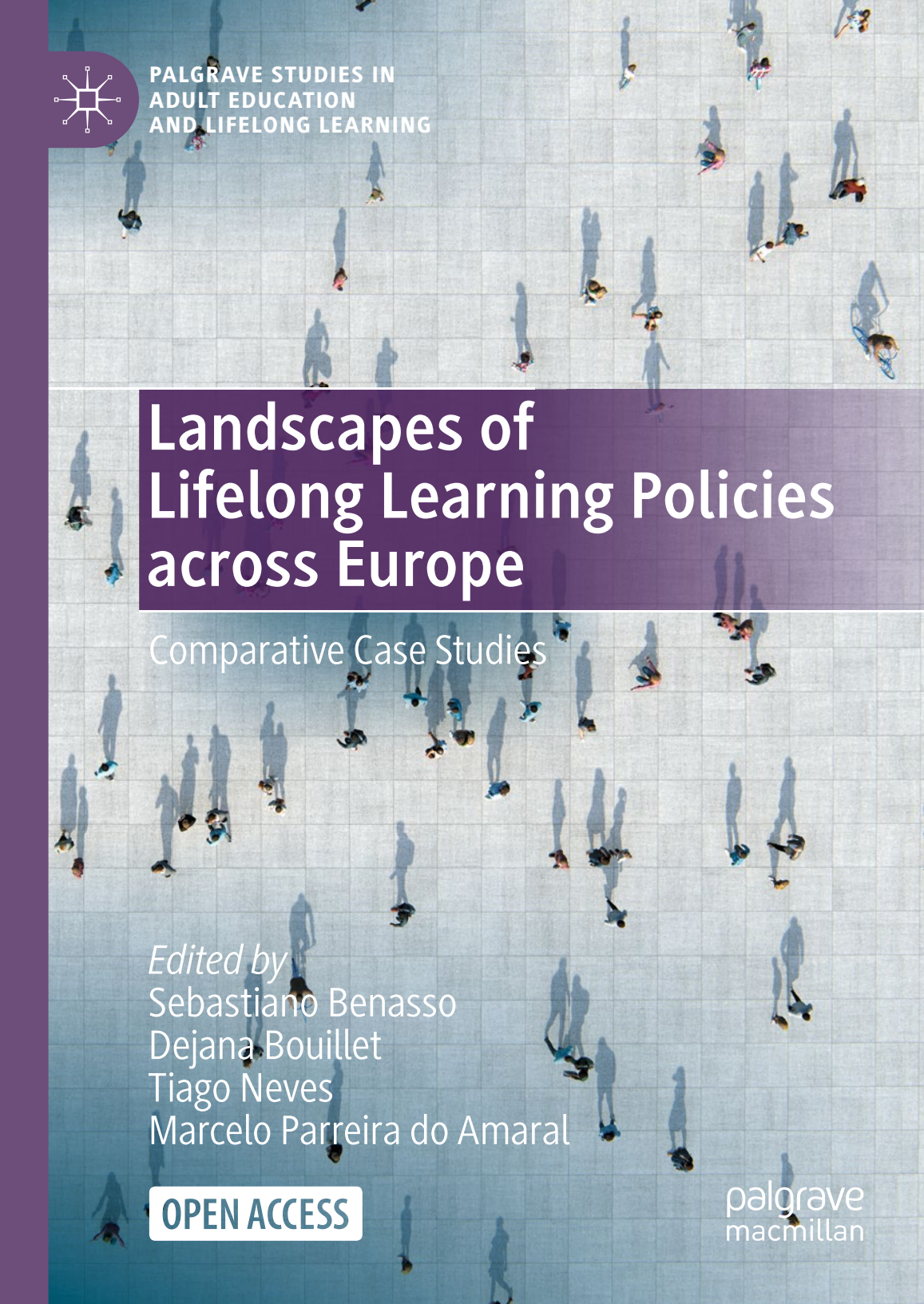
PALGRAVE STUDIES IN
ADULT EDUCATION
AND LIFELONG LEARNING
Landscapes of
Lifelong Learning Policies
across Europe
Comparative Case Studies
Edited by
Sebastiano Benasso
Dejana Bouillet
Tiago Neves
Marcelo Parreira do Amaral
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This book is dedicated to young people across Europe. Constituting roughly a third of the overall population in the continent, young generations across Europe face widely divergent realities along their lives. They are viewed as the most valuable resource in a greying society, promising a future of wealth and inclusion. At the same time, these parts of the population are most affected by adverse situations, impacting heavily on their ability to make self-directed choices and pursue their own life plans. Indeed, a substantial portion of young people in European member states struggle to develop their biographical trajectories and this is exacerbated during crisis-ridden times of uncertainty and precarity.

In particular, we would like to dedicate this book to those young adults whom we encountered during fieldwork and who gave us their time narrating their experience in participating in Lifelong Learning polices. We are deeply indebted to them as their contributions have enriched our understanding of the topic and opened invaluable lines of research.

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The empirical foundation of this book draws on the materials collected during the project lifetime. The analyses conducted in the different chapters of this volume are original and have been produced for this publication.

The editors owe a special thanks to one of the most relevant "outputs" of the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, namely the Network *Research on Youth Opportunities and Transitions*, or RYOT for short. The network was founded by early career researchers participating in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project to foster collaboration and share opportunities and strategies to cope with uncertainties typically faced by young researchers.

We invite readers to visit the network website for more information: http://ryot-network.eu/.

Finally, we are grateful to Dr Matteo Botto for his thorough work on the editing of this book.

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Abbreviations

ACAR	Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Region in Scotland
AT	Austria
CIE	Comparative and International Education
CCS	Comparative Cases Study
CPE	Cultural Political Economy
DE	Germany
DYW	Developing Young Workforce
ESF	European Social Fund
ESL	Early School Leavers
FBP	Foreign-Born Parents
FI	Finland
FR	Functional Region
GOV	Governance Perspective
HCT	Human Capital Theory
HR	Croatia
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IT	Italy
JPO	Youth for Occupation Programme
LCR	Life Course Research
LLL	Lifelong Learning
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
PT	Portugal
SOC	Catalan Employment Service

SP	Spain
UK	United Kingdom
VdA	Vale do Ave Region in Portugal
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBL	Work-based Learning
YG	Youth Guarantee

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1

Introduction: Exploring Landscapes of Lifelong Learning Policies across Europe

Sebastiano Benasso, Dejana Bouillet, Tiago Neves, and Marcelo Parreira do Amaral

1.1 Lifelong Learning Policies for Young Adults

Lifelong learning (LLL) as a concept developed amidst long and rich debates that emphasised different connections from early childhood to adult learning and stressed the universal right to education. "Learning to

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be" was seen as a lifelong process along the life course. From this point of view, policies were to be organised along the principle of a humanistic, rights-based and holistic view of education. More recently, however, the political focus on LLL has shifted to labour market security and economic competitiveness and a stronger orientation towards human capital and employability became central to policies implementing European strategies. With this, the meanings of the concept of LLL have thus changed considerably since it was first introduced in the 1960s. While the early "maximalist" perspective on LLL (see Wain, 2001) considered the whole of society to be a learning resource for each individual, considering the wider cultural, social, and political context and conditions under which education and learning take place, the 1970s witnessed a narrowing of the concept and the first move towards a more "functionalist" view of LLL in relation to the labour market. In this narrower and more instrumentalist discourse, the concept of LLL is linked with further training, professional development and economic growth. The importance of LLL as preparation for the needs of the labour market gained more ground during the 1990s, when social problems such as low employability, unemployment and social exclusion were increasingly explained with reference to a mismatch between competences acquired in schools and the competences demanded by a fast-changing economy (Walker, 2012). In an increasingly complex world, with a rapidly changing economy, LLL plays a crucial role in preparing a workforce that is able to adapt to the ever-changing demands of the economy (Rizvi, 2007).

Alongside this shift in the meaning of LLL, special attention has been devoted to supporting young people to become and remain employable by means of education and/or labour market policies, that—despite different logics of intervention: prevention, compensation, activation, and empowerment—to a large extent focus on solutions to a problem that is commonly attributed to young peoples' dispositions, competencies and aspirations (see Parreira do Amaral & Zelinka, 2019). This points to a

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clear mismatch between structural problem-perceptions and individual problem-solution. That is, although the majority of the policymakers realise the structural difficulties that young adults are exposed to, they nonetheless oftentimes devise policy solutions grounded on individual interventions. This potentially further opens up the cleavage between young adults' possibilities and their chances to achieve the socially and culturally created and expected outcomes, reinforcing inequalities and oftentimes leading them to frustration and/or disinterest.

Moreover, the analyses in this book depart from the assumption that young adults are not passive recipients of LLL policies across the places analysed. On the contrary, although some people express how they struggle to build their own life course in extremely uncertain circumstances, others are quite assertive about their life projects and openly criticise the constraints they face. While in most places young people have internalised a discourse of self-responsibility and achieving autonomy through labour market inclusion, still they attribute different meanings to their involvement and place it within a much wider framework of life strategies. Against this background, this volume sets out to explore the different landscapes of LLL across Europe by shifting attention to the widely divergent realities in which young people pursue their life plans and in which LLL policies are implemented—in other words, we shift attention to different places and spaces. It also attends to the varying pathways made possible and used by young people. Not least, the discussions in the different chapters in this volume are attentive to issues of social and spatial justice.

The following section will introduce these ideas, both framing the research conceptually and highlighting the issues dealt with in the collection.

1.2 Landscapes, Pathways, Young People and Social Justice

This section presents and discusses the main concepts and ideas drawn from in framing the research: "landscapes" refer here to the different places and spaces under examination, the diverging pathways that open up or narrow down opportunities for young people, and not least mark

a concern with social and spatial justice imbued in the discussions throughout the book. By adopting these concepts, our aim is to address a shortcoming of more traditional approaches to policy analysis when applied to the field of Lifelong Learning. In our view, it is a necessity to tackle the dynamics which unfold in the domain of LLL policies by taking into consideration their processual nature, the interplay between structural and cultural dimensions on different levels (from international to regional/local), and the negotiations among the actors who, from very different positions and with varying power differentials, interact around the policies. This multidimensional view of the LLL policies makes their analysis resemble the exploration of a landscape consisting of physical/geographical features (height of mountains, length of rivers, the breadth of the plains), but also of paved (or dirt) roads and trails used to journey across it, including the barriers, cliffs or impassable tracks. Not least, it also involves considering people's perception(s) of the landscape as an agreeable, challenging or even menacing environment, if they see themselves as travelling alone or with others, since this will also impact on how they move in it. The following sections deal with these concepts in turn.

Focusing on landscapes entails understanding spaces as dynamic products of social relations which can be analysed by different, complementary, perspectives. As argued by Doreen Massey in her critical approach to geography, the space is much more than "a flat, immobilized surface" (Massey, 1994: 4). Instead,

> the spatial […] can be seen as constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales, from the global reach of finance and telecommunications, through the geography of the tentacles of national political power, to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household and the workplace. It is a way of thinking in terms of the ever-shifting geometry of social/power relations, and it forces into view the real multiplicities of space-time notion of space. (Massey, 1994: 4)

Likewise, the exploration of the LLL landscapes goes far beyond the one-dimensional evaluation of the capacity of the policies to meet the expected outcomes as reported on official documents. It aims to grasp the

interplay of material and immaterial factors in the processes of LLL policymaking and delivering, by taking into consideration how their unfolding is always shaped by their specific context and by the social relations among the actors involved.

Metaphorically locating them in an urban space, the LLL landscapes may also help us represent the different pathways to the city-centre—the main space of productivity, where employability is often the most exchanged and valued currency. Notably, this representation resonates with the targeting logic of the currently most relevant educational labour policy for youths at the European level: the Youth Guarantee scheme, which profiles its recipients exactly on the basis of the operationalisation of their "distance" to the labour market.

