

# ISSUES AND ASPECTS OF COMPARATIVE LONG-TERM STUDIES IN YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN EUROPE

## BIOGRAPHICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF “GENERATION Y”<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract:* Youth unemployment is still a persistent conflict. Youth unemployment rates in European countries always used to be higher than average unemployment rates. This has not only to be defined as an individual but also as a structural phenomenon. Since socialization via work is still highly relevant and an aspect of the future European integration, youth unemployment occurs to be a very crucial issue for sociological research. This means a research that reflects the mutual constitution or interplay of individual and collective processes as well as the drag effects of institutional and individual behavior. The paper investigates this debate and asks whether one could one speak of a “forgotten generation” or even of a “generation without future” in Europe. It exemplifies several empirical studies and develops a framework for future research.

*Keywords:* Youth unemployment, Socialization, Habitus, Europe, Process-sociology, Generation Y

*In the highly industrialised societies of Europe, the great majority of those who cannot find occupational employment are no longer threatened by starvation and extreme physical distress. Many of them, particularly the young unemployed are hurt in their self-respect, in their search for a meaningful activity with which they can identify. Their plight is made worse by the fact that in industrialised societies people are ranked in accordance with their occupational work while, as a rule, non-occupational work is not yet ranked, [or not] by any means at the same rate. Perhaps it is time to start changing that value scale. (Elias 2009: 237)*

This socio- and psychogenetic perspective on current problems of social cohesion and integration via having work actually refers to a severe debate that was raised in the mid-1980s when the emerging labour market crisis of the post-war industrial societies

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indicated the decrease of economic prosperity in Europe. It was even made the topic of the 21<sup>st</sup> German Congress of Sociology, which took place in Bamberg/Germany (Matthes 1982). Since then the crisis, or moreover the end of the labour economy, has been and still is critically discussed (Bourdieu 2004; Gorz 2000; Rifkin 2005; Kern, Schumann 1984). Whereas in the 1980s the debate mainly focussed on (male) standardised industrial work, in the following decades the transformation of industrial society towards civil and/or information society against the backdrop of informatisation and technology development of work led to the question whether mankind is in the fourth stage of an anthropological history of wage labour (Castel 2000). Precarity, exclusion, marginalization, the European 'May-Day Movement' (Freudenschuss 2013) but also new forms of (hyper-)individualized self-understandings and subjectivation besides '9-to-5' permanent appointments are keywords in this engaged discussion (Ernst 2007, 2009; Holm, Lobo 2006; Florida 2004). Young urban 'Creatives' and 'Hipsters', as part of this individualization processes of work and youth movements, are part of this new phenomenon too. Besides some apocalyptic or euphoric dimensions of the debate, a process-theoretical perspective could provide a more detached, comparative, empirical and long-term analytical perspective on the question of social integration and the importance of labour with a focus on youth and their socialization processes in society today.

On the one hand, labour economy suffers from skills shortage; on the other, low-performance persons with a minimal amount of cultural capital are increasingly isolated from participation in the job market. Especially youth unemployment continues to be a persistent conflict, and their unemployment rates in European countries have always been higher than average unemployment rates. Especially in the southern countries of Europe where the rate is between 30 and even 50 percent. With regard to these developments, youth unemployment can be defined not only as an individual, but also as a structural phenomenon: generational conflicts, increasing radicalization of young people without a professional perspective, a long lasting dependency of young people on family resources and homes, the threat of small pension claims as well as uncertain living conditions for these young people in the future are being discussed.

Accordingly, these young people are accused of showing little respect for social and political institutions at the European level, due to the lack of their integration. But these structural and individual aspects are interdependent and cause a dilemma: the transformation of labour economy, the flexibilization and de-standardization of work demands flexible workers who permanently react in the right way to new economic efforts and to take care of their individual work force at the same time.

