give us a quantitative blurred picture of the transition to work at the end of the VET courses while nothing is told about young people's biographical experiences" (Alves et al., 2016, p. 43); and the Spanish report maintains "that public policies are hardly evaluated" (Rambla, 2016, p. 6).

On the other hand, the four remaining countries (Austria, Finland, Germany, and Italy) put less emphasis on the deficiencies of the LLL policies and tend to describe a more stable functioning. While remaining critical of some of the features of LLL policies, mainly their growing "utilitarian humanism" (particularly in the cases of Finland, Germany, and Italy), these reports give more detailed insight into the adequate applicability of LLL policies in the context of the FRs, as well as into their relevance in relation to the actors to whom they are addressed. Thus, these criticisms are more focused on specific details of the described LLL policies rather than on practical implementation problems.

The second diverging development is related to the leverage and autonomy of the FRs in relation to LLL policies, which is closely intertwined with the relationship between the state and other stakeholders. The governance and leverage of the FR refers to their capacity to promote strategies and programmes relevant to young adults independently of the political system that rules them.

Based on our cross-national analyses, the governance and leverage of the FRs in the nine participating countries can be separated into at least three groups. The first group is represented by countries such as Bulgaria and Portugal, which are characterised by a

centralised governance structure. The second group is made up of countries with a unitary system of government and which are currently carrying out different reforms of decentralisation (e.g. Croatia, Finland, Italy, Scotland, Spain). The third group of countries consists of Austria and Germany where a considerable political autonomy at the regional level, due to their federalist structures, gives the regions a clear possibility of defining the scope of LLL policies. Our cross-national analyses of the nine countries in these three groups allow us to make three observations in particular. First, it becomes evident that there is a difficulty in implementing LLL policies in the first group of countries described as "centralized". Second, the success of LLL policies in the FRs does not necessarily depend on decentralization processes as such, but on their 'true implementation'; i.e., on the ability of regional and local governments to decide and manage tailored policies to the needs of young adults in a specific context. As a direct consequence of this second observation, in order to define the governance and leverage of the FRs more precisely, it is, third, inevitable to deepen the study of the decentralisation process in each country in terms not only of public spending and income, but also in terms of the political decision-making power granted to various actors to implement diverse LLL policies according to contexts and precise needs.

The third diverging development is related to the construction of target groups of LLL policies. There are many examples of target group constructions within the project such as the study of migration background (by examining its effects from a life course research perspective), the promotion of gender equality (by reducing gender stereotypes and countering gender inequalities) or the analysis of educational background (by studying its impact on the educational possibilities of young adults). Since young adults as targets of LLL policies differ substantially between the participating countries, the target group construction in the national reports is also very different and could be analysed in three groups.

Firstly, there is a group of countries that mention target group constructions mainly in relation to groups which are specific to their context. This first group consists of Bulgaria and Croatia. The Bulgarian report presents different operational programmes and other national strategies, for example the *Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and students from ethnic minorities (2015-2020)*, which pay particular attention to the Roma community, other ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities (Kovacheva et al., 2016, pp. 10-22). Similarly, in Croatia, the target group construction concerns mainly *The*

National Roma Inclusion Strategy 2013 – 2020, the main goal of which is "to create and develop human capital in the Roma community by raising the level of general and targeted education of children and adults and encouraging life-long learning" (Bouillet & Domović, 2016, p. 17).

Secondly, there are those countries where other target group strategies are taken into consideration by LLL policies. The second group consists of the following countries: Finland, whose target group construction prioritizes, as the *Child and Youth Policy Programme* shows, not only "the prevention of discrimination towards children and youths belonging to various minorities (such as immigrants, traditional Finnish minorities, or people with disabilities) through sometimes necessary affirmative actions, but also specific gender identity or sexual orientation aspects" (Rinne et al., 2016, p. 15). Thus, the policy "defines equality of rights and opportunities between girls and boys as a strategic goal" (ibid.). In the case of Germany, the report focuses its attention on target group construction strategies related to the "welcome centres" opened to the more than one million refugees who came to the country in 2015 and how the "LLL policies of the chambers of commerce focus mainly on supporting programmes for apprentices at risk of dropping out of their training" (Kotthoff et al., 2016, p. 16).

Thirdly, there are some countries which deal very briefly and/or rather superficially with the issue of target group construction (Italy, Portugal, Scotland and Spain). An exceptional case which does not fit into this categorization is Austria. Although it is highly selective and does not consider the integration of migrants a priority ("missing efforts", Pot & Kazepov, 2016, p. 49), paradoxically two of the basic principles of the national LLL strategy are "gender and diversity, equal opportunities and social mobility" initiatives (ibid., p. 6). To sum up, despite the fact that national reports give account of target group construction, most of them do not analyse them in a very detailed way. Furthermore, as the Scottish report states, it is important to be careful to the extent that in many cases some of the issues related to this construction, such as the pursuit of equity for example, are "rhetorically emphasised" (Lowden, Valiente & Capsada-Munsech, 2016, p. 46), but their meaning remains unclear.

To sum up, the presentation of common issues and diverging developments of LLL policies in Europe identified in this section clearly indicates that there are tensions in implementing LLL policies across the different levels, which in their turn will create

challenges for LLL policy-making in Europe. These tensions and challenges will be analysed and discussed in more detail in the final section of this chapter.

Discussion and Conclusion: areas of tension and resulting challenges

The aim of this section is to present and discuss the tensions and challenges related to LLL policies both at European and at national levels that have become visible during the cross-country analyses. Tensions and contradictions refer to conflicting demands or contradicting orientations implicit and explicit in LLL policies. These tensions and inherent contradictions of LLL policies can in their turn present obstacles to policy implementation that are connected to structural, political, cultural and economic conditions at the different national/regional contexts across Europe. The findings of the cross-country analyses of LLL policies presented in the previous section suggest that there are at least six areas of tension (or even contradiction) in particular, which must be addressed, if LLL policy-making in Europe is to be made more coherent and effective.

The *first area of tension* that becomes apparent in the cross-country comparison of the previous section is the fact that the meanings and understandings of LLL vary substantially across the nine participating countries despite an emergent implicit consensus of what LLL is or should be and what it is for. Beyond this similarity at the surface, a more profound tension becomes visible that concerns how LLL is interpreted, i.e., whether LLL is understood as an instrumental means of creating and/or improving employability skills or whether it is seen in a more holistic way that goes well beyond its exchange value in the labour market. To put it bluntly: are LLL policies constructed as to realise the human potential or more narrowly to create/increase human capital? The tendency to give more importance to the latter vision in order to fulfil the needs of the labour market (particularly after the economic crisis of 2008) has diminished the potential social change ambition that encompasses LLL.

The tension between these two visions of LLL is also indicated by the observation that, contrary to common assumptions, the main emphasis of LLL policies do not predominantly originate in the educational policy sector. As can be seen in the following figure, from the 183 LLL policies mapped across Europe in the participating countries, 39.3 % (72 policies) are associated more directly with the labour market policy (LMP), 33.8 % (62 policies) are social and youth policies (SYP) and only 26.7 % (49 policies) may be defined as educational policies (EP). The distribution of LLL policies across these different policy

sectors reflects different orientations, time horizons and preferred views of problems and associated solutions. The heterogeneity of LLL policies not only complicates the identification of LLL policies, it also triggers tensions and contradictions when it comes to the prioritization and implementation of these policies. Finally, the perceived differences between LLL definitions and LLL policies can lead to administrative and communication problems and, most importantly, to a disregard of the needs of young adults, due to the lack of their involvement in the development of LLL policies. This leads us directly to the second area of tension.

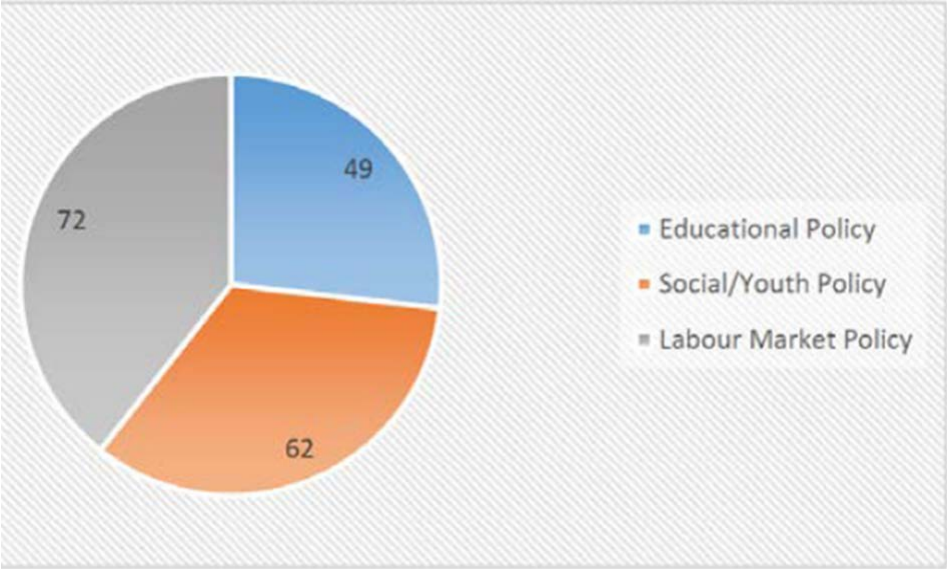

Figure 22. Distribution of LLL Policies (N = 183) among the three main policy sectors

The cross-country analyses reveal that a *second area of tension* arises from the fact that LLL policies are still developed and defined under the assumption of standard life courses rather than de-standardised life courses, which implies that they have been created following the model or the 'belief' that there is a 'normal' trajectory in life. Against this background, one of the main challenges faced by the LLL-policies of European countries is how to take into account and deal with the fact that a large share of today's young people and young adults do not follow the chronological steps of education, work and retirement and that their careers are becoming less predictable, involving breaks and the blending of educational and labour market phases of different kinds. In this respect, the key issue is how well LLL policies work in practice in the contemporary societal situation where life-courses are slipping from their temporal patterns, meaning that life stages are no longer determined by a specific age and the duration and forms of life course transitions

as they used to be. Further, de-standardisation concerns not only the school-to-work transitions but increasingly also other transitions, such as housing and family transitions as well.

A *third area of tension* arises from the fact that the European Social Fund (ESF) represents the main funding agent of LLL policies in Europe, which has far-reaching implications for the development of both national and regional LLL policies. The cross-national analyses show clearly that the ESF policies have an overarching significance, which leads to two main conclusions. First, without the ESF, there would be very little LLL policy activity in some European regions, if any at all; second, the cross-country comparison shows clearly that the predominant presence of ESF can be detrimental to the relevance of LLL policies in the regions. Thus, instead of addressing local and regional problems directly, European initiatives could be far from the specific realities of the countries and weaken the relationship between the regions and the EU. In addition, the predominance of ESF as the main funding agent of LLL policies could weaken or even hollow out regional and local funding and thus endanger sustainability of LLL policies after the ESF funding has terminated.

A *fourth area of tension* that becomes obvious through cross-country comparison is the observation that LLL policies largely disregard the fact that the construction of target groups and features of social exclusion differ from one region to another. The research shows clearly that LLL policies depend on cultural, social, and political features that must be taken into consideration. This not only presents a vital challenge for national policy-makers who are concerned with the development and implementation of LLL policies, but also points to the urgent necessity to create a deep awareness of this on the European level. Only in this way will LLL policies be able to relate to general cross-national features without disregarding specific needs and particularities of the target population, and the understanding that there are different definitions and procedures to tackle social exclusion. The evidence gathered through the cross-country analyses of LLL policies in Europe suggests that there is not yet a detailed reflection describing in which respect social exclusion is particularly associated with concrete aspects such as having the chance to study or the possibility to work. In addition, LLL policies in Europe do not seem to take into account sufficiently symbolic aspects such as the lack of participation of young adults in the construction of LLL policies or the lack of voice of young people with regard to the formulation of their life expectations at a young age.

A *fifth area of tension* points to governance structures and in particular to the autonomy of regions to develop and implement LLL policies. The cross-country analyses suggest that the leverage of LLL policies in the regions is closely related to differences between centralised / decentralised structures and to the varying levels of autonomy of the regions. Differences between centralised and decentralised systems affect the definition and implementation of LLL policies at different levels. In countries with a centralised structure (such as Bulgaria or Portugal), there is a difficulty to find autonomous LLL policies in the regions. However, the success of these policies does not exclusively and necessarily depend on the scope of the decentralisation processes (which can be observed in countries such as Croatia, Finland, Italy, Scotland, or Spain) but on the ability and autonomy of the regions to decide to implement those LLL policies within their own reach, which are tailored to the needs of their young adults (which could be found to some extent in countries with a federal structure such as Austria or Germany).

The *sixth area of tension* points to the challenge that the successful implementation of LLL policies depends largely on establishing and maintaining effective partnerships and sharing responsibilities. This aspect represents a key challenge at all levels and its aim is to recognize the crucial role of having effective partnerships and to share responsibilities when it comes to implementing the LLL policies. The cross-country analyses carried out in WP 3 suggest that there are not enough effective partnerships between the public and private sectors and that the participation of members of the target groups of LLL policies is reduced (some exceptions can be found in countries such as Finland and Scotland and to a lesser extent also in Austria and Bulgaria, where there are examples of Public-Private-Target Group-Partnerships). Establishing relevant networks and cooperation mechanisms at European level requires a high degree of organization. Reaching this level will be difficult, if one takes into account the heterogeneity of LLL policies at national, regional and local level, and how complex it is to identify and fulfil the needs of the targeted population.

To conclude, the mapping and cross-national analyses of LLL policies in the nine participating countries of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project performed in the first phase of WP3 research has, apart from a number of common issues, also identified important diverging trends, which can lead to tensions and contradictions, which in their turn can present obstacles to LLL policy implementation, and can weaken the coherence as well as the effectiveness of LLL policies. However, in order to understand the functioning and

fine mechanics of LLL policies more accurately, LLL policies need to be studied in their specific contexts and analysed more closely with regard to their objectives, orientations and target group constructions. These in-depth analyses of selected LLL policies have been performed in the second phase WP 3 research. The results of these interpretive policy analyses will be presented in the following chapter.

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6. Understanding Lifelong Learning Policies Across Europe: An interpretive approach

Marcelo Parreira do Amaral & Jozef Zelinka

Introduction

Lifelong learning (LLL) policies have a long history in the EU context (EC, 2000, 2001) but only more recently have they focused on aspects beyond vocational (and recurrent) training for employment of adults to include economic, political and social aspects also for the younger generations, including aspects of general and higher education but also support for so-called 'vulnerable' groups (Rasmussen, 2014; Riddell et al., 2012).

The concept of LLL stems from long and rich debates that emphasise different connections from early childhood to adult learning and stress the universal right to education.[17] 'Learning to be' was seen as a lifelong process along the life course. From this understanding it was derived that policies should be organised along the principle of a humanistic, rights-based and holistic view of education. Later on, the political focus on LLL was shifted to labour market security and economic competitiveness and there was a stronger orientation towards human capital and employability. More recently amidst the European strategies—especially Lisbon and Europe 2020—the conceptions of LLL have again shifted towards a more biographical orientation based on a continuous personal transformation on the one hand, and a functional/instrumental orientation on episodic learning—usually work-related and with attention to competences and outcomes during certain life phases—on the other hand.

While this broadening of the scope of LLL policies hints at how policy-making is tackling urgent contemporary issues, it has also increased the complexity and raised the stakes for policies to be effective in creating human capital while securing social inclusion. The challenges and dilemmas confronting policy-makers and young adults alike derive in substantial part from the complex overlapping of needs, interests and contexts of adult

[17] We refer to labour market policies as lifelong learning policies. This is based on the assumption that lifelong learning has generally two comprehensive dimensions: individual development and autonomy on the one hand and strengthening or even maintaining employability on the other hand (see Jarvis, 2008).

learning policies. In particular, regarding groups that are in vulnerable positions, policies may have unintended effects that exacerbate rather than improve their situations.

In this chapter, we present and discuss analyses of a mapping and review exercise of LLL policies across the nine participating countries in YOUNG_ADULLLT (see Introduction and Chapter 1, in this Report). Departing from Cultural Political Economy (CPE) as a conceptual perspective that aims at understanding the articulation of cultural (semiotic) and material (structural) aspects in the policy process, we adopted an interpretive approach to policy analysis that allowed us to discern the various meanings of LLL policies. The assumption in YOUNG_ADULLLT is that the numerous (and oftentimes fragmented) LLL policies and initiatives set up to support young adults in precarious situations differ not only in terms of their overall goals – economic growth *and* social inclusion – but also in terms of their distinct objectives, different orientations, and time horizons. Although the goals of economic growth *and* social inclusion may be complementary to each other, they are not causally linked in a linear way. Conflicts and adverse effects for the target groups may arise not only due to the complex overlapping of needs, interests and contexts of adult learning policies across Europe, which is in itself a reason for concern; these may also be the result of incompatible and/or ambivalent orientations, target group constructions and ill-matching problem identification and the solutions devised.

Against this background, YOUNG_ADULLLT conducted research grounded on three different, but complementary, theoretical perspectives—Life Course Research, Governance and Cultural Political Economy (see Chapter 1, in this Report). In particular the latter enabled us to enquire into issues of (mutual) compatibility and integration with other policies at local level, which, in turn, required an interpretive approach to policy analysis. In the following sections, we *first* discuss conceptual and methodological choices made. These refer to CPE as a conceptual lens and to interpretive policy analysis as a research method. *Second*, we present and discuss the research design and process as well as the data basis of the analyses. Further, *third*, we present and discuss the findings of these research activities. The presentation and discussion of findings focus on the objectives and logics of intervention reconstructed as well as the target group construction of the policies analysed. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of the findings and their relevance to policy-making in LLL. It also highlights some of the contributions of the

research approach chosen to aid a better understanding of lifelong learning policies for young adults, in particular to those in vulnerable situations.

Conceptual and Methodological Discussion

Conceptually, *Cultural Political Economy* highlights the relevance of the cultural dimension in understanding and analysing the complexity of social formations such as policies (Jessop, 2010; Sum & Jessop, 2013). CPE is a recent analytical approach in social science and policy studies analysing "the articulation between the economic and the political and their embedding in broader sets of social relations." (Jessop, 2010, p. 337) In general, CPE responds to criticisms to more traditional political economy analyses and offers crucial insights to enquiring into the mobilization of policy ideas, and the perceptions of political actors as well as of other stakeholders, in the explanation of education policy dynamics and policy outcomes.

Thus, the CPE perspective helps us examine the role of semiotic or meaning-making (cultural) and extra-semiotic (structural, power asymmetries) aspects in policy processes by exploring the role of discourses in shaping 'economic imaginaries' between economic and political institutions and their social embedding (Jessop, 2004; Sum & Jessop, 2013). As the 'economy' does not exist in a vacuum (Best & Paterson, 2010), the approach focusses on pre-existing interpretations of imaginaries (as instances of complexity reduction) in policy discourses, their translation into hegemonic strategies and the institutionalisation of these procedures into structures and policies.[18]

As regards LLL policy analysis, CPE examines the utilisation of resources in power asymmetries and the underlying paradigms that frame policy-making in education as a solution for economic issues. Drawing from critical discourse analysis, CPE focuses on interactional realities produced and institutionalised between discourses and social elements (e.g. power, ideologies, etc.) by focussing on the 'orders of discourse' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 3), which are structured and stabilised along the constitutive role of language in bringing about the social. Thus, CPE seeks to explore the changing cultures

[18] For instance, Godin (2006) has examined definitions of 'knowledge-based economy' and found myriad of conceptual frameworks ranging from a buzzword to catch the attention of policy-makers to an economic imaginary with performative and constitutive power (see also: Godin, 2004).

generating and influencing dominant imaginaries on the hegemonic procedures, practices and structures of policy on economy. The production and institutionalisation of dominant imaginaries can be described according to Bob Jessop as the result of the interaction of material and semiotic factors. The approach departs from the assumption that the world's complex and chaotic social realities are reduced by the production of imaginaries in a still complex, yet manageable, meaningful and structured narration (Jessop, 2010; Jessop & Oosterlynck, 2008). As a result, they give meaning to the world in form of semiotic, often globally shared, systems (cf. Best & Paterson, 2010, p. 7). This highlights the perception of actors (policy-makers, stakeholders, target groups, etc.) and the role of power in mobilising and solidifying ideas, which can be explained with the three evolutionary mechanisms of variation, selection and retention. *Variation* implies the problematisation of existing processes through emerging new challenges, both external (for instance, economic crisis) and internal (for instance, high rates of early school leavers), which lead to the revisioning of existing narratives and practices. *Selection* refers to the identification of suited interpretations and solutions for the challenges (for instance, recognising informal learning and upgrading/updating competences and skills). *Retention* describes the implementation and institutionalisation of the solutions in a system of practices (for instance, setting programmes, changing legislation). Thus, CPE provides a critical view on policy orientations and objectives as it reveals the selective interpretations and solutions for social, economic and political problems of specific groups of actors and highlights the legitimations of certain political practices.

Inspired by Cultural Political Economy, we operationalised this conceptual lens drawing from a recent approach to policy analysis—Interpretive Policy Analysis (IPA)—that proved particularly useful in capturing and describing the manifold variations of LLL policies in their respective cultural meaning and constructed nature.

Until very recently, policy-making has been mostly informed by a research based on so-called 'positivistic presuppositions', which confine the focus "to description, explanation, and prediction of events in the political world" (Hawskesworth, 2015, p. 41) with the intent to "devise 'value-free' definitions of politics grounded squarely upon observable phenomena" (ibid.). However, what needs to be taken into account is the fact that "each definition is value laden and that each subtly structures the boundaries of the political in ways that have implications for the practice of politics" (ibid.). As a deliberate move away from these positivistic presuppositions, the YOUNG_ADULLLT project has instead turned

to approaches that allow to bring about “local knowledge—the very mundane, expert understanding of and practical reasoning about local conditions derived from lived experience” (Yanow, 2000, p. 5). The reason for this is to capture the various conditions under which LLL policies develop and are implemented and to understand their (local) cultural meanings. Rather than seeking to displace or compete with the positivistic-based research style, YOUNG_ADULLLT has aimed at accounting for recent cultural and economic developments that are seen to have important transformative implications both for policy-making in education, but in particular to young people’s life courses.

In response to the cultural developments hinted at above, many policy analysts turned to an interpretive approach to policy analysis that departs from the traditional understanding of policy as (rational) instruments for problem-solving in linear or cyclical manners. They aimed at acknowledging and incorporating conceptual and theoretical discussions most often referred to as the cultural turn (Jameson, 1998), linguistic turn (Rorty, 1967), argumentative turn (Fischer & Forester, 1993), or ideational turn (Blyth, 1997; Béland & Cox, 2011). These turns reject a positivistic view of reality, i.e. reality as something fixed and static that could be simply ‘captured’ by researchers who wish to understand it. From a post-positivistic perspective, reality is mediated by culture, language and ideas and must be seen as the result of social processes in which people construct their identities, define the values and beliefs they have and make sense of their own world.

In this vein, culture, language, and ideas do not represent a pre-given, well-established set of rules and social codes, but rather hegemonic and constructed ensembles of ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling, which differs from site to site and from region to region. For van Hulst and Yanow:

> ’Culture’ does not comprise a set of stable frames that drive all members of a culture (whether national, organizational, or some other) to see things in certain ways: Multiple influences are often at play; multiple possible interpretations co-exist within a single cultural ‘code’, and actors bring their own prior knowledge (from experiences, education, and other sources) to situational sense-making. (van Hulst and Yanow, 2016, p. 98f.)

It is this attribution of meaning to social problems and policy solutions that opens the window for unlimited policy variation and change. Yet, not every policy solution can be selected, retained and institutionalised. In line with the CPE perspective, IPA applies

methodological tools that “are based on the presupposition that we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations” (Yanow, 2000, p. 5).

From this perspective, the analytical task is not simply to optimise policy solutions or make their outcomes more predictable, but rather to understand the conceptual frames and discursive processes that underlie actors’ practical reasoning in specific situations (cf. Yanow, 2000, 2014). As a research approach, interpretative policy analysis has the function of helping to uncover the processes by which social problems are recognized, construed and constructed (cf. Münch, 2016). This offers a means of discerning different orientations and objectives of LLL policies; it also allows distinguishing of various ways of target group construction, which in turn will impact the types of solutions deemed possible and desirable. Understanding these processes that vary substantially from site to site proves a precondition to deliberate on the intended and unintended consequences of LLL policies for the target groups, and to yield knowledge that supports the formulation of well-suited, sustainable policy solutions.

In short, as we argue in this chapter, IPA opens new vistas to research by showing “how and why has something become a problem and who is the winner and the loser of this way of seeing things” (Münch, 2016, p. 140), rather than simply asking what and how it functions and how it could be improved. The next section introduces the operationalisation of this research in YOUNG_ADULLLT.

Understanding LLL Policies For Young Adults: Operationalising interpretive policy analysis

In this chapter, we draw specifically on results of a sub-study on policy mapping, review and analysis of LLL policies in eighteen sites (two sites per Functional Region per country) across the European continent (cf. Kotthoff et al., 2017). The comparative design of the study implied meeting the challenge of developing a research framework that was able to capture the myriad understandings of ‘policy’ in the different places as well as capturing the various and oftentimes contradicting meanings of what counts as ‘lifelong learning’. Compared to traditional usages of the term ‘policy’ in political sciences, the term ‘policy’ in YOUNG_ADULLLT adopted a broader definition, in order to be able to cover the wider scope of LLL activities in each research site. Thus, ‘policies’ did not only include different forms of policies ranging from a low level of materiality and concreteness such as discourses, to very concrete policy programmes and measures.

In addition, the underlying understanding of 'policies' also included policies which are formally initiated and run by a single institution or a group of institutions (e.g. Ministry of Labour and/or Education) and also those policies which are more informally initiated and run by (informal or temporary) networks, which are justified by broader societal interests. Finally, based on the assumption that LLL policies will go beyond the field of education and will encompass other related policy sectors, the study was not restricted to the education sector, but also reviewed and analysed LLL policies in the labour market and the youth and social sectors. The LLL policies focused on in YOUNG_ADULLLT were selected in relation to the *age range* of minimum 18 and maximum 29 year-olds in order to accommodate the different definitions and understandings of young adults in the participating countries. In addition, with regard to the *timeframe* of the policies that were to be mapped by the project partners, the focus laid on policy documents and initiatives between 2010 and 2016 for two reasons in particular: *first*, this timeframe can be classified as a 'post-recession period' and, *second*, a shorter timeframe was thought to be necessary because of the large number of relevant LLL policies in each country. *Finally*, selection was also made in terms of the focus of policies on specific *target groups***:** young adults neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET); early school leavers (ESL); young immigrants; young entrepreneurs and business people; young adults who formerly were NEET. When identifying target groups of a given policy, we were also aware of absences of certain target groups in LLL policies, such as people with physical disabilities or mental disorders.

In the *first* stage of the research, all relevant LLL policies were mapped according to the criteria above in two research sites (N=18) per participating country, amounting to 183 policies (cf. Kotthoff et al., 2017; see also Chapter 5, in this Report). In the *second* stage of the research process, descriptions of LLL policies identified as the most central policies[19] compiled in the first stage were further elaborated and interpretive analyses of three LLL policies in each research site (N=54) were conducted.[20] In the following sections, we present and discuss findings from the analyses of the second phase.

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[19] For instance with reference to perceived relevance in public discourse, with reference to the political actors/stake-holders involved, etc.

[20] These policies can be accessed at: http://www.young-adulllt.eu/policy-mapping/index.php

Findings from Interpretive Analysis

In this section, we present selected finding of interpretive analyses that focus on the orientations, objectives and target group construction of LLL. We elaborate on the frames that informed the perception, construal and construction of 'problems and issues' to be addressed as well as on the 'policy solutions' devised.

The mapping and reviewing of policies between 2010 and 2016 in the nine countries of YOUNG_ADULLLT showed intense activity in the realm of LLL policies, and 183 policies were mapped that related more directly to our selection criteria (see above; see also Chapter 5, in this Report). In terms of *orientation* of the LLL policies, we first looked more generally on their relation to specific policy sectors. The assumption was that, from a policy sector perspective, LLL policy-making will invariably set priorities for the issues to be tackled that relate to the sectorial and functional requirements in question. They will also define target groups either more generally in terms of social categories (age, gender, migration status, competence or qualification levels, etc.) or from a more functionally focused perspective of a policy sector in terms of perceived (behavioural or attitudinal) problems of the individuals or groups in question. Following this line of reasoning, this framing would then have impact on the time horizons as well as on the definition of success criteria of the policies.

Objectives and Logics of Intervention

As discussed in Chapter 5, it was hardly possible to distinguish and attribute LLL policies to one policy sector, for instance to the policy sector education. The vast majority of LLL policies involved measures that could be attributed almost equally to the education, labour market and social/youth policy sectors. Nonetheless, despite important sectorial differences, across all sites raising levels of employability was the principal objective of the policies. From a comparative perspective, this finding is insufficient and unsurprising given that the 18 sites studied share the European context (for instance, the strategic framework 'Education and Training 2020' or the 'Renewed Agenda for Adult Learning'), implement Europe-wide policies such as Youth Guarantee and draw widely on resources from the European Social Fund. Also, researchers in the field have discussed how different concepts of employability are used by policy-makers and called attention to understandings that go beyond a narrow focus on individuals' employability skills and

attributes, suggesting paying attention to individual factors, personal circumstances and external factors (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005).

For this reason, we enquired further into the logics orienting the policies in pursuing this objective. A further analysis of the stated objectives of the 54 LLL policies conducted in the second stage of the research yielded interesting insights that corroborate the observations made about the overall orientation of the LLL policies discussed above. When looking at the objectives of the LLL policies more closely, we were able to identify various *logics of intervention* that guided the implementation of the policies. These four different logics were reconstructed from the interpretive analyses of the policies: *prevention, compensation, activation, and empowerment* (see below).

Figure 23 below shows how the 54 LLL policies were mapped in relation to each of these four different logics and how they framed and set their objectives. Since the policies referred to more than one of the abovementioned logics, it was deemed sensible to establish their respective position within four quadrants by linking them proximally to other features of the policy.