The LLL pathways can be explored by paying attention to their organisation, considering how they are structured by different national welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and transition (Walther, 2006) regimes, as well as by local governance patterns. Moreover, the focus can be placed on the regulation of the access to the LLL routes, and the underlying rules for their usage, which are affected by the ideological dominant conceptions of what should be the "right" goal pursued in passing through them. The interplay of these factors produces different LLL pathways and possibilities of movement within them, depending on the prevalence of understanding LLL policies as a support for personal empowerment or as a tool for economic growth. The latter kind of routes are structured aiming to reduce the distance between the peripheries and the city-centre in the fastest possible way, intervening throughout the itinerary on the deficits attributed to their users, so as to adjust their profiles to the standards of the city-centre. The former provides longer and less targeted paths, designed to favour the experiences of the pedestrians rather than swiftly bringing them to a destination. In brief, according to the dominant conceptions of the overall meaning of the LLL policies in a local context, we can observe different prevailing models of LLL pathways: less standardisable and experience-oriented routes, where the transition is more relevant than the arrival, shortcuts towards the access to the city-centre are possible, and the goal coincides with an integration in the labour market as sustainable as possible.

Yet, if the LLL pathways are socially constructed landscapes, their exploration cannot stop at the reading of the roadmap, as it must also consider how different people experience their crossings, the relations build while passing through these experiences, and the ways in which these movements impact the more general direction of their biographical trajectories. Considering that people usually access the LLL pathways as a more or less focused attempt to get closer to the centre, to better understand their motivations and expectations we need to firstly pay attention to the varying distances they depart form. Since the LLL policies addressed in this book are mainly targeted to young adults in diverse conditions of vulnerability, most of them move from deprived outskirts, where they have often amassed negative experiences of relation with the local representatives of institutions (especially within the education system), and can usually rely on limited amounts of economic, cultural and social capital. Previous analysis of the living conditions of young adults in many European countries has shed light on these aspects (see Scandurra et al., 2020). According to variable intersections of disadvantages affecting the youths coming from the suburbs, the journey into the LLL pathways might further discriminate those who are sufficiently equipped to support and make sense of their movement towards the centre, finding in the LLL policies opportunities for integration, from those who struggle to recognise their own goal, risking to get lost in a loop of movement with no clear (and often neither aspired) direction.

However, the inequalities faced by these youths are not only a matter of low individual resources, as they also deal with a more general trend towards the "peripheralization" (Naumann & Fischer-Tahir, 2013) of youths in many European countries. As some studies have shown (see Woodman, 2020), the intergenerational imbalance in terms of economic and political power to the detriment of the younger generation is visible in many fields of social life. On this point, we may, for instance, consider that the research conducted in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project on the processes of policy-making has highlighted that the engagement of youths' organisations and voices is very weak, and often totally absent, even when the policies are explicitly designed to target them (see Parreira do Amaral et al. 2020).

The symbolical overlap between the distance from a centre and the social and structural disadvantage finds its actualisation in the perspective

of spatial justice, as framed by critical studies. Departing from the concept of the "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1968), scholars such as Harvey (2006) and Soja (2010) prompt us to question how social (in)justice materialises in the spatial organisation of the city, reproducing inequalities through spatial segregation, unequal distribution of resources, and geographically uneven systems of opportunities. As Soja (2010) argues, in the wake of the so-called spatial turn—which stems from critical geography—a critical spatial thinking is fostered in current societies by a new spatial consciousness and the acknowledgment of the related conditions of injustice.

> The new spatial consciousness [makes us] aware that the geographies in which we live can intensify and sustain our exploitation as workers, support oppressive forms of cultural and political domination based on race, gender, and nationality, and aggravate all forms of discrimination and injustice. Without this recognition, space is little more than a background complication (Soja, 2010: 19).

As described by Soja for the case of Los Angeles, this new consciousness paves the way for bottom-up movements claiming for a compensation of the spatial inequalities produced by the capitalist and neoliberal organisation of today's cities.

Returning to the imagery of LLL pathways as connections between peripheries and the city-centre, how can we identify "claims" for spatial justice in this context? In addressing this question, we first want to clarify that we do not mean to produce a naïve depiction of "heroic youths" struggling for justice through participation in LLL policies, as we acknowledge the influence of power imbalances within this field, as well as reasons for instrumental participation. Furthermore, the analyses presented in this book clearly show that the possibility to exert agency in this context is profoundly affected, on the one hand, by the availability of individual resources, and on the other by the more or less rigid structuration of LLL pathways (see Chap. 2, in this volume, for a discussion of opportunity structures). The negotiation of spatial justice in this context may be sought at a micro-subjective level, and it coincides with the possibility of constructing subjective meaning attached to the movement

towards the city-centre. The agentic capacity of the LLL policies' addressees is visible in their sense-making of the aims of the policies they have accessed, which can enable them to reframe their participation as a support for their life course management. Again, the leeway for applying agentic capacity certainly depends strongly on the nature of the diverse policies, as the variable focus on individual deficit or empowerment affects the scope for addressees' "customisation". Yet, it also depends on the kind of relations built on a micro-level throughout the pathway, and we find in this space a privileged perspective from which to observe youths' agency in making sense of the reachable opportunities that not necessarily overlap with the ones determined by the institutions and discourses surrounding them.

Therefore, to understand how LLL policies work in their contexts of implementation, we need to overcome the mainstream monolithic representation of youth recipients as passive subjects, which flattens them out as a homogenous group on the basis of an imputed lack of employability. Instead, we suggest exploring the spaces of re-subjectivation and personal empowerment "crafted" by the young addressees of the LLL policies by means of their relations with the actors they have met in their trajectories within the policies. One the main challenges of this book is thus to show heterogeneity within these groups "on the move" and their different reactions to the opportunity structures available to them.

1.3 Exploring Landscapes of LLL

The governance of individual life trajectories in times of markets' instability, hyper-flexibilization of professional careers and educational inflation is a common problem for many today's young adults. Yet, they unfold their "biographical work" (Chamberlayne et al., 2000) dealing with very heterogeneous contexts in terms of structural and cultural features across Europe. Indeed, in different EU member states, young people have different living conditions and they are faced with a wide variety of institutional and structural settings. The interplay between education systems, labour markets, skills ecologies, welfare regimes, governance models and cultures occurs at different levels, resulting in different contextual

opportunity structures. In constructing their life plans, choices and the very subjective understanding of the notion of opportunity, the young adults interact and negotiate with these variable combinations, developing different strategies of action.

Against the background of this heterogeneity, a continuity in the institutional response in many EU countries is visible in the promotion of LLL policies as pathways towards opportunities. The overarching idea is that policies supporting education-to-work transitions play a pivotal role in compensating the uneven distribution of opportunities for labour market integration—or, alternatively, for personal empowerment. Yet again, the variability of the contextual features produces a fragmentation and diversification of the LLL policies spread across Europe, which must prove successful in quite different settings while catering for the needs and interests of highly diverse target groups. Diverse landscapes of LLL policies are thus shaped by multiple factors, and the analyses presented in this book aim to show their variation and highlight relevant features.

Furthermore, particular attention is devoted to showing how the LLL landscapes impact differently on the opportunity structures available to young adults. Due to the different orientations, goals and time horizons of the policies, contrasting and potentially adverse effects for beneficiaries may indeed arise, reducing rather than increasing their opportunities.

Our exploration is inspired by the concept of opportunity structure, here applied to the analysis of the complex interrelationships captured by the focus on unique landscapes of LLL policymaking and implementation (see Chap. 2, in this volume). Departing from Dale and Parreira do Amaral's (2015) distinction between discursive and institutional structures of opportunity, our research integrates a third component focusing on the micro-relational level, to enable the analysis of the consequences of the actor's different interaction patterns in the LLL landscapes.

The multidimensionality of the LLL landscapes requires a research design to capture the multi-layered nature of the phenomena at hand. For this reason, the chapters in this volume adopted a case-based methodology that does not simply assume the "cases to be "naturally" existing phenomena to be "discovered", but rather as constructs resulting from a multi-method, multi-level approach aimed at showing the dynamic interrelations of LLL policies and their contexts (see Chap. 3, in this volume).

1.4 Sources of Empirical Evidence

The empirical foundation of this work lays on the research materials collected throughout the European research project "YOUNG_ADULLLT—Policies Supporting Young People in their Life Course. A Comparative Perspective of Lifelong Learning and Inclusion in Education and Work in Europe". The project, carried out between 2016 and 2019, was designed as a mixed-method comparative study focused on LLL policies for young adults, and particularly for those in "vulnerable" positions, with the aim to critically analyse current developments of LLL policies in Europe. It was carried out in nine European countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Italy, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

The research carried out in the YOUNG ADULLLT project was designed as a multi-level and multi-methods study structured along three main theoretical perspectives: Life Course Research (LCR), Cultural Political Economy (CPE) and Governance research (GOV). To "feed" these research lines, a variety of empirical materials was collected by the project partners.

First, macro-quantitative data were gathered by querying (at the Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (NUTS) 2 level) international databases such as Eurostat, OECD, EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) and EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) to observe the main structural features and the living conditions of the young adults in their local contexts. Referring to a ten-year period (2005–2016) and focusing on the 18–29 age group, the dimension of living conditions was operationalized by means of a set of indicators including: economics (based on GDP per inhabitant; R&D expenditure; researchers in all sectors; motorways railways); demography (based on old dependency ratio; median age of the population); education and training (based on data concerning students in tertiary education; participation in education; early school leavers; NEET; lower education; upper secondary education; tertiary education); labour market (based on data concerning employment; youth employment; employment since attainment of the highest education; weekly hours in main job); material conditions (based on disposable income; risk of poverty or social exclusion; severe material deprivation); health (based on life expectancy and infant mortality).

Furthermore, a mapping and critical analysis of policy documents of the most relevant LLL policies in the countries involved in the project Consortium were carried out. Given the manifold nature of the aims and actions fostered by LLL policies across Europe, the documents collected and analysed (N=129) included policies regulating the fields of education, labour market, social inclusion and youth at the regional and national levels.

Through semi-structured qualitative interviews (N=121) targeted at managers and street level professionals involved in LLL processes, different understandings of the role played by LLL policies in supporting their addressees' life transition were observed, and data about the main (material and immaterial) factors affecting their implementation were collected. This line of work was complemented by 81 semi-structured interviews to LLL policymakers and relevant stakeholders at the regional and national level, whose narratives allowed to reconstruct the mechanisms operating in the local systems of regulation regarding the match between skills' demand and supply.

Biographical interviews (N=164) with young adults participating in the LLL policies were also carried out. The non-directive approach used in these interviews enabled the interviewees to provide detailed accounts of their life trajectories, plans and projections for the future, devoting particular attention to the moment (and related aims and expectations) where their biographies met the LLL policies.

Finally, the research findings were discussed and shared in Policy Roundtables (N=20) with diverse stakeholders (N=206) in every functional region studied.

The analysis of these different research materials served to produce a wide range of national and international research reports and was finally integrated through the development of case studies (N=18). In the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, the case studies enabled the combination of different empirical materials, analytical entry-points and theoretical perspectives. Through their comparative analysis, different patterns of policymaking in LLL were framed, based on their modes of operation at a local level. The case studies presented in this book draw on the same "raw" empirical materials and follow the same rationale for their building yet shift the analytical focus to fit the research questions that have prompted this work.

1.5 Overview of the Chapters

This edited collection is organised in three parts. Part I focuses on the conceptual and methodological discussions of the research. Part II presents six chapters that bring a variety of comparative case studies of LLL landscapes. Finally, Part III provides a chapter that summarises and discusses the main insights and lessons from the case studies and discuss the challenges of governing the life course in multi-level landscapes of LLL.

The first part includes Chap. 2, written by Sebastiano Benasso, Ruggero Cefalo and Jenni Tikkanen. It introduces the readers to the conceptual lenses adopted in the chapters of this volume. The authors provide an overview of the life course research, Cultural Political Economy and governance perspectives through the integration of the case studies analysed in this book. Further, different epistemological framings of the concept of opportunity structure are discussed, introducing a potentially "new" dimension, that of the relational opportunity structure, which aims to complement the analysis based on the more established approaches of the discursive and institutional opportunity structures.

The first section of the book closes with Chap. 3: "Comparative case studies" by Marcelo Parreira do Amaral. He discusses the methodological basis of case-based research, also highlighting the methodological requirements of examining LLL landscapes. The chapter offers a discussion of recent developments in comparative scholarship to provide insights into the issues at stake and to suggest a heuristic approach to the comparative cases studies in the chapters in Part II.