Since socialization via work is still highly relevant and young people are supposed to refine the future European integration, youth unemployment occurs to be a very crucial issue for sociological research; especially a research that reflects the mutual constitution or interplay of individual and collective processes as well as the drag effects of institutional and individual behaviour. With regard to European labour policy, strategies of work agencies, the discourse about the educational system and even research in (un-)employment, it seems, as if the predominant discussion individualizes macro-sociological aspects of social transformation. Moreover, it neglects socio- and psychogenetic aspects of employment and unemployment in favour of measuring

individual employment commitment, competence, employability and the willingness to accept labour to find the optimal profiling strategy (Ernst, Pokora 2009). Who is actually surprised that growing up into a deregulated labour economy today has become more complicated and complex? Therefore, we want bring to light possible aspects of a generational (or in a more sociological term cohort) conflict too.

With regard to these developments, we want to raise several questions. Could one, for example, speak of a 'forgotten generation' or even of a 'generation without future' in Europe? Is this generation of young people fundamentally separated in (highly qualified) northern European 'winners' and (low qualified) southern European 'losers'? In addition, what circumstances are striking to explain the gap of disparate distribution of youth unemployment in northern and southern Europe? How can we cope with methodological problems of long-term and comparative research throughout Europe (various quotas, work ethics etc. and key figures of youth unemployment)? How can we compare European youth unemployment, employment policies, the long-term effects and its biographical impacts (i.e. physical, material and psychological effects, self-images in relation to dominant work ethics)?

Although youth unemployment has been discussed and measured for a long time we find it worthwhile to have a closer look at the interwoven interdependent problems of possible changes. For example, changes in socialisation processes themselves, the effects of the so called transformation of capitalist (European) societies on the macro, meso and micro level, and, last not least, the discourse about youth unemployment itself are relevant.

As we found many contradictions in the research on youth unemployment at several levels, we want to give a brief overview about the current discussion. In the following, we will first focus on (useful) indicators and measurements of EU Labour Market (1). Secondly, we will present the discussion about whether there are basic changes in work ethics and youth or not (2). Because qualitative and comparative data is still missing here, we discuss a reinvented empirical study, developing the so-called 'shock-thesis' of youth school-to-work-transition, and its usability for comparative long-term research (Goodwin, O'Connor 2006). This will be interwoven with the discussion about new ways of biographical constructions of youth in the so called 'great transition' of Western societies with its rapid social changes (Crow 1997) which needs new concepts of analysis (3). Therefore, based on the located research desiderata, we finally present our thesis of our pilot project, which focusses on issues and aspects of comparative long-term studies (4). Here we can refer to first research results from the UK and Germany about interpretation models of experiencing unemployment (Ernst, Pokora 2009), which can serve as a comparative study.

### *The European Labour Market*

In sum, youth unemployment is related to various perspectives, concerning, for example, active employment policies and their impact on youth unemployment rates, long-term effects and biographical impacts of youth unemployment (i.e. physical, material and psychological effects, self-images in relation to dominant work ethics).

Methodological problems of long-term and comparative research throughout Europe (various quotas, work ethics etc. and key figures of youth unemployment; Dietrich 2012, 2013; Mansel, Speck 2012) are worth to be mentioned, too. Also dynamics of employment markets (skill shortages in some regions, overqualified populations in others and mobility) and unequal distribution of the risk of youth unemployment due to socio-demographic features (Dietrich 2013; Keller, Tucci, Jossin, Groh-Samberg 2012) are being discussed. Many contradictions characterize the debate about individual, institutional and structural aspects of employment, labour markets and unemployment.

The question regarding the form of the connection between employment status and individual well-being (connected with age and gender) (Stam et al. 2016) is, for example, completed by the perspective on labour market perceptions among European young adults (Reeskens, Van Oorschot 2012) and work experience. As a striking exceptional case, a few autobiographical stories from unemployed and their labour market marginality in the UK and in Norway (Karlsen et al. 2014; Simmons et al. 2013) add the research.