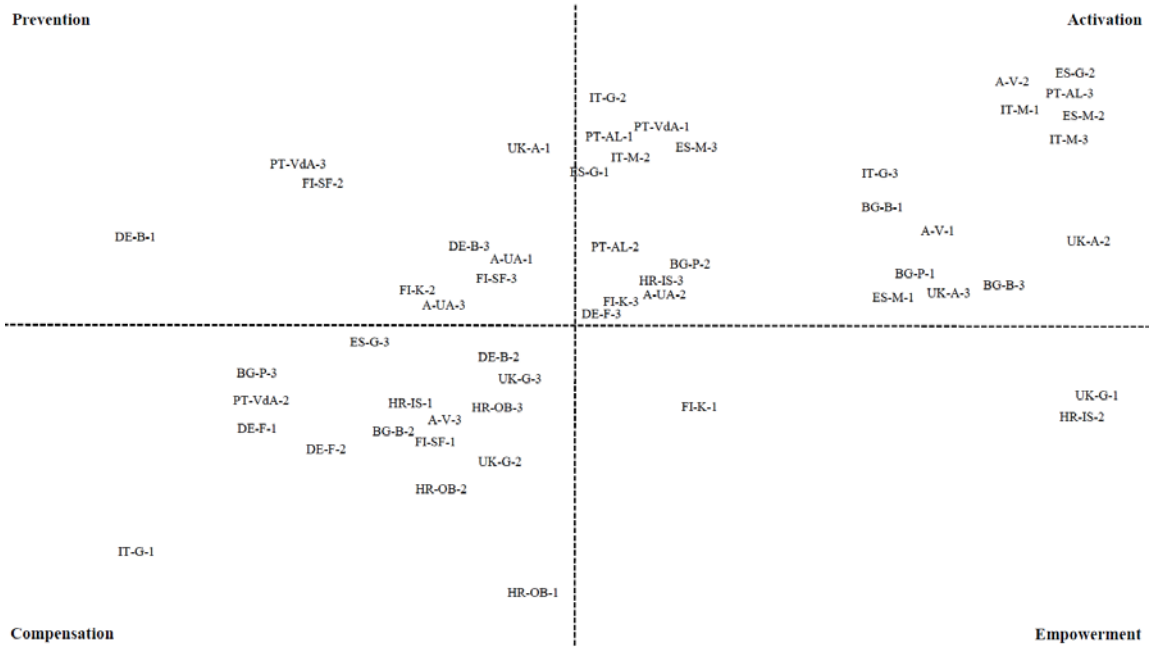

Figure 23. Four different logics of intervention that orient the implementation of LLL Policies

Inspired by CPE, this involved an interpretive cross-reading of the stated objective of the respective policy against the issues it purports to tackle as well as against the means it uses to achieve it. Defining the primary logic behind the objectives started from the

explicitly stated objective of the policy. Then, depending on the relationship it had to the perception of the issues to be tackled – these ranged from individual deficits, characteristics or dispositions to structural issues faced by individuals – as well as to the solutions it devised – these were interventions at the level of the individual or solutions at institutional level – the position of the policy was shifted within the quadrant towards the others. The aim was to position the policies within each of the four quadrants in a way that would best reflect their relation to the logic of intervention, prevalent perception of problems, and the types of solutions it devised. The closer a policy is placed to the outer corners of the quadrant, the more it corresponds to the respective logic of the quadrant. In contrast, the closer a policy is placed to the centre of the figure, the more commonalities it shares with the other logics. In short, if a policy is positioned within one quadrant, but placed closely to another, this means that although it states its objectives within one logic it also includes central aspects from the logic of the other(s) quadrant(s). Therefore, the position of each policy in Figure 23 aims at illustrating in how far it shares and/or combines various logics identified.

In the following we briefly discuss further the four underlying logics of intervention reconstructed from the objectives of the LLL policies:

- In terms of a *preventive* logic, policies usually follow a rather linear understanding of causation and aim to avoid (in the present) the occurrence of an anticipated specific problem (in the future) (cf. Billis, 1981; Gough, 2013). Policies examined aimed primarily at reducing the rates of early school leavers (ESL), of those not in employment, education or training (NEETs), and school and training dropouts among young people, especially among those in vulnerable or socially or economically unstable situations. In general, although prevention could also mean that policies tackle issues related to the (living) conditions and (material) infrastructures under which youths participate in education and training, the policies reviewed focus on personal circumstances and foresee various forms of guidance/counselling, mediation or direct individual support related to education or vocational training in order to prevent the deterioration of young adults' performance and the possible social exclusion issues for them. While some policies offer guidance and counselling, other focus more closely on improving studying and learning skills or preparing individual customized support for disadvantaged young people. Additionally, some policies aimed more generally at

preventing crime and social and economic exclusion. In short, paradoxically LLL policies that frame their objectives in a logic of prevention seem to react to social problems already affecting young adults rather than preventing them from happening.

- In terms of a *compensatory* logic, LLL policies seek to counterweigh or balance out a lack of or missed opportunities for (further) education/qualification, give young adults (second) chances to pursue their studies/ trainings, or compensate for individual deficits or personal and/or family problems. When grounded in distributive welfare terms, such policies are usually framed by norms such as compensatory justice and equality of opportunities (Kaufmann, 2009; Dean, 2012). However, the policies reviewed aimed more generally at providing information and guidance to young adults, raise their levels of entrepreneurship, resilience, etc. at individual level. Moreover, some policies aimed at compensating for insufficient or missing educational programmes by offering work-life coaching and psychosocial support for young adults to enhance their life and civil competencies. In sum, the objectives of LLL policies that applied a compensatory logic focused on individualised solutions, often independently of the availability of education/training or job opportunities. In doing so, rather than compensating for unequal/inequitable conditions/structures in which young people are immersed, the policies focus on spurring individuals to fill in the gaps that the labour market and/or social/welfare policies themselves seem to leave behind.

- In terms of *activation*, policies called for stronger individual responsibility of citizens by means of incentives or sanctions. As a policy concept, activation refers to a dual function of establishing more effective social control structures and mobilising the self-care of individuals to transform passive service recipients into active job searchers (Dingeldey, 2011; Barbier & Ludwig-Mayerhofer, 2004). Quite a number of LLL policies reviewed focused predominantly on labour market (re)integration and employability skills and attributes of young adults. In order to help them to enter the labour market as soon as possible they offered various forms of training, seminars, or workshops to upgrade their skills, re-qualify them, support their possible future employers, adjust their job orientation to the labour market needs or enable a smooth transition from education to the labour market. Still other policies activated young adults through offering possibilities to reconcile work and

family or through recognizing their informally acquired skills. Therefore, the overall objective of these policies was to react to the ongoing labour market transformations by mobilizing young adults to participate more actively and independently in pursuing their career goals. In this case, young adults have been portrayed as in need of supervision and as lacking the chance to realise themselves. The role of the policies was, then, to supply them with necessary experiences and options that would increase their employability, so that they could meet the expectations of the labour market.

- In terms of an *empowerment* logic, there was a minority of policies (3 out of 54) attempting to create conducive conditions for young adults. These policy measures looked for solutions that could improve the capabilities of young adults and could allow them to develop and successfully pursue their own life projects (cf. Hilverdink et al., 2010; Otto et al., 2017). When choosing their objectives, these policies did not frame the policy 'issue' or 'problem' as being narrowly related to the individuals or groups targeted, but rather as lack of resources and information, inadequate legislation, as well as grim labour market structures. Against this background, they offered them free and confidential counselling and advice on life management and lifelong guidance, and strived to maximise their social, economic and environmental benefits and to increase their creative skills and experiences in international cooperation. In doing so, they aimed at improving level of information about the matching of skills supply and demand, changing legislation and expanding infrastructures, for instance by including social impact clauses to public contracts with business service providers to create jobs and apprenticeship places. This cluster offered an interesting insight as it shows how tackling the same issues can be approached from a less individualising perspective.

From a comparative perspective, a number of further considerations can be made from a cross reading of the analysed policies and their underlying logics.

Prevention aims at an individual solution to school-to-work problems: Policies drawing on prevention as a logic of intervention prevail in regions where apprenticeships, vocational education and training or on-the-job training schemes are well established. The core idea seems to be integrating professional orientation and pre-vocational education into (lower) secondary education to avoid dropout, "waiting loops" in the transition system or reducing

the number of NEETs and welfare recipients. The exception here is Vale do Aver FR, where prevention of crime and social exclusion was the focus.

Compensation appears as a reactive rather than redistributive strategy: Policies oriented by this logic of intervention generally react to highly individualised perceptions of deficits or personal and/or family problems; often disregarding both socio-economic and labour market structures. Also, in that they focus on individual behavioural and dispositional issues almost in a pathologising way (as if vulnerability were an attribute), policies risk 'blaming the victim'.

Activation is the prevailing logic of intervention orienting policies focused on short-term labour market integration through individual employability: An interesting observation pertains to the fact that nearly half of all analysed LLL policies (26 of 54) set their objectives based on the logic of activation. This once again underpins the observation that labour market orientation and a narrow understanding of employability have become hegemonic in designing and implementing LLL policies. This was particularly the case in Italy and Spain where five out of six policies have been implemented along this logic. The role of long-term educational and professional projects in developing the life courses of young adults is threatened by the immense pressure of the state-driven welfare policies to ensure stable/growing labour force supply, which operate on short-term horizons. This in turn re-defines the role of education and professional training, marking them as means to an end, and not the other way round.

Related to this, when a logic of intervention becomes dominant in a particular region, young people have no other opportunities to develop their own life projects. Indeed, the findings show that the majority of FRs (15 out of 18) framed their policies within one prevailing logic of intervention. In some FRs, policies analysed set their objectives based on the same logic, i.e. either the logic of activation or the logic of compensation.[21] In this situation, young adults are required to develop their life projects in line with the given logics of LLL policies and to conceive of education and/or training as either an investment into their employability or as a chance to make up for their lost time. In short, still a great

[21] For example: Activation: ES-M-1, ES-M-2, ES-M-3; PT-AL-1, PT-AL-2, PT-AL-3; IT-M-1, IT-M-2, IT-M-3; or Compensation: HR-OB-1, HR-OB-2, HR-OB-3.

number of policies stresses single issues to be tackled by specific problem-solving strategies, thus framing particular—and in some cases one-sided—ways of seeing and problematizing issues.

Empowerment of individuals may serve to eschew more institutional or structural solutions: Only three out of 54 policies were seen as pursuing empowerment as an orientation, however they raise very intriguing questions. These were FI-K-1 in Kainuu, Finland, UK-G-1 in Glasgow FR, Scotland, and HR-IS-2 in Istria, Croatia. *FI-K-1* offers a guidance centre that provides individually-tailored support in a comprehensive reading of the subjective needs. While this entails a holistic approach that might serve to support de-standardised life courses, it could also risk normalising issues by intervening primarily at personal/individual level. It is worth noting that this policy is implemented in a region characterised by a single labour market (wood industry) that offers only scarce professional and labour market opportunities to young people. *UK-G-1* involves the Community Benefit Clauses Policy that put in place requirements on those contracted by local government to contribute to delivering wider benefits in addition to the core purpose of a contract. They are seen as a key component in maximising social, economic and environmental benefits for individuals within the constituent localities of the Region. This includes impacts for priority groups of people in the community, for instance support provision of LLL, skills, and employability services. While this policy aims at improving the local conditions for young people, research has also shown that the government has been reluctant in enforcing and monitoring the effectiveness. Also, although networking and cooperation among stakeholders is key to this approach, young people are not actively involved and figure only as recipients of the benefits. *HR-IS-2* is an international programme taking place both in Spain and in Croatia called Community Makers that aims at providing opportunity for young people to build the necessary knowledge and skills needed to be active in media development projects. There is no condition for participation and young people actively take part to create and maintain an Internet portal that will help young people to get information on further skills development and job search. Also here, the main locus of intervention is the individual.

Policy orientations are multiple in a few regions: There are three FRs (e.g. FI-K-1, FI-K-2, FI-K-3), which have included a variety of policy orientations, promoting apart from the logic of activation also the logics of empowerment and prevention, the logics of compensation and empowerment, or the logics of compensation and prevention. This fact could trigger

either synergies; for instance, within these regions, policies may be seen as responding to the observed problems by means of different approaches, thus maximising the possible solutions and creating multiple options to tackle the existing economic and socio-political challenges. If implementation is rigid, this could also create contradictions in terms of catering to the specific needs of some groups or even produce stigmatisation effects. However, this is an open question for further research.

Recognising 'Problems' and Devising 'Solutions'

Subsequent to identifying the logics that oriented the implementation of LLL policies, we inquired further into the various approaches that the policies adopted to frame/assess the problems and challenges to be tackled and to devise problem-solving strategies accordingly. As Figure 24 below shows, problem perception may be distinguished as framing the issues either as an individual or as a structural problem (see below). The figure below illustrates how the 54 LLL policies analysed perceived, conceptualized and approached the problems they target.

Figure 44. Problem perception of the LLL policies

Although clustered into four different logics of policy orientation, the policies nonetheless envisaged various problem-solving approaches. The policies were positioned between the two different poles of problem perception: the individual problem perception on the left side or the structural problem perception on the right side. In the next step, considering

them in more detail, they were then shifted either towards the left or the right side of the figure. The most important criterion of the placement was whether the policy saw problems as deriving from individual deficits or inability to integrate into the society and tackle one´s own issues, or whether it related to the emergent structural, political or economic difficulties or inefficiencies or to more general trends caused by current societal developments. Thus, the more the policy was shifted to either the left or the right side, the more it related to one of the two poles of problem perception. Finally, based on the aspects of policy orientation it shares with other three logics, it was then moved upwards or downwards, depending on the policy orientation it affiliates with more closely. Stretched between these two poles, the LLL policies depict the tendency to ascribe perceived problems as either an individual failure or as a structural contradiction. Here, we observe that a great number of policies perceive and describe the issues they tackle as deriving from structural problems

Moreover, when looking at the solutions the policies deemed necessary and appropriate, all 54 LLL policies could be again mapped between two poles, as Figure 25 below shows. The figure depicts the range of solutions devised by the analysed LLL policies.

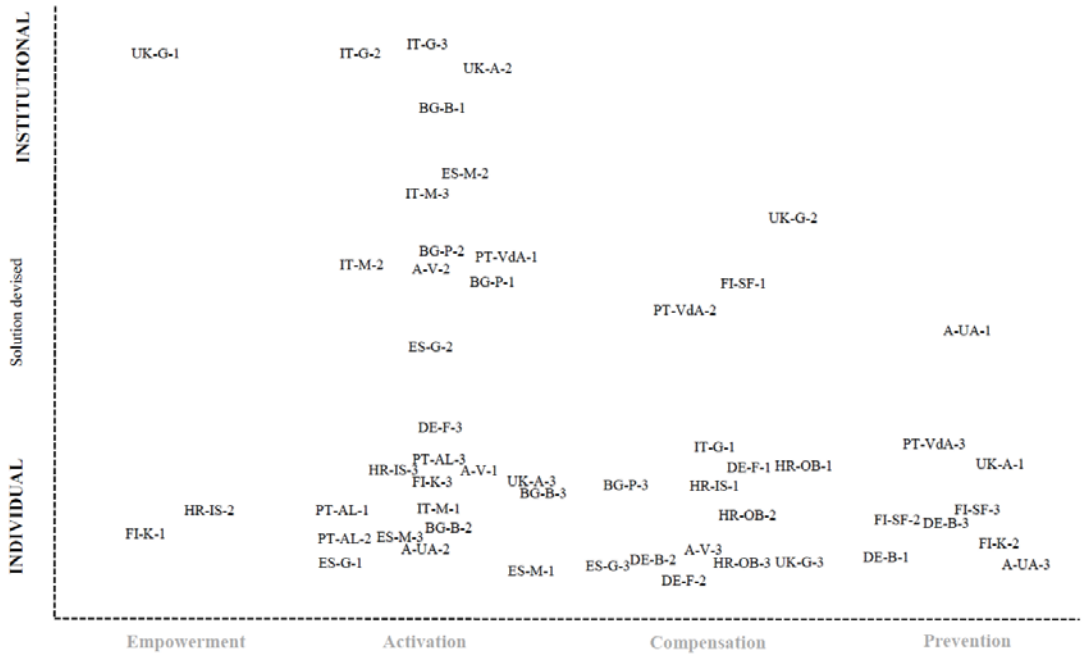

Figure 25. Solutions devised by the LLL policies

Arranged in four different clusters of logics of policy orientations, the policies were now placed on the graph according to their proposed problem-solving strategy. If the policy proposed institutional changes or flexibilisation of the policy-making processes, it was placed in the upper part of the figure. If, on the other hand, it was aiming at mobilizing individual resources and motivating young adults to a direct cooperation, the policy was placed in the lower part of the figure. Following the exact measures that the policies adopted, they were then shifted more accurately on the figure reflecting the amount of either individual or institutional responsibility. If the policies were proposing a combination of both institutional arrangements and active personal contributions, they were shifted more towards the centre of the figure, respecting, however, their general focus. Finally, the policies were then moved to the right or the left side of the figure according to the aspects they share with other policy orientations.

Now, when comparing results that Figures 24 and 25 provide, several comparisons may be made. *First*, Figure 24 highlights the variety of problem perceptions among the analysed policies. The majority of the LLL policies (31 out of 54) has perceived the existing difficulties as more or less structurally conditioned. Only very few of them (12), have clearly described the existing problems as individual deficits, whereas an even smaller number (11) has perceived them as a combination of both individual and structural problems. On the other hand, Figure 25 clearly shows that the overwhelming majority of the analysed LLL policies has proposed individual solutions (37 out of 54) and that some of them have devised a rather combined approach (10). However, just a very tiny minority has come up with proposing institutional changes (7). The clear mismatch between the structural problem-perception (31 policies) and individual problem-solution (37 policies) points out to the fact that although the majority of the policy makers realise the structural difficulties that young adults are exposed to, they nonetheless devise policy solutions grounded on individual interventions. In doing so, they further open up the cleavage between young adults´ possibilities and their chances to reach the socially and culturally created and expected outcomes, reinforcing 'Matthews' effects' and oftentimes leading them to frustration and/or disinterest. *Second*, limiting the scope of analysis to FRs, Figure 24 demonstrates that there was no FR where all the policies would identify only individual problems. However, in four of them every policy has perceived the existing problems as clearly structural. Only in three FRs, each of the LLL policies has identified different causalities, i.e. either individual, combined, or structural. Regarding the solutions devised

as seen on Figure 25, there was not a single FR, in which the policies proposed only institutional changes. However, in one third of them, the policies have devised only individual solutions. Only in two sites the policies proposed individual, combined, and institutional problem solutions. On top of that, among the FRs, there was one particular case, where all policies implemented perceived the problems on-site as clearly structural, but proposed purely individual solutions. This case manifests a clear mismatch between the structural difficulties and risks that young adults are facing, and the institutional inability to overcome them. Moreover, such critical situation blocks attempts to provide social inclusion and remains resistant to the economic changes it needs in order to foster growth and sustainable development.

Target Group Construction

In terms of the *target groups* of LLL policies, it became evident that these were more often than not constructed along the perceived deficits of young people, as illustrated by Figure 24 above. In other words, target groups were constructed focusing on individual characteristics and attributes, and oftentimes framed by pathologising characteristics such as not being mature, able or willing to progress through education and successfully transition to the world of work or even as lacking 'life skills'. In doing so, LLL policies categorise target groups as a 'problem' (social, structural, of inclusion, etc.), particularly regarding their aptitude in participating in the labour market (cf. EENEE, 2012; cf. Schneider & Ingram, 1993, pp. 335ff.), thus marking a deficit or problematic position defined as deviance of a 'normal' life course. Target groups were very often depicted as in need of guidance and support to overcome behavioural and/or attitudinal issues, leading to their dominant representation as 'being in need' of activation, compensation and prevention. The latter hints at one important implicit assumption underlying the idea of 'information' and 'guidance' as a policy solution, namely that there is a secure and definitive knowledge about what to do and what kinds of skills and competences are needed in the labour markets of tomorrow.

However, as target groups are not a static or natural category, whose categorisation may change under the different scopes of various policy-agendas, we assume that target group construction *first*, creates problem-definitions along individual ascriptions, and *second*, reveals a narrow definition of those 'in need' and thus, limits the possibilities of participation, objectives and orientations of LLL policies.

Overall, the LLL policies target a distinct group of young people by setting specific access criteria in the form of requirements the young adults have to fulfil before participating in the measures. Almost all policies list, *first*, a set of rather static access criteria, such as age, school-leaving certificates and receiving unemployment benefits and, *second*, a more variable range of disadvantages and/ or individual lack of skills, such as educational, health and social 'needs', intended to be supported by the measures. As other demographic criteria, such as gender, class and migration background can hardly be found in the LLL policies description, the measures focus on specific individual characteristics and attributes of their target groups, narrowing down on educational developments as a means to labour market inclusion.

While many policies do not explicitly specify fixed age frames and target young people from 15 to 30 years, one interesting observation was that, more and more, policies focused particularly on school-aged youths, shifting the focus of attention to earlier stages of the life course, thus demonstrating the particular prominence of preventive and compensatory logics. Although the LLL policies mapped in the project were explicitly sampled as targeting 18-29-year-olds, the bulk of policy measures also focus on younger age groups: the vast majority of the LLL policies is designed mainly for youths from 15 years on as their target group (34 LLL policies); a smaller proportion explicitly names the age group of 18-year-olds or older as access criterion (9 LLL policies), and the remaining solely name 'young people' as their addressees (7 LLL policies) or have no age restriction at all (4 LLL policies). Although young adults encompass quite different groups, in European policy-making it seems that target group construction is more and more addressing younger groups, an observation corroborated by the analyses of the logics of intervention of the policies discussed above.

A rather broad definition of the addressee's age can lead to tensions for younger groups. *First*, since younger groups of young adults are confronted with many other developmental tasks, such as career and family building, gaining social, socio-economic, etc. independence and taking on responsibility, their needs can differ substantially from other age groups. As a result, this can lead to mismatches between the policies' scopes and the needs of the young people targeted. *Second*, the access criteria in itself reproduce specific definitions of those being supported – and those who are not. Young adults may hardly be identified as a monolithic target group by policy measures; disregarding this also reveals their under-represented position in LLL policy formulation. In other words: young adults

are rather invisible in the phase of policy conceptualisation. The selection process for participation may, if developing into standards, represent certain social choices which raises questions as to their stigmatising effects especially for those who are selected or not selected (cf. Lampland & Star, 2009). The selection of youth as the main target group reveals the LLL policy focus on an early prevention and compensation. As the time frame of LLL policies shifts forward towards youngsters as their target group, they increasingly follow the logics of early prevention for a 'successful' transition into the labour market.

Besides age, the majority of the LLL polices define low educational qualifications as access criteria. Out of the 54 mapped LLL policies, 19 specify educational certificates from compulsory or secondary school tracks as a precondition for participating in the measures, while only a small proportion targets youth from higher education or with a completed vocational education or training certificate. It seems that the certificates function as a 'sorting mechanism' for accessing the policy measures. Although LLL policies also focus on young people neither in education nor in employment or training (NEETs), they often require a certificate from those groups before they can participate in the programmes. In doing so, they construct a notion of 'being in need' or 'vulnerable' as matter of educational trajectories, or rather missing educational certificates. In other words, having a lower degree is perceived as personal 'deficit' for a successful inclusion by LLL policies, not as a matter of lacking educational or labour market opportunities on site. As a result, they nourish the imaginary that knowledge and skills are the guarantors for a successful transition into the labour market and young adults would increase their chance for a successful career by simply 'upskilling' their abilities and competences. This description is mirrored by the identified lack of skills in the LLL policies, framing a lack of 'basic skills' or 'skills for life' as the characteristic of their target group. Although it mostly remains unclear what is meant by 'basic', the description constructs a notion of young adults merely being able to exist in today's society as they lack essential social, behavioural, etc. competences. In doing so, the responsibility for 'success' is viewed as merely a personal responsibility of young people – and policies provide the needed 'information' or 'guidance' to overcome the lacking skills in question.

Alongside age and prior educational qualification, the LLL policies focus on unemployed young people. With 25 policies, almost 50% of the total, a vast amount determines unemployment (registered and receiving benefits) as access criteria, focussing on their lack of socio-economic independence. This description can lead to tensions for the young

people, as a part of the LLL policies focus on those living in socio-economically precarious situations, but are 'willing' and 'motivated' to take financial risks of being self-sufficient. In doing so, the policies aim to enable young adults to be financially independent, however, for the most part policies do not necessarily offer opportunities for (regular) paid work themselves or that directly lead into the labour market.

Discussion and Conclusion

The chapter has argued that analysing LLL policies by adopting an interpretive approach is helpful in uncovering ambivalences and incompatibilities in the objectives and orientations of policies. As the previous sections showed, while employability was identified as the dominant objective of the policies examined, the logics orienting the implementation vary substantially. Four different logics of intervention were reconstructed – prevention, compensation, activation and empowerment – which, in turn, framed how problem perception and solutions devised took place. In the sample of 18 regions, most LLL policies focus on employment and rely on individualised solutions. From a CPE perspective, this comes out as a particular case of policy retention.

Although discussions about an ongoing individualization and de-standardization of life courses started already during the 1980s, the analyses showed that a significant number of LLL policies are still referring to the model of a standard – educational and occupational – life course. This can be observed both through a 'mirror image' and through implicit and explicit promises made by LLL policies. Employment-centred policies assume that NEETs experience a sort of deviant youth, disregarding completely life course de-standardisation. As a consequence, LLL policies put additional pressure on young adults, exposing them to more vulnerability.

In terms of the first, the constant thematising of deficits and lacks of young people (re)produce assumptions of normality, from which the groups targeted assumedly deviate. This is intensified by the dominant preventive and compensatory logics of most policies. In terms of the latter, LLL policies often implicitly or explicitly suggest that participation will lead the young participant (sooner or later) to a stable occupational career, notwithstanding the structural, economic or labour market landscape in which young people are inserted.

A great number of the LLL policies analysed follow the assumption of a linear life course with defined stages and trajectories along specific life spheres, with formal education and

work as central themes. As a result, young adults are confronted with preconceived notions of a standard life course forcing them to adjust and adapt. The policies hardly take into account the diverse living conditions, uncertainty, 'yo-yo-effects', flexibilisation or individual choices (Walther, 2006). A major (potential) negative impact is that when participation of young adults in various LLL measures and programmes does not lead to the desired occupational career, in the long run, these empty promises may lead to a reduction of educational aspiration and motivation. This is problematic particularly for young adults in vulnerable positions. The odds for quick fixes are not high, not only because there is little certainty in contemporary economic developments due to abrupt technological changes, subjecting the labour markets to much volatility, but also because the impact of the LLL policies on labour market integration depends mostly on the actual infrastructures at regional and local level.

Since LLL policies unfold differently depending on the specific local contexts, each local context provides distinct opportunities or constraints affecting the social realities of young adults. As LLL polices are generally tailored based on information available at national level, and not necessarily in view of the needs and circumstances at local level, their competing and ambivalent orientations and objectives produce mismatches with young adults' life courses. The implementation of LLL policies from the EU level to the national and regional level is difficult as national cultural, social and political features are often bracketed out in the construction of the policies and their target groups. For instance, the implementation is highly influenced by political features such as centralised/decentralised structures and the autonomy of the regions. While in countries with a centralised structure (e.g., Bulgaria and Portugal) local policies can hardly be found, the decentralised structures only can promote successful implementation if they have the ability and autonomy to decide on the implementation and tailor them for the young adults´ needs on site. Additionally, the networks and partnerships across and within the levels are crucial. Within the implementation process responsibilities are hardly shared – with exception of Finland and Scotland and to a lesser extend in Austria and Bulgaria with some Public-Private-Target-Group-Partnerships.

In summing up the discussion of the results, we attempt to relate them to the two theoretical perspectives adopted in this paper. In line with LCR, an important observation can be made that relates to the ability of individuals to take decisions about their own life trajectories, especially in reference to the point in time of their transition from education to

work. LLL policies may be seen as narrowing individual agency and choice by narrowly focusing on labour market entry, in particular for those in vulnerable positions. For instance, the 'right' point in time of this transition seems to depend heavily on socio-economic status since policy-makers seem to draw quite distinct conclusions about a 27-year-old youth still in education depending on whether he or she is from low, middle or upper social strata. Contrary to the general assumption that education is a lifelong process, LLL is reducing education to acquiring the formal credentials as a ticket to the labour market (cf. Kotthoff et al., 2017, p. 24).

In line with CPE, it becomes visible that while there is no agreement on what skills are needed where, when and at what levels, LLL policy-making emphasises their value for labour market participation and identifies the problem with young people lacking them. The preferred solution is prevention, compensation and activation of young people to participate in policies and programmes that only seldom lead to formal qualification. In other words, LLL is closely linked to productivity and employment for which formal credentials are a precondition, while LLL policies focus on 'soft skills' preparing for employability. Further national, cultural, social and political contexts are bracketed out in the construction of the policies and their target groups.

In particular for young people in vulnerable positions, this has a doubly problematic impact. First, they are left out in the formulation process of LLL policies as no attempt is made to relate policies to their individual needs, interests and life projects. Second, their participation in LLL policy measures and programmes is streamlined towards preventive and compensatory activities that seldom lead to formal qualification or regular employment. As it seems, strong incentives are offered for those being 'vulnerable' or 'at-risk' to stay in education/training and not try to enter the labour market, as they are perceived as 'maladjusted and unprepared' (Normand, 2016, p. 111) or to accept low-pay, part-time and precarious work. The policy formula for those perceived as being 'vulnerable' seems to be: keep them away from the self-regulated labour market and instead as long as possible in lifelong learning. The responsibility for creating opportunities lies here with the autonomous individual – by participating in learning and training to get the skills needed – and not with the institutions and structures of the labour market and welfare.

As opposed to evaluative or positivistic research methods, the underlying idea of mapping the LLL policies with IPA was not to define the 'right' or the 'wrong' policy measures, but to show how they function against their respective culturally constructed backgrounds. When mismatches or redundancies in their functionality occurred, it was crucial to see how it affected the implementers and the recipients and how these two groups in turn responded to them. Thus, the most challenging procedure was to understand the multi-layered and multi-relational character of LLL policies and to look at the contingency of their modes of practice. Again, when compared to positivistic research approaches, the task was not to prove "that the 'same' intervention never gets implemented identically and never has the same impact, because of differences in the context, setting, process, stakeholders and outcomes" (Pawson et al., 2004). Rather than explaining their lack of functionality, the IPA-inspired research in YOUNG_ADULLLT tried to uncover the various orientations of LLL policies and discuss their impact on problem perception and solution strategies. While assessing these policies' ability to be effective and estimating their power to generate long-term solutions for young adults, the IPA approach at the same time paid attention to the highly diversified and de-standardized life courses of young adults, especially to those near social exclusion, i.e. those in 'vulnerable' positions.