Part II of the book presents comparative case studies. As further detailed in Chap. 2, the six empirical chapters share a common theoretical framework, yet they devote attention to different dimensions. Specifically, Chapters 4 and 5 tackle the topic of LLL policy participation mostly drawing on the biographical interviews to young adults.

In Chap. 4 Valeria Pandolfini, Borislava Pektova and Thomas Verlage build three case studies by following the trajectories of young adults accessing LLL policies in Italy, Bulgaria and Germany. The core of the chapter is the analysis of the relation between the addressees' life plans, aspirations and visions of the future and the systems of opportunities

they have met through the mediation of LLL policies. Particular attention is devoted to the impact of the relational dimension in shaping the meanings attached to the experiences of participation.

The six case studies constructed around LLL policies in Finland, Spain and Scotland by Jenni Tikkanen, Judith Jacovkis and Ellen Vanderhoven in Chap. 5 are analysed comparatively to frame different styles of participation among their beneficiaries. Integrating the data from the biographical interviews with young addressees with the views of the professionals involved in policy delivering, the authors look at the negotiations of the meanings and the aims of policy participation to observe different uses of youths' agentic capacity in relation to different cultural and institutional contexts.

The main focus of Chaps. 6 and 7 is on the cultural dimensions resonating in and shaping the processes of policymaking and delivery.

In Chap. 6, Queralt Capsada-Munsech, Ralph Chan, Jenni Tikkanen and Oscar Valiente analyse the influence of institutional, economic-material and discursive opportunity structures on the aims of LLL policies, as a pivotal dimension shaping the impact of participation on the beneficiaries' life trajectories. The comparative analysis devotes particular attention to the relation between national regulations and the local implementation of the policies, focusing on the translation of national skill formation regimes in LLL policies interacting with local skill ecologies.

Chapter 7, by Jozef Zelinka, Ana Bela Ribeiro and Monika Pažur, explores how the underlying cultural assumptions in LLL policies can foster the production of vulnerable and dependent subjects. Drawing on case studies from Germany, Portugal and Croatia, the Foucauldian notion of subjectivation is applied to highlight how power relations are mediated through LLL policies, although with different impacts related to different local institutional settings.

The governance patterns applied in the implementation of LLL policies are at the core of the comparative case study analysis delivered by Chaps. 8 and 9.

In Chap. 8, Domingo Barroso-Hurtado, Monika Pažur, Ana Bela Ribeiro analyse case studies built around LLL policies in Spain, Croatia and Portugal. These share a common orientation towards the

improvement of their addressees' employability. The chapter provides a reflection on the how diverse governance patterns are applied in relation to different contextual features to pursue a common aim.

By focusing on the governance patterns in VET systems in Chap. 9, Ruggero Cefalo, Mariana Rodrigues and Rosario Scandurra apply the perspective of institutional opportunity structures to show how variable governance solutions shape the youths' access to opportunities for integration in the local labour market.

Part III of the Volume consists in a chapter that offers conclusions and reflects on the challenges of governing life courses through LLL.

Chapter 10, by Marcelo Parreira do Amaral, Sebastiano Benasso, Tiago Neves and Dejana Bouillet, draws together insights generated by the comparative case studies and revisits the themes dealt with in view of the theoretical framework adopted. Here, questions regarding the meaning and relevance of the discussions for life course research and opportunity structures for young people are dealt with in an attempt to move forward from cases to lessons.

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Part I

Conceiving of and Researching Landscapes of Lifelong Learning Policies

2

Landscapes of Lifelong Learning Policies Across Europe: Conceptual Lenses

Sebastiano Benasso, Ruggero Cefalo, and Jenni Tikkanen

Across Europe, the structural and cultural changes which are long-term effects of the neoliberalisation processes (Jessop, 2018), make education systems and local labour markets challenging "environments" to stay in. Within the paradigm of the human capital (Dardot & Laval, 2014), the volatility of markets' needs entails a constant work of adjustment for individuals, who are responsible for the synchronisation of their educational and professional profiles through strategies of self-entrepreneurship. The accountability for making and dealing with professional and

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educational choices is ascribed primarily to individuals, who make these choices and shape their life trajectories according to different types and amounts of resources they have at their disposal. Thus, the consequences of social inequalities and disadvantages on young peoples' lives are significant, particularly as young adults—amid their school-to-work and other life transitions—are among groups who deal with the hardest challenges in today's societies (Hamilton et al., 2014; Ilmakunnas, 2019).

Long lasting processes, such as the inflation of education and the decline of young adults' labour market conditions (both in terms of access and permanence), together with the more recent impact of the Great Recession (e.g., Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Sironi, 2018) have increased the distance between those youths who are socially and culturally well-equipped to manage their own trajectories, and those who struggle to achieve autonomy and fulfilling work and life conditions. Lifelong learning (LLL) policies targeting young adults are promoted in many European countries to tackle this issue in order to promote social inclusion—but simultaneously to facilitate economic growth. These policy interventions vary substantially regarding policy aims, intervention sectors, design levels, and target groups. Furthermore, LLL policymaking is extremely context specific, as previous research has pointed out (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020). Examination of regional-level functional and structural relationships has shown that LLL policies interact with sedimented economic and socio-cultural arrangements, thereby producing specific impacts on young people's opportunities and constraints.

Given the potentially non-converging overall aims of the LLL policies, namely economic growth and social inclusion, the analysis of their dynamics, which unfold at different structural, cultural, and micro-relational levels, enables exploring the effects that policies and discourses have on shaping of individuals' life trajectories within specific contexts. To disentangle the interplay among those different levels, the analyses of the case studies presented in this book draw on three main perspectives. First, Life Course Research approach (LCR) (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003) enables considering how biographies, here understood as product of a subjective meaning making concerning one's individual life course (Stauber & Ule, 2015), result from the interplay of manifold factors. They include subjective choices, resources, and embeddedness in

institutional macro-social frames (such as the labour market, welfare and education programmes), as well as in more intangible frames like social inequality, systems of relations, and age norms (Settersen Jr., 2003). The second theoretical lens is the Cultural Political Economy perspective (CPE) (Jessop, 2004; Sum & Jessop, 2013), which highlights the relevance of the cultural dimension for understanding and analysing multilayered social formations, such as LLL policies. It places a specific focus on the relationship between the discourses reproduced by policies and the construction of subjectivities and imaginaries. Lastly, the Governance perspective (GOV) (Ball & Junemann, 2012) calls attention to important shifts in visions and preferred concepts in the political field. Furthermore, it helps to address coordination issues among agents within the State, the economy, the labour market, and civil society at different scalar levels (Kazepov, 2010). Although such perspectives have informed all the case studies presented in this volume, the second part devotes particular focus to LCR (see Chaps. 4 and 5), CPE (Chaps. 6 and 7) and GOV (Chaps. 8 and 9).

In this chapter, we elaborate also on the dimension of opportunity structures, which in their institutional and discursive components emerge from the analyses of the case studies. Drawing on a rich vein of studies that opened the debate about the notions of "life chance" (Weber, 1946; Dahrendorf, 1979) and "opportunity" (Merton, 1968), we can place the concept of opportunity structure in relation to the visions and patterns of action applicable in response to culturally framed problems. Furthermore, we take into particular consideration how recent research (Koopmans et al., 2005; Roberts, 2009; Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015) has problematized the dimensions of discursive and institutional opportunity structures. Discursive opportunity structures shape public discourses circulating at different levels (from international to national, from mainstream to common sense) and determine what a problem is and how to deal with it. Institutional opportunity structures organise the implementation patterns and modes of action according to specific structural features at the national level, contextualising and actualising the discursive opportunity structures in relation to local systems.

Moreover, a third, relational component of opportunity structures has caught our attention due to the observed relevance of the processes of

negotiation of aims, strategies, and solutions among the actors involved in the field of LLL policies. Such processes address the grey area between structure and agency, objective and subjective elements in the theorisation on opportunity structures, and they impact the meanings attached to the participation in LLL policies by the different actors participating in the field. Thus, we seek to pave the way for further research on the relational components of opportunity structures. We do so by introducing the concept of relational opportunity structure, which highlights the structure of interactions whereby people negotiate the meaning of the LLL policies they enter (or reject), framing them as opportunities (or not). The dimension of relational opportunity structure helps emphasising the active character of the subject, whereas discursive and institutional opportunity structures mainly look at structuring agents and their impact on individuals' possibilities of choice. When applied to the analysis of case studies, the relational opportunity structure perspective enables exploring the effects of the multi-faceted intersection between individual biographies and LLL policies.

The following sections will present the main theoretical perspectives applied in the analyses of the case studies, as well as the reconstruction of relevant stages of the debate about opportunity structure. Finally, the relational opportunity structure is introduced as a new direction to be explored by further research.

2.1 The Three Main Theoretical Perspective Applied in the Case Studies Analysis

2.1.1 Life Course Research

The normative patters and pathways of age-proper behaviour and transition sequences that people tend to follow in their lives are typically institutionalised through the regulation of the welfare state and its institutions (Kok, 2007). The concept of life course refers to this institutionalised construction of culturally defined patterns of lives (see Stauber & Ule, 2015). In sociological research, the concept of life course has been defined

in various ways and with varying degrees of complexity from "people's movements through social space" (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016, p. 31) to "a temporal pattern of age-graded events and roles that chart the social contours of biography, providing a proximal content for the dynamics of human development from conception and birth to death" (Elder et al., 2015, p. 6). Particularly central to the concept is that individuals' life courses are multidimensional as they develop in different mutually related and influencing life domains (Mayer, 2004) that correspond to functionally differentiated spheres of modern societies (Heinz et al., 2009a). With regard to policies related to the different societal institutions, such as education and training, it is important to recognise that they represent public interventions aiming to bring about preferred visions of individuals' personal and social development (Walther, 2011; Heinz et al., 2009b), which relate to a desired "normal" life course in the society.

As a result of the profound changes that have taken place in Western societies in the last decades, life courses have become less similar and the domination of specific types of life courses has become weaker. This process is often referred to as de-standardisation of life courses (Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007), which has been noted in several studies (see Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Eurofound, 2014). Indeed, the view that life courses have become less predictable, less stable, and less collectively determined and, hence, increasingly flexible and individualised, has become widely accepted (Brückner & Mayer, 2005). The different transitions related to progressing from youth to adulthood have become more prolonged and non-linear, and the challenges young people face in constructing their life courses are unprecedentedly demanding, as they must navigate in an increasingly complex, insecure, and globalised world (see Tikkanen, 2019). Thus, the course and the sequence of the life course phases cannot be taken for granted in today's societies (Parreira do Amaral, 2020).

Life course research (e.g., Elder et al., 2003; Meyer, 2009; Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003) has no explicit and encompassing theory as such (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016). Thus, the life course approach or perspective should be rather viewed as a heuristic tool for studying how individual lives result not only from subjective choices and individual resources but also from their embeddedness in institutional macro-social frames. The latter include, for example, the labour market, education, and the welfare mix,

but also more intangible frames such as social inequality (Mayer, 2004) What follows is that the life course approach enables analysing the ways in which individual lives are affected by macro-level societal conditions and changes, and how different institutions have a filtering role in the way these changes impact individual opportunities, constraints, and decision-making (Kok, 2007; Mills, 2007). The usefulness of the life course approach in studying young people's lives derives from the logical framework it offers for analysing their perceptions, expectations, and abilities to create subjective meaning and continuity along the different phases, domains, and spheres of their life courses. It also enables taking into account the vastly diverse living conditions of young people across European societies in these analyses (Parreira do Amaral, 2020).

2.1.2 Cultural Political Economy

At the heart of the Cultural Political Economy perspective (Jessop, 2004; Sum & Jessop, 2013) is "the analysis of the articulation between the economic and the political and their embedding in broader sets of social relations" (Jessop, 2010, p. 337). Through its multidisciplinary approach, the CPE perspective fosters critical readings of the political economic sphere. By drawing on a range of disciplines (e.g., economics, political science, and sociology) CPE tackles the complexity of multi-layered social formations, such as LLL policies, considering the concurrent processes of "culturalization" of the economics and "economisation" of the cultural (Biebuyck & Meltzer, 2017). The distinction between material and cultural dimensions, which has informed different traditions of research in political economy, is overcome by CPE, as it looks at the interplay between the discursive and cultural components intervening in the political field and the material elements of social life shaped by the economic dimension. In this view, the impact of the neoliberal turn on both sides of social structure and hegemonic discourses can be questioned through analysing policies as social formations embedded in cultural contexts and broad sets of social relations, which reflect selective interpretations of problems, their causes, and preferred solutions (Rinne et al., 2020). Hence, CPE puts a strong focus on the "study of policy discourses, economic and political imaginaries, their translation into hegemonic

strategies and projects, and their institutionalisation into specific structures and practices" (Parreira do Amaral, 2020, p. 6 f.).