Defined by the so-called NEET-indicator, i.e. «Young People Not in Employment, Education or Training», youth unemployment rates range between 13 percent (Eurofund, Bruno et al. 2016) and 21 percent (Reeskens, Van Oorschot 2012) worldwide. Therefore, the question is raised whether we have to face a «risk of a lost generation» (Bruno et al. 2016) struggling for social integration in a vicious circle of low qualification, less work experience and weaker work contracts, which is connected with long periods of unemployment eroding skills and employability. Associated with the external constraint to employability are immense regional institutional (meso-) effects and impacts of extensive active labour market policies. Further, macro-effects are being typified with the deep impact of financial crisis, great recession, euro crisis, tertiarisation of the labour market, and the kind of the national welfare regime and employment protection (Bruno et al. 2016; Dörre et al. 2014; Lehndorff 2014). Socio- and psychogenetic perspectives, as well as regional and social comparisons about the way in which young people experience and interpret their job chances and unemployment risks, are therefore relevant. Especially when we take into account that the 'causation between welfare arrangements and social norms runs in both directions' (Van der Wel, Halvorsen 2015: 115).

Moreover, we can recognize a double-bind and drag effect of structural policies, resulting from exaggerated employment protection, closed employment and labour market segregation (especially for elder, qualified white men; Dieckhoff, Steiber 2012), on the one hand. On the other hand, the demand of more mobility, causing various individual strategies of labour market participation, self-images and job expectations, especially amongst the youth is another aspect. Labour market entrance is an underemphasized aspect in this context, nevertheless it looks different depending on gender, qualification, region and ethnicity. Although students are, for example, the most optimistic group, it is said that «the higher educated do not have an accurate view of the market value of their diploma» (Reeskens, Van Oorschot 2012: 387). Contrary, middle educated might receive hardly any signals and have a «depressed view on overall job opportunities». They live under «persistent precarious conditions», which drive down perceptions and lead to «psychological scars» (Reeskens, Van Oorschot 2012:

387). Locating the decrease of the welfare state since 2008, the authors claim that we need more research on country case studies and individual interpretations of the current labour market.

In this context, longitudinal data from cross national comparisons by Reyneri and Fullin (2011) show paradox phenomena too. They are expressed, for example, in the fact that young female and immigrant workers indeed find a new job more quickly, but only in flexible, low paid and low qualified jobs than established employees. While they found only a few local studies about Italy, well researched places include Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. The authors state that «entry to skilled manual, and even more to white-collar employment, appears to be closed.» (Reyneri, Fullin 2011: 251). There is still a growing need to measure migratory inflows, especially when we think about present social integration of refugees that recently entered Europe. Here, for example «long-term unemployment penalizes female immigrants» as compared to native Italian women (Reyneri, Fullin 2011: 259). Contrary to this, there is a wider gap between natives and immigrants' unemployment rates in the UK because of a lower employment protection in general. And the situation in Germany shows that flexibilization and deregulation of fixed-term jobs lead to high employment outcomes at the price that immigrants are more integrated in fixed-term contracts (Reyneri, Fullin 2011: 259; Dieckhoff, Steiber 2012: 110).

Young adults are affected by these developments in a special way. Bruno et al. (2016: 251) also Simmons et al. (2013: 587) state, therefore, that the (typical adolescent) vulnerability of young people (depending on their qualification level) lasts longer and school-to-work transitions have become more and more important. Depending on the class or milieu, group spill-over effects from benefit recipients to other people (Van der Wel, Halvorsen 2015: 102) are discussed with the presumption that young people with experiences of discouragement are socialized into a culture of dependency. In this context, a view to several cohort studies (Hilmert, Mayer 2004) and the revisited *Young Worker Project* (Goodwin, O'Connor 2015) give insights into similarities and differences in experiencing and coping with class-specific critical and fateful moments in life courses.

Analysing the connection between welfare state and employment commitment via a linear multilevel analysis of 17 to 18 European countries, Van der Wel and Halvorsen (2015: 113) found that under «people in poor health, women, ethnic minorities, the non-employed and those with shorter education, employment commitment was higher if they lived in a more generous and activating welfare state». Who is actually surprised about this? And against all assumptions, especially those of Stam et al. (2016: 311) (who, seriously, still operate with this middle-class biased item of women's lower work commitment), European Social Survey/EUROSTAT also show that women have a higher (sic!) employment commitment than men (Van der Wel, Halvorsen 2015: 103; Cornelißen et al. 2002).