In conclusion, the interpretive analyses conducted of LLL policies offer insights into how policies identify and respond to social and economic issues that are to be tackled by LLL policies. In this sense, policies themselves always reflect selective interpretations of problems, explanations of their cause, and preferred solutions. They embody pre-existing interpretations and attribute meaning to which aspects of the world are viewed as 'problematic' and, in EU parlance, are in need of an 'intelligent' and coordinated policy solution.

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7. Functional Regions as Dynamic Units: Understanding coordinated policy-making in LLL

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on LLL policies regarding their embedding and interaction in the regional economy, the labour market and individual life projects of young adults. How are the contexts in which LLL policies unfold conducive to coordinated policy-making? Drawing on insights from the project's research and case studies, this chapter argues that FRs provide a useful concept to understand differences in the planning and implementation of education, labour market, and economic policies at regional/local level. It first introduces the concept of the FR as adopted in our research; second, it presents the units selected for research in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, focusing on functional and thus on dynamic rather than administrative units of the research sites. In a third section, the chapter discusses the value-added and the challenges related to this conceptualisation in order to draw first conclusions as to the utility of the concept in supporting the formulation of coordinated policy-making in the field of LLL.

The concept of Functional Region

To understand the concept of the Functional Region and its relevance to policy analysis, it is first important to consider the global economic and social changes that make the concept significant. Since the nineteenth century, nation states have been traditionally considered the 'natural' units of analysis throughout social sciences research. Until the late twentieth century, policy analysis focused on the nation state as the main unit of analysis. For example, the concept of territorialisation has been used to refer to the "organization of human activities by fixing them in spatial territory" (Castree et al., 2013c). As a result the world is seen as divided in "contiguous and nonoverlapping areas, each identified with a sovereign state" (McCarthy, 2007, p. 959). States were seen as acting within these respective territories, increasingly becoming important agents in the organisation of human activity through an expanding repertoire of regulatory activities (military defence, economic wealth, cultural identity, political legitimation, social welfare (cf. Brenner, 2004b). Public policy, therefore, was seen as *made* by national governments and administrations and largely directed at the organisation of human activity within their

'own' respective territory. However, since the late 1990s, researchers have argued that this basic premise has become more and more inadequate as globalisation entailed processes of both *de*territorialization and *re*territorialization (Brenner, 1999), rendering the relationship between state territoriality, sovereignty and power more complex. Emerging concepts from this stance include *de*territorialisation, which refers to the decreasing significance of territory to organising human affairs in general and more specifically that of national borders. The extreme case of this development would be what Castells (2009) described as the network society. Here, the emphasis is on space as detached from territory; rather the focus is on a space of flows. Nonetheless, while "powerful new non-territorial forms of economic and political organization in the global domain, such as multinational corporations, [and] transnational social movements" (Held et al., 1999, p. 9) have emerged, territories remain important. However, the latter are being reshaped as the territorial and supraterritorial interact, resulting in processes of *re*territorialization (Brenner, 2004a), in which governments are to be seen as strategic actors. For instance, in the global competition, the global flow of capital as a supraterritorial phenomenon influences territorial relations. In order to attract investment, national governments have devolved "[s]ignificant aspects of economic regulation […] to subnational institutional levels and major socioeconomic assets are reconcentrated within the most globally competitive urban regions and industrial districts" (Brenner, 2004b, p. 447).

These conceptual developments, with a focus on processes of de- and reterritorialization have significant implications for public policy analysis. Political communities can no longer be identified, "as simply discrete worlds or self-enclosed political spaces; they are enmeshed in complex structures of overlapping forces, relations and networks" (Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 41). It is no longer sensible, therefore, to conceptualise policy-making as taking place in separate spheres of sovereign territories predominantly shaped only by national governments and administrations. The processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation and the changing role of the state create a need for increased attention to more dynamic aspects of policy-making formulation and implementation. Policy analysis needs to take into account the different contexts in which policy formulation, decision-making and implementation take place. This realisation highlights the analytical potential of the concept of functional regions as dynamic units in the development and analysis of policy-making in lifelong learning.

Developments in international comparative research support the case for understanding the implementation of Lifelong Learning (LLL) policies being best studied by focusing on the regional/local level and adopting more differentiated analysis than the national level allows for. Thus, the concept functional region emerges and refers to a sub-division of territories that results from the spatial differentiation and organisation of social and economic relations rather than geographical boundaries, administrative particularities or historical developments. By adopting the concept of 'Functional Region' (FR), the research's conceptual framework took into account not only their administrative aspects but also their functional dynamics, their interrelations with other units as well as the interaction of their different sectoral policies. A focus on mainly administrative units at national level can provide useful statistical data on socio-economic aspects, welfare systems, labour markets, and education and training systems. However, this alone does not provide a sufficiently nuanced picture of the social reality in which most young adults' life courses unfold. For this reason, the national sub-units that were the focus of the project's analysis were not restricted to geographic/administrative terms, but rather were defined as Functional Region (FR) units. These were units defined as regions organised by functional relations as well as by spatial flows and interactions both within and across the borders of a particular territorial unit.[22]

The concept of Functional Region, therefore, refers to a sub-division of territories that results from the spatial differentiation and organisation of social and economic relations rather than purely geographical boundaries, administrative particularities or to historical developments. A FR may be seen as organised by functional relations and can be described as a unit defined by labour/economic activities. For instance, labour mobility, or the size of the population as well as the level of employment are taken as central elements. FRs are regarded as more or less autonomous units that can take different shapes or types and have different inner patterns of interaction, since any kind of spatial flow or interaction can organise this region.

[22] Such dynamic relationships between different regional units and their administrative, geographic, and economic aspects could be best illustrated by the FR Rhein-Main that combines three different regions and even more municipalities.

A fundamental component of the FR concept is the acknowledgement of the relational delineation of space. The boundaries of the units involved do not necessarily "reflect geographical particularities or historical events" (OECD, 2016b, p. 14) but are drawn with respect to "spatial flows or interactions of various kind (persons, goods, material, energy, information etc.)" (Klapka, Halás, & Tonev, 2013, p. 2). Overall, FRs represent a particular way of organizing space. The FR concept takes cognisance of more recent social theories of 'space', including the concept of how such spaces are socially-produced (Lefebvre, 1991), that they are "social relations stretched out" (Massey, 1994, p. 4). Geographical physical boundaries, therefore, are less and less important in the definition of the space. Functional Regions derive from the interactions of significant relations among relevant actors and administrative boundaries; these latter define the perimeter of the effectiveness of the power and competences of the public actors. As a concept, FR captures the idea of a territory characterised by spatially related human activities (Tomaney, 2009); conceptualising social relations in spatial terms focuses on the flows and linkages among levels and actors, particularly the ways in which they are the outcome of strategies and struggles (Jessop, 2004) and how particular configurations work in the interest of some groups and not others.

Functional Regions can either be delineated around a centre, such as an urban core with commuting from the periphery, or may possess a number of clusters of smaller, inter-related centres (OECD, 2002, p. 11). The latter allows accounting for polycentricism, a feature heavily present in major urban areas like the metropolitan region 'Rhein-Main'. The most common types of Functional Regions used are *Local Labour Market Areas* (LMAs) and *Functional Urban Areas* (Klapka et al., 2013, p. 99). Most OECD Member countries define Functional Regions in terms of local labour markets, "where labour demand and supply are relatively well matched" (OECD, 2002, p. 3). This delineation is overwhelmingly based on commuting patterns and aggregates smaller administrative units. The OECD and EU introduced a common definition and methodology in 2012 (OECD, 2012) and provided publicly available data that assists in the definition of FRs; Functional Urban Areas. These consist of "densely populated urban centres and adjacent municipalities with high levels of commuting (travel-to-work flows) towards the densely populated municipalities" (OECD, 2016a, p. 15). Functional Regions can, thus, be seen as 'nodal regions' (Nystuen & Dacey, 1961; Brown & Holmes, 1971): the orientation of spatial flows or interactions are centred to or radiate from the so called 'node' (i.e. focus, centre or

core). The identification and delineation of FRs are commonly based on the local labour market areas and the travel-to-work areas and they can be seen as the most dynamic concepts of Functional Regions.[23]

Functional Regions in the YOUNG_ADULLLT Project

The YOUNG_ADULLLT project aimed to reconstruct the interactive constellations in a multi-level environment, according to the multi-level design characterising the whole project (see Chapter 1 in this Report), observing the implementation and the impact of the LLL policies selected as case studies in each FR in their specific local and regional context. One of the main challenges this created relates to the very heterogeneous set of research sites with unique contextual factors in the particular chosen FRs. The following sections present an overview of the FRs selected in YOUNG_ADULLLT project and discusses their main functional relations and features.

Austria

In Austria the FRs selected are *Vienna* and *Upper Austria*. **Vienna** FR is the capital of the country, has approximately 1.8 million inhabitants and is the 7th largest city within the European Union, the second largest German speaking city (after Berlin) and by far the largest city in Austria.[24] Vienna is at the same time – in terms of population – the largest federal state (while the smallest in size). More than one fifth of the Austrian population lives in Vienna. Regional trains connect middle size cities beyond the national boarders quite well to Vienna. Yet alone from within Austria approximately 180.000 people commute to Vienna on a daily basis (Brezina et al., 2015) (Pot & Kazepov, 2016). Vienna's economy contributed 26 % to the overall value creation in Austria in 2012. Regarding employment, Vienna plays a significant role in the regional, national and international context: the city functions as a hub for business with Eastern European countries and is still a major tourist destination (Pot & Kazepov, 2016). Vienna FR hosts nine public universities, four private universities and a teacher training college. In 2013, around 170,000 students were

[23] The local labour market areas were also used for the reorganization of local government in the UK and for the delimitation of industrial districts in Italy (Casado-Diaz, 2000).

[24] The second largest city in Austria is Graz with slightly more than 270.000 inhabitants, which makes it six time smaller than Vienna.

enrolled in these institutions. Another 13,300 students were enrolled at the six universities of applied sciences (Stadt Wien, 2015). It is important to stress the further development of Vienna as a centre for higher education and services in the fields of ICT, the Life Sciences and research and development (R&D) (Eichmann & Nocker 2015; Pot & Kazepov, 2016).

So, in functional terms, Vienna FR is a global hub for business, in particular for Eastern European countries and it is characterised by high levels of commuting (travel-to-work) flows to the core, thanks to a well-developed regional trains system. This also facilitates the commuting to schools and universities for students coming from the surrounding areas.

Upper Austria FR is the third largest Austrian regional state in terms of its population (1.4 million) and the fourth largest in terms of size. The regional state consists of fifteen districts that are further divided into 442 municipalities. The regional capital of Linz has a little less than 200,000 inhabitants and is the third largest city of Austria. Linz attracts more than 100,000 job commuters (Land Oberösterreich, 2015; Pot & Kazepov, 2016). Upper Austria FR is one of the centres of industrial production in Austria (around 25 % of the industrial production). Particularly steel production and automotive supply are two important branches. Against the national trend, the manufacturing sector in Upper Austria has developed and will develop positively in the coming years, confirming its importance as an industrial region. At the same time, structural changes in favour of the service economy are also visible in Upper Austria (Pot & Kazepov, 2016).

In terms of functional relations, the Upper Austria FR displays high levels of travel-to-work flows towards the regional capital of Liz and it plays a particularly economic role in its national context, particularly thanks to the industrial production. Its labour market is mainly characterised by gap between high skilled labour force demands and the education of the Viennese population.

Bulgaria

The two Bulgarian FRs are *Plovdiv* and *Blagoevgrad*. The **Plovdiv** FR corresponds to the municipality of Plovdiv that has a central location in the country and has 341,625 inhabitants. It is an urban territory with higher concentration of services and industry in its economy and it is unique in terms of administrative-territorial characteristics: e.g., Plovdiv Municipality is one of the three municipalities in Bulgaria that comprises only the main city.

The city attracts a workforce from a wider region, where more than 1.3 million people live at a distance, which allows them to travel for work in the city. The region has a well-developed logistics network that has big potential to attract local entrepreneurs and foreign investors, and it appears as an important characteristic on the supply side of the labour market: a highway connection with Central and Western Europe; well-developed railway network with a connection to the nearest sea port; an intersection of Pan-European transport corridors (IV, VIII and X); a cargo and passenger airport (upcoming concession); a free trade zone and a customs terminal. The Plovdiv International Fair, spread on a territory of 352,000 m^2, makes the city an international, intellectual, trade and investment centre, organizing many trade fair events and thematic exhibitions on national and international scale (Kovacheva et al., 2016). Plovdiv FR is one of the most economically robust in the country. The FR has a multi-sector economy providing around 7% of the national sales revenue of goods and services (www.pd.government.bg). The industrial production gives 62% of the revenue. There is a trend in revenue growth in services. The main economic sectors, which shape the industry, are: production of food, beverage and tobacco products (around 28% of the gross sales revenue); production of ferrous metals (14%); metal casting, metalworking, and machinery production (11%); production of chemicals and chemical products (9%); production of cellulose, paper, polygraph and publishing goods (8%) (www.pd.government.bg) (Kovacheva et al., 2016). Plovdiv, with its 9 universities, with 39,260 students, and 78 primary, secondary and vocational schools with 8,351 pupils, is positioned as a leading university area of national significance (second in Bulgaria, behind the capital city Sofia) (Kovacheva et al., 2016).

In terms of functional relations, Plovdiv FR displays high levels of travel-to-work flows towards the main city thanks to a particularly dense highway and railway infrastructure, facilitating also the commuting to schools and universities from the surrounding areas. Plovdiv FR is a hub for business and employment, being one of the most economically robust in the country.

Blagoevgrad FR is the sixth largest district in the country – with a total population of around 312,831 inhabitants in 2015. Blagoevgrad FR covers almost all sectors of the national economy; it is mixed with rural and urban areas and has a higher share of the agricultural sector in the economy. Its specialization in crop output in the country is the production of tobacco, potatoes, tomatoes, peaches, grapes. The conditions for the development of agriculture in the Blagoevgrad region are characterised by favourable

natural and climatic conditions, the amount of non-occupied labour resources with certain traditions in farming, as well as prospects for the development of international and domestic tourism in the region, which creates good opportunities for production. Industry occupies a significant place in the economic activities of the region. Its branches form 49.7% in total products in Blagoevgrad FR. More than 30 % of all employed people in the region are engaged in industry. The leading branches of industry in the area are food (it constitutes 31% of the whole FR industry and its companies form the predominant employment area), textiles (which is of particular importance for the economy of the region in recent years) and the production of tobacco (20.1% of national production in 2004) (Kovacheva et al., 2016). Blagoevgrad FR is a city of universities. Students can study at South-West University “Neofit Rilski” and the American University in Bulgaria, which are increasingly part of the cultural and social life of the town. Besides, there are three colleges in Blagoevgrad: College of Tourism, College of Economics and Management and Medical College. The academic atmosphere and the comfortable conditions of the town give all opportunities for students to concentrate on their studies aiming at best performance and achievements (Kovacheva et al., 2016).

In functional terms, Blagoevgrad FR exhibits well-established education and training infrastructures with higher concentration of universities in comparison to the peripheral territories. It is cultural centre of the Republic of Bulgaria and a large number of young people are living in FR for studying purposes. With its railway line and road connection, the Blagoevgrad FR forms the heart of the land-based trading route between northern Greece, Bulgaria and Romania.

Croatia

In Croatia the FRs selected are *Istria County* and *Osijek-Baranja County*. The **Istria County** FR is situated in the north-west of the Adriatic Sea and includes a large part of the Istrian peninsula. It is among the most developed counties in Croatia (together with Primorje-Gorski Kotar County and City of Zagreb), with the highest competitiveness rank and the highest development index (more than 125% of the average of the Republic of Croatia). The Istrian economy is very diverse; the leading activities are manufacturing industry, tourism, and trade. Other important economic sectors are construction, real estate and business services. Rivers, lakes and underground waters represent significant water resources for Istria County. One third of the Istrian peninsula is covered with woods.

Administratively, Istria County consists of 41 territorial units of local self-government: 10 towns and 31 municipalities. Istria has 208,055 inhabitants. As many as 145,894 inhabitants, that is 70.7% of the whole population living in Istria, live in the (10) cities; while 60,450 inhabitants (29.3%) live in the 31 municipalities. Rural areas are marked by extremely low population density, 33 inh/km2, while the average population density of the urban area is 254 inh/km2. Of the total 647 villages in the county, 52 of them belong to the urban areas, and 595 to rural areas; the county can therefore be seen as a predominantly rural region (Domović & Bouillet, 2016).

In functional terms, the Istria County FR is a predominantly rural region with a concentration of the inhabitants in the biggest town (Pula). Nevertheless, in recent years rapid growth has been seen in some of the urban areas that has increased differences between towns and the countryside; an element especially relevant in the relationship between coastal towns (such as Pula, Poreč, Rovinj, Pazin), the flows are concentrated between coastal towns and the less developed inland Istria.

Osijek-Baranja County, the other Croatian FR, is a continental county, located in the Pannonian valley in northeastern Croatia. It is among the least competitive counties (together with Virovitica-Podravina County, Brod-Posavina County, Vukovar-Srijem County, Bjelovar-Bilogora County, Požega-Slavonia County and Sisak-Moslavina County), with the lowest competitiveness rank and the lowest development index (below 75% of the average of the Republic of Croatia). It is expanded over an area of 4,152 km2 on fertile plain soil between the rivers Sava, Drava, and Danube. Administratively, the Osijek-Baranja County consists of 42 territorial units of local self-government – 7 towns and 35 municipalities. Osijek-Baranja County has 305,032 inhabitants. As many as 193,964 inhabitants, or 63.59% of the whole population, live in the cities, while 111,068 inhabitants (36.41%) live in the municipalities. The county territory is predominantly plain and favours agricultural development. Out of the overall area, 58% consists of arable area, and forests comprise 20%. The arable lands in the county territory enable intensive agricultural production, as well as an ecologically-based one. The county bases its economic development on agriculture and the food-processing industry, as well as on crafts and trades. In the foodstuff and beverage production, important are the capacities in the miller and baker's trade, sugar refinery, fodder processing, dairy industry, abattoir industry and meat-processing capacities, fruit and vegetable processing, confection industry and vintner and brewer's trade (Domović & Bouillet, 2016).

In terms of functional relations, the Osijek-Baranja County FR is characterised by particular economic specializations, connected to the processing industry (especially foodstuff and beverage production).

Finland

In Finland the FRs selected are *Southwest* and *Kainuu.* The **Southwest** FR consists of 27 municipalities and has a population of around 473,000 inhabitants, which makes it the third largest region in Finland. The capital city of the region is Turku, which, with a total population of around 186,000 inhabitants, is the fifth biggest city in Finland. Turku is surrounded by smaller towns, some of which are rather wealthy and from which many people commute on a daily basis to Turku for work or study. Southwest Finland is the second largest economic area in Finland with strong links to the Stockholm business area. The main industries of the region are marine industry and metal construction, which, together with research and development in biosciences and food industry, forms the base of the economic life of the region. However, during the past few decades, the traditional industry has given room for the service sector, of which one example is the increasing tourism (Rinne et al., 2016). Southwest FR is a strong educational region, with two universities in Turku (the capital city of the region) and four universities of applied sciences in the region, together with 75 post-compulsory educational institutions located throughout the region. Every year about 9,500 new students enroll in the universities, universities of applied sciences, and vocational institutions in Southwest Finland (Rinne et al., 2016).

In terms of functional relations, the Southwest FR presents a concentration of universities and educational institutions in the capital city of the region (Turku), to which many people commute on a daily basis for work or study. Furthermore, the marine industry represents the largest employer and the port's central location as a gateway to the West makes it an important international actor in the Baltic Sea area.

The Finnish Kainuu FR, located in northern Finland, consists of eight municipalities, which are primarily rural. The population of Kainuu is around 75,000, which makes it the second smallest region in mainland Finland. The capital city of the region is Kajaani, which is the only municipality of the region that can be described as mainly urban. However, with its 38,000 inhabitants, Kajaani is notably small for a capital city of a region. The strengths standing out in the regional profile of Kainuu are nature, space and natural resources, forests in particular. Since the paper industry ended in the region, there has been a shift

in the wood industry to upgrading wood to final products. The forests of Kainuu are an essential resource for the bio-economy that can be used to produce, for example, fuel, bio-plastics and different kinds of construction materials. Even though the amount of jobs in forestry and agriculture is still greater in Kainuu when compared with Finland on average, the service sector is nowadays the most important employer in Kainuu. In addition, the mining industry is an important employer for people living in Kainuu (Rinne et al., 2016).

In functional terms, Kainuu FR is a primarily rural region basing its economy on particular specializations, like the wood industry, bio-economy and mining industry. Due to the scarce educational opportunities the region is offering, young people living in Kainuu are in many cases forced to leave their hometowns for more attractive cities in terms of educational and working opportunities.

Germany

In Germany the FRs selected are *Bremen* and *Rhein-Main*. The **FR Bremen** is a relatively large area in the Northwestern part of Germany with roughly 2.7 million inhabitants. The main core of the FR is the city of Bremen with approx. 550,000 inhabitants, and roughly 130,000 people commute every day from surrounding Lower Saxony to Bremen for work, mostly to and from the secondary cores Oldenburg and Bremerhaven. The FR Bremen encompasses urban areas, wealthy suburbs and rural areas. Three main labour markets are present in this FR, one of the country's most important seaports (ca. 24 % of labour force), the world's second-biggest plant of Daimler-Benz car manufacturers (ca. 29 % of labour force), and a service sector that employs some 45 % of the labour force (Bittlingmayer et al., 2016). Moreover, the FR Bremen is defined by contrasting characteristics, which seem very relevant for the implementation of LLL policies. The region is not only economically diverse, it also has regional unemployment rates among young adults that are almost twice as high as for the country (ca. 10 %); further, it has high rates of people living on welfare (13.3 %), and especially the shipbuilding sector underwent severe crises due to automatization and demographic change, for instance the town of Bremerhaven went from approximately 150,000 in 1968 to ca. 110,000 inhabitants in 2015.

In functional terms, the different parts of the FR Bremen are strongly interlinked in economic terms and travel-to-work flows (highest towards the core, medium toward the

secondary cores) and the creation of the Association Metropolregion Nordwest led to close monitoring and increasing harmonisation of regional policies (cf. Metropolregion Nordwest 2018).

The **FR Rhein-Main** is the other German FR that covers a large area in the centre of the country and consists of parts of three different federal states (*Länder*), encompassing roughly 5.6 million inhabitants. The geographical, economic and functional centre of the FR Rhein-Main is Frankfurt am Main with its over 700,000 inhabitants. Regarding its economic power, it is one of the most important regions in Germany, thanks to its internationally outstanding position as a transportation hub (Frankfurt Airport), trade fair, financial centre as well as in terms of science, education and training. The region is connected through a dense suburban railway and motorway network (Bittlingmayer et al., 2016), used for instance by ca. 350,000 commuters to the main core of the FR alone. The labour market is diversified and includes different sectors: transportation, where Frankfurt Airport is the working place for some 80,000; the Frankfurt bank district with the German Central Bank and the European Central Bank as major employers; 76 % of the labour force is active in the service sector. Although yearly income average in the core is as high as €90,000, the FR is characterised by huge differences across the districts regarding unemployment, income, level of qualification, and consequently different chances for citizens. Unemployment ratios range from 4.9 % (Frankfurt) and 9.7 % (Offenbach), while in some other parts there is virtually full employment. There is also a dense and diversified infrastructure in education and training in the FR, with four universities and several universities of applied sciences, a broad and diversified range of vocational training (apprenticeship places), professional schools – and last but not least providers of pre-vocational education and training within the so-called ‘transition system’. With regard to the latter, the landscape is highly diverse with municipal providers (e.g. Gesellschaft für Jugendbildung), organizations of the youth welfare system (youth social work), organisations for the area of adult and further education as well as private companies offering education or training.

In terms of functional relations, the FR Rhein-Main displays high levels of travel-to-work flows towards the core, whose labour markets are generally characterised by a high-skills equilibrium. This makes access to (further) education, training and jobs much more competitive for those with lower credentials, not least because of the dense transportation

net in the FR. The figure below illustrates the two functional regions with their different cores and peripheries.

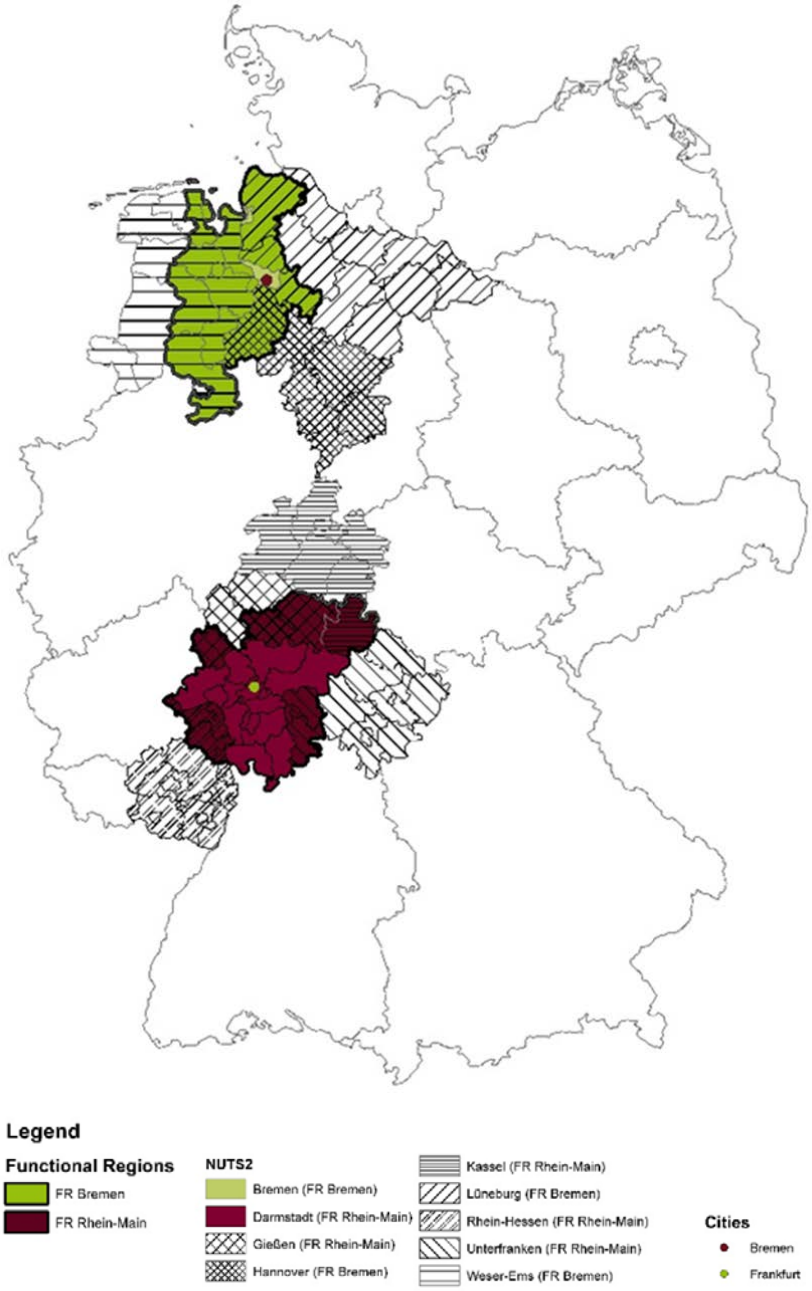

Figure 26. Functional Regions Bremen and Rhein-Main

Italy

In Italy the selected FRs are *Milan* and *Genoa*. The **Milan** FR is one of the largest metropolitan areas in Italy with a total population of around three million inhabitants. Milan

consists of 134 municipalities in an area of 1,575 square kilometres; it is the third most populated area in Europe after London and Paris for the complex variety of activities and for its distribution of wealth and welfare. Milan is generally depicted as the main 'working city' and the 'place for opportunities' in Italy: it is the 'economic engine' of the country and it is one of the largest business cities of Europe (Palumbo et al., 2016). The productive model is based on a dense network of small and very small enterprises, complemented by a limited number of medium to large size companies. Most of the activity is concentrated in the service sector and the tertiary sector (69%), especially those most qualified and of the highest added value. The hi-tech industry counts 15% of companies active in Italy and as many as 31% of employees, while one of the drivers of the development is the creative economy (registered design, fashion, patents, copyrights and trademarks). Milan FR shows a leading role of the city; Milan drives economic clusters in the surroundings: North of Milan 'Brianza region' – Furniture; North-East of Milan 'Vimercate' - Communication, media, ICT; North-South of Milan 'Legnano' - Textile, elector mechanical industries; South of Milan - Agro-food business (Palumbo et al., 2017). In Milan FR there are prestigious universities (such as Bocconi, IED, San Raffaele, etc.) attracting students from other regions and also foreign students (Palumbo et al. 2017).

In functional terms, the Milan FR displays high levels of travel-to-work flows towards the core, whose labour markets are characterised by two different types of skills equilibrium, high and low. In the Milan FR even the lower skilled young adults are generally better qualified than elsewhere in Italy, but, due to the more competitive context, their vulnerable condition is more intensively perceived than in other Italian regions.

Genoa FR is a metropolitan area with a population of approximately 853,000 inhabitants of which 8.3% are foreigners. It comprises 67 municipalities in an area of 1,833 sq km. It is characterised by a dynamic and specialized port especially with regard to container traffic and its nodal position with logistic corridors trans-European and Mediterranean: it ranks as the premier harbour in Italy in terms of total throughput and amongst the top Mediterranean gateway container ports. Moreover, the number of cruise passengers has increased in the last years (+118,410 units, or + 22.3%, Palumbo et al., 2016). Genoa has a high level of tertiary education, but the labour market is unable to absorb all those who have university degrees because it has a prevalence of intermediate and low skilled jobs. Occupational growth registered by the latest census data (2011) is therefore mainly due to the strong development of the services sector. Indeed, in the city

of Genoa most activities are related to trade (16.234 firms), tourism, harbour shipping and other tertiary activities and the public employment is close to a quarter of the total number of jobs. The sector which occupies the largest number of employees is manufacturing (44,074 -20.7%), followed by wholesale and retail trade with 34,998 employees (16.5%) from the real estate, travel agencies, business services (27,887; 13.1%). The labour force is concentrated in the age groups 35 - 64 years old (72.8%) not only due to the increase in the number of elderly people but also because of delayed access to the labour market by young people.