Resonating with dominant discourses, such as the push towards self-entrepreneurship in neoliberal societies, policies convey imaginaries about what is generally understood as relevant (e.g., achieving greater employability through "adjusting" the individual profiles to the market needs) and feasible (for instance, pursuing the synchronisation between individual profiles and market through participation in LLL policies) in different economic systems. Policies tend to consistently promote specific practices as best ways for actualising problems and solutions framed as relevant in the hegemonic discourses. At the same time, the establishment of dominant understandings, meanings, and sets of practices by policymaking hinders the development and circulation of alternative views and related solutions. To explore these dynamics, the CPE perspective considers both material and semiotic factors informing the policymaking processes through mechanisms of variation, selection, and retention.

> A thorough CPE analysis would include the role of extra-semiotic (material) as well as semiotic factors in the contingent emergence (variation), subsequent privileging (selection), and ongoing realization (retention) of specific discursive and material practices. (Jessop, 2010, p. 340)

The variation occurs when narratives about "new" problems emerge at mainstream level pushing aside the current policymaking patterns to provide new solutions. To do so, policymakers need to select among the potential interpretations of such problems and to choose the solutions among the ones shaped by the political economy structures and the prevailing ideological orientations of their context. Once the new solutions are assimilated into stable regulatory frameworks, the retention phase consists of the institutionalisation of new policies.

Given its attention for both the culturally shaped processes of meaning making and the results of the interplay between discursive and material elements of social life, the CPE perspective fits the overall purposes of the analysis presented in this book, which aims to tackle LLL policies as multidimensional and multilevel "landscapes" where subjective, cultural, and structural factors intertwine.

2.1.3 Governance Perspective

According to Levi-Faur (2012), the concept of governance has at least four meanings in the research literature. Governance as a structure denotes the structures of formal and informal institutions. As a mechanism, governance refers to institutional procedures of decision-making. Governance can also be viewed as a process signifying the dynamics and steering functions involved in policymaking processes. For example, Le Galès (2004, p. 243) defines governance as a coordination process of actors, social groups, and institutions aiming to reach collectively defined objectives. Lastly, governance as a strategy signifies those efforts to govern and manipulate the design of institutions and mechanisms that aim to shape choices and preferences.

Despite the differences in the ways governance is approached, Stoker (1998, p. 17) emphasises that there is a "baseline agreement that governance refers to the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred". This view is also echoed in the three common features Kooiman and Bavinck (2005) distinguish in the variations of the governance perspective. Firstly, they underscore that governing is not only a matter of public but also private actors. In addition to governments, for example companies, non-governmental organisations, political parties, international organisations, and individuals are capable of addressing societal problems and opportunities as well as engaging in shaping societal futures. Closely related to this is the second common feature of the governance approaches; the emphasis on the way dividing lines between the public and private sectors have become blurred and interests are frequently shared. This implies a growing awareness of the fact that many societal problems and opportunities require the commitment of a broader set of actors and approaches than previously was the case. The third shared denominator is perceiving governance as both having a basis in and reflecting societal developments. In this regard, Kooiman and Bavinck (2005, p. 16) emphasise that

> the state of contemporary governance reflects the growth of social, economic, and political interdependencies, and trends such as differentiation, integration, globalisation and localisation. These processes result in length-

ening chains of interaction, stretching across different scale levels and sectors. In addition to other effects, the lengthening of chains increases the numbers of parties participating in them, while interactions among these parties also multiply.

In the field of social sciences, the concept of governance and the governance perspective have been used widely. According to Parreira do Amaral (2020), the governance perspective calls attention to the significant shifts of perspective from viewing the coordination of social activities as "governing", "control", or "steering" to an emphasis on regulatory structures. He highlights also that the usefulness of the governance perspective as a conceptual tool relates to the ways it enables researchers to "understand the interactions of different actors, at the different levels, and with different mandates, competences and varying degrees of leverage power at their disposal" (Parreira do Amaral, 2020, p. 11). In a similar vein, Daly (2003), who positions the relationships between the processes of policymaking and implementation together with the identity of the actors and the institutional setting at the heart of governance, argues that the governance perspective has three key strengths. These include its direct interest in policymaking, focus on the state, and the ability to connect different levels of action and analysis. Regarding particularly social policy, she views governance to be more than just a descriptive concept as it provides both a critical perspective to the connections between the distribution of power and the nature and role of the state and has potential to reveal how these connections play out in public policy (Daly, 2003, p. 125).

2.2 Institutional and Discursive Opportunity Structures

As discussed above, in contemporary societies, young people's transitions are shaped by a wide variety of institutional and structural settings and living conditions combining into different national, regional, and local landscapes. These landscapes can enable (or hinder) specific opportunities as a consequence of the interaction between multi-scalar institutional

configurations and local socio-economic conditions (Scandurra et al., 2020). At the same time, due to the increasing fragmentation of transitions within the broader processes of life course de-standardisation (Brückner & Mayer, 2005; Levy & Bühlmann, 2016), biographies appear as potential fields of agency and, thus, they cannot be seen as entirely determined by the influence of structural agents (Lehmann, 2005). Biographical choices are situated in contextual conditions and institutional settings (Roberts, 2018) that contribute to the structures of chances and constraints within which young people actively choose and make sense of their choices.

The opportunity structure theory introduced by Roberts (1968) to account for the different paths and trajectories observable in the analysis of youth transitions is particularly fecund. It argues that the interaction between structuring agents (e.g., family background, education, and the labour market) creates blueprints or career routes within which different groups of young people are required to make successive and reflexive choices (Roberts, 2009). Opportunity structures frame the configuration of possibilities and constraints for thought and action in any given context. They represent

> collective and individual responses to situations confronting us, [meaning that] our responses to these situations are fundamentally framed by the kinds of opportunities for thought or action that we have at our disposal, or by the range of both construals and constructions of the nature of the problem/issue we are confronting, and the range and kinds of responses from which we might select. (Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015, p. 30)

Opportunity structures are both strategically selective as they limit the courses of action that are likely to see actors realise their intentions, and unevenly distributed because the possible options differ among groups of young people according to their background, resources, and previous course of action (Hay, 2002). For instance, upon entering the labour market, school leavers are presented with different opportunity structures, which can be described as varying degrees of social proximity to different types of occupations. Subsequently, their opportunities become cumulatively structured following a dynamic course of intertwining

possibilities and individuals' choices of actions consistent with the depiction of youth transitions as process with a specific time-dimension that needs to be considered (Brzinsky-Fay, 2007).

The structuring agents produce two distinct but related opportunity structures. Discursive opportunity structures (Rinne & Parreira do Amaral, 2015) impact—mostly through proscription—the cultural meaning and prestige attributed to certain courses of action as they either rule out or contribute to the stigmatisation of specific ideas and choices. For instance, one of the overarching issues framed as a problem by the discursive opportunity structures (and presented in the empirical section of this book) is the scarce employability of young people, which is seen to be a result of their lack of relevant competencies, poor attitude, or limited experience. Accordingly, the improvement of skills via various types of training is one of the most applied solution to fix the perceived individual deficits in employability. Among the theoretical perspectives applied in this book, analyses using the lens of cultural political economy are particularly equipped to identify and elaborate on discursive opportunity structures.

Institutional opportunity structures, on the other hand, organise the implementation patterns and modes of action according to specific regulations and structural features at the national/local level, and they contextualise and actualise the discursive opportunity structures in relation to local systems. By setting points of decision-making, which are defined by rules, options, and requirements, institutional opportunity structures frame a positively sanctioned course of action structured around the sequence of transitions. We can think of, for instance, the specific upper secondary qualifications that are necessary to enrol into higher education, the requirements and conditionalities attached to accessing unemployment benefits (e.g., regular meeting with employment services operators, attendance of training courses), or the formal processes that need to be followed when certifying informal and non-formal skills in diverse contexts. Along this line, adopting the governance perspective allows analysing the "pathways of opportunities" shaped for their recipients by policies and regulations that aim at solving the "problems" through the "proper solutions" framed by discursive opportunity structures.

Both institutional and discursive opportunity structures develop according to a multi-scalar configuration as supra and sub-national contexts have a deep impact on youth trajectories. On the one hand, the expansion of the knowledge-economy and the Europeanization of education (Dale & Robertson, 2009), the sharpening global competition for highly rewarded jobs (Brown, 2003), and the consequences of the Great Recession of 2008 play an important role in structuring the list of available options. On the other hand, local socio-economic conditions and local welfare arrangements shape regional skills ecosystems (Dalziel, 2015) and regional opportunity structures (Cefalo & Scandurra, 2021) contributing to significant intra-national variations of youth transitions (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020; Scandurra et al., 2020).

In order to be researched, these interplays call for analytical approaches that combine actor-related and structural analyses of institutions and discourses: macro-processes like globalisation, tertiarisation, and family changes are filtered through national and local institutions at the meso-level and they interact with young people's reflexivity and agency at the individual or micro-level. It is especially regarding this latter point where we see room for further reflection as it has often constituted a "blind spot" in the opportunity structure theory. For instance, although including subjective agency as a defining trait of opportunity structures, Roberts (2018) claims that youth's agency in school-to-work transitions ultimately finds its way through pre-determined material and cultural possibilities. Young people exercise agency within specific opportunity structures, thus propelling their careers forward biographically, but by doing this they tend to consolidate pre-built pathways and trajectories. Consequently, their aspirations would mostly adapt to the direction that their careers take them (Roberts, 1968).

Several scholars have criticised this standpoint, considering the interaction between structuring agents and youth a less rigid and predetermined process. These authors advocate the necessity of further theorising the interplay between social structures and individual agency (Moensted, 2021) to capture the nuances of decision-making and their impact on educational trajectories, career building, and labour market insertion (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2019; Atkins, 2017). Dale and Parreira do Amaral (2015) have shed some light on the nexus between

structure and agency in their theoretical and analytical elaboration on opportunity structures. They argue that opportunity structures frame possibilities, but do not necessarily determine them, as they do not rule out the existence of competing framings of issues or alternative legitimate courses of action. In this view, the opportunity structure approach leads to a focus on how the menu of possible choices is formed as a preliminary to choosing within it (Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015). More room for taking into consideration individual agency in dealing with opportunity structures is opened up in the ongoing debate. For instance, scholars working on the relationship between opportunity structures and social diversity categories in the field of entrepreneurship (see Ozaris Kacar et al., 2021; Villares-Varela et al., 2017; Ozasir Kacar & Essers, 2019) have made a further step towards the exploration of components of opportunity structures which overcome the objective dimension of rules and resources. To do so, they combine the opportunity structure theory with the intersectionality approach. Starting from Giddens' structuration theory (1984), they show how "structural forces often reproduce a given social group's intersectional positioning" (Romero & Valdez, 2016, p. 1554 quoted in Ozaris Kacar et al., 2021, p. 92). This approach sheds light on how inequalities can be produced by the varying relations between opportunity structures and "multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (Romero & Valdez, 2016, p. 1554 quoted in Ozaris Kacar et al., 2021, p. 92), broadening the scope of analysis beyond the understanding of opportunity structures as structurally and culturally pre-determined options, which shape individual agency. From a different standpoint, research on street-level bureaucracy has confirmed the existence of discretionary spaces in the provision of welfare policies and services (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). In some cases, these spaces may imply a highly shared construction of objectives and instruments between policy operators and beneficiaries.

Hence, the link between the formation of the "list of possibilities" and the choices within it represents a relatively grey area in the opportunity structure theory calling for further reflection and investigation of a relatively under-explored field of relationality and interaction. This process takes place within the frame set by institutional and discursive opportunity structures, but its results are not necessarily pre-determined in the

strict reproduction of rules and ideas, for it also opens up for possibilities of negotiations, flexible adaption, selective appropriation of meanings, and even construction of alternative pathways.