Against this backdrop, the German and continental European labour market policy and educational system still «appears the best way to minimize unemployment among young people» (Bruno et al. 2016: 258), while the Southern regions have the most resistant rates of youth unemployment.

To resume, more research about institutions, like schools, work agencies, trade unions and local initiatives, is needed in this context since they all function dissimilarly in different labour markets and national contexts. Although strongly coordinated, unions have high impacts on «labour market outcomes of all prime-agers»; Dieckhoff and Steiber (2012: 113) state that «strict employment protection legislation per se has [not, S.E.] any negative implications for labour market performance». Therefore, a process of social and cultural transformation concerning European working life and socialisation could have taken place in different ways, which we want to analyse with focus on UK, Germany and a selected country from the south of Europe.

### *Work Ethics and Youth: Generation Y*

Although it seems superficial to say that youth attitudes towards work have changed in a radical way and that younger people have a different employment commitment, one aspect is striking here: many social theories agree that a fundamental transition of society is taking place that concerns *every* social group and individual. At the latest since the famous Marienthal-Study (Jahoda et al 1976; Stam et al. 2016) insistently expressed the latent and manifest functions of work and its non-pecuniary benefits (i.e. time structure, shared experience, contacts outside family, shared goals, self-efficacy), we all know about the risk of social exclusion for those who lose their job or cannot enter the labour market. Recent research topics are connected with factors of well-being in relation to the social norm to work (individual resources, internalization of shame, inferiority and strategies of compensation of unemployed persons; Stam et al. 2016: 311, 325). However, it is well known that low-performance persons with a minimal amount of cultural capital are increasingly isolated from participation in the job market. Contrary to this, the labour market policy of ‘demand and support’ has not effectively led to increased opportunities for the young unemployed. Ludwig-Mayerhofer recognises, to a certain extent, a vicious circle of loss of productivity:

The longer unemployment exists within a society, the more probable that increasing segments of the group of unemployed persons indicate unemployed phases in their history for so long that hardly an employer is willing to hire these persons, due to a presumed or factual low level of ›productivity‹. (Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2005: 211).

As comparative longitudinal studies, institutional and biographical data are still missing, as well as social psychological data about labour market entrance, (risk) perceptions, and interpretation of the youth in relation to their resources and human capital, it is important to reintroduce comparative and long-term research. Youth studies, in particular, stress the importance not only of peer groups for the socialisation process but also of a cohort effect, i.e. the generational aspect (Hurrelmann et al 2008; Mannheim 1970). As gender, class and cultural, i.e. comparative and long-term aspects are also still often missing in (biased) research (Stam et al. 2016), it is worthwhile to have a closer look at the recently invented ‘Generation Y’ (Hurrelmann, Albert 2014) before we present the revisited, comparative *Young Worker-Project* (Goodwin, O’Connor 2015).



Contrary to the more statistic term of a cohort<sup>2</sup>, the wider term ‘generation’ describes common shared experiences as well as specific expectations and contentions. To understand the genesis of a generation’s «we-perspective» means to clarify what distinguishes this generation from another. A generational unit does not suffice to define the practices of distinction of the «generational context» (Mannheim 1970: 8). In addition, the initial sparks, critical and fateful moments in a life course and processes often cumulate into feelings of emotional turmoil and self-transcendence in the naming of oneself and the forming of legends and group myths (see for example the generation of war babies, the ‘teenage culture’ or the 1968s, the Rock’n-Roll Youth). Moreover, structural, socio-economic aspects are relevant too.

Although not being a generational theorist, Elias (2013) formulated the thesis that it takes up to three generations to recognize effective changes in societal processes and modes of thought, and to render societal outsiders into established. Therefore, one should be careful to speak of a new generation, as it happens with ‘Generation Y’, which follows ‘Generation X’ (born 1970-1985). Hence, one should ask whether we could find any (radical) transition processes in European inter- and intra-generational as well as long-term comparison.