In functional terms, the harbour is the 'nodal point' of the Genoa FR, which offers important employment and business opportunities. Genoa FR's labour market is characterised by skills surpluses of higher educated graduates, which often translates into over-qualification and in the widespread travel-to-work flows towards the surrounding areas, mainly Milan and other Lombard cities.

Portugal

The Portuguese FRs are *Alentejano Litoral* and *Vale do Ave.* **Alentejano Litoral** FR is an administrative region located near the Atlantic sea in the southwestern part of Portugal. It includes five municipalities and has a population of 95,410 inhabitants in 2016. Between 2000 and 2010, the region presented a variation of GDP per capita of 46% against 30.5% in whole country, mainly due to economic specialization and employment attractiveness (CCDRAlentejo, 2015). Agriculture is the main economic activity in Odemira, one of the main cities of the Region, together with Sines city, where many national and international firms using innovating methods are producing agricultural products for exportation (Alves et al., 2016). Sines city has one of the biggest deep-water harbours in Europe and a very dynamic industrial, logistics zone where many national and international firms are located. In 2014, the harbour had a turnover of 37.6 million tonnes and 1.23 million TEU. Some research and development centres associated with the energy and sea economies are also located at Sines. Another important economic activity is tourism. In recent years, several high quality tourism enterprises have been created representing an important sector for youth employment. (Alves et al., 2016).

In functional terms, the five municipalities are strongly linked in economic terms, constituting a regional labour market with intensive mobility flows based on a polycentric urban area. Since 2013 and under the supervision of the Intermunicipality Community of

Alentejo Litoral, the five municipalities joined together to promote an integrated strategy for the development of Litoral Alentejano for the years 2014-2020 which includes, among others, LLL and employment initiatives.

The **Vale do Ave** region is located in the northwestern part of Portugal, and includes eight municipalities along the river Ave. The institutional association of these municipalities constitutes the Intermunicipal Community of Vale do Ave, a regional public entity created in 2009 in order to promote and manage Intermunicipal projects on the euro-region NUTIII Ave. The Intermunicipal Community of Vale do Ave encompasses an area of 1541 km², with a total population of 419,119 inhabitants (www.pordata.pt), corresponding to a density of about 275 habitants per km², one of the highest in the country. The population of this region is relatively young in the national context (ageing index for 2015 is 115.7, compared to 146.9 for the country as a whole), but growth rates are in decline, accompanying the national tendency. Presently 69.9% of the region population is between 25 and 64 years old and 16.1% is over 65 years old. In terms of immigration, only 0.8% of the population has non-Portuguese nationality, contrasting with 3.8% found at the national level. The Vale do Ave is one of the largest and oldest industrial regions of the country, with roots on ancient flax processing traditions that evolved to industrial textile production (mainly flax and cotton based) from the mid-19th century onwards, mostly export oriented. Manufacturing is the main economic activity in five of the eight municipalities of Vale do Ave and it is strongest in the three municipalities located in the West (Vizela, Vila Nova de Famalicão and Guimarães). In the three municipalities to the East, agriculture is the main economic activity (Alves et al., 2016).

Both Portuguese FRs are relatively peripheral, without any major urban setting, but near the two most important Portuguese cities: Vale do Ave borders the Porto Metropolitan Area, in the North of the country, and Alentejo Litoral is located close to the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, in the South. The two regions are well established in administrative terms, as both are organized in Intermunicipal Communities that determine regional socioeconomic development strategies. Each region shows economic specialization: Vale do Ave is one of the more prominent textile industrial hubs in the country; Alentejo Litoral is specialised in the energy industry and in logistics, alongside tourism and agriculture.

In terms of functional relations, Vale do Ave region is characterised by a diffuse and uneven pattern of settlement that translates into the concentration of the population in the

urban centres in the west side of the region, contrasting with typically low-density rural areas to the east. Although the region has historically been one of the most prominent economic hubs in the country, it has also been one of the most dramatically affected by the recent economic crisis, as it was already facing a prolonged economic recession and a rise in unemployment.

Spain

In Spain the selected FRs are *Malaga* and *Girona*. The urban area of **Málaga** is formed by the main city and the peri-urban area around this city: it is one of the eight provinces of the Andalusia *comunidades autónomas* (CA). Málaga is an urban region because it configures both a unitary labour market and a housing area, which eventually imprint a metropolitan feature on the city and influence its fluxes of population. According to the prevailing territorial plans, Málaga is a regional centre or a functional region to the extent that it is the main urban reference for territory management. The regional centres are not only the urban centres themselves but also the varying sets of municipalities that form their metropolitan areas in flexible ways. Nonetheless, Málaga still plays a decisive role due to the concentration of population and economic activity, to its urban dynamics, and to its crucial role for the external integration of Andalusia. Transportation has a key role in the economic development of Málaga and its metropolitan area, for that reason the transport system and its services should be highlighted as an essential articulation of the territory and that is a main part of the development of the economic activities. Thus, the metropolitan transport consortium has the aim of articulating the economic, technical and administrative cooperation between the different areas of the metropolitan area. The railway tends to increase the transport of passengers on the regional level with metropolitan rail networks, improving competitiveness and sustainability of transport systems (Rambla, 2016). Finally, the movement of population within the urban area reflects the underlying territorial cohesion. As a matter of fact, many people leave the city of Málaga for a suburb but they keep their job and relations in the city (IECA, 2015). For example, between 2010 and 2014 many people (86,614) cancelled their registration in the city. But half of them moved to other localities in the same province. More importantly, about 71% of those who moved within the province settled in other municipalities located in the same functional region such as El Rincón de la Victoria (7,330), Torremolinos (5,357) and Benalmádena (4,596).

In terms of functional relations, the Malaga FR is the main urban reference for territory management, including the main cities and the surrounding metropolitan areas, which shape territorial units underpinned by economic and functional relationships. Malaga plays a decisive role due to the concentration of population and economic activity, to its urban dynamics, and to its crucial role for the external integration of Andalusia.

The other Spanish FR is the urban area of **Girona**: it is one of the four provinces of the Catalonia *comunidades autónomas* (CA) and the urban network of Girona clearly shapes a distinct sub-system within the broader urban network of Catalonia. Probably, the official province and a functional region only coincide in the administrative unit of *Comarques de Girona,* the other administrative units being much more internally diverse. The urban area of Girona is a very visible territory from an international stance: since it lays at the very border between France and Spain, it conveys key international connections of infrastructures. French and Spanish high-speed trains also meet at Figueres, the regional town situated most at North. At the more general geographic scale, it is normally conceptualised as an extension of the functional region of Barcelona. In fact, the frequent trains between the two cities remind of the attraction of Barcelona over the whole of Catalonia. But these train connections are nevertheless not so intense as the main commuting trains between the capital and the neighbouring towns. Moreover, the Girona Area Public Transport Consortium facilitates geographical mobility within the region. The consortium is comprised of state, regional and local authorities, who apply for membership on a voluntary basis. In essence, this body coordinates the bus and the train networks. Its mandate induces authorities to foster the development of local bus systems and look for a smooth alignment of timetables (Rambla, 2016). Girona FR, with its higher education district around the Universidad de Girona, created in the nineties, is an important pole as a public service for the surrounding area. In Spain, most universities are mandated to provide the widest possible array of degrees to the neighbouring territory. In fact, the preference for local institutions is quite remarkable in many places, and Girona is not an exception at all (Rambla, 2016).

In functional terms, the Girona FR is characterised by its higher education district, the bus and the train networks system that facilitates geographical mobility within the region, so that young adults living here can avail of jobs and study opportunities located not only in their town but also in many neighbouring places.

UK-Scotland

In Scotland the two functional regions selected are Glasgow City Region (GCR) and Aberdeen and Aberdeen Shire City Region (ACAR). The **Glasgow City Region** is an urbanized city region in the western central belt of Scotland nestled in the Clyde Valley and consists of eight councils. Glasgow City, the city region's urban core, is Scotland's largest city with a population of around 600,000; it is the main employment and service center, the main retail center, the main center of further and higher education, and the main center of cultural, leisure and entertainment activities for western central Scotland. The GCR provides 33% of Scotland's jobs and has over 29% of Scottish businesses. The professional, scientific and technical services sectors have an increasingly central role in driving economic growth. The wider City Region has a population of 1.75 million, and while there is a skilled workforce, the Region includes areas that have high levels of social disadvantage and unemployment.

In functional terms, GCR has important commuter flows from Argyll and Bute, Ayrshire, Stirling and the Edinburgh City Region (Lowden et al., 2016). There are interlinked local systems and economies with distinctive social and economic characteristics and challenges. The GCR features multi-partner collaborative responses to these challenges across the councils. It is an important provider of further and higher educational opportunities on a national – and increasingly international - level. Indeed, the Glasgow region produces a third of all Scotland's graduates (SSD, 2016a, p. 18). The GCR includes two international airports and possesses an extensive rail and road infrastructure. The City Region's £1.13 billion funding over a 20 year period focuses on enhancing innovation, business growth, infrastructure, developing new sites for housing, promoting skills and employment and improving public transport systems with the aim of developing economic levers to improve productivity and compete internationally.

The other Scottish FR is **Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Region (ACAR)**: Aberdeen is Scotland's third-largest city and the regional center for employment, retail, culture, health and higher education as well as being the region's transport hub. Although there are concentrations of deprivation in Aberdeen City and parts of Aberdeenshire, overall, the ACAR has performed well economically. However, the downturn in the oil and gas sector has meant reappraisal of the regional economy and skills. The ACAR plan has prioritised areas in need of regeneration and include coastal communities of north and

south Aberdeenshire as well as parts of Aberdeen City with social, economic and area-based initiatives to improve the economy, environmental quality, accessibility, employment opportunities and the competitiveness of business. The ACAR strategies include diversifying the employment base, including farming and fishing, retail and tourism, and increasing exports to reduce reliance on locally dependent oil and gas jobs. (SSD, 2016b, p. 18). The ACAR plan also includes improving transport, renewable energy and digital communications. The regeneration of Aberdeen city centre features in the ACAR plan so that it becomes a key shopping, leisure, commercial and residential environment and visitor attraction.

In functional terms, there is an interdependency between Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City[25]. There are significant levels of out-commuting from Aberdeenshire, and further afield, into Aberdeen City, with the City being the main regional employment centre and 40% of those employed and living in Aberdeenshire work in Aberdeen City. The two Councils of the ACAR work closely with SDS and other partner organisations to coordinate the skills strategies and implementation of key policies such as DYW. The Aberdeen harbour has a strategic importance and is being expanded to not only serve the energy sector, but also as part of the diversification of the whole region including tourism opportunities.

Comparative Insights

The majority of FRs selected by countries in the research are *functional urban areas*, with densely populated core(s) hosting different labour markets that produce strong and specific functional relations with the surrounding areas. In only a few cases, FRs were located in (semi-) rural areas categorised by economic specialisations. The majority of FRs selected in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project may be characterised as metropolitan areas consisting of multiple, linked urban cores, which are drivers for the regions in terms of economic output, transportation hubs, cultural facilities and administrative centres. They account for a higher than average concentration of services and industries in country-wide

[25] http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3811/1/2012lindsayphd.pdf.pdf

comparison, however the functional relations they display differ in terms of types and density of flows:

- Some FRs are characterised by high levels of commuting (travel-to-work) flows to diversified local labour markets. Examples demonstrating a particularly dense infrastructure in YOUNG_ADULLLT include the two German metropolitan areas of Bremen and Rhein-Main; the two Spanish FRs of Malaga and Girona; Milan FR in Italy; the Vienna FR in Austria; and the Bulgarian FR Plovdiv.
- Some FRs are hubs for business and employment and play a particularly economic role in their national context. Examples are: Upper Austria FR, Aberdeen FR in Scotland, the two Bulgarian FRs of Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad, but also FRs Rhein-Main and Milan.
- Some FRs exhibit well-established education and training infrastructures with higher concentration of general and vocational schools and higher education institutions when compared to the peripheral territories. In YOUNG_ADULLLT several FRs are illustrative of this type: Spanish Girona FR; Scottish Glasgow City; the two Bulgarian FRs of Plovdiv and of Blagoevgrad; Southwest Finland FR; Vienna FR in Austria.
- In other cases, an international harbour or airport is the 'nodal point' of a FR, as such infrastructure offers important employment and business opportunities. Examples include: Genoa FR in Italy, the Portuguese Alentejano Litoral FR, the German Rhein-Main FR, and Spanish Malaga FR.
- In few cases, FRs are located in predominantly rural areas that have particular economic specialisations. Examples are: The two Portuguese FRs of Vale do Ave and Alentejo Litoral, the Finish Kainuu FR and the two Croatian FRs of Istria County FR and Osijek-Baranja County.

By adopting the concept of 'Functional Region' (FR), research aimed at conceptually taking into account not only policies' administrative aspects but also their functional dynamics, their interrelations with other units as well as the interaction of their different sectoral policies. The aim was to identify regional and local policy-making networks related to LLL, by analysing the LLL policies embedded in and in interaction with the regional economy, the labour market and the individual life projects of young adults. Due to the heterogeneity of the sites selected for research, the FR concept provided an *added value*

for the analysis as it allows identifying areas with specific problems, such as mismatches between the education, social and employment sectors, since FR is the 'place' where policies and young adults meet (OECD, 2014).

Conclusion: The value-added and challenges related to the use of the Functional Region concept in understanding LLL policy-making

The on-going processes of internationalisation, Europeanisation and globalisation have challenged the ways we conceptualise and analyse policy-making, questioning in particular the usefulness of static and absolute spatial concepts such as that of the nation or region. FR as used in this research provides a potential dynamic concept with which to understand context- and culture-specific aspects of the policy-making process.

Coordinated policy-making denotes arrangements that successfully integrate labour market, social inclusion and individual life courses aspects of policy formulation and implementation at regional and local level. Here, the FR concept provides a sufficiently nuanced and sophisticated framework to analyse and understand coordinated policy-making and associated institutional (*governance*) solutions that take account of all relevant actors, stake-holders, dynamics, trends, and (mis)matches. The concept allows critical scrutiny of redundancies the synergic effects in terms of coherence/integration of specific training or educational programs with broader social interventions for specific groups.

Using the FR concept to look at these institutional solutions developed by governments to develop and implement regional and local skills strategies reveals the relational and power dynamics involved in the coordination of these activities across different areas of government (education, work, and economy). The focus on the FR further highlights the interplay and involvement of non-governmental actors (business, training institutions, civil society) in the planning, regulation and provision of lifelong learning opportunities in a particular territory.

Therefore, the policy spaces in the Scottish model for example, including the Functional Regions and their constituent sub-spaces can be seen to be comprised of vertical and horizontal relational networks, pathways and partnerships.[26] Here Jessop's (2016)

[26] In this respect, the reference to 'partnerships' deserves a further critical reflection of its discursive ideological meaning, questionning the equal status of 'partners'.

concepts are helpful in understanding how policy systems are a tangle of networked relations. Theorists such as Lefebvre (1991) and Harvey (2006) stress such partnerships are dynamic and the relationships between the various actors and their production of ideas and activities are key to the policy process. It is also important to recognise that spaces such as FRs are a manifestation of, and arena of politics and power. Here the ideas of Doreen Massey are useful. The social relationships present in networks and partnerships, such as those found in the FRs, constitute a "geometry of power" (Massey, 1994, p. 4). Such spaces at various scales are socially produced, as Massey states: "Space is social relations stretched out" (ibid, p. 2). Because of this, these spaces are not fixed, rather they are contingent dependent upon what networks and their actors are present (Shepherd, 2002).

The cross-case analysis in the project aimed at showing variations and commonalities across cases by juxtaposing them according to selected criteria (as different educational infrastructures or different labour market systems). This enabled the construction of insights and further research questions on policy effects on the addressees' life courses and on their potential in terms of transferability and policy learning, paving the way for the subsequent comparative analysis in our research (Palumbo et al., 2018). On this point, a consideration has to be undertaken. Since, as we have underlined, LLL policies are highly context-specific and are therefore best understood in their regional/local context, the notions of 'policy transfer' 'best practice' and 'policy learning' are questionable, because LLL policies have been devised for specific contexts so that their impacts, or even unintended effects, could be very different in different contexts. In this sense, the focus on FRs allows the analysis of specific regional and local policy-making related to LLL, reaching a better understanding of the structural relationships, functional matching(s) and specific forms of embedding of LLL policies in each local context in order to identify patterns of coordinated policy-making at regional/local level that can potentially be useful in other contexts.

Therefore, FRs are important 'structures' or spaces, seen by government and local policy actors as ways to organise and govern policy enactment. However, we can argue that

these spaces are constructs of their actors and the relationships of these actors are key to their operation and effectiveness. The concept of Functional Regions, if it includes an understanding of specialised social relationships and narratives and recognises power dynamics present, can be extremely helpful in understanding policy enactment processes including LLL. Rather than fetishising space, we are able to use the Functional Region concept to go beyond the descriptive and explore within this construct, relational networks with their integral "power, projects and politics" (Robertson, 2009, p.2).

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8. Comparing regional skill formation systems across European regions

Queralt Capsada-Munsech & Oscar Valiente

Introduction

In the context of the economic downturn post-2008, European countries have responded with policies for young people which address both economic growth and social cohesion, aiming to deal with the global competition and integrate young people as full citizens (European Commission, 2001; European Council, 2006). Most of the policies addressing the education to employment transition for young people are conceived as Lifelong Learning (LLL) policies, aiming to improve youth's knowledge and skills to better fit labour market needs. The most common LLL policies either addressed or reinforced during this period are apprenticeship schemes and employability agenda policies, which are especially targeting vulnerable young adults. While apprenticeships schemes aim at combining school- and work-based learning, employability agendas (re)train and/or upskill youth to meet the labour market demands and ensure that youth are ready for the world of work. In both cases, there is a focus on the skills demanded by employers, which is likely to vary across regions within a country given different socioeconomic contexts.

Education and training institutions — as well as most LLL and skills policies — are designed and promoted at the national level. However, their enactment and final implementation usually takes place at the regional and/or local level. Given the heterogeneity of socioeconomic contexts within nations, skill formation systems are likely to display different opportunities for young adults across regions within the same nation. Moreover, regional and local actors enacting LLL policies and daily managing education and training institutions might have different understandings and policy interests on why and how to develop these policies, as well as manage the institutions.

This chapter of the report explores whether and how different labour market demands lead to different education and training institutions across the nine countries in YOUNG_ADULLT. We consider how national education and training systems provide different opportunities for young adults across socioeconomically diverse regions within the same country and across them; and how the actors involved in socioeconomically diverse regions adapt the national education and training systems and LLL policies to the

regional/local context to support youth's skill formation and later transition into the labour market.

Theoretical framework for the comparison

Research on policy in education and training has traditionally used the nation-state as its primary unit of analysis, distinguishing different national institutional specificities, cultures, traditions, and structures in education/training, labour market organisation, economy/industry – education/training relations, etc. This literature pointed to several dimensions along which countries vary in terms of institutional design, different patterns of relationship between the public and private spheres, funding and support/guidance schemes as well as decision-making. Comparative research from a range of disciplines (i.e. education, labour market studies, political science) has contributed vastly to coming to terms with this enormous complexity by designing classificatory and typological frameworks that help us to understand different systems as ideal-typical cases, thus yielding interesting insights into the central characteristics and peculiarities of their systems (Ashton, Sung, & Turbin, 2000; Pilz, 2016; Saar & Ure, 2013).

While the institutional-comparative approach is useful in terms of discerning national types and patterns, so far little is known as to how these theoretical insights apply to the regional/local level of countries in Europe, in particular to specific forms of embedding education/training in labour market and economy in European functional regions. In its attempt to understand LLL policies, the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project is interested in the interplay between economy, society, labour market and education systems and in particular with a view to their specific forms of embedding at regional and local levels. Against this background, while the project draws from this research strand to conceptualise and characterise its research objects, the final aim is to integrate insights from these concepts and frameworks into more contextualized and fine-grained analyses of networks and landscapes of policy-making in LLL targeting young adults, thus probing their empirical usefulness at regional/local level. In the following paragraphs we review some of the most significant contributions from comparative research on education, labour market studies and political science to conceptualize these structural differences between the European countries participating in the study.

Comparative education research has put forward several typologies of education and training systems based on different institutional dimensions. Traditionally, typologies of

VET systems in Europe have focused on the influence of the state in the funding and provision of training. Greinert (2004) differentiates between the 'school model', the 'market model' and the 'state-regulated model'. In the school model, the state is responsible for the provision of initial VET (e.g. France). In the market model, companies provide training through apprenticeships at their own initiative (e.g. UK), while in the state-regulated model, the state largely influences the involvement of companies in training through dual apprenticeships (e.g. Germany). The underlying assumption is that the location of training (school vs workplace) is tightly linked to the level of influence of the state in VET.

Allmendinger (1989) introduces a different classification that focuses on the relationship between initial VET and the labour market. Two dimensions are considered for this classification: standardization and stratification. Standardization refers to the level of involvement of the state in setting standards nationwide that send clear and reliable signals to the employer of the value of the credentials. On the other hand, the notion of stratification refers to the level of separation between the general and vocational routes in the system and their implications in terms of labour market opportunities. Müller and Shavit (1998) added the degree of occupational specificity of the training to this classification. In countries with high degree of occupational specificity of the VET system (e.g. Germany), employees will not be expected to require significant additional on-the-job training to perform in their workplaces.

Labour market studies have contributed to this literature by incorporating the segmentation of labour markets and the role of labour market institutions in these classifications. Segmentation refers to the compartmentalization of people in different non-competing groups in the labour market (Doeringer & Piore, 1985; Ryan, 1981). These boundaries are created by institutional arrangements that are the result of agreements between employers, unions and the state. In countries with 'internal labour markets', education is mainly academically oriented with career progression depending largely on the specific skills learned on the job. In countries with 'occupational labour markets', education is closely tied to job requirements and highly skilled jobs are only accessible to those with the adequate credentials. This approach nicely fits with the criterion of occupational specificity of VET systems described above. VET systems with a high degree of occupational specificity will tend to coexist with occupationally segmented labour markets while those VET systems with low degree of occupational specificity will serve better the needs of internal labour markets (Shavit & Müller, 1998).

The institutionalist tradition within political economy has been the approach that has tried to integrate the interrelation between education, labour market and economic factors in a more systematic way. The economic focus of this approach has allowed interrogation of how the needs of national economies and the relationships between the state and collective actors (i.e. employers, unions) have shaped the making of different skills formation systems (Culpepper & Thelen, 2008). The most famous contribution from this tradition is the 'Varieties of Capitalism' typology (VoC), which aims at explaining the institutional complementarities between production regimes, industrial relations, education institutions and social protection systems (Hall & Soskice, 2001). The VoC approach classifies countries in a continuum between 'liberal market economies' (LMEs) and 'coordinated market economies' (CMEs) based on the prevailing mode of coordination of the activity of individual firms. In LMEs, individual firms coordinate their activities primarily via hierarchies and competitive market arrangements; while in CMEs, individual firms depend more heavily on the strategic interaction with other actors.

The main aim of the VoC is to explain how these modes of coordination and the resulting institutional complementarities among social spheres affect the national competitive strategies in the global economy. LMEs (e.g. UK) have been associated with economic competitive strategies based on low costs, low skills and low wages; while CMEs (e.g. Germany) have been associated with economic competitive strategies based on high product quality, high skills and high wages (Finegold & Soskice, 1988). Within the VoC approach, social protection systems create the incentives for the investments of firms and individuals in different types of skills (Estevez-Abe, Iversen, & Soskice, 2001). On the one hand, in CMEs, firms depend heavily on industry-specific skills. In this environment, employment and unemployment protection provide the incentives for workers to invest in skills training specific to their firm or industry. On the other hand, in LMEs, the competitive strategies of firms do not depend so much on these specific skills, and employment and unemployment protection will only damage their competitiveness by increasing their costs.

These different classification attempts have not escaped criticism from the literature. They have been criticized for being very static and focusing more on the description of the outcomes of the systems than on the causal explanation of the formation and transformation of these systems (Ashton, Sung, & Turbin, 2000). The inductive character of these typologies, many times based on just one case, has been also largely criticized (Pilz, 2016). In a similar vein, the variation within types and the similarities across types

have led some researchers to suggest the necessity of complementing these macro level typologies with more contextualized country case studies (Saar & Ure, 2013). More recent contributions from historical-institutionalism have tried to address some of these problems (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012; Maurer, 2011). One of the defining analytical traits of this approach is its interest in the critical historical junctures that explain the emergence and change of specific institutional configurations as well as the feedback mechanisms responsible for their stability and reproduction. Drawing heavily on the VoC literature, these authors pay particular attention to how the relationships between collective actors (i.e. employers, unions) and the state affect the financing and provision of skills in different countries.

In this tradition, Busemeyer and Trampusch (2012) contributed with the most accomplished classification of skill formation systems in advanced economies. Taking the paradox of collective action among firms as the starting point (Crouch, Finegold & Sako, 2001), they interrogate how institutional arrangements of skill formation facilitate the solution of collective action problems typical of unregulated training markets. They suggest that there are two dimensions of variation that are important to understand the different solutions to these collective action problems in VET: the degree of firm involvement and the degree of public commitment. A higher involvement of firms in training might imply a higher specificity of training, and a higher commitment of the state will go beyond the financial support and will include the certification and standardization of training as well as the recognition of VET as a viable alternative to academic higher education. The combination of these two dimensions results in a 2x2 typology. Countries are classified among these four types of solutions: the liberal solution of narrow on-the-job-training (e.g. UK); the segmentalist solution of firm's self-regulation (e.g. Japan); the statist solution of state-run training (e.g. France); and the collective solution where firms, associations, and the state collaborate in providing and financing skills (e.g. Germany).

In our analyses we further adopt the classification by Busemeyer and Trampusch (2012). However, as pointed at the beginning of this section, this skill formation model takes nation-states as the unit of analysis. While education and training systems tend to be state designed and monitored institutions, these are usually enacted and implemented in socioeconomically varying regions within the same country. Labour market conditions and opportunities (e.g. industries and sectors), and even the type of firms, are likely to vary across regions within the same nation-state, which might provide different opportunities

and outcomes for people living in the region. In this framework, regional and local actors involved in the skill formation system are likely to vary across regions within the same country, and even display different degrees of firm involvement and public commitment to VET. Therefore, it is likely that similar skill formation models within a country might present different opportunities and challenges in socioeconomically diverse regions.

Contextualisation and Justification of cases

Given the focus of this section on the variation of opportunities provided by national education and training systems across socioeconomically diverse regions, we select five countries out of the nine included in the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project representing different skill formation regimes and displaying a large socioeconomic contrast between the two selected regions in that country. The selected countries are Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Spain and the United Kingdom, providing a total of 10 regions for the analysis.

We use aggregate quantitative data at the national and regional level (NUTS[27] 2[28]) to map countries and regions under study in the YOUNG_ADULLT[29] project against the skill formation regimes framework (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012). The national classification of skill formation regimes is based on the degree of public commitment and firms' involvement in skill formation in VET, which is approached in the following way:

- Public commitment to VET: following previous research (Busemeyer & Iversen, 2011), we measure the degree of public commitment to VET by multiplying the national public spending in upper secondary education as a share of GDP[30] (average 2012-2015) with the share of students in upper secondary vocational education (2012), which provides a more refined and proportional measurement of the public spending for VET. In both cases the indicators come from harmonised Eurostat data (Eurostat, 2012, 2017).
- Firms' involvement in VET: following previous research (Busemeyer & Iversen, 2011), we measure the degree of firms' involvement in VET using the share of

27 Nomenclature of Territorial Units of Statistics (NUTS) of the European Union.
28 See Table 1 for detailed correspondence between the FRs under study and NUTS 2.
29 Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and UK.
30 Data on public spending is unavailable for Croatia.

students enrolled in combined school- and work-based programmes. Since this indicator is not available in Eurostat, we use OECD data[31] (OECD, 2015). One of the limitations of this indicator is that this type of programme does not exist in some education systems (e.g. Spain) or the national statistics do not differentiate between them using these criteria (e.g. Italy and Portugal).

Figure 27 below displays a wide variation across the nine countries under study in reference to their degree of public investment (Y axis) and firms' involvement in VET (X axis), as well as the youth unemployment rate (marker's size). Unsurprisingly, Germany (40%) and Austria (33%) are the ones displaying the largest share of students combining school- and work-based programmes and, thus, firms' involvement in VET, followed by the United Kingdom (22%). The rest of countries considered in this study present comparatively low or null levels of firms' involvement in VET: while in Finland 10% of students in upper secondary education are enrolled in school- and work-based programmes, in Spain these are non-existent, and in Italy and Portugal this type of programme is quite rare and included in the main statistics as part of vocational programmes[32].

With regard to the degree of public investment in VET in proportion to the number of students, Finland displays comparatively the largest investment, followed by Austria. The remaining countries display a fairly similar public spending in VET[33], including Germany, which proportionally presents similar spending as Portugal, Bulgaria and Spain.

Mapping the position in the figure of the nine countries against the four skill formation regimes (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012) we can see that — in relative terms — Austria can be clearly classified in the collective skill formation regime (i.e. high public investment – high firms' involvement), while Germany displays the highest degree of firms' involvement but a more limited public commitment, locating it at the edge between the collective and the segmentalist regime (i.e. Japan's model). These results are interesting, as Germany has been traditionally presented as the model of the collective skill formation

31 This indicator is not available for Croatia.
32 No data available for Bulgaria and Croatia.
33 No data available for Croatia.

category. Similarly, the United Kingdom, which in the theoretical model is presented as an example of liberal skill formation regime (i.e. low public investment – low firms' involvement), appears to be at the boundaries of this category, displaying middle levels of public commitment and firms' involvement in VET. Finland can be clearly located in the statist skill formation model (i.e. in line with Sweden and France, high public commitment - low firms' involvement). The remaining countries (i.e. Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain) could be classified within the liberal model given the non-existent level of firms' involvement in VET and the low or middle public commitment/investment in VET. However, the non-existence or limited practise of the combined school- and work-based training limits the classification of these Southern and Eastern European countries within this classification of skill formation regimes.