2.3 Accounting for the Relational Dimension of Opportunity Structures

The research presented in this book shows that the negotiations of the meanings attached to LLL policies by different participants and stakeholders take place especially at a micro-level of interaction between actors. Indeed, as it emerges particularly from the chapters mostly devoted to the LCR perspective, the relational dynamics prompt different reactions and lead to different results in terms of impact of the policy participation on the addressees' biographies. The interviewed young adults participating in the analysed LLL policies showed different forms of agency especially in relation to the "use" they were able to make of the policies for supporting their biographical work. For instance, participating in a LLL policy has improved the plan-making ability for some of them, which does not result only from guidance actions about the system of opportunities available in their local contest, but is also a consequence of reflexive work about their aspirations based on a renewed capacity to acknowledge their own potentials. However, others framed their participation as a form of culturally spendable "justification" of their current inability to "see" their own future while still staying active. More generally, different degrees of overlapping between the goals of the policies and young adults themselves were observed, and the leeway for framing (or reframing when needed) the meanings attached to the participation in the policies depended mainly on the kinds of relations the young adults were able to build "around the policy". According to the case analyses presented in the empirical section of this book, this was particularly relevant when the interviewed youths were facing disadvantages at different levels. Some were struggling to adapt their profile to the formal requirements for accessing the opportunities provided by local institutions. For others, their very capacity to "see" opportunities and find links with their

projects was limited by a heterogeneous range of factors, such as their family or ethnic background, the prevailing cultural assumptions about what youths "should" aspire to, or the problems experienced in relationships with significant others. In most of these cases, it was mainly through the construction of positive relations with LLL policy professionals, tutors, employers, and other actors participating in the field that the structural rigidities or the limits reinforced at cultural level were overcome—or at least questioned—fostering processes of self-reflexivity, improvement of self-confidence, and life-plan revision. Thus, the relational dimension had an impact on the amount and nature of the opportunities achievable by these youths often by broadening them. In other words, we can argue that different relations contribute to both bridging the gap between structure and individuals' choice, therefore impacting the institutional and discursive opportunity structures faced by youths in their contexts, and to creating more room for their agentic capacity.

Exploring such relational and contextual processes requires lenses that, from a micro-level, enable looking at the interplay between objective and subjective dimensions in shaping the actors' choices and actions within systems of opportunity structures. Therefore, a sensible solution to be employed is to take into consideration how different interactions lead to different opportunity structures. We propose to frame such perspective as "relational opportunity structure". Relational opportunity structures follow an operational logic as they target the interaction between objective and subjective elements that intervene in the negotiation that takes place at the micro-level and results in a specific course of action. The objective aspect of relational opportunity structure is shaped by the varieties of contexts—material, organisational, administrative, professional, locational, and so forth—as well as by discursive and institutional structures. The subjective elements reside in particular local "logics of action" which result from individual resources and attitudes, and are shaped by the relations with other actors participating in the field. The unfolding of relational opportunity structures includes a range of outcomes. At the level of structures, outcomes may include a selection of a course of action within the list of possibilities, an exclusion of some options, and a creative opening of new opportunities; they can reproduce but also modify previous institutional and discursive opportunity structures. At the level

of the subject, outcomes may include consequences of choices on life course events and impacts on identity construction.

Relational opportunity structures can be investigated fruitfully through several theoretical lenses that share an attention to the relational and the context-based elements outlined above. The life course perspective can tackle relational opportunity structures and their outcomes especially at the individual and subjective levels, shedding light on perceptions, expectations, and creation of subjective meaning. Cultural political economy appears to be particularly suited for investigating the linkages between relational and discursive opportunity structures, thus facilitating an understanding of how discourses impact and are impacted by the unfolding of relations at the micro-level. Finally, a governance perspective allows to observe the linkages between the relational and institutional by looking at discretionary spaces in the provision of policies and services.

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3

Comparative Case Studies: Methodological Discussion

Marcelo Parreira do Amaral

3.1 Introduction

Exploring landscapes of lifelong learning in Europe is a daunting task as it involves a great deal of differences across places and spaces; it entails attending to different levels and dimensions of the phenomena at hand, but not least it commands substantial sensibility to cultural and contextual idiosyncrasies. As such, case-based methodologies come to mind as tested methodological approaches to capturing and examining singular configurations such as the local settings in focus in this volume, in which lifelong learning policies for young people are explored in their multidimensional reality. The ensuing question, then, is how to ensure comparability across cases when departing from the assumption that cases are unique. Recent debates in Comparative and International Education (CIE) research are drawn from that offer important insights into the

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issues involved and provide a heuristic approach to comparative cases studies. Since the cases focused on in the chapters of this book all stem from a common European research project, the comparative case study methodology allows us to at once dive into the specifics and uniqueness of each case while at the same time pay attention to common treads at the national and international (European) levels.

The chapter, first, sketches the methodological basis of case-based research in comparative studies as a point of departure, also highlighting the requirements in comparative research. In what follows, second, the chapter focuses on presenting and discussing recent developments in scholarship to provide insights on how comparative researchers, especially those investigating educational policy and practice in the context of globalization and internationalization, have suggested some critical rethinking of case study research to account more effectively for recent conceptual shifts in the social sciences related to culture, context, space and comparison. In a third section, it presents the approach to comparative case studies adopted in the European research project YOUNG_ADULLLT that has set out to research lifelong learning policies in their embeddedness in regional economies, labour markets and individual life projects of young adults. The chapter is rounded out with some summarizing and concluding remarks.

3.2 Case-Based Research in Comparative Studies

In the past, comparativists have oftentimes regarded case study research as an alternative to comparative studies proper. At the risk of oversimplification: methodological choices in comparative and international education (CIE) research, from the 1960s onwards, have fallen primarily on either single country (small n) contextualized comparison, or on cross-national (usually large n, variable) decontextualized comparison (see Steiner-Khamsi, 2006a, 2006b, 2009). These two strands of research—notably characterized by Development and Area Studies on the one side and large-scale performance surveys of the International Association for

the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) type, on the other—demarcated their fields by resorting to how context and culture were accounted for and dealt with in the studies they produced. Since the turn of the century, though, comparativists are more comfortable with case study methodology (see Little, 2000; Vavrus and Bartlett 2006, 2009; Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) and diagnoses of an "identity crisis" of the field due to a mass of single-country studies lacking comparison proper (see Schriewer, 1990; Wiseman & Anderson, 2013) started dying away. Greater acceptance of and reliance on case-based methodology has been related with research on policy and practice in the context of globalization and coupled with the intention to better account for culture and context, generating scholarship that is critical of power structures, sensitive to alterity and of other ways of knowing.

The phenomena that have been coined as constituting "globalization" and "internationalization" have played, as mentioned, a central role in the critical rethinking of case study research. In researching education under conditions of globalization, scholars placed increasing attention on case-based approaches as opportunities for investigating the contemporary complexity of policy and practice. Further, scholarly debates in the social sciences and the humanities surrounding key concepts such as culture, context, space, and place but also comparison have also contributed to a reconceptualization of case study methodology in CIE. In terms of the requirements for such an investigation, scholarship commands an adequate conceptualization that problematizes the objects of study and that does not take them as "unproblematic", "assum[ing] a constant shared meaning"; in short, objects of study that are "fixed, abstract and absolute" (Fine, quoted in Dale & Robertson, 2009, p. 1114). Case study research is thus required to overcome methodological "isms" in their research conceptualization (see Dale & Robertson, 2009; Robertson & Dale, 2017; see also Lange & Parreira do Amaral, 2018). In response to these requirements, the approaches to case study discussed in CIE depart from a conceptualization of the social world as always dynamic, emergent, somewhat in motion, and always contested. This view considers the fact that the social world is culturally produced and is never complete or at a standstill, which goes against an understanding of case as something fixed or natural. Indeed, in the past cases have often been understood almost in naturalistic

ways, as if they existed out there, waiting for researchers to "discover" them. Usually, definitions of case study also referred to inquiry that aims at elucidating features of a phenomenon to yield an understanding of why, how and with what consequences something happens. One can easily find examples of cases understood simply as sites to observe/measure variables—in a nomothetic cast—or examples, where cases are viewed as specific and unique instances that can be examined in the idiographic paradigm. In contrast, rather than taking cases as pre-existing entities that are defined and selected as cases, recent case-oriented research has argued for a more emergent approach which recognizes that boundaries between phenomenon and context are often difficult to establish or overlap. For this reason, researchers are incited to see this as an exercise of "casing", that is, of case construction. In this sense, cases here are seen as complex systems (Ragin & Becker, 1992) and attention is devoted to the relationships between the parts and the whole, pointing to the relevance of configurations and constellations within as well as across cases in the explanation of complex and contingent phenomena. This is particularly relevant for multi-case, comparative research since the constitution of the phenomena that will be defined, as cases will differ. Setting boundaries will thus also require researchers to account for spatial, scalar (i.e., level or levels with which a case is related) and temporal aspects.

Further, case-based research is also required to account for multiple contexts while not taking them for granted. One of the key theoretical and methodological consequences of globalization for CIE is that it required us to recognize that it alters the nature and significance of what counts as contexts (see Parreira do Amaral, 2014). According to Dale (2015), designating a process, or a type of event, or a particular organization, as a context, entails bestowing a particular significance on them, as processes, events, and so on that are capable of affecting other processes and events. The key point is that rather than being so intrinsically, or naturally, contexts are constructed as "contexts". In comparative research, contexts have been typically seen as the place (or the variables) that enable us to explain why what happens in one case is different from what happens another case; what counts as context then is seen as having the same effect everywhere, although the forms it takes vary substantially (see Dale, 2015). In more general terms, recent case study approaches aim at accounting for

the increasing complexity of the contexts in which they are embedded, which, in turn, is related to the increasing impact of globalization as the "context of contexts" (Dale, 2015, p. 181f; see also Carter & Sealey, 2013; Mjoset, 2013). It also aims at accounting for overlapping contexts. Here it is important to note that contexts are not only to be seen in spatio-geographical terms (i.e., local, regional, national, international), but contexts may also be provided by different institutional and/or discursive contexts that create varying opportunity structures (Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015; see also Chap. 2 in this volume). What one can call temporal contexts also plays an important role, for what happens in the case unfolds as embedded not only in historical time, but may be related to different temporalities (see the concept of "timespace" as discussed by Lingard & Thompson, 2016) and thus are influenced by path dependence or by specific moments of crisis (Rhinard, 2019; see also McLeod, 2016). Moreover, in CIE research, the social-cultural production of the world is influenced by developments throughout the globe that take place at various places and on several scales, which in turn influence each other, but in the end, become locally relevant in different facets. As Bartlett and Vavrus write, "context is not a primordial or autonomous place; it is constituted by social interactions, political processes, and economic developments across scales and times." (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 14). Indeed, in this sense, "context is not a container for activity, it *is* the activity" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 12, emphasis in orig.).

Also, dealing with the complexity of education policy and practice requires us to transcend the dichotomy of idiographic versus nomothetic approaches to causation. Here, it can be argued that case studies allow us to grasp and research the complexity of the world, thus offering conceptual and methodological tools to explore how phenomena viewed as cases "depend on all of the whole, the parts, the interactions among parts and whole, and the interactions of any system with other complex systems among which it is nested and with which it intersects" (Byrne, 2013, p. 2). The understanding of causation that undergirds recent developments in case-based research aims at generalization, yet it resists ambitions to establishing universal laws in social scientific research. Focus is placed on processes while tracking the relevant factors, actors and features that help explain the "how" and the "why" questions (Bartlett and

Vavrus 2017, p. 38ff), and on "causal mechanisms", as varying explanations of outcomes within and across cases, always contingent on interaction with other variables and dependent contexts (see Byrne, 2013; Ragin, 2000). In short, the nature of causation underlying the recent case study approaches in CIE is configurational and not foundational.