Regarding Germany, it has been stated that the generation born between 1985 and 2000 differs from the preceding generation in that they are used to status inconsistency and have developed a system of self-monitoring (Hurrelmann, Albert 2014: 54f.). There are «winners» as well as «precarious types», «ego tacticians», «hedonists», «nerds», assimilated and flexible «diligent types». The authors think that these young adults could become «hidden revolutionists». Their parental, ‘baby boomer’ generation (born 1955-1970) stands in direct contrast to them: they are the generation of today’s deciders, characterized by diligence, ambition and suspended satisfaction as they grew up in a «risk society» (Beck 1986). As embodiment of performance society they

value performance and pleasure equally, and this makes the difference to former generations. Their values are nothing new. Rather they make a connection between the values of their grandparents with those of their parents. They are inspired by both, redefine them and adopt them to their own living conditions. (Hurrelmann, Albert 2014: 38, transl. S.E.)

A closer look shows that 66 percent of ‘Generation Y’ are able to realise the traditional life course, whilst 33 percent live precariously, in volunteer, flexible and temporary work, training or unemployment. After all, at least 20 percent are without training position or workplace. There exists a competition in the dual education system: 50-65 percent students per cohort are confronted with a growing minority in vocational training. Young trainees are increasingly missed in traditional handcraft and business (metal-, electric-, medical business, baker, butcher, merchandise and gastronomy; Hurrelmann, Albert 2014: 24 f., 60 ff.). By the way this could be a chance for refugees on the labour

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<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a cohort can be divided through the item of birth, marriage or death. The term ‘generation’ in our project includes cultural, socio-economic and socio-psychological interdependencies and constraints, i.e. individual experiences and social institutions as well as long-term impacts, such as critical and fateful moments in the life course, especially careers.

market. However, there exists a mismatch between demand and supply. The result is a huge gap between prevailing skills shortage, a huge offer of apprenticeship and companies providing numerous gratifications for trainees. Nevertheless, many young trainees abandon their vocational training before completion. Hurrelmann and Albert furthermore found that companies encounter a mentality of «ego-tacticians», who are used to get permanent feedback, recognition, support and promotion on an eye-to-eye-level. These young adults are assumed to refuse hierarchy, to expect their chief to be a coach, and, as they are said to be used to comebacks and job-hopping, the loyalty to the firm is presumed to decrease. Being aware of demographical changes, innovative firms develop tools like Diversity Management to increase efficiency and to recruit all diverse talents under the «high potentials» (Ernst 2013) on the labour market.

Contrary to this, a comparison with the cohort analysis of Hilmert (2004: 13 ff.) is useful: asking in how far historic circumstances impressed collective life circumstances, he compares the dynamics of educational and professional careers of people born 1964 and 1971 (i.e. 'baby boomers'). For example, he mentions the Vietnam War, Left Terrorisms, the NATO Double-Track Decision in 1979, the Invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Russia's Perestroika and the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, the privatization of TV channels and increased unemployment up to 10 %. Against this background, he analyses macro-economic changes such as both the expansion and decrease of the welfare state and the educational system despite perpetuating social inequalities. This resulted into a lack of apprenticeship, the precarization of middle-skilled, low- and unqualified workers on the one hand, and multiple and extended qualifications of higher educated people on the other. Nearly 20 percent of the 1964-born became unemployed in their discontinuous 'patch work careers' with enormous status inconsistencies, disillusionment and frustration of career chances. Despite this, the 'baby boomers' also profited by more independence from their parents too. Therefore, the discourse about a so-called 'lost generation' and its vulnerability is nothing new and a relative phenomenon. Hilmert searches for forms to compensate these specific constraints of the labour market, macro-economic changes within different cohorts. More insights we can get if we bring in the revisited *Young Worker Project*.

In the following, we want to compare this briefly characterized study with selected long-term studies about youth and their work experiences. Weiss et al. (2014) interviewed 2252 German graduates from 1997, Simmons et al. (2013) interviewed and observed 78 young English people between 15 and 20 years and Karlsen et al. (2014) compared biographical Norwegian stories from 1989 with stories from the 1930s about labour market marginality, which they found in archives.