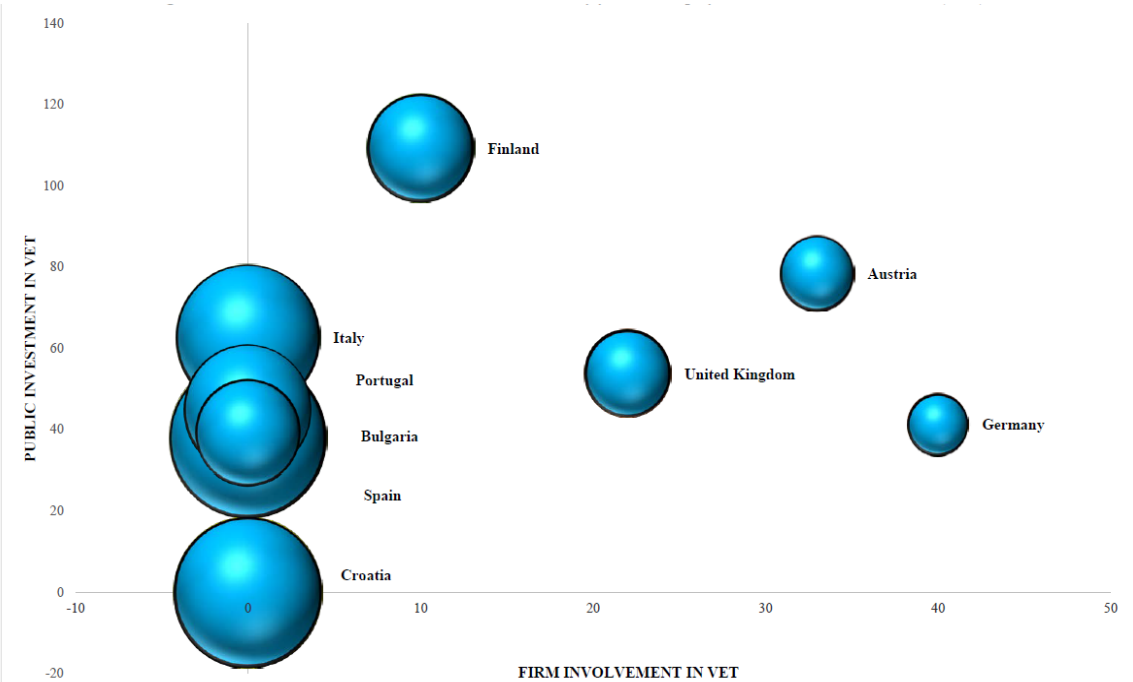

Figure 27. Public investment and firm involvement in VET by youth unemployment across selected countries (2015). Source: Capsada-Munsech, Q. and Valiente, O. (2019), based on Eurostat and OECD data

At a first glance, Figure 27 also suggests a negative association between the youth unemployment rate and the degree of firms' involvement in VET. This is in line with previous research findings, showing that education systems with early tracking and a vocational orientation facilitate labour market allocation, although they also increase social inequality (Bol & van de Werfhorst, 2013; Shavit & Müller, 1998). Nevertheless, these

differences in labour market allocation are not only influenced by educational institutions and characteristics of the VET system, but also by the national and regional employment, education and training opportunities available. Table 2 presents an approach to the potential supply and demand of youth's skills across the regions under study, including the share of early leavers from education and training[34] (Eurostat, 2014a), the share of youth aged 30-34 with higher educational attainment (ISCED 5-8)[35] (Eurostat, 2014b) and the youth unemployment rate[36] (Eurostat, 2014c). Overall, data presented suggests a positive association between youth unemployment and the share of early leavers in the region, and a negative one with the share of higher educated youth. Although these are not surprising findings, for the purpose of this chapter what is more interesting is to have an in-depth look at the variation between regions in the same country, which present very similar or identical education and training institutions. For instance, large differences between regions within the same country are observed in the share of early leavers of education and training in the selected regions in Bulgaria (7.1%), Finland (4.5%) and Spain (5.5%), while in higher educational attainment Austria (17.3%), Bulgaria (19.8%) and Spain (14.7%) also display comparatively large differences compared to the rest of countries. With regards to the youth unemployment rate, the largest regional differences are observed between the regions in Austria (10.1%), Bulgaria (12.1%), Italy (13.8%), Spain (14.4%) and the United Kingdom (Scotland) (11.0%). Based on the larger cross-regional differences within countries and to ensure representation of different skill formation regimes, we provide in-depth analysis of the following cases: Austria (Collective regime), Bulgaria (Eastern-liberal regime), Finland (Statist regime), Spain (Southern-liberal regime) and the United Kingdom (Scotland) (Liberal regime).

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34 Early leavers from education and training (Eurostat, 2014a): share of 18-24 year olds who have completed at most lower secondary education and are not currently involved in any further education or training at NUTS 2. We use it as a proxy of the low-skilled youth supply at the regional level.

35 Population with higher education attainment (Eurostat, 2014b): share of the population aged 30-34 with higher educational attainment (ISCED 5-8) at NUTS 2. We use it as a proxy of the high-skilled youth supply at the regional level.

36 Youth unemployment rate (Eurostat, 2014c): people aged 15-24 without employment and actively looking for a job at the national and NUTS 2 levels. Data corresponding to 2014, except for Bremen (2011) and North East Scotland (2015). We use it as a proxy for the demand/labour market opportunities at the regional level.

NUTS 2	Functional Region	% Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education)	% Difference between FRs Early leavers	% Aged 30-34 with Higher Educational Attainment (ISCED 5-8)	% Difference between FRs Higher Educated	% Youth Unemployment Rate (aged 15-24)	% Difference between FRs Youth Unemployment Rate	Skill formation regime
Oberösterreich (AT31)	Upper Austria	8,0	-1,0	33,1	-17,3	7,9	-10,1	Collective
Wien (AT13)	Vienna	9,0		50,4		18,0		
Yugozapaden (BG41)	Blagoevgrad	5,9	-7,1	43,0	19,8	16,8	-12,1	Eastern-Liberal
Yuzhen Tsentralen (BG42)	Plodiv	13,0		23,2		28,9		
Jadranska Hrvatska (HR03)	Istria-County	2,2	-0,8	31,1	-1,6	46,5	1,5	Eastern-Liberal
Kontinentalna Hrvatska (HR04)	Osijek-Baranja	3,0		32,7		45,0		
Pohjois- ja Itä-Suomi (FI1D)	Kainuu	7,9	-4,5	40,9	2,9	22,1	-0,8	Statist
Etelä-Suomi (FI1C)	Soutwest Finland	12,4		38,0		22,9		
Bremen (DE50)	Bremen	14,0	3,8	39,4	2,8	15,3	5,9	Collective
Darmstadt (DE71)	Rhein Main	10,2		36,6		9,4		
Liguria (ITC3)	Genoa	13,6	0,7	31,3	5,4	45,0	13,8	Southern-Liberal
Lombardia (ITC4)	Milano	12,9		25,9		31,2		
Alentejo (PT18)	Litoral Alentejano	18,4	-0,6	24,9	-5,4	36,2	0,5	Southern-Liberal
Norte (PT11)	Vale do Ave	19,0		30,3		35,7		
Andalucía (ES61)	Málaga	27,7	5,5	32,3	-14,7	61,5	14,4	Southern-Liberal
Catalunya (ES51)	Girona	22,2		47,0		47,1		
North Scotland (UKM5)	Aberdeen City & Shire Region	13,2	-1,1	60,7	5,8	8,3	-11,0	Liberal
West Scotland (UKM8)	Glasgow City Region	14,3		54,9		19,3		

Table 2. Comparison of regional low-/high-skills supply and youth unemployment rate differences between regions within the same country (NUTS 2, 2014). Source: Capsada-Munsech, Q. and Valiente, O. (2019), based on Eurostat and OECD data.

Data & Methodology

Within WP 6, national teams initially employed a qualitative approach to identify the actors involved in the regional skill formation system and understand how they adopt and manage the skills agenda affecting young adults to cope with the regional challenges. Three main methods have been used to address this objective: desk research, semi-structured interviews with relevant actors involved in the regional skill formation (49 in total, 5 per region on average) and a review of the influential grey literature in the selected regions (65 documents in total, 6-7 per region on average)[37]. In the latter two a qualitative content analysis of the texts (i.e. interview transcriptions and documents) has been applied using thematic coding to identify the main topics related to the regional skill formation systems (Bowen, 2009; Schreier, 2012). This exercise has been replicated by seven coordinated research teams across the five countries under study. The interviews were conducted between March and July 2017 and mainly took place face-to-face, while telephone interviews were performed when the remoteness of the area or the availability of the interviewees required it.

The results of the analysis for each region were summarised in national reports (2 regions per country), which were used for the comparative report on which this report builds (Capsada-Munsech et al., 2018). The quality and comparability of the national reports was assured organising three milestone activities (March, May and June 2017) including sections of the final national report. A first draft of the national report was submitted by each partner in July 2017, to which the authors of this chapter provided individual feedback, allowing for a month to introduce suggestions for improvement.

The present research also builds on previous work done in the framework of the European funded H2020 YOUNG_ADULLLT research project involving the mapping of LLL policies for young adults (Kotthoff et al., 2017), their living conditions (Scandurra, Cefalo, Hermannsson & Kazepov, 2018), the understanding of their biographies and the views of managers and practitioners of the policies under study (Rambla, Jacovkis, Kovacheca,

[37] See Tables 5 and 6 in the annex of the WP6 - International Report analysis of skill supply and demand for a detailed list of interviewees' affiliation and grey literature reviewed (http://www.young-adulllt.eu/publications/working-paper).

Walther & Verlage, 2018). The units of analysis are Functional Regions (FRs), as employed by the European Commission (EC) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and conceptualised by (Klapka, Rnd, & Halás, 2013) and as explored in earlier reports from the project.

The employment of the FR approach for the qualitative analysis allows us to go beyond the geographical, historical and administrative boundaries (static) that usually characterise statistical data, placing forward the organisation of social and economic activities (functional) in a territory and the interactions among actors interviewed.

Findings

Regional challenges in skill formation

The regional differences within countries pointed out in the contextualisation section suggest that similar education and training institutions (i.e. skill formation regimes) can display different opportunities for young adults across regions facing different socioeconomic and skills challenges. Beyond educational institutions, employment opportunities in the region are likely to influence the appropriateness of the skill formation regime to the region. These cross-regional variations pose different issues to policymakers, practitioners and civil servants across regions who have to enact national policies at the regional level.

Although different across countries, education and training systems are well established institutions across the five countries under study. Within countries, non-existent or very limited differences are observed in the skill formation features, as these are usually designed and led at the national (or federal, central) level. Across the ten FRs under study at least one institution has been identified providing information and supporting youth in making their educational and training choices and, therefore, supporting and managing the transitions within the skill formation system in the region. In most cases these are national institutions or agencies coordinated at the national level (e.g. Federal Ministry in Austrian FRs, Ministry of Education in Bulgarian FRs, Autonomous Community Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Labour Agency in Spanish FRs, National Skills Agency, Funding Council and Qualification Authority in the Scottish FRs), the FRs in Finland being the only ones relying on regional and local institutions (i.e. Regional Councils and Municipalities of Kainuu and South West Finland). However, the skill formation challenges faced in different regions by actors enacting the policies and

directives of these national institutions vary within and across countries. Based on the interviews with key actors and stakeholders at the regional level, we identify a number of key issues relating to the skill formation system that affect young adults' education and training opportunities in the region.

One of the commonalities identified across all regions under study is that beyond the national education and training institutions and policies, the limited differences across regional skill formation are very much influenced by the regional labour market demands. Across all FRs, interviewees pointed out that one of the most relevant objectives of the skill formation system targeting young adults — and especially vulnerable ones — is providing education, training and skills valued in the regional labour market. Only in two FRs out of ten (i.e. Glasgow FR in Scotland, South West Finland FR) other purposes of the skill formation for young adults were explicitly mentioned (i.e. social inclusion, self-esteem, mental health). Given this focus on education, training and skills for work, two common policies have been identified across most regions concerning skill formation with the intention to support and smooth the transition from education and training into employment: first, the apprenticeship schemes and, second, the youth employability agendas. Both can be considered as part of the skill formation, as their main function is to further develop skills valued by employers and certify them. In the following paragraphs we discuss how these skill formation policies are differently influencing youth's opportunities across regions within and between countries.

Apprenticeship schemes: vacancies and quality assurance

Although across countries and regions under study apprenticeship schemes are regarded as a good way to introduce youth into the world of work, the relevance of it and the challenges faced differ based on two main points: the degree of development of the apprenticeship system — and the VET system overall — and the socioeconomic characteristics of the region (i.e. type and level of supply and demand for skills).

In FRs with an underdeveloped apprenticeship system interviewees recognise it as the main cause of the struggle for youth to get a job in the region (e.g. Blagoevgrad in Bulgaria). The assumption is that a more developed VET system including a dual apprenticeship scheme would improve youth's work-related skills and equip them with the type of skills employers are looking for. Moreover, it would also function as a screening process for employers to later hire youth on a working contract. One of the main reasons

for not further developing the apprenticeship system in the FR of Blagoevgrad (Bulgaria) is the limited national funding, and it was pointed out that without the European Social Funds (ESF) the VET and apprenticeship offer would be scarce or non-existent in the region. In the Spanish FR of Málaga ESF funding was also considered as key to promote VET and apprenticeships among vulnerable young adults in a region highly affected by youth unemployment, but most of this funding stopped due to inappropriate management, monitoring and accountability, affecting to a larger extent the most vulnerable youth.

The limitations of the apprenticeship system are not usually taken into consideration in initial stages, but they emerge in countries and regions where this type of skill formation has a more long-standing history. In Aberdeen FR (Scotland, UK) one of the consequences of the 2014 oil and gas crisis — the most relevant economic sector in the region — has been the scarcity of available apprenticeship vacancies for all youth, as a non-negligible number of apprenticeship positions became redundant. The result is that the most socially vulnerable young adults with lower soft skills levels and/or social networks are left without a placement.

In the FRs of Vienna (Austria) there are not enough apprenticeship vacancies available to place all students. In Austria the value of attaining and gaining an apprenticeship certificate goes beyond the technical and practical skills: employers recognise it as proof of being able to commit to work and engage in a working culture. Concerns have also been directed towards the quality assurance of the VET system (i.e. Vienna FR) and how to monitor the process. While the Austrian Government is willing to introduce more quality controls, employers are reluctant. Most apprenticeships are hosted by small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which are already struggling with quality assurance and might consider withdrawal from the apprenticeship system if quality control increases. Unsurprisingly, the most vulnerable young adults are the ones most likely to end up in lower quality apprenticeships positions or in none.

It is interesting to see how the relevance and concerns about apprenticeship schemes have been pointed out in FRs with a comparatively high share of youth with higher education in comparison with the other FR in the same country, while in the partner FR in the country no concerns on apprenticeship schemes have been raised. For instance, in Bulgaria the share of higher educated youth is 19.8% larger in Blagoevgrad FR compared to Plodiv FR. Similarly, in Austria Vienna FR outpaces Upper Austria FR by 17.3% in the

proportion of higher educated; in Scotland (UK) the proportion of higher educated youth is slightly higher (5.8%) in Aberdeen FR than in Glasgow FR. The only country under study in which regional interviewees have not explicitly manifested any concerns with regards the apprenticeship scheme is Finland, where both FRs (i.e. Kainuu and South West Finland) present a similarly large proportion of youth with higher education. Therefore, within the same country regions with a larger proportion of higher educated youth might be facing more challenges with their apprenticeship schemes, or it might be simply less appropriate to accompany and accommodate youth with this type and level of skills into employment, Finland being the exception given its overall high share of youth with higher educational attainment.

Skills for jobs: regional youth employability agendas

Previous to the 2008 financial crisis a number of European countries were already publically funding courses to promote employability skills. However, after the 2008 economic and social downturn most European countries either retargeted these policies to youth or initiated them. In both cases a stronger focus was placed on developing employability skills demanded in the labour market to promote employment among youth, which was considered as one of the most vulnerable social groups. As discussed and exemplified in the following paragraphs, some regions in countries deemed it necessary to introduce local initiatives to address youth's employability agendas, while in other countries national policies were promoted and regionally enacted.

For instance, in Vienna FR the local initiative Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (WAFF) funds education and training for employed people, trying to further align employees' skills with the ones demanded in the labour market. This employability policy emerged in Vienna FR because of the need to cover a skill shortage of highly-skilled people in the city. Vienna FR faces the challenge of facilitating upskilling opportunities to the youth population in order to meet the high skills demands in the city. Conversely, in Upper Austria FR the demand for technical and vocational skills is easily met via VET and apprenticeship schemes, facilitating the transition from education and training to employment for young adults in the region. Thus, no relevant regional youth employability initiatives have emerged beyond the VET and apprenticeship schemes. This contrast within Austria suggests that its skill formation systems struggle in providing second

opportunities for skills upgrading in dynamic urban regions with a higher demand for high skills, which are being addressed with local employability initiatives.

In Scotland (UK) the approach to youth employability is designed at the national level, but allowing for regional flexibility to be adapted at the regional needs. A good example is the national policy *Developing the Young Workforce* (DYW), which aims at ensuring that all youth experience at least one learning component in their daily activities once they leave compulsory education (i.e. +16). The objective is to provide alternative opportunities for youth who do not follow an academic path proposing flexible pathways to school-, work-based learning, including also volunteering activities. The enactment at the regional level is taking different routes: while in Aberdeen FR DYW is being mainly used to support young adults in transitioning to VET or apprenticeship schemes, in Glasgow FR the support is mainly directed towards supporting disadvantaged young adults to overcome barriers (e.g. financial, health, self-esteem, family situations) to get back into education, training, employment or volunteering. Hence, it seems that this flexibility allows tackling of regional challenges faced by youth, even if the guidelines and the accountability are directed at the national level.

In Bulgaria, Finland and Spain more comprehensive skill formation systems prevail. As noted above, their skill formation systems are characterised either by a high (i.e. Finland) or middle-low (i.e. Bulgaria and Spain) public investment in VET, and the degree of firms' involvement in VET is rather limited (i.e. Finland) or non-existent (i.e. Bulgaria and Spain). The regional employability training targeted to youth is very much influenced by the regional labour market demands, but this is not always a positive sign as in some cases the regional labour market offers scarce employment opportunities for youth or unattractive working conditions (i.e. temporary contracts, hard work, low-skilled, low-wages), raising the question if it is desirable to tailor the regional employability courses to meet this type of labour market needs.

The same question and similar concerns about regional employability agenda arise across FRs that have a predominant employment sector, such as the oil and gas industry in Aberdeen FR (Scotland, UK), tourism in Girona and Málaga (Spain), metal and wood in Kainuu (Finland) and automobile and marine industries in Southwest Finland. Tailoring the employability courses to meet the needs of these specific industries or sectors facilitates youth employment in the region. Nevertheless, the employment dependence on

specific industries or sectors might also have negative consequences, like the low-skilled equilibrium of tourism in Girona and Málaga (Spain) or the hard conditions of the metal and wood industries in Kainuu (Finland). Moreover, the dependence on a single regional industry or sector of the economy makes youth more vulnerable to exogenous changes (e.g. oil and gas crisis in Aberdeen in Scotland, UK) and might promote unbalanced demographic structures in terms of gender and age (e.g. oil and gas crisis in Aberdeen, metal and wood industry in Kainuu).

Similarly, FRs with a predominantly urban area (e.g. Glasgow in Scotland, Vienna in Austria) are poles of attraction for high-skilled demand — especially in the business and ICT sectors — but these also coexist with a contrasting share of low-skilled demand – especially in the service sector. In line with the previous paragraph, some of the interviewees in these urban FRs wonder how desirable it is from a public perspective to meet the regional labour demands of low-skilled jobs, as from a short-term perspective it might raise youth employment Tables, but also trap them in low-skilled jobs in a long-term perspective.

Finally, a cross-cutting topic and unsolved debate mentioned across all FRs is who is responsible for developing youth's 'soft', transversal, communication and discipline skills. Beyond technical knowledge and skills, employers appreciate and require youth who can effectively communicate, behave and follow orders, as well as commit and have positive attitudes towards work. While employers consider these as employability skills and would appreciate these being developed as part of the youth employability agenda, the most critical interviewees across FRs question who is responsible for promoting these skills, what is the reasonable degree of "maturity" to realistically demand from a young adult with null or limited working experience, and what is the appropriate degree of commitment to precarious jobs (e.g. low wage, fix-term contracts, unskilled, seasonal).

Conclusions

In this section we have presented and discussed how national education and training systems face different challenges across socioeconomically diverse regions, displaying different opportunities for young people in the area. Based on the evidence of five European countries with different skill formation regimes, two common education and training policies – namely apprenticeship and employability courses - have been selected to present differences across regions.

In the case of apprenticeships we have seen that in the same country this scheme is raising more concerns in some regions than in others. While in regions with a technical and middle skilled labour demand apprenticeship are not in the focus of attention, in urban dynamic areas with a need for highly-skilled youth concerns about apprenticeship have been raised because of limited vacancies and quality assurance issues. Comparatively, countries with a more underdeveloped apprenticeship system still rely in its development as a tool to smooth education to work transitions, especially in those with large youth unemployment rates.

In reference to employability courses, these have become a trend across European countries and regions, allowing in some cases for local initiatives to emerge, whereas in others national direction has been set but allowing the regions to flexibly adapt these to their needs. However, questions have been raised in regions where employment opportunities for youth are either limited or concentrated in a specific sector or industry, posing the question of to what extent public authorities should totally align to the labour market needs and support precarious jobs or try to meet unrealistic employers' demands.

In sum, national education and training systems display different opportunities for young adults across regions facing different socio-economic challenges. This finding suggests that the variation on the socio-economic profile of the regions within a country is a relevant feature to be taken into account when designing national education and training policies.

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9. Patterns of LLL policy-making: Parameters for LLL Coordinated Policy-Making

Mauro Palumbo, Sebastiano Benasso & Marcelo Parreira do Amaral

Introduction

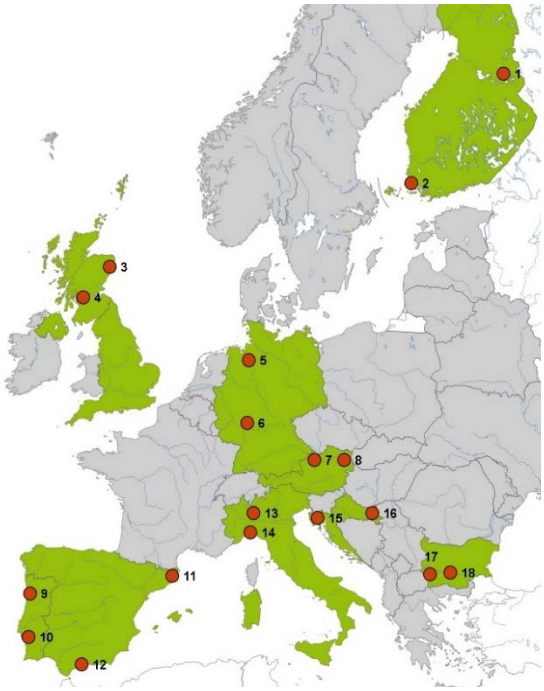
In this chapter, we present further analyses regarding the comparative research conducted during the YOUNG_ADULLLT project. The chapter presents and discusses different kinds of interactive configurations that lie at the basis of LLL policy-making in the regional contexts researched in the project. These pertain to aspects related to the phases of the policy process: a) policy formulation/target group construction; b) implementation of LLL policy; and c) the pedagogical interactions that represent policy enactment.

The point of departure for the analysis is the assumption that the different elements examined come together in myriad configurations in the specific sites. In this way, they shape and substantially impact LLL policy-making and thus also the ability of policies to become effective and successfully meet the expectations embodied in them. The argument is that policy-making at local and regional level can best be understood and assessed by accounting for these different elements, which, in turn, allows us to identify key parameters of coordinated policy-making in LLL.

The empirical evidence on which the discussions below draw is part of case study research conducted in Work Package 7 in YOUNG_ADULLLT (cf. Palumbo et al., 2018). In WP 7, comparative case studies (N=18) were conducted to analyse LLL policies and programs at the regional and local level identifying policy-making networks involved in shaping, formulating, and implementing LLL policies for young adults. These case studies integrated different data sets and methodologies of previous project WPs. While applying an interpretive approach to policy analysis they also aimed at yielding knowledge on different patterns of policy-making in LLL. Specifically, there have been different empirical materials integrated in the case construction, including document analysis and thorough descriptions of LLL policies from WP3 (see also Chapters 5 and 6, in this Report); macro-statistical quantitative data analysis from WP4 (see also Chapter 3, in this Report); different structural, institutional and subjective perspectives (re)constructed by interview research (WPs 5 and 6), including young adults, street-level professionals, experts and other actors who play different roles in the processes of design and implementation of LLL policies (see also Chapters 2 and 4, in this Report). Finally, it also included results from

the analysis of local 'skills ecologies' from WP6 (see also Chapter 8, in this Report). Figure 28 below illustrates the sites and cases selected.

The following sections, first present and discuss the findings on interactional configurations, then sets out on some conclusions that were drawn along the three theoretical perspectives adopted in the research. The chapter closes with a few concluding remarks on the implications that these patterns have for coordinated policy-making.



Functional Regions	Case Studies (codes)	Case Studies (names)
1 – Kainnu FR	FI-K-1	NUPPA Centre
2 – Southwest Finland FR	FI-SF-1	Ohjaamo Centre
3 – Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire FR	UK-A-2	DYW
4 – Glasgow City Region FR	UK-G-2	DYW(GCR)
5 – Bremen FR	DE-B-3	Werkschule
6 – Rhein-Main FR	DE-F-3	VbFF
7 – Upper Austria FR	A-UA-2	Du Kannst Was!
8 – Vienna FR	A-V-1	Back to the Future
9 – Vale do Ave FR	PT-VdA-1	Professional Courses
10 – Litoral Alentejo FR	PT-AL-2	EFA courses
11 – Girona FR	ES-G-2	TP12
12 – Malaga FR	ES-M-3	Workshop Schools
13 – Milan FR	IT-M-2	NEETwork
14 – Genoa FR	IT-G-1	Civic Service
15 – Istria-County FR	HR-IS-1	Open Public University Diopter
16 – Osijek-Baranja County FR	HR-OB-3	LLCG Centre
17 – Blagoevgrad FR	BG-B-3	University Student Training Practices
18 – Plovdiv FR	BG-P-2	Youth Guarantee

Figure 28. Functional Regions and case studies in YOUNG_ADULLLT

Cross-case analysis: Interactional configurations of LLL policies at regional level

We have identified three patterns of interactions that are related to the construction of target groups, to the implementation of policies, and to the pedagogical interactions involved. These patterns of interaction represent different configurations of the interlinkages of structure and agency (Elias, 1978) that influence policy-making in LLL in the Functional Regions examined.

Regarding patterns of interaction related to the construction of target groups, attention is paid to the frames of reference of target group construction which may be related to international/ European programmes or to the specific contextual conditions at the local level. We also look into the criteria used to define target groups and identify two main aspects (age range and understandings of vulnerability) and inquire into issues of correspondence and compatibility. Further, the main discourses underlying target group construction are discussed as are the relationships between target group construction and governance arrangements in place. Finally, we examine the perspectives young adults themselves have on target group construction and discern different impacts or reactions to this.

In examining interactional configurations impacting on the implementation of policies, focus is placed on the aims and goals of a policy and its fit to the specific setting of implementation. In particular, we focus on the extent, to which the policy takes into account the contextual features such as model and scale of (educational) governance, degrees of regional autonomy, the various skills ecologies in place, and not least the mechanisms used in implementation. Moreover, the analyses also consider other issues related to policy construction such as the underlying conception of life course, inclusion of the target groups in policy formulation, and the tools, means and approach of implementation. Attention is also paid to the type and size of the organisations implementing the policies. In addition, the mode of selection deployed to recruit and/or select participants in a policy programme or measure is examined, as is the duration of the inclusion of young adults in the policy. Finally, and importantly, from the perspective of young people themselves, the rationales and justifications of young adults for participation in a policy programme are also discussed, as are their perceptions of impact. These are considered important aspects influencing the interactions in the implementation of LLL policies.

The last part of the section focuses on configurations of pedagogical interactions, which refer to the operational level of a policy, and it offers insights into the relations between intentions of policy-makers and practitioners, the organisational structures set in place, the (intended or unintended, reflected or unreflected) practices of staff in the interaction with young people (as well as preparing them). Practices of young people – whether they are actively engaged with appropriating services offered and contents taught or with making use of what is on offer for their everyday lives and their subjective identities – are questioned, too. These will be discussed along the following dimensions: organisational

forms of pedagogical interactions, educational training and goals, intended contents of learning and communication.

In the following sections, we present and discuss each set of interactional configurations in turn. We start with those related to target group construction.

Interactional configurations in target group construction

The process of target construction is a relevant aspect because of its relationship with the discourses underlying the policy-making of the analysed cases, the governance patterns applied according to the addressees' profiles and the self-representation of the beneficiaries. Indeed, the construction of the target group of a policy is affected by the goals set by the political agenda at different levels (from transnational to regional) for the cases designed top-down, and by the interpretation of local needs for the cases designed bottom-up. Further, the target group construction tends to interplay with the funding criteria modifying, according to the different cases, the possibility of accomplishing the expected results. Sometimes, local or regional authorities try to adapt broader policies to local needs "forcing" young adults to fit a predefined target group, which is specified at the national or European level. In other cases, broader policies are modified in order to fit the local target groups. In addition, the definition of target groups affects the governance models applied for policy implementation, calling for different patterns of interaction among private and public bodies, as well as different types of professionals involved in the policy delivery. Moreover, from a subjective standpoint, the very fact LLL policies are assessed because their profiles match with the policy target requires a reflexive reading of the addressees´ own biographies, which are – irrespective of the widely different life trajectories – necessarily relating to the dominant conception of the life course (both in terms of timing and meaning attached to the different phases).