This is also in line with how CIE research regards education practice, research, and policy as a socio-cultural practice. And it refers to the production of social and cultural worlds through "social actors, with diverse motives, intentions, and levels of influence, [who] work in tandem with and/or in response to social forces" (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 1). From this perspective, educational phenomena, such as in policymaking, are seen 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. 1f). Culture here is understood in non-static and complex ways that reinforce the "importance of examining *processes* of sense-making as they develop over time, in distinct settings, in relation to systems of power and inequality, and in increasingly interconnected conversation with actors who do not sit physically within the circle drawn around the traditional case" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 11, emphasis in orig.).

In sum, the approaches to case study put forward in CIE provide conceptual and methodological tools that allow for an analysis of education in the global context throughout scale, space, and time, which is always regarded as complexly integrated and never as isolated or independent. The following subsection discusses Comparative Case Studies (CCS) as suggested in recent comparative scholarship, which aims at attending to the methodological requirements discussed above by integrating horizontal, vertical, and transversal dimensions of comparison.

3.2.1 Comparative Case Studies: Horizontal, Vertical and Transversal Dimensions

Building up on their previous work on vertical case studies (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006, 2009), Frances Vavrus and Lesley

Bartlett have proposed a comparative approach to case study research that aims at meeting the requirements of culture and context sensitive research as discussed in this special issue.

As a research approach, CCS offers two theoretical-methodological lenses to research education as a socio-cultural practice. These lenses represent different views on the research object and account for the complexity of education practice, policy, and research in globalized contexts. The first lens is "context-sensitive", which focuses on how social practices and interactions constitute and produce social contexts. As quoted above, from the perspective of a socio-cultural practice, "context is not a container for activity, it *is* the activity" (Vavrus and Bartlett 2017: 12, emphasis in orig.). The settings that influence and condition educational phenomena are culturally produced in different and sometimes overlapping (spatial, institutional, discursive, temporal) contexts as just mentioned. The second CCS lens is "culture-sensitive" and focuses on how socio-cultural practices produce social structures. As such, culture is a process that is emergent, dynamic, and constitutive of meaning-making as well as social structuration.

The CCS approach aims at studying educational phenomena throughout scale, time, and space by providing three axes for a "studying through" of the phenomena in question. As stated by Lesley Bartlett and Frances Vavrus with reference to comparative analyses of global education policy:

> the horizontal axis compares how similar policies unfold in distinct locations that are socially produced […] and 'complexly connected' […]. The vertical axis insists on simultaneous attention to and across scales […]. The transversal comparison historically situates the processes or relations under consideration (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017: 3, emphasis in orig.).

These three axes allow for a methodological conceptualization of "policy formation and appropriation across micro-, meso-, and macro levels" by not theorizing them as distinct or unrelated (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 4). In following Latour, they state:

> the macro is neither "above" nor "below" the intersections but *added* to them as *another* of their connections' […]. In CCS research, one would pay

> close attention to how actions at different scales mutually influence one another (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 13f, emphasis in orig.)

Thus, these three axes contain

> processes across space and time; and [the CCS as a research design] *constantly compares* what is happening in one locale with what has happened in other places and historical moments. These forms of comparison are what we call horizontal, vertical, and transversal comparisons (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 11, emphasis in orig.)

In terms of the three axes along with comparison is organized, the authors state that horizontal comparison commands attention to how historical and contemporary processes have variously influenced the "cases", which might be constructed by focusing "people, groups of people, sites, institutions, social movements, partnerships, etc." (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 53) Horizontal comparisons eschew pressing categories resultant from one case others, which implies including multiple cases at the same scale in a comparative case study, while at the same time attending to "valuable contextual information" about each of them. Horizontal comparisons use units of analysis that are homologous, that is, equivalent in terms of shape, function, or institutional/organizational nature (for instance, schools, ministries, countries, etc.) (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 53f). Similarly, comparative case studies may also entail tracing a phenomenon across sites, as in multi-sited ethnography (see Coleman & von Hellermann, 2012; Marcus, 1995).

Vertical comparison, in turn, does not simply imply the comparison of levels; rather it involves analysing networks and their interrelationships at different scales. For instance, in the study of policymaking in a specific case, vertical comparison would consider how actors at different scales variably respond to a policy issued at another level—be it inter-/supranational or at the subnational level. CCS assumes that their different appropriation of policy as discourse and as practice is often due to different histories of racial, ethnic, or gender politics in their communities that appropriately complicate the notion of a single cultural group (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 73f). Establishing what counts as context in such a

study would be done "by tracing the formation and appropriation of a policy" at different scales; and "by tracing the processes by which actors and actants come into relationship with one another and form non-permanent assemblages aimed at producing, implementing, resisting, and appropriating policy to achieve particular aims" (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 76). A further element here is that, in this way, one may counter the common problem that comparison of cases (oftentimes countries) usually overemphasizes boundaries and treats them as separated or as self-sustaining containers, when, in reality, actors and institutions at other levels/scales significantly impact policymaking (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017).

In terms of the transversal axis of comparison, Bartlett and Vavrus argue that the social phenomena of interest in a case study have to be seen in light of their historical development (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 93), since these "historical roots" impacted on them and "continues to reverberate into the present, affecting economic relations and social issues such as migration and educational opportunities." As such, understanding what goes on in a case requires to "understand how it came to be in the first place." (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 93) argue:

> history offers an extensive fount of evidence regarding how social institutions function and how social relations are similar and different around the world. Historical analysis provides an essential opportunity to contrast how things have changed over time and to consider what has remained the same in one locale or across much broader scales. Such historical comparison reveals important insights about the flexible cultural, social, political, and economic systems humans have developed and sustained over time (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 94).

Further, time and space are intimately related and studying the historical development of the social phenomena of interest in a case study "allows us to assess evidence and conflicting interpretations of a phenomenon," but also to interrogate our own assumptions about them in contemporary times (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017), thus analytically sharpening our historical analyses.

As argued by the authors, researching the global dimension of education practice, research or policy aims at a "studying through" of

phenomena horizontally, vertically, and transversally. That is, comparative case study builds on an emergent research design and on a strong process orientation that aims at tracing not only "what", but also "why" and "how" phenomena emerge and evolve. This approach entails "an open-ended, inductive approach to discover what […] meanings and influences are and *how* they are involved in these events and activities—an inherently processual orientation" (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 7, emphasis in orig.).

The emergent research design and process orientation of the CCS relativizes a priori, somewhat static notions of case construction in CIE and emphasizes the idea of a processual "casing". The process of casing put forward by CCS has to be understood as a dynamic and open-ended embedding of "cased" research phenomena within moments of scale, space, and time that produce varying sets of conditions or configurations.

In terms of comparison, the primary logic is well in line with more sophisticated approaches to comparison that not simply establish relationships between observable facts or pre-existing cases; rather, the comparative logic aims at establishing "relations between sets of relationships", as argued by Jürgen Schriewer:

> [the] specific method of science dissociates comparison from its quasi-natural union with resemblances; the interest in identifying similarities shifts from the level of factual contents to the level of generalizable relationships. […] One of the primary ways of extending their scope, or examining their explanatory power, is the controlled introduction of varying sets of conditions. The logic of relating relationships, which distinguishes the scientific method of comparison, comes close to meeting these requirements by systematically exploring and analysing sociocultural differences with respect to scrutinizing the credibility of theories, models or constructs (Schriewer, 1990, p. 36).

The notion of establishing relations between sets of relationships allows to treat cases not as homogeneous (thus avoiding a universalizing notion of comparison); it establishes comparability not along similarity but based on conceptual, functional and/or theoretical equivalences and focuses on reconstructing 'varying sets of conditions' that are seen as

relevant in social scientific explanation and theorizing, and to which then comparative case studies may contribute.

The following section aims presents the adaptation and application of a comparative case study approach in the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project.

3.3 Exploring Landscapes of Lifelong Learning through Case Studies

This section illustrates the usage of comparative case studies by drawing from research conducted in a European research project upon which the chapters in this volume are based. The project departed from the observation that most current European lifelong learning (LLL) policies have been designed to create economic growth and, at the same time, guarantee social inclusion and argued that, while these objectives are complementary, they are, however, not linearly nor causally related and, due to distinct orientations, different objectives, and temporal horizons, conflicts and ambiguities may arise. The project was designed as a mixed-method comparative study and aimed at results at the national, regional, and local levels, focusing in particular on policies targeting young adults in situations of near social exclusion. Using a multi-level approach with qualitative and quantitative methods, the project conducted, amongst others, local/regional 18 case studies of lifelong learning policies through a multi-method and multi-level design (see Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020 for more information). The localisation of the cases in their contexts was carried out by identifying relevant areas in terms of spatial differentiation and organisation of social and economic relations. The so defined "functional regions" allowed focus on territorial units which played a central role within their areas, not necessarily overlapping with geographical and/or administrative borders.[1]

Two main objectives guided the research: first, to analyse policies and programmes at the regional and local level by identifying policymaking networks that included all social actors involved in shaping, formulating, and implementing LLL policies for young adults; second, to recognize

strengths and weaknesses (overlapping, fragmented or unfocused policies and projects), thus identifying different patterns of LLL policymaking at regional level, and investigating their integration with the labour market, education and other social policies. The European research project focused predominantly on the differences between the existing lifelong learning policies in terms of their objectives and orientations and questioned their impact on young adults' life courses, especially those young adults who find themselves in vulnerable positions. What concerned the researchers primarily was the interaction between local institutional settings, education, labour markets, policymaking landscapes, and informal initiatives that together nurture the processes of lifelong learning. They argued that 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 covered a wide range of actors and levels and aimed at securing compatibility throughout the different phases and parts of the research.

The multi-level approach adopted aimed at incorporating the different levels from transnational to regional/local to individual, that is, the different places, spaces, and levels with which policies are related. The multi-method design was used to bring together the results from the quantitative, qualitative and policy/document analysis (for a discussion: Parreira do Amaral, 2020).

Studying the complex relationships between lifelong learning (LLL) policymaking on the one hand, and young adults' life courses on the other, 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.

3.3.1 Constructing Case Studies

In constructing case studies, the project did not apply an instrumental approach focused on the assessment of "what worked (or not)?" Rather, consistently with Bartlett and Vavrus's proposal (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017), the project decided to "understand policy 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. 1f). This was done in order to enhance the interactive and relational dimension among actors and levels, as well as their embeddedness in local infra-structures (education, labour, social/youth policies) according to project's three theoretical perspectives. The analyses of the information and data integrated by our case study approach aimed at a cross-reading of the relations among the macro socio-economic dimensions, structural arrangements, governance patterns, addressee biographies and mainstream discourses that underlie the process of design and implementation of the LLL policies selected as case study. The subjective dimensions of agency and sense-making animated these analyses, and the multi-level approach contextualized them from the local to the transnational levels. Figure 3.1 below represents the analytical approach to the research material gathered in constructing the case studies. Specifically, it shows the different levels, from the transnational level down to the addressees.