### *The 'Shock Thesis' and Qualitative Youth and Employment Studies*

In a recently rediscovered (Goodwin, O'Connor 2006) English empirical social research project from the 1962s, consisting of quantitative survey with 900 young adults school leavers, Norbert Elias and his colleagues stated eight problems of transition from school to work: young adults experience a prolonged separation from the adult world getting only indirect knowledge of this world. There is a lack of communication,



although their social life takes place in the midst of adults. The social role of young people is ill defined and ambiguous. Therefore, the role of fantasy elements in the life of the young is striving for independence, on the one hand; but as there is still an asynchrony of social and biological childhood, on the other, they are still dependent on their parents and other adults. Working outside home here creates a new situation of being independent from home but being dependent on their own money. «Young workers are neither fully adult nor fully children» (Goodwin, O'Connor 2006: 169), they are confronted with contradicting norms of working. For example, elder colleagues tell them not to work too hard whereas their chiefs accuse them of lacking loyalty, diligence and carefulness (Hurrelmann, Albrecht 2014). Elias understood this conflict as a typical «reality shock», as «something which may have a variety of forms, which may sometimes be sudden and biting and sometimes slowly coming over the years ending in final shock of recognition that there will never be anything else but that» (Goodwin, O'Connor 2006: 171; Furlong, Goodwin et al. 2017).

Compared with several other studies, which will be presented below, and compared with what we have written before, we find that a re-analysis of today's youth experience is the demanding point here. Present-day critics on Elias' model have to be taken into account for sure. They concern the gender, ethnic and middle class biased construction of the study. However, as in our project, we want to ask whether there exists a severe transition problem in today's youth; the similarity between this older research and the recent one on work commitment, labour market entrance and work experiences of the youth is striking:

The more complex a society, the more complex this process of transition to adulthood or the learning of adult norms becomes. (Goodwin, O'Connor 2006: 168)

As mentioned before, the transition from school to work is a critical and vulnerable phase in youth biography in every generation. The question whether the vulnerability of young people is or is not a new phenomenon with reference to the 'shock-thesis' (Elias 1960) shows that it seems to be not a new but a *longer lasting* phenomenon, whilst the risk that «commitment to work wanes over time» (Simmons et al. 2013; Bruno et al. 2016) increases. Therefore, youth transitions have become more complex, more protracted and increasingly non-linear in a world with deregulated economies and labour markets.

Contrary to the 'baby boomer' generation, and especially the generation before, the '68s', as a carrier group of post-war 'teenage culture' with increasing consume (Goodwin, O'Connor 2015), conditions of labour markets have changed radically. In the 1960ies for the first time youth had «a significant amount of disposable income thanks to a period of economic boom and prosperity which led to earlier adolescence» (Goodwin, O'Connor 2015: 105), especially under the male as well as female skilled factory working class youth. But this '68s teenage-generation' as well as the 'baby boomer generation' and the 'Generation Y' had been affected by long-term developments of globalization, IT-revolution and increasing inequalities at different points of their life courses. For example, the revisited young workers after

45 later suffered from the decrease of traditional industry and workplaces as well as of traditional life courses. In addition, Goodwin and O'Connor (2015: 127 ff.) stated non-linear transition processes of fateful moments, job commitment and self-images like less, short term and extended careers. The low qualified went from lower schools to semi-skilled jobs and unskilled work, whereas the short-term careers had moderate success at school, in middle positions of skilled manual trades and in the technical and clerical work. Extended careers they found under the middle class youth, who had ambitions for long-term rewards, high and secure income:

The data suggests that the transitions were not linear in nature. Many respondents experienced breaks in employment, significant divergences from their predicted careers early on and reversals in their employment trajectories. (Goodwin, O'Connor 2015: 130)