Frame of reference for target group construction

The construction of target groups from the cases examined has been framed at different levels, and we find a rather equal balance between transnational/national and regional/local levels among them. Indeed, a consistent number of cases relate to the Youth Guarantee scheme, consequently referring to its standard target definition (namely people under 25, who have left formal education and/or have been unemployed for at least 4 months). Moreover, the application of the Youth Guarantee scheme provides the possibility for extending the age of the group targeted in order to better tackle youth

unemployment. Indeed, unemployment rates of the analysed Functional Regions seem to be crucial for the target group construction process. In countries where the rates of NEETs are consistently high even among people over the age of 25 (i.e., Bulgaria, Italy and Spain), the age group of the potential policy addressees includes also young people up to the age of 29.

For a second sub-group of cases, the target is initially framed at national level and subsequently shaped by its local application (exemplifying how national criteria also need to be contextually applied at the regional level). Finally, seven cases share the regional/local dimensions as the first level of their target framing. Figure 29 below summarises the distribution.

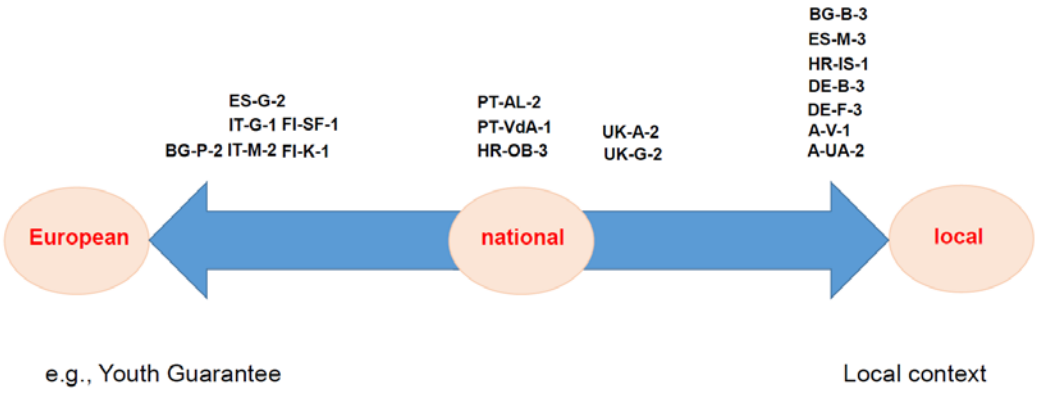


Figure 29. Frame of reference for target group construction. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

Constructing target groups according to predefined criteria. Issues of correspondence and compatibility

The construction of target groups according to predefined criteria referred to two main dimensions in the cases examined: age range and different conceptions of vulnerability. The latter were related either to different individual 'deficits' (for instance, lack of soft skills) or to structural conditions.

In terms of age range as predefined criterion, three groups of policies may be identified: a) a clearly delimited age group (16–24, 18–24, 18-29), b) a broadly defined age group (above 15 or 18, below 25, up to 29, etc.), and c) an undefined age group, without age group restriction (for instance, "all Croatian citizens - with a general focus on youth"). Noteworthy is that most policies included a broadly defined age range as criterion, and only UK-Scotland and Spain included young people starting from 16-years-olds. The

discussions in Chapter 6 in this report point to the fact that although young adults encompass quite different groups, policy-makers formulate policies that target groups of young people very broadly, while devoting more and more attention to younger age groups.

In terms of defining target groups according to a conception of vulnerability, policies examined included different factors/aspects seen as causing or influencing vulnerability. Figure 30 below summarises the distribution of policies into four conceptions of vulnerability:

- *Educational/training*: understood as low level of education, qualification, early school leavers, drop outs;
- *Current occupational condition*: mainly NEETs and unemployed youths;
- *Structural*: due material conditions (poverty, homelessness, health care), and social relations (lack of support by family or peer group, absence of guidance in difficult situations), immediate risks from the environment (segregation), or belonging to minority or disadvantaged groups (gender or ethnicity);
- *Physical and/or cognitive impairments*: for instance, sickness, disability, mental illness, immaturity, substance dependence, etc.

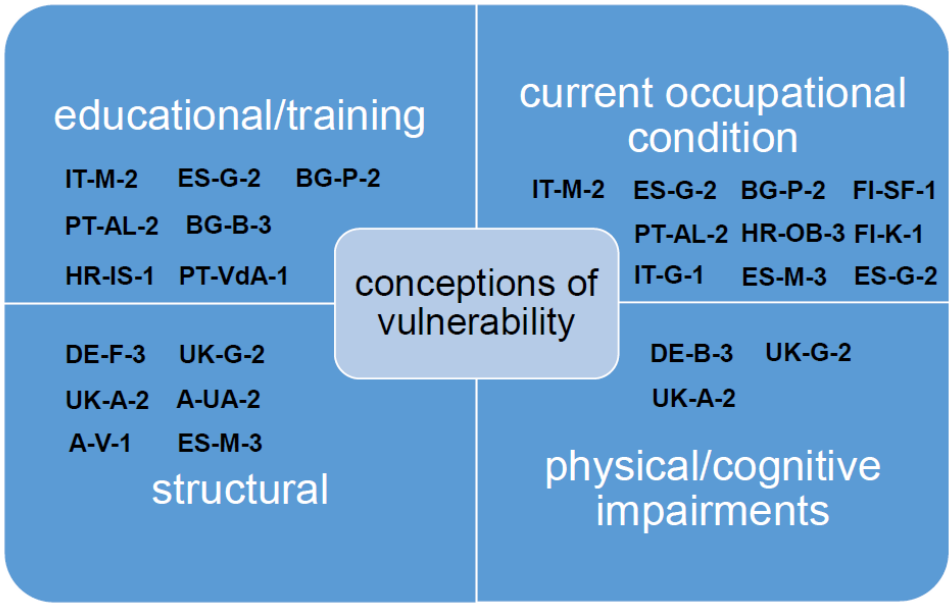


Figure 30. Conceptions of vulnerability. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

The analysis show that vulnerability has been approached from different viewpoints – individual conditions and behaviours, structural and systemic material conditions or also social relations and insecurity. At the same time, it refers essentially to perceived lacks and deficits underlying the negative representation of the addressed young adults as a 'weak group' to be empowered. Such representations are generally top-down defined referring to the national policies. In this sense, the transversal interpretation of vulnerability underlying the definition of the target groups among the different case studies seems to be based on and, at the same time, seems to reinforce some widespread discourses on young adults. Moreover, the differences among case studies focusing the attention on different types of vulnerability show how features of the local context exert significant influence on target group construction, aiming at properly answering to the specific local 'needs'.

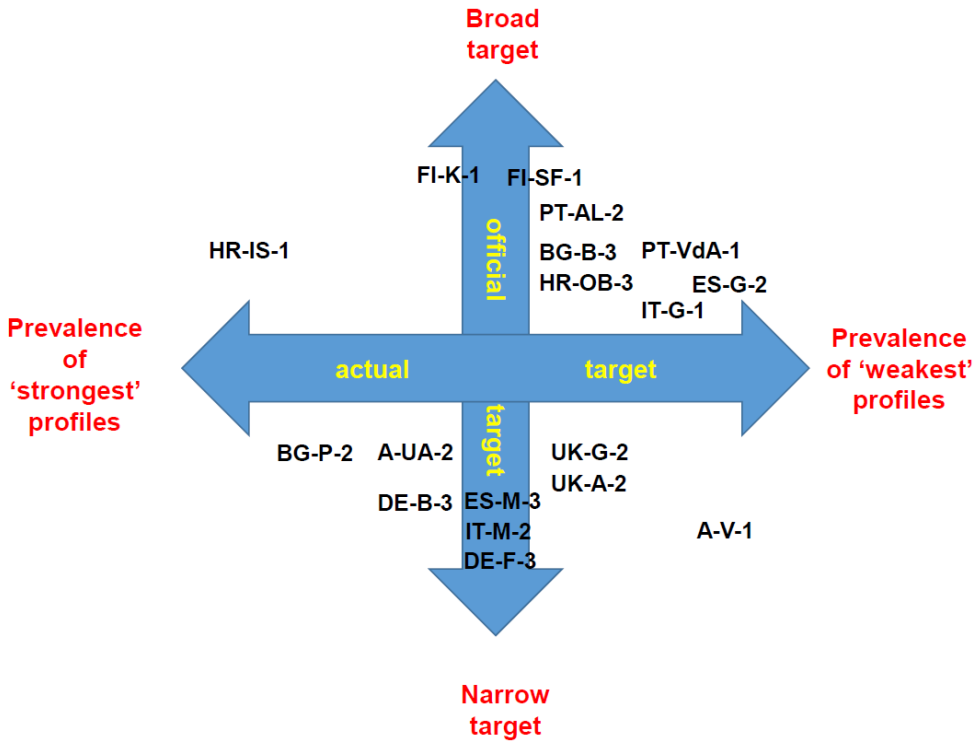


Figure 31. Constructing target groups according to predefined criteria. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

Moreover, we have identified other "priority groups" (e.g., asylum seekers, women victims of gender violence) which were related to vulnerability. Indeed, although in general being young and inactive constitutes a condition of vulnerability in contexts where the youth

unemployment rate is higher, some of the cases tackle further specific vulnerabilities according to emerging phenomena in their contexts.

Correspondence and compatibility of defined and actual target

According to different contextual features and dynamics, some sub-groups within the broader definition of the targets on policy documents were over-represented in the composition of the actual addresses' group. Also, some (more or less) implicit access 'thresholds' produced a 'creaming-off effect' which further selected the more fitting profiles, shrinking the heterogeneity of the profiles actually reached by the policy. From this standpoint, we identified cases for which the broad targeting corresponds to a very heterogeneous group of actual beneficiaries, and on the other side cases where the beneficiary profiles overlap with the ones constructed/defined by policy-makers. We have then observed different forms of incomplete correspondence and, among them, two main patterns can be distinguished: cases where some specific sub-targets tend to be over-represented, and this occurs in terms of age-group or structural conditions. Concerning this latter point, another distinction applies. We can indeed find cases where persons belonging to groups identified as priority, because of their being defined as vulnerable, tend to outnumber other beneficiaries and cases that reproduce, at least at some levels, a 'creaming-off effect', which entails exclusion of the 'weakest' profiles.

Main discourses underlying target group construction

The main discourses underlying the target construction refer to the diffused social and cultural representations behind the profile of the young addressees, evidencing how such stereotypes can intervene on the definition of the target groups in the different contexts. Observing the core topics of the discourses affecting the policy's target group construction, four main transversal dimensions can be identified (see Figure 32 below):

- Attitudinal and/or dispositional limitations requiring activation and compensation for the lack of (soft) skills (focusing on missing competences and abilities of the target group). The attitudinal limitations are often described by experts as the main limitation of young adults in socioeconomic difficulties. In this sense, a diffused image of idleness, incapacity and negative attitudes toward activation stresses and culturally reproduces the negative representation of the target groups. Specifically, these limitations can be further distinguished in terms of inactivity and limited

orientation to mobility and self-autonomy, lack of job market orientation, low motivation and scarce proactivity and the inability/unwillingness to engage in long-term planning;

- deep social vulnerability of the target groups implying the need for a dedicated and specific multidimensional approach in terms of empowerment. Social vulnerability is often related to the expectation of safeguarded experiences and dedicated learning contexts, assuming the need of educationally disadvantaged profiles for individual support and development of a particular relationship based on trust and confidence with mentoring profiles, in order to enter the vocational sector effectively;
- stereotypes behind the target group biographies, represented as a deviation from a standard linear life course;
- training/education path as a 'conversion factor' (Sen, 1992) to overpass the weakness of the target group.

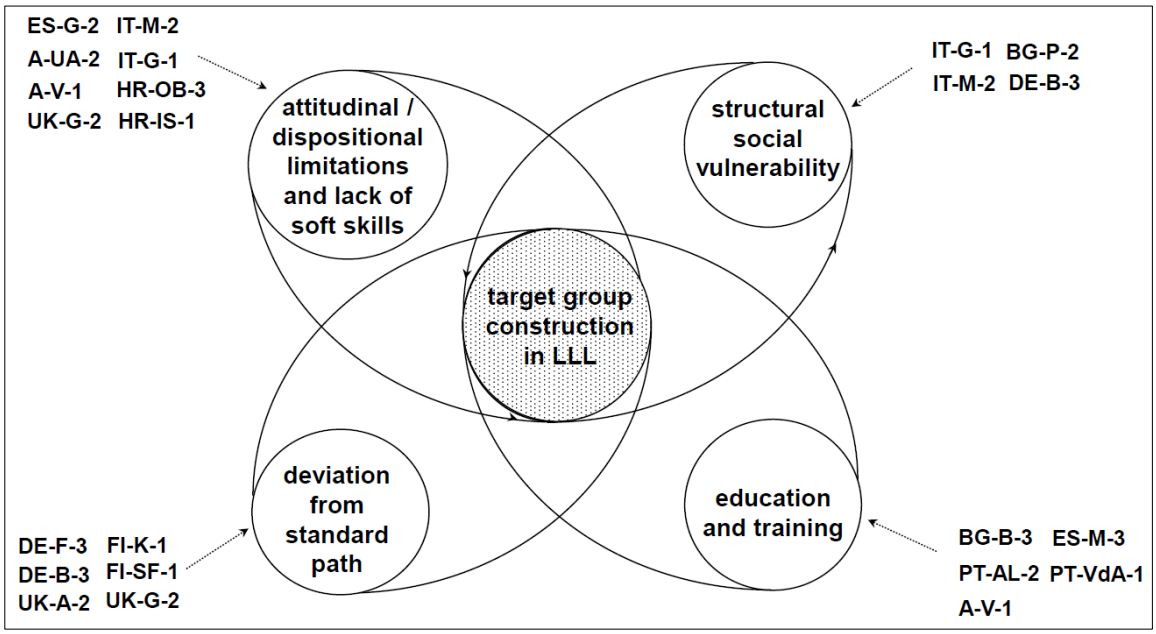


Figure 32. Discourses underlying target group construction. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

Cooperation and competition with other actors

Target group construction is also shaped by the actors and networks collaborating in policy implementation. Among the analysed cases, we identified different kinds of relations among the various actors at different levels (mainly training, educational agencies and

local firms) since they enter into competition by offering similar solutions and/or services for similar targets, or, alternatively, into cooperation in search for synergies. The issue of potential competition among different actors is tackled in relation to two main dimensions: the first one refers to the funding issue, considering the competition for guaranteeing the funding of policy programmes. The second dimension refers to the competition numbers of addressees. The role of the actors and institutions in the FR is also considered, distinguishing the cases where a monopolistic role within the region is played by a single organisation from the cases where a network or a system prevails. Figure 33 shows the relative distribution of the policies along the poles competition and cooperation:

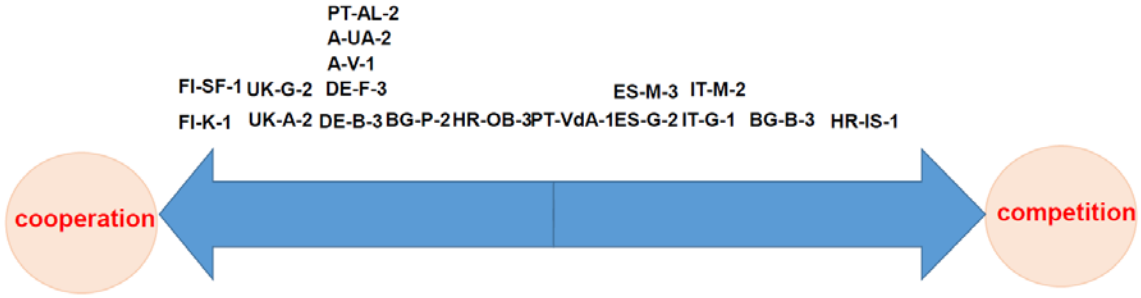


Figure 33. Cooperation and competition with other actors. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

In this sense, an important distinction occurs between the cases that entered into competition with other actors by offering similar solutions and/or services for similar targets or, alternatively, cases which, because of their very policy design, fostered synergies with other actors in their context. Pre-existing trust-based and productive relations among different actors dealing with similar target groups as well as providing similar services seem to be a key factor in creating and maintaining cooperation, rather than competition. The strong cooperation among different actors also contributes to improving services, making them more fitting with the local young adults' needs. Moreover, we have to consider the funding issue: where the economic resources are sufficient to guarantee the services' implementation by all the actors and institutions, competition is less likely to occur, including the competition to engage the highest number of addressees.

Addressees' perspectives on target group construction

From a life course perspective, issues emerging from the various case studies show an implicit correspondence with the elements described in the previous sections, often displaying a reproduction of the main discourses underlying the construction of the policy

target group. However, adopting the addressees' standpoint allows reinterpreting these elements, understanding better the actual limitations, offering thus an alternative interpretation according to the individual perspective and often explaining differently the effective conditions and the causes behind the limitations described. Following the addressees' perspective, several common themes were identified in the case studies: a) the lack of autonomy and independence (often describing the counter effects of public provisions); b) the underlying linear conception of young adults' trajectories (often reflecting a cultural expectation rather than an effective diffused opportunity, especially for those young adults with no linear trajectories); c) self-perception corresponding to social image and stigmas (reproducing marginalisation of disadvantaged young people); d) the hidden dynamic behaviours of young adults (contradicting the passive representations of their profiles); e) low expectations towards the project itself (generated by poor self-perception); f) the reaction to vulnerability labelling (against prejudices and social stigma). Figure 34 shows the mapping of policies according to these themes:

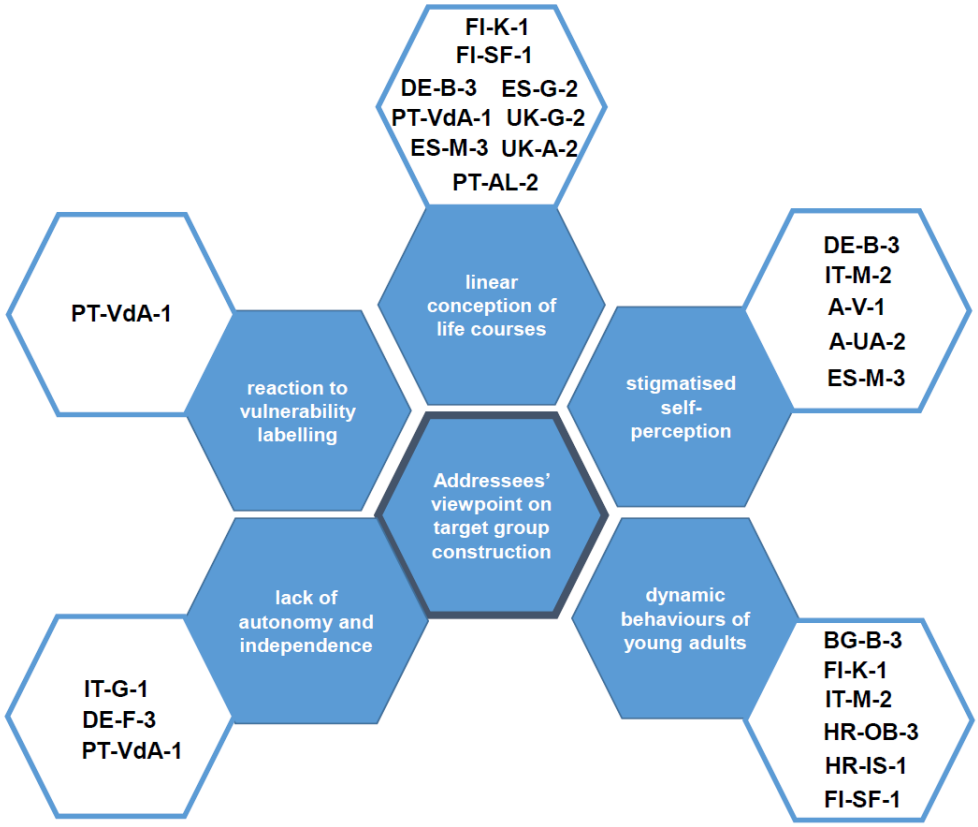


Figure 34. Addressees' perspectives on target group construction. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

The analysis has discussed some common issues among the different case studies, showing how some of the main discourses underlying the construction of a target group are the same in different national and regional/local contexts. In particular, we have often seen how the underlying linear conception of young adults' life course risks being applied as a evaluative criterion of successful or unsuccessful paths and how, sometimes, policies do not seem to recognise de-standardized life courses. Both these aspects have impacts on the young adults' self-perception as well as on their "reaction" to being labelled 'vulnerable'. Indeed, some youths have a negative self-representation and a poor self-identity; some have internalised these representations in their own perceptions (for example in the cases of early school leavers) and often view their paths as deviating from a 'normal' trajectory. This could lead also to lowering expectations towards the projects as well as to low motivation to improve their competences. Thus, sometimes, such poor self-perception leads them to consider themselves as vulnerable people, producing what we can call the "certification of vulnerability" and generating self-fulfilling prophecies.

Interactional configurations in the implementation of LLL policies

Policies are interventions devised to address challenges of common importance and interests, and their success or failure depends heavily on the way they have been implemented. The implementation of a policy is a very complex process, which involves a great number of variables and elements, although having very similar or completely identical components and phases. Comparing the interactions of key elements of the policy implementation and understanding how they intersect and are "knit together" allows us to identify productive patterns or counterproductive practices, but also allowing for deeper understanding of a particular policy itself. In the context of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, the term "implementation" refers to how a particular policy succeeds in improving the opportunities of young people through lifelong learning.

The aspects discussed in this section relate to influencing factors and their interplay at three different levels – policy decision, enactment and acceptance. They pertain to the aims and goals of a policy and its fit to the specific setting of implementation. They also refer to the extent to which the policy takes into account the contextual features such as model and scale of (educational) governance, degrees of regional autonomy, the various skills ecologies in place, and not least the mechanisms used in implementation. Additionally, they concern issues related to policy construction such as the underlying

conception of the life course, inclusion of the target groups in policy formulation, the tools, means and approach of implementation. The organisations implementing the policies, their modes of selection to recruit and/or select participants, but also the duration of the inclusion of young adults in the policy are further aspects discussed. Finally, with reference to the acceptance of the policy on the part of young people themselves, the rationales and justifications of young adults for participation in a policy programme as well as their perceptions of impact are also discussed as important aspects impacting the interactions in the implementation of LLL policies.

Aims and objectives of LLL policies

Overall, the key goal of most policies is to reduce the share of inactive population while improving the efficiency of the local labour market and promoting economic activity. The significance of the policies studied is in supporting young people in the country, and particularly the region, in their endeavours to achieve adequate personal and professional success. Most of the policies are associated with high expectations for solving the problem of youth unemployment, ensuring an effective workforce, enhancing the adaptability of the young workforce to labour market requirements and reducing the gaps and mismatches between skills supply and demand.

The link between the objectives of the programmes and local needs is mainly in two directions: on the one hand, public institutions aim to promote economic activity by increasing employment, and on the other hand, they aim to increase employment corresponding to the needs and requirements of local stakeholders. In some cases, the policies serve other goals, as well (i.e. how to get young adults to stay in the region or at least to return there after studies or how to attract young people, especially young families, to move to the region). Figure 35 below summarises the different aims and objectives of LLL policies:

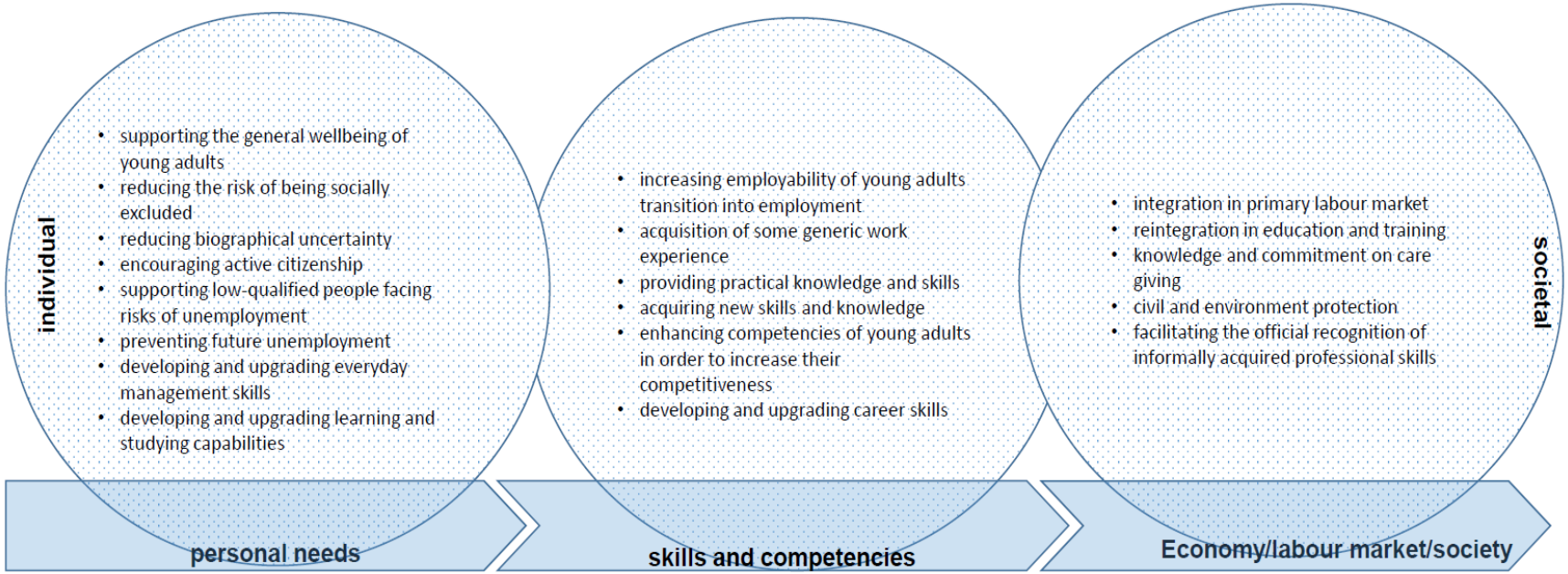


Figure 35. Aims and objectives of LLL policies. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

Contextual factors of implementation

Since the LLL policies are being devised at a national level (sometimes with strong influence from international trends and developments) but implemented at a regional or local level it is necessary to take into account some key factors influencing the process. For that reason, we highlight a few basic indicators that have key importance for the success of policy implementation. Some of these indicators relate to educational governance (its dominant model, scale and level of regional autonomy), while others are more connected to ecology (particularly skills ecology) in terms of the type of localism as well as the mechanisms of coordination. Furthermore, factors like established transition regimes of young people from school to work environments (for instance by transitional employment) are also very important and their influence needs to be explored.

Concerning the "model of educational governance", all the cases within the countries could be defined as state regulated with slight variations. For instance, in Italy a recent push is reported towards quasi-market models, especially in higher education and vocational education and training. In Scotland the state deals with compulsory education (up to lower secondary) and higher education, and vocational education and training are quasi-market. In fact, there is a great variety of quite different examples among the 18 cases that demonstrate original methods undertaken or measures elaborated at regional or local levels in order to align the measures and initiatives to the centrally imposed regulations while at the same time responding to contextual necessities, peculiarities and needs.

In relation to the profile of the countries, in terms of "scale of governance", which strongly influences policy implementation, there are different variations between the two main types. National (or federal) profiles are found in Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany and Italy, and regional or local profiles in Finland, Spain and Scotland. Portugal is an exception because national and regional profiles are equally presented. This indicator closely relates to the level of regional autonomy (in terms of educational governance), which is also a very important factor when analysing the implementation of LLL policies.

Regional autonomy allows a certain freedom in devising measures, using tools, establishing partnerships, creating independent governing bodies and using appropriate approaches to achieve intended outcomes and desired impacts. This could allow regional or local institutions and people to independently apply policy measures to local economic environment, labour market, education and training practices. All these provide greater

compactness and purposefulness in management actions, a higher degree of continuity between labour market, educational and LLL policies and measures.

The level of regional autonomy in terms of educational governance refers to freedom and independence from centralized management and control. In other words, it illustrates how much the decisions taken in a regional context are influenced by regional interests and are focused on problems and plans within the region.

In summary, most of the cases studied show an "medium" level of regional autonomy, which in most cases of educational management varies to a "high" level, and to a lesser extent to "low" regional autonomy.

De-standardisation or re-standardisation as orientation of LLL policy[38]

The majority of the policies related to our 18 cases originating from nine different European countries follow the "linear" assumption of a standard life for young people, although with certain variations: only three cases envisage a "non-linear" life course trajectory. As a consequence, for the majority of the cases their target groups are defined as deviating from the standard life course. Among them, a group of seven cases addresses young people with a standard life course trajectory (see also Chapter 5, in this Report).

In relation to policy implementation, consideration should also be given to adopting, following and complying with certain standard paths relating to the target groups' life courses will have direct impact on the extent to which a policy will 'fit' and become operative. Connected to this are the objectives of the policies aimed at:

1) re-standardizing, meaning creating conditions in which individuals or groups "out" of the normal cycle of standards return to it; or

[38] In YOUNG ADULLLT, we pay a particular attention to the processes of de- and re-standardisation. These are important concepts since they allow for a critical re-reading of the existing normative and cultural assumptions that have an impact on the design of lifelong learning policies and programmes. Once they aim at supporting transitions, they implicitly refer to rather rigid models of individual trajectories, i.e. to 'standard' life courses. As Brückner und Mayer put it, "the standardization of life courses refers to processes by which specific states or events and the sequences in which they occur become more universal for given populations or that their timing becomes more uniform." (Brückner & Mayer, 2005, p. 32). On the other hand, de-standardisation would mean that "life states, events and their sequences can become experiences which either characterize an increasingly smaller part of a population or occur at more dispersed ages and with more dispersed durations." (ibid. p. 32f).

2) de-standardizing, showing cases in which individuals come from a standard vision of sociality.

Within the continuum “re-standardizing” – “de-standardizing“ (see Figure 36 below), some interesting conclusions could be derived from the fact that the majority of the cases refer to re-standardizing the normal life course model, while only a few of them address de-standardizing. In summary, almost all of the analysed cases represent activities aimed at creating a return to ‘normality’ and standardization of social stages.