The project partners aimed at a cross-dimensional construction of the case studies, and this implied the possibility of different entry points, for instance by moving the analytical perspective top-down or bottom-up, as well as shifting from left to right of the matrix and vice versa. Considering the "horizontal movement", the multidimensional approach has enabled taking into consideration the mutual influence and relations among the institutional, individual, and structural dimensions (which in the project corresponded to the theoretical frames of CPE, LCR, and GOV). In addition, the "vertical movement" from the transnational to the individual level and vice versa was meant to carefully carry out a "study of flows of influence, ideas, and actions through these levels" (Bartlett and Vavrus

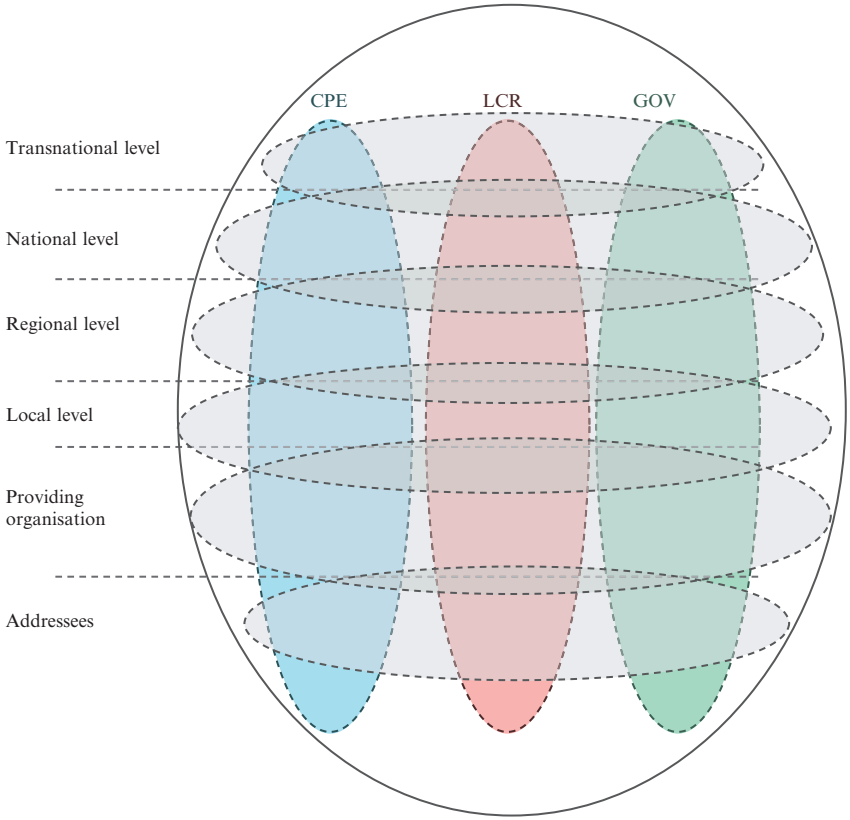

Fig. 3.1 Multi-level and multi-method approach to case studies in YOUNG_ADULLLT. Source: Palumbo et al., 2019

2017, p. 11), emphasizing the correspondences/divergences among the perspectives of different actors at different levels. The transversal dimension, that is, the historical process, focused on the period after the financial crisis of 2007/2008 as it has impacted differently on the social and economic situations of young people, often resulting in stern conditions and higher competition in education and labour markets, which also called for a reassessment of existing policies targeting young adults in the countries studied.

Concerning the analyses, a further step included the translation of the conceptual model illustrated in Fig. 3.1 above into a heuristic table used to systematically organize the empirical data collected and guide the analyses cases constructed as multi-level and multidimensional phenomena, allowing for the establishment of interlinkages and relationships. By this approach, the analysis had the possibility of grasping the various levels at which LLL policies are negotiated and displaying the interplay of macro-structures, regional environments and institutions/organizations as well as individual expectations. Table 3.1 illustrates the operationalization of the data matrix that guided the work.

In order to ensure the presentability and intelligibility of the results,[2] a narrative approach to case studies analysis was chosen whose main task was one of "storytelling" aimed at highlighting what made each case unique and what difference it makes for LLL policymaking and to young people's life courses. A crucial element of this entails establishing relations "between sets of relationships", as argued above.

LLL policies were selected as starting points from which the cases themselves could be constructed and of which different stories could be developed. That stories can be told differently does not mean that they are arbitrary, rather this refers to different ways of accounting for the embedding of the specific case to its context, namely the "diverging policy frameworks, patterns of policymaking, networks of implementation, political discourses and macro-structural conditions at local level" (see Palumbo et al., 2020, p. 220). Moreover, developing different narratives aimed at representing the various voices of the actors involved in the process—from policy-design and appropriation through to implementation—and making the different stakeholders' and addressees' opinions visible, creating thus intelligible narratives for the cases (see Palumbo et al., 2020). Analysing each case started from an entry point selected, from which a story was told. Mainly, two entry points were used: on the one hand, departing from the transversal dimension of the case and which focused on the evolution of a policy in terms of its main objectives, target groups, governance patterns and so on in order to highlight the intended and unintended effects of the "current version" of the policy within its context and according to the opinions of the actors interviewed. On the other hand, biographies were selected as starting points in an

Table 3.1 Heuristic table for case studies analysis

LEVEL	CPE	LCR	GOV
European	Discourses Agenda setting	Programmes	European social funding regulation
National	Discourses	Statistics on young adults living conditions	Institutional framework of policymaking
	Assumptions underlying policymaking	Secondary data analysis reports	Patterns of funding Welfare models Labour and skill market regulation
Functional region	Assumptions underlying policymaking Target groups construction	Young adults targeted welfare measures Statistics on young adults in FR	Policies governance models
Local	Policies' meaning construction	Specific youth targeted welfare measures	Policies implementation models
	Target groups construction	Interrelation with local labour market, schools and other LLL policies	
Institutional	Organisation specific interpretation of policies and target groups	Negotiation with local labour market, schools and other LLL policies	Organisation culture and structure
Interactive	Communication of objectives between organisation and young adults	Negotiation of match between young adult's previous career and organisation objectives	Process of access and entry to the organisation
Individual	Policies' meanings construction	Subjective biographical sense-making Life trajectories and life choices/planning Perceptions of target group depictions (especially "vulnerable groups") Subjective policies' meaning construction "Ecologies of expectations"	Patterns of participation in stakeholder representations

Source: Palumbo et al., 2019

attempt to contextualize the life stories within the biographical constellations in which the young people came across the measure, the access procedures, and how their life trajectories continued in and possibly after their participation in the policy (see Palumbo et al., 2020 for examples of these narrative strategies).

3.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented and discussed the methodological basis and requirements of conducting case studies in comparative research, such as those presented in the subsequent chapters of this volume. The Comparative Case Study approach suggested in the previous discussion offers productive and innovative ways to account sensitively to culture and contexts; it provides a useful heuristic that deals effectively with issues related to case construction, namely an emergent and dynamic approach to casing, instead of simply assuming "bounded", pre-defined cases as the object of research; they also offer a helpful procedural, configurational approach to "causality"; and, not least, a resourceful approach to comparison that allows researchers to respect the uniqueness and integrity of each case while at the same time yielding insights and results that transcend the idiosyncrasy of the single case. In sum, CCS offers a sound approach to CIE research that is culture and context sensitive.

Notes

1. For a discussion of the concept of functional region, see Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020.
2. This analytical move is in line with recent developments that aim at accounting for a cultural turn (Jameson, 1998) or ideational turn (Béland & Cox, 2011) in policy analysis methodology, called interpretive policy analysis (see Münch, 2016).

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Part II

Comparative Cases Studies

4

Youth Aspirations Towards the Future: Agency, Strategy and Life Choices in Different Structural Contexts

Valeria Pandolfini, Borislava Petkova, and Thomas Verlage

4.1 Introduction

Lifelong learning (LLL) policies for young adults figure centre stage in the economic and social policy agendas of the European Union as they simultaneously aim at economic growth and social inclusion. In achieving these common goals, these policies impact young people's life courses

Although the chapter is the result of the collaboration of the three authors, Valeria Pandolfini has written Sects 4.1., 4.2.2., 4.4.; Borislava Petkova has written Sect. 4.2.3; Thomas Verlage has written Sects 4.2., 4.2.1. Sect. 4.3. was written by the three authors.

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substantially, in particular during the transition from education to work. They also interact with ongoing changes such as processes of life course de-standardization, which make young adults' life-planning more complex and less predictable than in the past (Shanahan et al., 2016). Against this background, young people's capacity to cope with these challenges and their ability to actively navigate obstacles and proactively search for courses of action are essential for policies to be able to support young people along their life courses.

Through the analysis of three case studies which build on the intersection between three young adults' trajectories and three LLL policies in different contexts, this chapter aims to explore how participation in LLL policies can contribute (or not) to supporting young people's transitions in relation to their agentic capacity and expectations. In doing so, we discuss the ways and the extent to which contextual conditions, institutional settings, and opportunity structures contribute to framing the configuration of possibilities and constraints within which young people unfold their life paths.

A key perspective for the analysis is the notion of youth capabilities (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2021), which can be thought of as the scope of possibilities that a person can effectively achieve in a given situation and time to develop his/her life courses, considering the structures of opportunities and constraints. The capability approach is considered appropriate for analysing the interrelationship between structure and agency, allowing exploration of "the substantive freedoms to choose the life one has reason to value" (Sen, 1999, p. 74) and how the heterogeneity of the local landscapes in which LLL policies unfold impacts differently on their beneficiaries' biographies.

In this framework, youth aspirations are conceived as "navigational capacities" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69), that is, a set of socio-emotional (as in not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety, engaging in various forms of social interaction) and material capabilities

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(such as cash, income, assets, training programmes provided via school or the like) required for young people to navigate in their life course, coping with adversities to achieve the best possible outcomes given their environments. Navigational capacities are socially constrained but are influenced by culture and social conditions; everyone aspires to something, but circumstances can enhance or diminish the capacity to navigate from where we are to where we would like to be. This approach is assumed to capture a more nuanced view of the intersection between material and social embeddedness and individual agency. Indeed, the "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2004) is influenced both by opportunity structures and by individual preferences and depends on the existing capability set of a person; it is strongly context-related and, simultaneously, may be nurtured or stunted through relations with others, including peers, societal institutions, family and life experience, shaped by opportunities and networks. Hence, agency becomes central, as the ability to pursue goals that one values requires both agency and possibilities (Moensted, 2020).

Based on these assumptions, the chapter explores how different young adults' life plans were pursued (also) with participation in LLL policies in Germany, Italy and Bulgaria. For each country, one young adult's biography is analysed, putting the paths of the young people into relation within the LLL policy they accessed with their previous educational and professional trajectories, as well as with their aspirations, self-representations, and the opportunity structures characterizing their local contexts. Research questions included how, and to what extent, individual resources and motivations, institutional settings and opportunity structures determine one's degree of freedom of choice in exercising agency, which affects a person's capability set. This means exploring a few broad questions: In which ways do different youth strategies and agency interact with diverse socio-economic contexts and with varied opportunity structures? What obstacles stand in the way of young adults' plans? What actual freedom of choice do they have? What real opportunities do LLL measures open up for young adults?

In the sections that follow, we first discuss the criteria for selection of the three biographies of young adults participating in LLL policies in Germany, Italy and Bulgaria and present the main features of the different contexts. This is followed by the presentation of the three cases. Next,

the German, Italian and Bulgarian cases are compared, relying on Bartlett and Vavrus' (2017) comparative case studies approach, using three axes (horizontal, vertical and transversal). The cases are explored and compared, highlighting similarities and differences among the young people's trajectories before and after their participation in the LLL measure they accessed, taking into account individual aspirations and resources as well as structures of opportunities and constraints on developing their life courses. The chapter closes with a discussion of the possibilities of better capturing the complex relationship between structural limits, possibilities and subjective aspirations in shaping individuals' choices and actions within specific opportunity structures.

4.2 Navigating Obstacles and Proactive Searching: Youth Coping Strategies in Different Opportunity Structures

The young people's biographies selected in each country are here understood as a pivotal element for the construction of case studies aimed at contextualizing the intersection between life courses and LLL policies. By analysing the case studies, we explore how different biographical trajectories are shaped by specific LLL measures, their institutional arrangements and the prevailing discourses underlying such policies. These dimensions are put into relation with the macro features of the different contexts and welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and transition regimes (Walther, 2006) characterizing their countries. This means accounting for the embedding of the specific case in its context, within different structural, cultural and policy frameworks.

More specifically, the reasons for the construction of the cases rely on the different discursive and institutional opportunity structures available in each context, in order to show how LLL policies interact with specific economic and socio-cultural arrangements, thereby producing specific impacts on the opportunities and constraints faced by young people when dealing with the difficult task of managing their biographies. In constructing the cases, particular attention was also given to contrasting

features such as different levels of qualification among young people and different subjective meanings attached to the participation in LLL policies, proactively searching for different amounts of resources available for supporting life-planning. Indeed, the three analysed cases are characterized by specific features that could be depicted, continuing the navigational metaphor (Appadurai, 2004) with different labels helping us to introduce them.

The German case study is characterized by a very rigid institutional opportunity structure and a rather productive local labour market that gives young people opportunities but does not allow them to deviate from the paths devised by institutions for unfolding their school-work transitions. In the case of Paul, the protagonist of the story, it means that his qualification as a cook, a profession which he cannot relate to, ends up limiting his scope of action, as it narrows the institutional vision of his profile down to specific skills he does not desire to put into practice. The German case could be labelled as "being on the track though with aspirations to deviate": the case is about finding strategies to pursue a more fulfilling professional life, thus overcoming the rigidity of the opportunity structure characterizing the context.