Returning to the 'Generation Y', in recent times young people increasingly had to look for voluntary work or practical training in firms relevant for their later career, whereas before even low-qualified young adults and college dropouts of the '68s'-generation made a good career in Germany despite their middle skilled education. Meanwhile, practical training has even become part of the curricula in higher education, too, so that students are coerced to find these jobs and their dependence from their parents lasts longer. In this context, 2252 German graduates from 1997 have been asked whether they see a connection between job research and experience in field and non-field related work (Weiss et al. 2014). Not surprising, the researchers found that labour market outcomes are influenced in a positive sense «by field related voluntary work experience» (Weiss et al. 2014: 802). Seen as a first step into comparative research about institutional settings, the authors call for a wider and, we would add, long-term perspective in this context. In doing so, then one can realize that the socio-economic shift towards more individual responsibility under the roof of a re-organized, i.e. deregulated welfare state, the transition of so called 'active' job-market policy into 'demand and support' implies more surveillance and pedagogisation (Ernst, Pokora 2009). In terms of higher female employment and higher education rates, on the one hand, social inequalities decreased step-by step - as mentioned before, Germany has a relatively low unemployment rate. On the other hand, in terms of secure and high income, this generation suffers from downsizing, two heavy economic crises, and social inequalities between the elder and the younger generation increased heavily. Whereas we face a surplus of middle skilled jobs, industrial jobs have been reduced in the 'knowledge society' and the rate of highly educated employees increased (OECD standard). Like the 'baby boomer generation' in a world of ecological risks, Perestroika, the Balkan-War, (East-)European Integration, IT- and 'Social Media' revolution patchwork careers and status inconsistency have become more and more widespread. In terms of adolescence, transition and socialisation processes, we face a backward movement and longer lasting vulnerability.

A second empirical study, which is of interest for our research questions, is the comparison of youth transitions in UK working class: longitudinal ethnographic research based on participant observation and 78 interviews with 15-20 years old not

in employment, training and education (NEET) show not only that «youth transitions have altered radically since the 1970s and the advent of mass unemployment that accompanied the collapse of the UK's traditional industrial base» (Simmons et al. 2013: 578). Moreover, the tensions between aspirations of youth and their opportunities on the labour market are connected with local aspects. These young people underestimate their commitment to work, on the one hand, and, on the other, do not overcome their prevailing traditional orientations in their family social network. This cumulates in a reproduction of a *marginalized* instead of *excluded* position of the youth, which is embedded in a setting of protracted adolescence. As young people are expected to do voluntary work, a «new modern reserve army of labour» (Simmons et al. 2013: 587) and interchangeable workers are reproduced. It is in particular these young working class people, who are the most vulnerable, and their commitment to work wanes over time. Taking into account that (male) boomerang kids are a severe phenomenon, for example in Italy and Germany, because mostly they do not leave their parental home before their mid-twenties, one can imagine the extent to which useful and important resources or competence to develop work commitment and collect work experience outside the home have become much more difficult to obtain, and this is realized only by a few of young people (Waterstradt 2015).

More insight into conditions of youth transition is provided in a long-term study by Karlsen et al. (2014) who compared N= 650 youth autobiographical stories of young unemployed from the 1930s with five 'Write your life' articles from 1989s. They use as arguments the social circumstances, for example, white spread unemployment, economic crisis, and fates of 'failed' careers are similar. The researchers ask whether the patterns of dealing with and interpreting unemployment have changed and how the young adults see themselves. Already in the 1930s, a 'failed' career has been individualized and enduring shame (as a hint of highly internalized work ethics; Elias 2009) manifested amongst the young unemployed. They saw themselves as «victims of a fate beyond their control» (Karlsen et al. 2014: 1408). Depression, the feeling of being ruled out and excluded from social life, is therefore nothing new or special in present experience. But, living in an area of 'secular individualism', with post-protestant work attitudes, and unlocked from class identity, could make a difference in the interpretation: the «work imperative can loop back into a moral imperative, placing social responsibility squarely in the shoulders of the individual and a burden of guilt on the shoulders of the poor and the unemployed» (Karlsen et al. 2014: 1397). The «project of self-defence, a lonely struggle for relief/vindications» (Karlsen et al. 2014: 1395) has replaced the long-term struggle for work inclusion.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, new patterns of demand for labour (frequently part-time, often temporary and/or insecure) have become widespread in the European labour market and tighter benefit regulations in a more activating and demanding state can be observed. As during this processes new forms of precarity and employment often go hand in hand with the lack of training, the labour market more and more offers