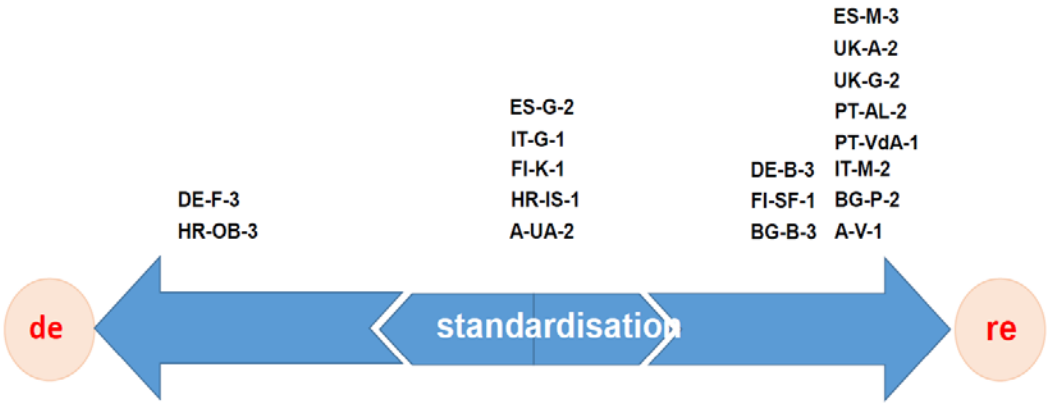


Figure 36. De-standardizing and re-standardizing orientation. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

Organisational aspects impacting the enactment of policies

Regarding the performance of the policy measures, there are several important aspects – overall approach of implementation, sources of funding, network of players, profile and size of the organisation that implements the measure, customisation related to the addressees’ needs, approach to them, addressees’ access to the measure and level of activation, as well as duration of addressees’ paths within the measure.

For most of the case studies the overall implementation approach is “top-down”, for the rest of them (5 cases) it is “bottom-up”. Sources of funding are mainly “public” for 14 cases, and the remaining cases have been ensured by “private” funds. There are great varieties of players who implement the measures around the 18 Functional Regions. Almost half of them are “public” or “mixed” and there is only one “private” player. Figure 37 below shows the distribution of implementing organisations:

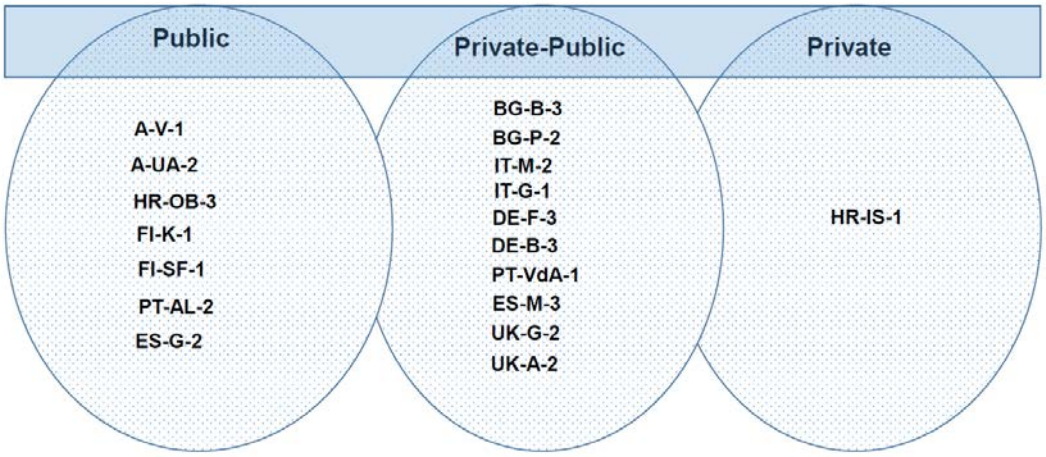


Figure 37. Type of implementing organisation. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

Similarly variable are the sizes of the implementing organisations as well as their role in the Functional Region according to the main task of the measure. But what is more important is whether implementation is tailored to the addressees' needs or not. In this respect, the majority of the organisations are customized to contextual factors, while 5 of them are not.

The issue of "networking" turned out to be of paramount importance for the successful implementation of a policy involving diverse kinds of organisations and their available resources. Overall, it seems that for most of the 18 case studies the collaboration network is a central instrument. Working together with institutions and individuals sharing visions, goals and resources in diverse forms of collaboration proved to be a crucial condition for the successful implementation of the measure.

The level of activation of the target group in the process of the policy implementation is a very important related aspect of the implementation process. The different 'styles' of activation are reported as "autonomous" but with some limitations for 7 cases, and "tutored" for 11 cases.

As for the modes of selection deployed to recruit and/or select participants, there are three main groups of cases classified by "competition" "threshold", and "free access". Figure 38 below shows the distribution of the cases analysed across these types:

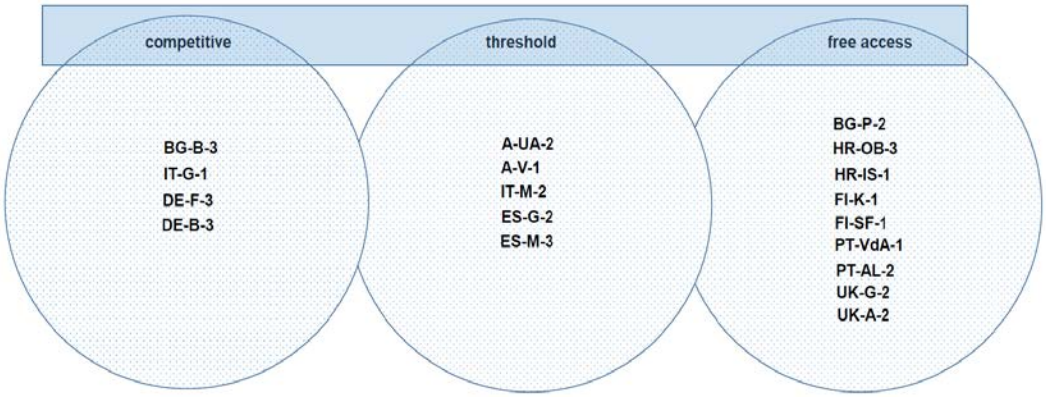


Figure 38. Mode of selection deployed to recruit and/or select participants. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

As for the duration of paths within the measures, they vary from low (0-3 months), medium (4-12 months) to high (13 months and over), as summarised in Figure 39 below:

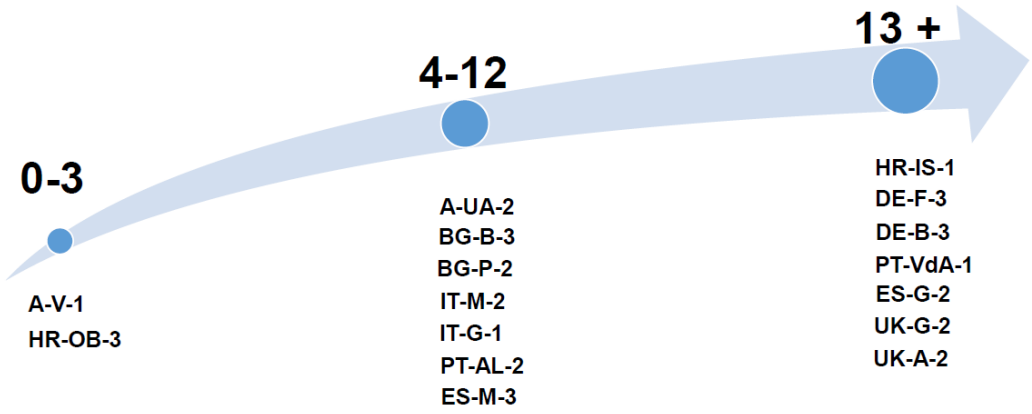


Figure 39. Length of permanence/duration of inclusion of young adults in the policy measures. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

In summary, the policies examined in the case studies are mostly employment-centred and labour-market policies. At the same time, the focus in some cases is also on social objectives related to community integration, the achievement of educational results, etc. Most of the policies are implemented through the system of "tutoring" or "mentoring"; focusing on apprenticeships or internships, emphasizing the need to acquire practical skills, assimilating professional success abilities and various social skills. Policy paths are varied, and this highlights the opportunities for young adults that the policies involved provide.

Young adults' expectations and acceptance

The implementation of policies is related to the creation of sustainable solutions at the regional and national level. This can be analysed through two important dimensions – how addressees justify their participation in LLL policies and how they evaluate their experience in them. Implementation is related to the awareness of personal participation as an element of life courses, as well as an upgrade and extension of life trajectories, which raises the meaning of this participation for the individual. Reflection on these topics is related to the improvement of inclusive approaches to the learning environment and their modernisation. By improving sustainability and outcomes, methods of participation in LLL activities have the potential to engage individuals who are at risk of failure and school dropout. In describing and evaluating their LLL experience, young adults assess the level of relationships between mentors/lecturers and learners and the extent to which they meet their individual needs. The concepts reflecting LLL policies emphasize partnership in the educational environment and interaction-oriented approaches. Considering their participation in the young adult measures, the justifications can be classified as "individualized", "2nd/last chance", "subjectively meaningful" and as "systematic ascription". Figure 40 shows the distribution of cases according to these distinctions:

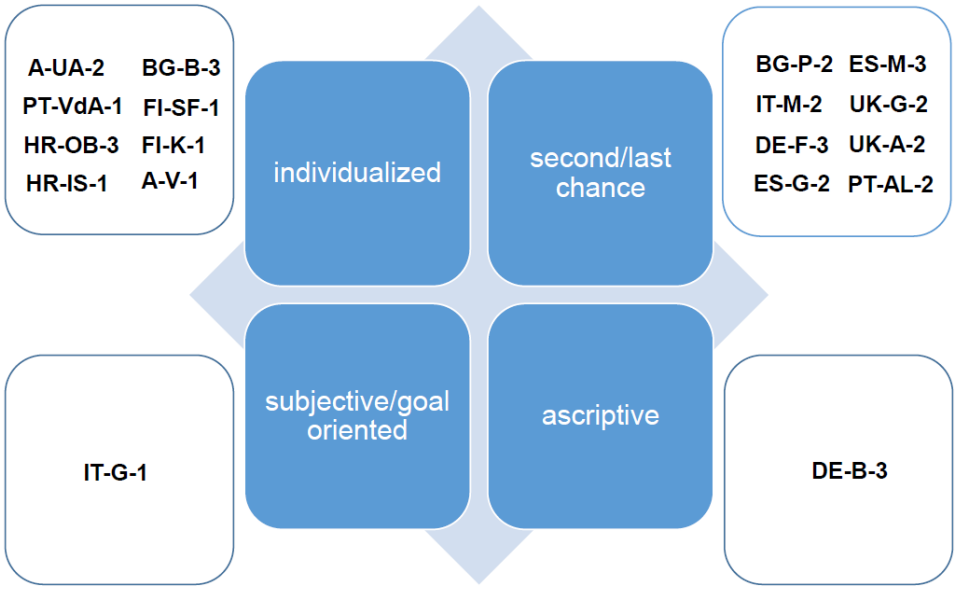


Figure 40. Young adults' rationales and justifications for participation. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

All this reveals that the degrees of participation in LLL and labour market policy projects are perceived and defined in the categories of personal life plans and standards.

Regarding the second element, there is a great variety of evaluating opinions about individual experience in the policies, which could be grouped around the following categories: “well-being”, “relevant learning experience”, “improved life chances”, “useful”, “meaningful goal”, “improved/enhanced self-esteem” and “acknowledgement”, as summarised in Figure 41 below:

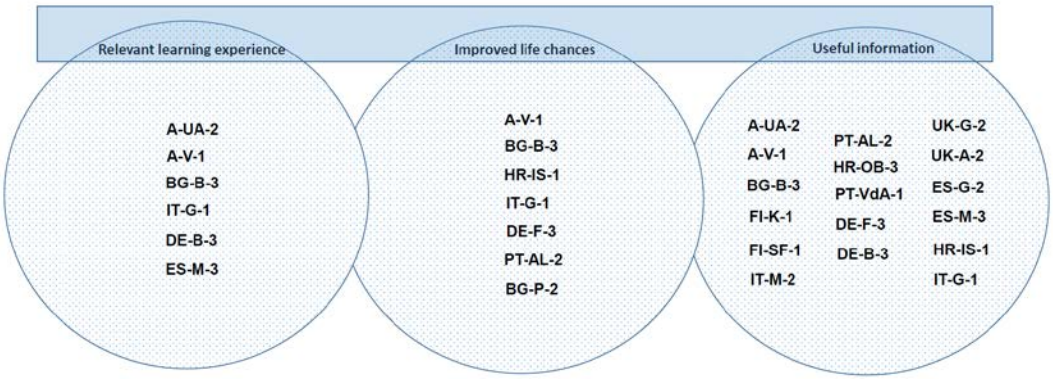


Figure 41. Young adults’ individual experience of impact. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

In summary, the LLL policies are evaluated reasonably positively by young adults, which is very encouraging in terms of the international sample of 18 case studies. However, there is limited evidence on one of the main goals of most measures – employability, i.e. to what extent participation in the measure helped them to find a job, be successful at work, get a promotion, etc.

The majority of cases report the personal benefits of young adult participants in the policies as a result of their implementation. Among the benefits most often mentioned are: improved self-esteem and self-worth, increased self-confidence and self-satisfaction, raised motivation, reduced biographical uncertainty, acquired life skills, acknowledgment of educational possibilities, support in making choices, solving health and mental health problems, smooth transitions to the labour market, experiencing the importance of social contacts and support from peers, etc.

Pedagogical interactions

Pedagogical interactions refer to different combinations of teaching and learning activities intended and/or occurring in a specific policy programme or measure. A distinction between intentions and actual learning is crucial inasmuch as learning needs to be understood as an individual activity, which emerges from and is embedded in social relationships. According to Wenger (1998, p. 229), learning “cannot be designed, it can

only be designed for". LLL policies thus can be understood as settings designed for the learning of young people in their life courses. While oftentimes the intended outcomes of policies are in the focus, we also need to account for transintentional outcomes. Transintentional outcomes refer to how policy expectations are often disappointed or surpassed, how unexpected side effects or remote effects arise and unwanted compromises and dynamics develop; it points thus to the fact that more often than not, intentional design is faced with transintentional results. For instance, policy objectives and practice goals are reflected by and materialised in more or less bureaucratic entry procedures to which young people are subjected. Yet, they participate in these measures with their own biographical agenda which influences their individual learning processes. Learning means that individuals actively appropriate and (try to) make meaning of the social and material world they find themselves in (Bandura, 1977).

In this sense, attention is commanded to pedagogical interactions as relational configurations that mediate between the intentions of policy-makers and practitioners, the organisational structures set in place, the (intended or unintended, reflected or not) practices of staff in the interaction with young people (as well as preparing them), and the practices of young people – whether they are actively engaged with appropriating services offered and contents taught or with making use of what is attainable for their everyday lives and their subjective identities.

Thus, the analysis of pedagogical interactions contributes to understanding the cultural political economy of lifelong learning policies inasmuch as explicit and implicit education and training goals are expressions of dominant discourses of what competencies are needed for social inclusion, the most powerful of which is 'employability'. These objectives underlie the implementation of policies but are also referred to in daily practice where practitioners legitimise teaching approaches, methods and contents towards their addressees or where the latter translate their subjective life plans into education or training choices (even if these choices are enforced and/or lack alternative options). Pedagogical interactions are thus expressions of governance inasmuch as they structure and are structured by the way in which teaching, training or counselling are programmed politically and planned and framed by organisational structures and processes. Finally, they are related with the life course because the normative justification of most education and training goals derives from orientation towards an assumed standard life course while

young people's individual learning processes reflect earlier biographical experience as learners both in and outside formal education and training.

In the following, we analyse pedagogical interactions related to the organisational forms, education and training goals, as well as the communication styles that impact to various degrees on pressure and/or voluntariness.

Organisational forms of pedagogical interactions

Pedagogical interactions are organised in different formats, the most important include: theoretical instruction, group work, practice-based learning, and counselling and guidance. In some cases, these occur in standardized forms like classroom teaching, in others they occur in flexible, individualised ways, which apply especially to counselling and guidance. However, based on reported experiences and intentions, there is a broad range of counselling and guidance from transmitting information to open, dialogic reflection of personal orientations and experiences and external demands.

Two central continua allow us to draw a picture of the landscape of organisation of pedagogical interactions in different policy formats according to which the different constellations in the 18 Functional Regions can be located (see Figure 42 below).

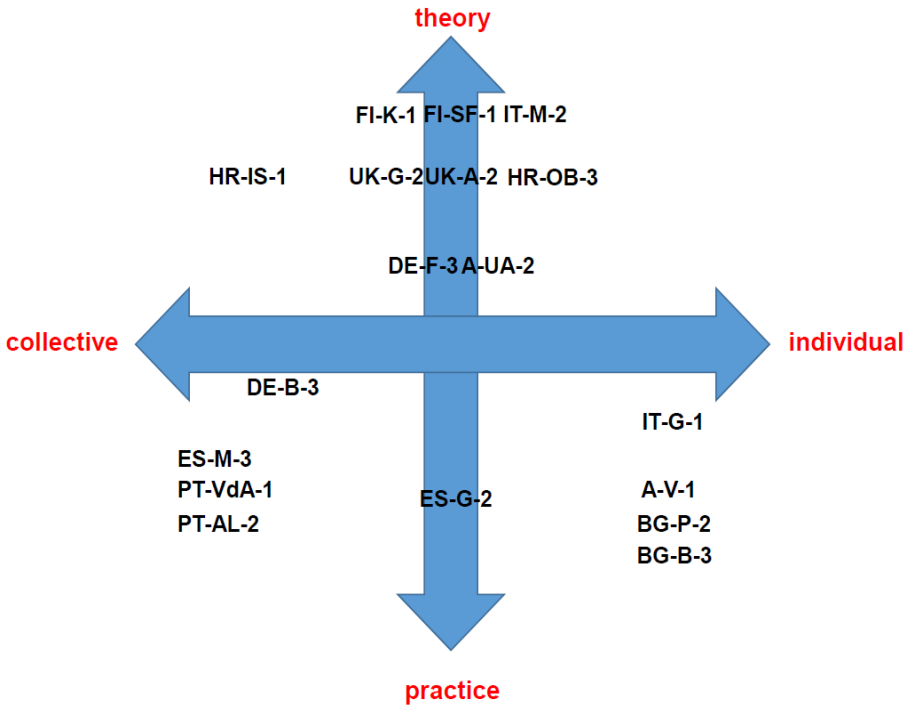


Figure 42. Landscape of the organisation of pedagogical interactions. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

On the *vertical axis*, we position the cases between the poles theory and practice, which are expressions of the differentiation of theoretical input and instruction on the one hand, and practice-based learning and approaches on the other hand. The *horizontal axis* allows us to locate the cases between the poles of collective pedagogical approaches like classroom teaching, courses and workshops and individual pedagogical approaches like single-case counselling or guidance. While substantially reducing the complexity of the cases, we still think that the figure helps to visualise the diversity of pedagogical approaches in the different cases.

Education and training goals: formal and non-formal qualification and compensation between resources- and deficit-orientation

Educational and training goals derive from policy objectives but are often negotiated and translated with regard to particular target groups, local context factors and organisational and interactive situations. They materialize in more or less tangible outcomes from soft skills to acknowledged certificates (all interpreted in terms of employability) to effective placement in further education or training or in employment (in a few cases).

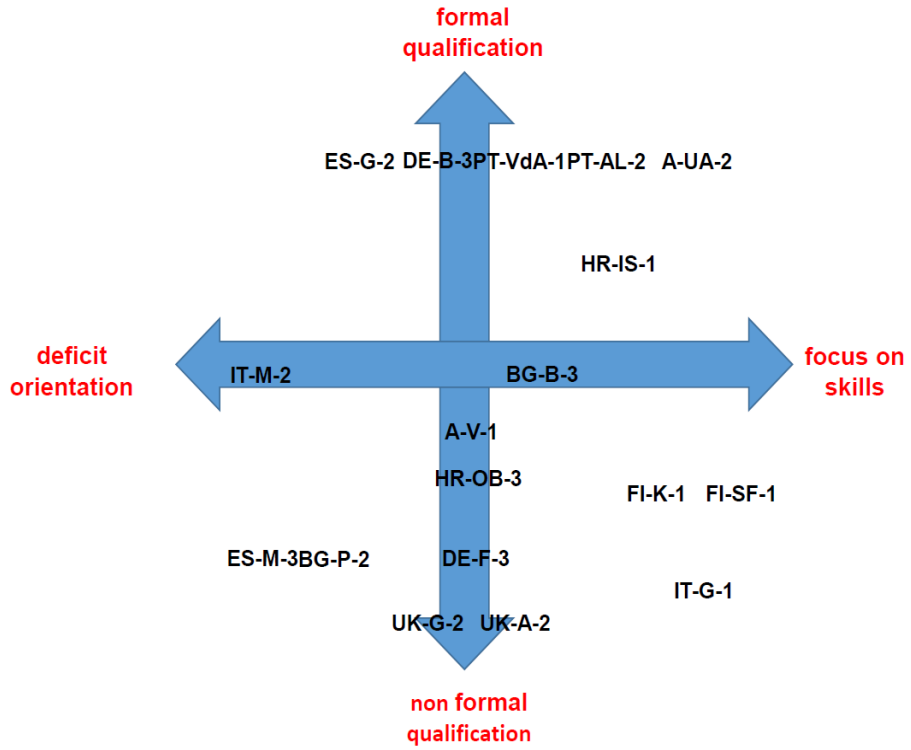


Figure 43. Landscape of the cases between the degrees of qualification and deficit orientation. Source: Author´s own elaboration.

On the *vertical axis*, we position the cases between the poles of formal qualification, which could be certificates or professional qualifications and non-formal qualifications, which could be gained in skills, experiences and others, but without the official formal recognition. The *horizontal axis* allows us to locate the cases between the poles of deficit orientation in the description of the cases of the National Reports and the skills focused description of pedagogical approaches in the cases. And again, Figure 43 reduces the complexity but helps visualize the diversity of pedagogical approaches in the different cases.

Communication styles: pressure and voluntariness

Another important dimension for pedagogical interactions related to communication styles refers to the degree of pressure and voluntariness in the policies. Here, especially the Finnish cases stick out with their explicitly voluntary offers. In addition, the selected cases in the UK, Croatia as well as the Upper Austrian case have a high degree of voluntariness. Much more pressure on the participants is ascertainable in the Spanish and Portuguese cases, the Vienna (Austria), the Rhein-Main (Germany) and the Genoa (Italy) cases. The cases in Bremen (Germany) and Milan (Italy) are the ones with the highest pressure on their participants.

Communication aspects are general styles or cultures of communication in education and training measures, which are reflected by specific situations. Communication, of course, is again closely related to the overall format, content and methods deployed in enacting a policy. In classroom teaching, communication is formalized by student/teacher roles, in practice-based learning this can either be the boss/worker constellation (giving and following orders) or more horizontal communication among colleagues. In group work and counselling, communication tends to be more informal. In several policies, the horizontal communication between professionals and young adults was highlighted by young adults as very positive. Yet, communication happens not only between professionals and participants. For example, in three cases peer-learning was explicitly mentioned as a positive experience. While we can conclude that, for a great number of young people enrolled in a policy, open and horizontal communication styles is of paramount importance – not least because many of them have had negative experiences in formal education – we also see evidence of the need for collective approaches that provide space and time for peer contacts and exchange. Some projects foster these constellations explicitly, in other cases these peer effects are side effects.

Insights and conclusions

In this concluding section we summarize insights from the analyses of interactional configurations above and relate them to the three conceptual perspectives adopted in YOUNG_ADULLLT: Cultural Political Economy, Governance and Life Course. The following section deliberates on the implications these patterns have for coordinated policy-making.

Cultural Political Economy perspective

A *first* aspect emerging from the analysed case studies and from the whole project is the prominent role played by employability in the different measures/policies considered. Indeed, employability is at the root of at least two important assumptions from Cultural Political Economy perspective underlying the policies examined in WP7. The first one concerns the polarity between a holistic approach and a segmental approach. Although there are cases of holistic approaches, most others focus on employability and this is linked to the segmentation of policies, which undoubtedly assumes a standard approach to life courses. A standard approach prevails where educational, labour and social inclusion policies are more segmented, because they assume that the addressee lacks a specific characteristic, that is, employability. Such employability is supposed to be provided by precisely intervening in the "distance" that separates the addressee from the market in terms of that specific characteristic. However, usually, those who present a significant distance from employability in terms of a specific feature are often even further from a standard path. Therefore, the segmented approach (which in pedagogical perspectives is well-known as a resource-based approach to be converted into skills) is likely to prove unproductive because the needs of addressees are wider and they cannot be segmented. Moreover, the segmental approach is often heavily bureaucratic. In other words, those implementing them are not always able to grasp the difference between the substantial needs and those assumed by the dominant cultural political economy and, therefore, they are unable to provide flexible solutions to the diverse groups targeted.

From a life course perspective, the mix of the different dimensions characterizing the transition to adulthood (work, family and other typical "markers of adulthood") significantly varies and policies intervene when people's shortcomings are concentrated in one dimension. If, instead, policies concern different dimensions, then the policies are inclusive and holistic. Otherwise, as an integrated one-sided policy when faced with wider

deficiencies, it risks being ineffective, as well as producing an unbalanced relationship which 'blames' the addressee if she/he does not know how to take advantage of the opportunities offered. The 'segmental' approach of a policy, aimed, for instance, at work integration, ends up penalizing the most disadvantaged groups, which obviously need a holistic approach. Furthermore, segmentation is functional to an equally segmental view of people, thus indirectly implying a linear conception of the life course (because it fosters interventions on a specific segment of a life-phase in which other segments have already been resolved or have not yet been addressed).

Moreover, the hypothesised (re-)standardisation of the life course generates a (re-)standardisation of the addressees' needs, which the policies aim to satisfy. Standardisation depends on both the segmentation of policies (assuming specific standard needs for housing, education, work ...) and the segmentation of addressees, considered homogeneous by virtue, often, of just one characteristic (being early school leavers, without analysing the reasons for the dropout; being unemployed for a long time without analysing the reasons for unemployment, etc.). This also assigns a key role to the activation of the addressees: the absence of activation is conceived as an element to blame potential addressees and not as a sign of poor effectiveness of policies designed on erroneous assumptions. The lack of participation of young people in the planning and management of policies that emerges from the analysis of implementation further fosters this perception. This occurs because the Cultural Political Economy has no way to "clash" with Life Course Research even in the implementation phase. In turn, this produces the "certification of vulnerability", which risks generating the self-fulfilling prophecy: if a specific policy is aimed at people with a "certified" form of vulnerability, this produces the labelling and the welding of individual perceptions according to the collective one. If the recognition of a specific form of vulnerability is a requirement of access to a policy, this recognition by the addressee could conflict with the activation paradigm, which underlies all the interventions. On the other hand, the activation paradigm, in addition to underpinning a model according to which the responsibility for the "deviation" from the standard (i.e., to be employed, to have completed a school path, etc.), is individualised and not attributed to an unbalanced social order, it tends to leave behind those people who have a conception of life that is actively different from that underlying the cultural political economy. In other words, if many young people can passively accept the cultural assumptions and normative expectations that undergird the policies and then can adapt to them, more or less consciously, others, who reject (even unconsciously) such

assumptions, can be pushed to drop out of them (again confirming the underlying stereotypes and, also in this case, agreeing with a form of self-fulfilling prophecy, as they end up being “unfit” for these policies). In these cases, the goal of employability differs from the empowerment goal, which, in contrast, is considered by policy-makers as an instrumental objective towards the final goal of employability (assuming that the needs of addressees are or become identical or at least coherent with those of policy-makers).

Another important aspect concerns the implicit prevalent orientation of policies for employability, which seems to be inspired by the model of dependent work, thereby indirectly considering the dependent worker’s career as the main, if not the only, access to the labour market. The soft skills that many policies aim to provide are consistent above all with employed work rather than with self-employment. This aspect is very interesting, because, it is possible that the “distance” of addressees from work and from a linear conception of the life course converges in considering self-employment as more appropriate, in some cases, to activation through empowerment. This, in turn, makes it possible to exploit resources that can be directed towards self-employment or entrepreneurial work, rather than towards employees. However, this orientation would require refusing another implicit assumption in policies geared towards employability, that is, that one needs to work on the needs of the labour market for dependent workers even when one is perhaps closer to the independent labour market. In other words, the more a society invests in young adults the closer they are to the needs of the labour market (this means to the needs of job demand, of the demand for dependent workers). On the other hand, the less it is invested in young adults, the further they are from the dependent labour market, and undoubtedly closer to self-employment. This aspect is linked to a fact that seems implicit in many policies that is, the appropriate life choices for young adults are those consistent with the re-standardisation of their life course. On the contrary, it could be said that young adults make choices precisely by de-standardising their courses of life, while remaining or falling within a linear logic/path involves non-choices, and being out of a linear logic/path involves constant choices. This aspect is tied to one of the most significant implicit critiques embedded in cultural political economy, related to young adults’ lack of planning: that most often the energies and skills required for a divergent project from that implicit in a life course perspective are not recognised.

Governance perspective

LLL Policies are most often devised at the governmental level to address societal needs and challenges of particular target groups by means of specific pedagogical interactions. They set goals and objectives and propose measures to achieve them. The implementation of the proposed policies appears as a crucial stage for their success or failure. Therefore, from a Governance perspective, the analyses in section 2 above (target group construction and pedagogical interactions) intersect with the analysis of the implementation of LLL policies. This is because the official target group is constructed mostly at national level, while the concrete pedagogical interactions are designed and enacted at regional or local ones.

Governance patterns are applied in accordance with predefined target group profiles, constructed along different criteria like age and vulnerability. What becomes evident from the analysed cases is that different contexts produce different degrees of correspondence between the official target and the actual users. It might be partially due to the fact that only in very few cases, participants were involved in the policy construction process. Another reason could be the dominant “top-down” approach of implementation, which leaves just a narrow room for regional or local adaptations related to the specificities of the concrete contexts.

Another important aspect related to the governance perspective is the activation of the target groups and the amount of funding provided. There is a huge diversity of activation approaches among the 18 cases, which involve the joint efforts of broad networks of players – both institutions and professionals. It seems also that funding is crucial for the majority of case studies, which means that the most vulnerable participants would not benefit in case of insufficient or lack of funds from policy promoters. In this respect, involving private companies and employers turns out to be a successful solution in contexts where this is possible.

Some interesting mismatches and gaps were identified during the case study analyses especially in the implementation phase. For example, in some cases there was certain contradiction between the intended holistic approach aiming at employability or labour market integration of young people and the applied approach by concrete implementers oriented toward the personal empowerment of participants in the measure. Another deficiency turned out to be insufficient feedback from the different stakeholders, including

the participating young adults, who could enable more objective evaluation of the outcomes related to the policy implementation.