poor quality jobs with limited opportunity to enhance skills. Therefore, one can ask whether Castel's «zones of precarity» (2000) are replacing the contrast between youth employment and unemployment, or whether we should talk more precisely about marginality instead of (complete) exclusion of a «lost generation», as it is implied in the discourse about precarity. Already the 'baby boomers' suffered from status inconsistencies, unemployment and non-regular jobs on a split labour market. The situation of uncertainty and anxiety about the future has not only economic impacts (individually and societal) but also affects the integration of these young people, in terms of politics because the «long-term consequences - from social tensions and the danger of political radicalization to potential 'brain drain' out of Europe - would be immeasurable» (Eichhorst et al. 2013: 1). With the enduring disempowerment of the working class (youth, who is dependent from parental care for a longer time than the generation before) the 'social question' and populism not only returns but becomes more and more problematic up to the recently observed fear of the «dangerous class» (Standing 2011) or the decrease of the middle-class.

Because it is our aim to highlight the experiences and conditions of (precarious) work in established and outsider youth in selected European countries in the 1980s and 2000s by comparing and testing Elias's shock-thesis (Goodwin, O'Connor 2006; Furlong, Goodwin et al. 2017) and other long-term youth studies, we search for phenomenon that remained the same, and for those that have changed in terms of adulthood and identity formation. We want to show in what ways, for example, the experiences and work commitment of unemployed insecure and vulnerable 18-25 year-olds have changed between two key periods of economic instability in Germany (and the continental region), UK (Anglo-Saxon region) and south European countries (Spain, Italy or Greece). We, in contrast and comparison, look for the typical, common experience of the younger generation to the former generations and how the cohort effects look like.

In a German evaluation project from 2007 (which serves as a contrast for leaving instead of entering the labour market), we made semi-standardized interviews with 15 long-term elder unemployed (between 30 and 53 years old) and 18 participatory observations with 90 unemployed in social-welfare-oriented companies. Here we found a multitude of interesting diverse results: Losing the job is still experienced as a highly significant interruption, to a certain extent, as a 'shock' and as a step down on the 'social ladder'. Thus, it is comparable to quaternary socialisation (i.e. leaving labour market via retirement) as a crisis, an effort of new orientation. Nearly all of the interviewed unemployed have a high or very high work commitment with an orientation towards traditional permanent occupation. Only some of the younger unemployed (circa 30 years old) claim that they lead a bohemian way of life, others see the constructive or destructive pressure of the new activating state. As many of them have low or no qualifications, the rhetoric of 'support and demand' promotes a paradoxical view in the context of a simultaneous pedagogisation and economisation of labour-market policy. We found indications for increased as well as decreased work ethics, but the moral imperative towards more hard working self-entrepreneurs is growing. Therefore, nowadays labour-market policy creates an enduring ambivalence of authoritarian-activating character via measuring employability (Ernst, Pokora 2009:

42). Of course, this ambivalence has an impact on the youth of today: for (probably most male) students as well as for low-qualified young adults. They experience this as a rollback in that way that adolescence, dependence and transition problems are becoming more protracted. Besides life logging and other life style and consumer phenomenon, for some of them the traditional work ethics such as like self-discipline, ambition and social participation have lost their attraction in favour of peer group acceptance in decoupled milieus (Castel 2000).

Against this backdrop our mixed-methods consist of secondary analysis of contemporary and historical data; national and EU-Household Panel Surveys, biographical interviews and stories (AGIS, GESIS; Cornelißen et al. 2002, Hilmert, Mayer 2004) and own pilot studies (Ernst 2009, 2010). Labour market institutions, policies, structural similarities/differences in processes of adolescence, education and qualification system, income, consumer style, family background and demographical change, entry to employment, experiences of (un)employment, class, ethnicity, gender, locality, educational experiences and attainment are the transition factors that have at least also to be taken into account.

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