In terms of the pedagogical interactions, as “expressions of governance”, there is also a great variety of options and solutions proposed by different (public and private) actors in line with the policy objectives as well as in correspondence with the concrete needs of young people and local markets. What is important from a governance perspective is the organisation of the learning, training and other support services, offered usually in cooperation with different local institutions, networks and experts led by a public or a private one.

From a governance point of view, we can also see that of the three main types of governance, Hierarchy, Market and Networks (see Greany & Higham, 2018), the last one prevails, also because the main part of the measures focused on in our case studies was implemented by different kind of actors, both from sectoral or institutional point of view. In any case, not all the Network forms of governance are the same. In certain cases, the aim of the policies is to find a job for their addressees and unbalance the governance towards a quasi-market system, for example, when funding of the measure is connected to the achievement of some threshold of results (as a minimum percentage of created jobs). On the other hand, when public authority defines rules of funding, participation of other private or third sector actors must preliminarily accept these rules and so the situation is more similar to Hierarchy.

A great part of the case studies showed the prevalence of the Network mode. Here, the interdependencies among a set of actors were created by mutual commitments and common frameworks shared by the main stakeholders. In such a constellation, the coordination towards the addressees cannot be predicted by only analysing the features and interests of each partner.

Another important conclusion, taken from the cases studied is the prevailing role of the practice-based approach that aims to link education and training with real market conditions. In this respect, close cooperation between the governmental actors and private companies (in some cases public organisations also) turned out to be of crucial importance.

The holistic approach in the implementation process of certain cases offering services that were not strictly market-related, for example, psychological, health or other types of

personal support, turned out to be an example of good practice which could also be transferred to other policies and measures.

Life Course Research perspective

The life course theory builds upon the interplay between life course and biography. The key transitions in the life course are embedded in a social time and place – social circumstances and historical events influence transitions (Heinz, 2009; see also Chapter 1, in this Report). At the same time, individuals actively construct their biography and their individual agency is employed in the sequence of events in the life course, in the construction of interpretive accounts and meaning making processes. The institutionalised constructions of the life course define normal patterns of transitions for age and gender. Social change however constantly undermines such notions of normality. Nevertheless, policies are trying to limit 'deviance' from these normal patterns.

The analysis of the above mentioned interactional configurations (target group construction, implementation, and pedagogical interaction) shows the interplay of individual biography and institutionalized life courses. The life course perspective allowed us to investigate processes of securing or restoring young adults' standard life course, and at the same time revealed some weak points of this policy orientation. The target group construction is closely linked with addressing young adults as a 'vulnerable group', an attribution that in many cases is based on the assumption of deviation from the standard life course. Targets of LLL policies are often young adults who:

- are seen by state institutions/employers as having left education and training too early and therefore are targeted by policies to re-enter education or training;
- spend longer in education or training than accepted by mainstream institutions/standard life course normal expectations;
- are seen as being in need of support to compensate for inequalities – usually framed as relating to indigenous, ethnic, migration or gender issues;
- are expected to re-enter education in order to upgrade qualifications or correct earlier educational/occupational choices which were not in line with their interests.

The life course perspective on target group construction interactions allows us to recognise that young adults have to develop their biography, while they compare their individual life courses with the life course of others. They notice their 'deviation' and have

to cope with this knowledge. In some cases, policies did not reflect this perspective of young adults. This blind spot of (some) LLL policies could lead to mismatches between young adults and the policy. The risk of dropping out rises if the expectations of young adults do not match the aim or the implementation of the policy. In other cases, young adults take part in the project with no significant expectation and with only a very low level of life planning. If in these cases the policies themselves have no understanding of the perspective of the young adults on their life course deviation, they cannot develop an understanding of supposedly 'deviant' behaviour like passivity or aggressiveness. On the other hand, there are of course young adults who do not recognise deviations from a standard life course. In these cases, addressing them as potential participants is often difficult. This problem is resolved in cases where access to the policy is open to all young adults. But importantly, a large portion of young adults participating in LLL policies were very actively engaged in developing skills and abilities to actively manage their life courses and achieve a balance between their life domains. Consequently, recognising that young people are active learners and participate in policies based on own previous biographical experiences, with individual-subjective goals and expectations that might differ substantially from the policies' aims is then crucial.

Life course research offers a logical framework to research young adults' perceptions and expectations of their informal/non-formal competences and their ability to create subjective meaning and continuity along the different phases, domains, and spheres of their life courses. Pedagogical interactions are the place where expectations are met or disappointed, they are the place where the different ways of teaching and learning meet and where the standard life course is again the vanishing point. In our analyses we encountered the entire bandwidth of formats of pedagogical interactions: from theoretical instruction, group work, practice-based learning to counselling and guidance; from single-case support to collective classroom teaching. Some policies lead to formal qualifications, like school leaving certificates or completed apprenticeships; others foster soft-skills and are located in the area of non-formal qualifications. Behind all these differences and variation, employability seems to be the vanishing point of nearly every selected policy. The dominant means of achieving this objective is through practice-based approaches, which seem to be very much the trend in the European LLL policy landscape.

'Not ready for practice' is an often noted assessment from professionals and with regard to the life course perspective means that deviation from the standard life course is a threat

or has already occurred. The analyses showed that ongoing life course de-standardisation (and re-standardisation) processes affect young adults in their life course. On the one hand, this is not only in spite of the LLL policies but also due to them. On the other hand, LLL policies have the potential to decrease insecurity and uncertainty in the life course or help people to cope with them.

Concluding remarks on parameters for coordinated policy-making

Coordinated policy-making denotes arrangements that successfully integrate labour market, social inclusion and individual life course aspects of policy formulation and implementation at the regional and local level. It is important to highlight that it refers to a stipulative rather than lexical definition. Coordinated policy-making is viewed as an ideal-type sustainable institutional solution that takes account of all relevant actors, stakeholders, dynamics, trends, and (mis)matches, avoiding redundancies and creating synergic effects in terms of coherence/integration of specific training or educational programs with broader social interventions for specific groups. These institutional solutions allow policy-making to develop and implement regional and local skills strategies that coordinate the activities of different areas of government (education, labour, economy) and facilitate the involvement of non-governmental actors (business, training institutions, civil society) in the planning, regulation and provision of lifelong learning opportunities in a particular territory.

Against the background of the discussions in this chapter a number of elements or parameters stick out as relevant in the planning, regulation and provision of lifelong learning policies. The following paragraphs briefly deliberate on them along three main themes that are related to the policy process from design, formulation and target group construction, implementation and the enactment in concrete (pedagogical) arrangements and interactions.

Policy design, formulation and target group construction

- Policies are often designed at European and national level (e.g., Youth Guarantee; European Qualification Framework, etc.) and adopted/adapted to other contexts (regional/local), which makes it necessary to reflect the implications of these frames of reference for policy formulation (e.g., aims and objectives, orientations) and target group construction. The latter reflection involves also the dominant goals of labour market security and economic competitiveness that places a

stronger orientation towards human capital and employability by means of LLL policies, often disregarding that learning is not synonymous with 'education' and goes well beyond a narrow interpretation of it as mastery of skills and competencies;

- Avoid devising individual solutions to structural problems; this includes a clear distinction of cross-cutting holistic and segmental policies. It is also related to the need to formulate policies that provide a balance between flexibility and security to young people, and to ensure that policies' goals and success´ criteria are oriented or at least compatible with subjective-biographical expectations of young people who have to conciliate in their life plans different functional and society expectations and roles, bridge different and competing (for resources and time) expectations and normalities anchored in various spheres of life (family, education, work, leisure time, etc.);
- Careful consideration of the criteria used to define target groups clearly distinguishing between causes and symptoms to avoid the pathologisation of individuals through target group construction. This is related to accounting for young adults´ perspectives on target group construction in order to reflect on its different impacts or reactions (intended, unintended, side-effects, etc.), also as a means of ensuring correspondence and compatibility.

Policy implementation and the enactment in concrete (pedagogical) arrangements and interactions

- Accounting for the context of the policy appears as important as the policy content itself, however, ensuring that the aims and goals of a policy are fit to the specific setting of implementation is crucial. This refers to the extent to which the policy takes in to account the contextual features such as model and scale of (educational) governance, degrees of regional autonomy, the various skills ecologies in place, and not least the mechanisms used in implementation.
- The roles of and the ability of stakeholders to influence policy-making also commands careful consideration. For instance, state actors play central roles as networkers and connectors, even when a policy is implemented in close cooperation with private partners. Also the type and size of the organisations implementing the policies came out as central in the analyses, pointing to how

(pre-existing) trust-based and productive relations among different actors dealing with similar target groups as well as providing similar services seem to be a key factor in creating and maintaining cooperation, rather than competition;

- During the implementation phase, it appears crucial to reflect the consequences of the underlying discourses and conceptions of the life course, the level of inclusion of target groups in policy design and formulation, but also of the tools, means and approaches of implementation, such as the mode of selection deployed to recruit and/or select participants in a policy programme or measure; the duration of the inclusion of young adults in the policy. These elements will have an impact on the rationales and justifications of young adults for engaging in a policy programme as well as on their perceptions of this impact. Institutional reflexivity – i.e., foreseeing time and places to reflect during the implementation process, e.g. periodic (internal) reviews) appears as one means of ensuring these interactive effects are accounted for.

Policy enactment in concrete (pedagogical) arrangements and interactions

- Recognizing young adults as active learners and shapers of their own life courses oftentimes stands in contradiction to policies geared toward the labour market integration and employed work. Those young adults that diverge from this dominant orientation are at risk of suffering from further social problems, especially in contexts of successive economic crises that devastated employment rates. Accordingly, countering stereotypes of youth as passive, incompetent, or unwilling to invest in skills development seems highly important, considering the impact it will have on perceptions, motivation and expectations of young addressees of these policies.
- Open and dialogical debates about the contents of learning and of educational training and goals become visible as important elements of policy enactment of LLL policies. A clear distinction between a resources-based and a deficit orientation needs to precede the negotiation and translation of policy objectives to target groups. Also, open and horizontal communication styles are of paramount importance as they provide space and time for (peer) contacts and exchange – not least because many of them have had negative experiences in formal education;

- Organisational forms of pedagogical interactions must allow for the customisation to local contexts and target group demands and needs as different (standardised or individualised) formats generate different pedagogical interactions and allow to varying degrees the matching between policies´ and users' orientations and expectations.

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10. Conclusions and Reflections

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Introduction

The concluding chapter takes stock of the insights yielded by the combination of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches in YOUNG_ADULLLT. While looking back at the comparative analyses done, this chapter undertakes an attempt to cross-read and subsume the most relevant insights yielded by the project´s cumulative research. It therefore, first, presents the results and main lessons from the comparative analyses. Second, it discusses how YOUNG_ADULLLT contributed to a sound conceptualization and operationalization of comparison, while accounting for complexity. Third, it discusses the gains and pains of making contextualised comparisons via multi-sited, multi-level and multi-method research as means of coping with complexity. Fourth, it contributes to the discussion about tensions between contextualised comparison and the (policy) quest for transferability/best practice. And, finally, it refers to the concept of embeddedness to reflect on the insights yielded in the cross-case comparative analyses of this report.

Presenting results of comparative analyses

In our report, we have demonstrated an intense interest in studying and further elaborating three overall research questions that guided all research activities in YOUNG_ADULLLT. In terms of these overall research questions outlined in the Introduction, we want to highlight three general conclusions.

The first question posed from the *Life Course Research* perspective was “whether LLL policies have been ‘colonised’ by an instrumental perspective focused primarily on short-term labour market needs, undermining the contribution of more holistic and long-term educational objectives (Weiler et al., 2017, p. 118). Departing from this observation, we have also questioned, whether lifelong learning policies are able to cope with young peoples’ desires and aspirations, or whether they perceive them as a new imposition and pressure. As the Report shows, especially in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, there are remarkable discrepancies between the expectations of young adults and policymakers, because of the different views that these two groups have on the importance and potentials of lifelong learning. In this regard, a great role in shaping these relationships is played by structural and economic determinants, such as the allocation of supply and demand on the labour

market or the existing disparities across as well as within European countries and their Functional Regions. However, we could also observe a growing rupture between young adults´ desires to construct their own life projects and the awareness and readiness of policy implementers to include these desires in the design of lifelong learning programmes. Finally, due to the growing and pervasive influence of the neoliberal narrative, there is a tendency to emphasise the instrumental nature of lifelong learning, thus putting education at the service of economic agenda.

The second question posed from the *Governance* perspective was trying to understand whether the existing fragmentation and inefficiency of lifelong learning policies are "less direct and linear results of the lack of coordination of actors and policy sectors (the mismatch assumption) and more a result of the tensions and asynchronities across the different levels of policy-making (ibid., p. 119). We were particularly interested in whether these tensions and asynchronities are further being exacerbated by the ongoing global trends that influence all levels of policy-making. As our research has shown, especially the analyses in Chapters 5, 6 and 9, there are two central issues that need to be highlighted. First, there is a remarkable impact of discursive practices and context-dependent aspects on formulation and implementation of lifelong learning policies. More precisely, the research has shown that the selective, culturally conditioned interpretation of problems and solutions affects, in turn, the ability of local and regional authorities to counteract the structural deficits, turning them instead into individuals´ lack of skills and knowledge, which paradoxically further stigmatises and overburdens the most affected and vulnerable young adults with new demands and expectations. Second, the construction of lifelong learning policies is greatly dependent on dominant assumptions that seldom reflect the current changes in life paths of young adults. Optimising employability, as the most prominent assumption, prescribes the orientations and underpins the relevance of lifelong learning policymaking in the majority of the sites analysed. This, in turn, corresponds with the effects it has on young adults in vulnerable positions that appear to be in need of assistance, which is why better policy coordination seems to be the most appropriate answer. Contrary to this assumption, the comparative analyses have instead opted for elaborating reflective tools or parameters of a better-coordinated policy-making, deliberating especially on the processes of design, formulation and target group construction, implementation and the enactment in concrete (pedagogical) arrangements and interactions.

The third question posed from the *Cultural Political Economy* perspective was inquiring whether the decisions of lifelong learning policy-makers "are being more or less directly framed by the dominant economic priorities, rather than including a contextualised assessment of the needs and taking into account the highly diverse life projects and aspirations of young adults" (ibid., p. 120). In this respect, we have especially asked ourselves whether they acknowledge and make use of their individual and hidden resources and potentials. Studying these complex relationships, particularly in Chapters 7 and 8, has led us to the fact that lifelong learning policymaking is extremely context-specific. In that respect, more accurate and context-sensitive analytical categories such as the concept of 'Functional Regions' are needed to allow for incorporation of the existing functional and structural relationships on sites. In addition, these analytical units have shed a different light on the spaces where policy actors and other stakeholders take their actions, and question how far they construct and sustain them for their own sake. Looking at these contextual specificities more closely has also revealed the interdependencies between the implementation of lifelong learning policies and the sedimented economic and socio-cultural arrangements, such as focus on a single industry or a long-term structural unemployment.

When recapitulating the lessons from the comparative analyses, we once again want to underscore that "the implementation of a policy is a very complex process, which involves a great number of variables and elements, although having very similar or completely identical components and phases." (see Chapter 9, in this Report). And it is by carefully deliberating on the interactions and intersections of key elements of the policy implementation that help the actors involved – policy implementers, researchers, government authorities, regulatory bodies, young adults and other stakeholders – to identify productive patterns of coordinated policy-making, while at the same time avoiding mismatches, redundancies and wasted opportunities.

Conceptualisation and operationalisation of comparison under conditions of complexity

The complexities of comparison of policies across 18 functional regions in nine countries in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project have provided lessons of relevance to the field of Comparative Education and to similar projects. Historically, comparative studies have focused on the isolation of 'factors and forces' that shape phenomena in a small number of contexts (usually two) (see, for example, Hans, 1958). 'Methodological nationalism'

prevailed, and more often than not the contexts were nation states. Various *a priori* frameworks were applied, to set out the kinds of broad forces that researchers might use as analytical categories. The YOUNG_ADULLLT comparative project is on the whole quite far from these traditions in its approach. As well as being of a large scale and across multiple sites, this research programme's conceptual richness and polyscalar and methodologically eclectic nature have made for a multi-faceted and occasionally rather complicated set of comparative processes. This has invoked a wide range of identifiable 'variables' across contexts, some of which might have been predicted in advance, but the process has also demanded sensitivity to the particularities of each case. Stemming from this complexity and contextual embeddedness, a number of tensions have been identified, worth exploring in more detail for the lessons that they offer.

The focus of the project – policies supporting young, vulnerable adults –has embedded in it a number of concepts which needed to be operationalised across contexts. What do we mean by policies, and their implementation? How young is a 'young adult', and how do we know when someone reaches or leaves this category? What does it mean to be labelled as vulnerable? Each of these generates issues of structural, functional and cultural equivalence (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014) that need to be foregrounded to make comparisons meaningful. Arguably, even across the three theoretical frameworks of the project - cultural political economy, life course and governance - understandings vary, but here we will focus on how the equivalences across cultures and contexts can affect comparison and interpretation.

Structural equivalence refers to the extent to which the phenomena are governed similarly, and whether they occupy the same 'space' in a context and have the same official importance. So, for example, policies and their implementation may or may not be structurally similar in different contexts. Policies may be generated by different bodies; they may have more or less weight in governing the behaviours of actors and have tighter or looser accountabilities attached to them; they may be created and legitimated centrally, or devolved to sub-national units. So, in the case of Croatia, policy-making is nationally centralised, and the expectation is that policies will be implemented wholesale in the periphery. In contrast, UK government policy in Scotland is re-framed in the context of devolution, and the bodies which form and implement it are quite different from those in neighbouring England. Both of these, however, are broadly shaped by EU directives. 'Young adult' in research terms is a heuristic category, but there are structural and

practical implications for how parameters are set. Programmes targeting young adults define this group differently from each other. The project definition is broad to include the full range of likely possibilities. Individual programmes, however, are structured to limit participation on the basis of how vulnerable particular groups are seen to be, and how fit particular programmes might be for particular target groups. So, for example, the New Opportunities Centre in Girona, Spain, targets 16-24 year olds (ES-G-1); Portuguese Apprenticeship course programme (PT-AL-1) is limited to school dropouts with a maximum age of 25; the 'No Threshold Guidance Centre' in South-West Finland has a maximum age of 30, while in Bulgaria, the University Centre 'Student Practices' in Plovdiv includes any 'young' people enrolled in Bachelors, Masters or PhD programmes, without age specifications (BG-P-1). In the context of this study, structural equivalences may be particularly important in the case of transitions between, for example, training and work – when and how these take place, what kinds of structures support them, how aligned these are, and whether an assumed linear progression underpins the structures that young adults navigate in their life course.

The term functional equivalence has a range of definitions, including in translation, but as we use it here it refers to the whether something has the same purpose and functions. So, for example, what is a policy for? What is it trying to achieve? What are the functions of the institutions and actors that support its implementation? Most of the policies in the young adult project reflect the globally hegemonic emphasis on employability, but we see in the context of Finland for example a more emancipatory approach reflected in greater attention to the voices of young people and their needs beyond employability, including programmes that address social inclusion and wellbeing and the coherence of services young people may access (e.g. the NUPPA Centre in Kainuu, F1-K-1).

Cultural equivalence refers to the cultural meanings attached to phenomena in their context. One aspect of this is semantic. 'Vulnerability' is a loaded term, with different cultural meanings, and the English term has more-or-less linguistic equivalences across Europe, but with different nuances to the connotations that may shape how the 'vulnerable' young adults are defined and perceived. In some countries, the term is relatively neutral (as in the Finnish word 'haavoittuva' derived from the word 'haava', meaning wound). In others, the tone is more paternalistic, as in the German term 'Verletzlich', as the antonym of resilient. In others, the term is relatively new in use (as in the Bulgarian word уязвим, 'uyazvim') to replace terms no longer considered appropriate. In still other contexts, there

is evidence of the term for vulnerability being borrowed from English, as in the German 'Vulnerabilität' used in Austria, or 'Vulnerabilan' in Croatia. The connotations for each of these are likely to shape cultural responses to people placed in these categories. As a different kind of example, we see that some commonly-used indicators for young people's successful transitions to work and adulthood may not have the same cultural meanings. So, for example, living independently from one's parents after finishing schooling may be a normal life course in the UK (although increasingly less so, since the crisis), while in Italy this may not be a cultural expectation suitable for use as a yardstick of social or economic integration.

Contextualised Comparison (multi-sited, multi-level and multi-method research) as means of coping with complexity

Equivalences always matter in comparisons, but they matter in different ways depending on the underpinning epistemology and how the relationship between the case and its context is conceptualised. On the one hand, they can be used as categories for identification of similarities and differences between cases. So, a set of research questions around whether policies in different functional regions are structurally, functionally and culturally similar or different would be a meaningful starting point to a comparative inquiry after the juxtaposition stage (as in the Phillips and Schweisfurth´s Structure for Comparative Inquiry, in Chapter One). On the other hand, they also serve as a check to enhance the validity of comparisons. The very worst comparisons inadvertently compare cases which are structurally, functionally or culturally different, and invalid conclusions drawn. Comparing, for example, two policies for young adults which target different age groups (structural equivalence), for different purposes (functional equivalence) or based on differing understandings of vulnerability (cultural equivalence), without awareness of these fundamental differences, would confound the validity of any conclusions drawn about how effective, meaningful, or transferable they were. In our methodology, the careful attention to context and the embedded view of cases has helped us to avoid this trap. In a more extreme view, some purists might argue that if they are not sufficiently alike, they simply cannot be compared, as in the old adage about 'comparing like with like'. The tight framing of some variable-oriented comparative case studies reflect this orientation; too many variables untidies comparison. However, a case-oriented approach sees policy and context more holistically, and if structural, functional or cultural differences exist, these become part of the study and among the parameters which shape effectiveness or

meaning. In the YOUNG_ADULLLT study, we tried to draw on both variable-oriented and case-oriented comparison to gain a full picture and maximise the advantages of both, and in fact, in different work packages, slightly different framings were used, depending on the purpose (see mixed methods below).

Secondly, given that the study is multi-level – including EU, national, subnational, and functional region scales – the strengths and weaknesses of such approaches need to be considered. Drawing on Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), this is the vertical axis of our horizontal comparisons across cases. Issues in the process of comparison may include the functional equivalence of levels including the functional region policy 'cases', the relative independence of the levels from each other, and the comparability of available data.

To add to the mix, given the importance of policy processes and actors, we are, as noted above, de facto comparing not units or contexts but sets of relationships, requiring the management, again, of considerable complexity. The Phillips and Schweisfurth´s Structure for Comparative Inquiry can accommodate this complexity but its apparent tidiness belies the intricacy of the process. So, the 'isolation of variables' within the cases being compared is still an important part of the process, but these variables need to continue to be seen in their context, rather than fully 'neutralised'. 'Vulnerability' for example, cannot be fully 'neutralised' because there is no term for it that is neutral across the full suite of project languages, but we have tried to take some of the emotional weight out of it. One strategy we use is referring to 'vulnerable situations' rather than individuals, to diffuse some of the stigma that may come from describing young people themselves as vulnerable. In addition, in order to maximise the possibility that we are talking about the same thing from the same intellectual foundations, and to problematize connotative differences, a glossary on the project website sets out shared understandings gleaned both from the relevant literature and from ground-level understandings. But whether or not someone is vulnerable, or in a vulnerable situation, and what that means to people around him or her and how he or she is constructed as a policy target, will always need to be seen in context.

Thirdly, in conducting these polyscalar comparisons, we use multiple methods. Differing quantity and quality of available statistical data, and differing understandings and valuing of qualitative data, are examples of issues faced in large-scale comparative projects using mixed methods. Within the scope of this large project, work packages with different aims worked in arguably paradigmatically different ways. For example, the work package

looking at the supply and demand of skills gathered data from national teams using a tight template based on an a priori framework (WP 6: Capsada-Munsech et al, 2018). This generated perfectly aligned information for comparison, ideal for managing the largely quantitative or 'factual' data and for seeing clearly issues of mismatch. On the other hand, work package five (see above, Rambla et al, 2018) was concerned with the experiences of stakeholders, including young adults experiencing programmes implemented through the case policies. The researchers sought to capture emic perspectives on the lifecourse of these young adults as they interacted with the policy context. For this, the reporting strategy used narrative approaches. The thick description helped to ensure context sensitivity and relativity, but the narratives used different entry points, identified and emphasised different 'factors', and were organised to invoke the tone of the participants rather than to address comparability. This inevitably demanded a different understanding of comparative synthesis. The task of aligning and integrating these fundamentally different approaches and their findings further complicates comparison, but the scale of the project, the work package structure and the three theoretical perspectives help to make this possible. Ultimately it cannot be a question of integrating all the findings synthetically, but of using them as complementary lenses.

Comparative research and policy-making: the tensions between contextualised comparison and the (policy) quest for transferability/best practice

Two further sets of issues flow from the data when the comparative analysis has generated findings. If phenomena are deeply contingent upon contextual factors and relationships between them, at a higher level of abstraction there are questions of the extent to which generalisations can be made which are meaningful and not simply banal or obvious. It is fairly banal, for example, to say 'it is important to align policies in coherence with each other, and with the needs of young people'. And common sense might have started us there in any case. So, generalisations and their attendant policy messages are often in tension with context sensitivity. This, then, affects the usefulness of the data to different stakeholders and the dissemination processes and tools that maximise this usefulness (see below). 'Context matters' is one of the adages of comparative education, and one of the most frustrating points one can make to a policy maker seeking solutions. If we could offer packaged, transferable policy solutions that 'work', that would make the task of policymakers considerably easier. As this chapter indicates, however, we have not been in the reductionist business of simplifying processes or findings. This does not mean the

research does not have important messages for policymakers, and we will reflect in more detail on these lessons in the next Work Package 8 Report.

General concluding remarks

In concluding we turn to the concept of embeddedness to discuss some of the challenges for the potential of LLL policies for young adults in Europe in contemporary times. The term *embeddedness* in social science refers to how social conditions are contingent upon varying social factors within a field (for instance, economic, social, political, and cultural spheres) and that comprehending the relationships and agents within a field, requires an analysis of society at large (cf. Little, 2012). Twentieth century economist Karl Polanyi and sociologist Mark Granovetter addressed the concept of embeddedness. Karl Polanyi used the term *embeddedness* in 1944 to identify that an understanding of the functioning of an economy cannot be disassociated from analysis of the social world in which it was embedded. Studying the functioning of economy, Karl Polanyi ([1944] 1957) coined the term *embeddedness* to point out that it was embedded in both economic and non-economic institutions. Later, questioning what he termed an "'oversocialized concept of action'", Mark Granovetter (1985) viewed economic action as "embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations" (ibid., p. 487) and argued that it is these social relations that help us explain outcomes. Notwithstanding whether one follows Polanyi's institutionalist or Granovetter's more structuralist conceptualization of the term (cf. Beckert, 2007), embeddedness calls our attention to the cultural, cognitive and normative frames of reference, the patterns of (social) relationships, networks, and infrastructures available to those aiming at the coordination of action. Thus, understanding how LLL policies relate to these various factors and conditions in a specific site (for instance a Functional Region), it is argued, allows us to better understand LLL policy-making.

As this report has demonstrated, FRs are embedded in their local, national, European and global contexts A variable-oriented approach constructs a list of ingredients in the local skills supply and demand systems and the nature of the programmes that function to address these, within particular economic and political structures. An alternative view sees these FRs and their wider contexts as eco-systems. Over a long period of time, the political economy, culture, and governance structures of each become part of the subjective reality within which individuals' standardised life courses are enacted. We are not arguing that this guarantees harmony, but a particular interdependent nexus is established and fossilised which has its own internal logic over the *longue durée*.

Recent events and changing patterns have started to uncouple the components of the system in many of these FRs, and threatened the eco-system. The de-standardisation of life courses as a near-global social phenomenon; network governance replacing static bureaucracy, with the aid of technology; and specific economic crises (such as dramatic changes to the oil and gas market) and general economic pressures (especially the crisis of 2008) have all served to destabilise these systems to a greater or lesser extent. This has demanded policy responses attuned both to the long-existing nexus and to the changing demands of the labour market, the availability of funding, and the needs of youth in late (or perhaps post) modernity. As we see in these national and FR cases, policy responses and policy logics are not always co-ordinated within themselves, let alone mapped constructively onto the eco-system. Of particular concern is the way that with few exceptions the voices of young adults are absent and so their life projects are ill-understood and poorly addressed in policy responses. This is problematic both in terms of what they experience – including its fragmentations and de-standardisations – and in terms of what they desire for themselves.

The rich range of data used or created within the YOUNG_ADULLLT tells us a great deal about these contexts and the extent to which their trajectories represent favourable outlooks for the kind of ‘meaningful work’ set out in the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030, for instance. However, data shapes context as well as reflects it – it tells us what is important and deserving of policy attention. Data that is set within CPE and Life Course frameworks as well as labour market and education outcomes can provide a more nuanced and complete picture to inform governance and action.

In term of messages of particular relevance to policy-makers in regional contexts, the report presented detailed analyses of an array of themes, namely: vulnerability, living conditions, participation, policy diversity, policy rationales, functional regions, skills ecologies and coordination. Policy-makers will find some specific recommendations for their countries and the selected functional regions. Thus, readers will find two sets of complementary results. On the one hand, the reader learns about specific and cross-setting issues. On the other hand, the reader can easily associate policy-based recommendations with more general analyses.

A comparative analysis of lifelong learning policies in eighteen functional regions in the EU eventually highlights that current policy frameworks often overemphasize the potential of functional equivalences. Actually, some policies such as the Youth Guarantee Scheme

assume that lifelong learning conveys the main support that all youth, and particularly those who are exposed to the main factors of vulnerability, will need in order to become autonomous citizens and productive workers. Nevertheless, the comparative analysis of lifelong learning policies yields a number of findings that significantly qualify this assumption. First, functional equivalences are not straightforward to the extent that target groups greatly vary across regions. Second, the general assumption is properly a cultural equivalence that EU policy aspires to generalize throughout the regions of member states. However, policy-makers normally translate EU discourses to the terms of national and regional frames of meaning. And third, the diversity of target groups, living conditions, policies and skills ecologies indicates that structural equivalences cannot be taken for granted.

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