The Italian case study shows a very "blurred" institutional opportunity structure: it is characterized by scarcity of opportunities and serious uncertainty. This structurally adverse situation is contradicted by a prevailing rhetoric on youths' passivity and their unwillingness to take on responsibilities. Young people seem to be free to choose among different paths, especially when they come from families with higher socioeconomic status, but, actually, there are very few job opportunities, even for higher-skilled people. The biography of Maria could be labelled as "being in the mist, struggling to find a direction, though well equipped": she is theoretically well equipped (in terms of educational qualifications and skills) to go through the mist, but still, it is not sufficient for her to find the direction to reach her goal, within a context which is not very productive in terms of opportunities. She tries to "surf" contingencies which are averse to her, to tackle systemic contradictions (like job supply and demand mismatch) with biographical solutions (training and job experiences) in order to pursue her life projects and expectations.

In the Bulgarian case study, the specific discursive and institutional opportunity structures characterizing the local context frame the biography of Katya, a young woman from an ethnic minority: the main issue that she has to cope with is ethnic stigmatization and the challenge of dealing with life alone. In terms of institutional opportunity structures, this means tackling the risk of not being able to stabilize the position in the labour market. The biography of Katya could be labelled as "being in the loop and finding oneself at the starting point, despite having been active": to be more competitive, she accessed a number of LLL policies as a way to try to improve her skills, to develop her agency, but at some point, she felt trapped in the circle of further education and qualifications, that is, the loop of education-training-work without achieving a fulfilling place in the labour market.

Hereafter, before the three young people's biographies are presented and discussed, a brief description of the three different landscapes is introduced, referring to the following dimensions: the welfare and transition regimes characterizing the countries; the main socio-economic features at national and local/regional levels, particularly focused on the young adults' living conditions; the policy related to the cases, presenting the main problem on which the policy aims to act, the means used to solve it and the expected results.

4.2.1 A Case Study in Germany: Being on Track Though with Aspirations to Deviate

Germany can be described as an employment-centred, highly institutionalized transition regime (Walther, 2006). It is characterized by the coupling of a selective school system and a standardized vocational training system. This is accompanied by a split into a core of normal employment relationships and a precarious periphery. Since the early 2000s, Germany has also adopted a more intensive activating approach to labour market policy. The support services of the Job Centre are oriented towards the guiding principle of "encourage and challenge". Among other things, this means that people who have not paid unemployment insurance for a sufficiently long time, which affects young people in particular, must accept

any "reasonable" employment otherwise their social benefits will be cut; furthermore, especially young people under 25 will have all their social benefits cancelled. In the event of a repeat offence, their rent is even cancelled.[1] For some years now, a shortage of skilled workers has been identified and discussed as a central problem in the German labour market. Therefore, the activation of potential workers is gaining importance. Growing up in a specific region can make it easier to create "successful" life projects or hinder it. Therefore, a look at the local level is necessary. The functional region[2] Rhein-Main and especially its centre Frankfurt am Main is an economically successful region with a thriving labour market (Schaufler et al., 2017) and a comprehensive and institutionally embedded support system typical for Germany, consisting of education, labour market and social and youth policies that share the overall orientation towards employability and independence through standard employment (Verlage et al., 2017). Overall, the picture that emerges is one of a thoroughly institutionalized structure geared towards a prosperous labour market, access to which is flanked by funding opportunities as long as individuals follow the institutionally prescribed and pre-structured tracks.

The policy at the core of the German case (DE_P1[3]) is commissioned by the city of Frankfurt and the Job Centre. The background of this measure is the finding that young people, who depend on social benefits, often have multiple problems simultaneously. The plurality of the problems can prevent them from searching for a job or a VET place which makes it impossible for them to get into the labour market. For this target group, the policy offers an individual tailor-made support. Possible interventions can be individual case work for coping with the everyday life, competence training, guidance, clarification of their life situation, assistance measures, social-pedagogical support at the transition into vocational training, further education or development of personal and professional perspectives.

This is the story of Paul, a young man who has been participating in DE_P1 for over a year at the time of the interview. Paul describes his childhood as dominated by his mother, who took little interest in caring for him. He describes her as destructive and that she deliberately kept him small and stupid. At his mother's insistence, he began training as a cook, a profession that he has nothing good to say about.

Up to this point, the narrative of his life is marked by negative experiences with people he experiences as authority figures who prevent him from developing freely and use him for their own interests. In the family, at school and at work, he experiences how his opportunities for action are massively restricted. Nevertheless, his great dissatisfaction and desire for change already indicate his potential to aspire.

He moved to Frankfurt with his girlfriend and broke with his family completely. Having no job, he was dependent on the Job Centre. For the Job Centre, he proves to be a difficult client: a cook who doesn't want to be a cook, in an environment where cooks are in demand and any reasonable job must be accepted. Since he is forced to apply as a cook, he develops a variety of strategies to retain his capacity to act and to make the Job Centre's efforts come to nothing, like sending applications late, without a photo or even deliberately poorly written or simply telling the truth in job interviews, that he only applied because the Job Centre would cut off his money—behaviour that led to considerable disputes with the programme office. Here we see Paul as a young man, off the beaten track, in conflict with institutions, trying to overcome his negative past and in search of a career perspective that makes sense to him.

After more than half a year and several caseworkers at the Job Centre, he opened up to a "fully nice" employee, who simply asked him what was wrong, why the jobs were not working out. She recommended the DE_P1 policy to him, where to start, appointments with a psychologist were organized together with him; to follow, tailor-made individual support was implemented. His programme finally looked like this: they met twice a week—one appointment where Paul could ask questions and a second appointment where practical help was given. Asking questions was important to Paul, "because my mother, my family, NEVER used to answer my questions".

The second appointment in the week was for practical help in life. The contact person explained and practised with him how to use public transport in a big city, how to approach people, how to sell his old car and much more. Basically, Paul especially appreciated the fact that finally someone was there to listen to him. They also worked together on a professional perspective. He had always known that he did not want to be a cook. Through the joint discussions, Paul's own ideas of a satisfying

professional activity could be worked out. He emphasizes that although he cannot yet name the specific goal, he already knows the direction, which is working in the field of social work. Together they have found a school where he can continue on this path. Through the policy, Paul finds his way back to an institutional track that matches his goals.

4.2.2 A Case Study in Italy: Being in the Mist, Struggling to Find a Direction, Though Well Equipped

Italy has the main characteristics of the "conservative-corporatist" welfare state model identified by Esping-Andersen (1990). This is characterized by poor and fragmented social services, a highly unequal social structure and a heavy reliance on the family production of "private" welfare. Recently, Italy has been included in the group of "emerging activation regimes", in which the weight of passive labour market policies and the role of family services remain significant, notwithstanding the recent reinforcement of activation policies (Heidenreich & Aurich-Beerheide, 2014). With regard to the transitions of young people into employment, Italy can be described as a "sub-protective" transition regime (Walther, 2006). As they are not entitled to any kind of social benefits, young adults depend to a large extent on their families who are referred to as "social security cushion" for the socio-political vacuum. Indeed, due to a lack of reliable training pathways into the labour market, transitions often imply a waiting phase until one's mid-thirties with unequal outcomes, often characterized by several job precariousness experiences.

In this scenario, the Italian Youth Guarantee (YG) Implementation Plan launched a reform to foster active labour market policies. Here we will focus on a measure (IT_P1) integrated within the regional YG scheme in the Genoa functional region addressed to young people up to 29 years of age. The main perception of the problem starts from the acknowledgement of the difficulties faced by high qualified young adults in a context characterized by a "static" labour market (Palumbo et al., 2017), significant skills mismatch, mainly due to an excess of higher-educated graduates in relation to job opportunities, and a high level of

youth unemployment. This trend leads to an over-qualification in the working population in Genoa FR (similar to what has happened at the national level). The underlying success criteria consist of smoothening labour market integration for the participants, and the development of soft skills through six-month traineeships with a monthly reimbursement hosted by several third sector organizations, mainly in the educational, cultural and social fields.

Maria is a 28-year-old Italian graduate, living in Genoa. At school, she always had excellent learning outcomes, thanks to her family that stimulated her to learn out of school and to her positive relationship with teachers, so that she had developed the wish to attend university since she was a child. After finishing school, she enrolled in a political science degree course, following the recommendation of a teacher. After completing the three-year degree, she got a master's degree in development cooperation. Before that, she had a very difficult year, due to burnout syndrome; she postponed her master's degree and ended a long relationship. This period allowed her to focus on her life plan and aspirations for the future.

During the master's degree, Maria did an internship as a volunteer at an international humanitarian organization: she wanted to insert practical experiences in her curriculum. At the same time, she was attending a post-graduate course in human rights at the University of Genoa, while doing various precarious jobs to earn some money. After completing her master's, she started as a volunteer at a Civic Service organization in the educational field. The following year, she entered the Youth Guarantee and accessed the IT_P1 measure integrated within its scheme. After a fixed-term contract, she was permanently hired by the organization hosting her traineeship. Her duty was to teach courses on education for active citizenship addressed to pupils at primary schools. She was happy and she was appreciated by teachers, pupils and their families, but she did not feel fully satisfied. Hence, she took a second master's degree in the management of non-profit organizations, which allowed her to acquire many new skills; she asked her employers to take advantage of these new skills, permitting her to change her usual job duties, but they refused. Thus, she resigned: "it wasn't what I wanted to do […] it wasn't my aspiration". Maria defined herself as being "proud to have resigned from a permanent

job contract"; this confirms her tenacity in reaching her aims, together with a strong awareness of her abilities, given the scarcity of structural opportunities and severe uncertainty in the local context. This structurally adverse situation contrasts with a public discourse permeated by stereotypes on Italian youth as unresponsive to sacrifices and commitment (Cuzzocrea et al., 2020), framing the discursive opportunity structure in the Italian context.

The biography of Maria shows how she tried to get away from the accusation of not being proactive through further investments in her training path, underlying her resourcefulness and how she tries to "surf" contingencies averse to her. Maria clearly showed the will to optimize the skills acquired during long years of studies to carry out the desired professional project and to achieve self-realization in her job. This will is further confirmed by her decision to quit the permanent job contract, which is very unusual in the Italian context, considering the problems related to the widespread precariousness of the local labour market in general and specifically referring to young people. The resources and "protected" relations she can count on must surely have affected this choice, since the important economic and emotional support by her family allowed her to complete university studies and to wait for job opportunities which fit her expectations, as well as to quit an unfulfilling permanent job.

The participation in the IT_P1 measure has represented a chance to broaden her networks in relation to a heretofore unknown context, the third sector, allowing her to strengthen her relational and soft skills, as well as acquiring greater self-acknowledgement of their aspirations and potential.

At the time of the interview, Maria was working with an apprenticeship contract at an association of non-profit social enterprises dealing with social innovation start-ups. She defines herself as "a young woman who is satisfied with herself".

4.2.3 A Case Study in Bulgaria: Being in the Loop and Finding Oneself at the Starting Point, Despite Having Been Active

Bulgaria is a post-socialist Eastern European country where the liberal or employment-oriented transition structures have entered into specific mixed relationships with the socialist legacy (Walther, 2006). Labour market integration of young people at all educational levels in the past three decades is a huge challenge: there is a lack of fit between the skills and the expectations of the economy, low pay for labour and the emigration of young, qualified people (Milenkova & Kovacheva, 2020). The problem of shortage of skilled young workers has become apparent, the emigration flows to Europe have completely exposed the Bulgarian labour market and youth unemployment and NEET rates are high. These trends are visible in Plovdiv FR and youth unemployment is one of the tangible problems in the formation of the urban economy. Being a young adult from an ethnic minority in Plovdiv means building a life project with fewer resources. Young people from Roma and Turkish ethnic minorities usually faced various forms of stigmatization, high levels of poverty, difficult economic and social living conditions, a large percentage of dropout of the formal education system and early marriages among Roma girls (12–13 years of age). Due to the lack of education and family support, access to the labour market establishment through the standard channels is extremely difficult and often unattainable for the young people from ethnic minorities.

In 2007, Bulgaria joined the EU; various European youth employment LLL schemes have gradually emerged, aiming at smoother school-work transition, seeking an activating approach to the young adults. One of the most famous European LLL schemes, centrally controlled and implemented locally, is the Youth Guarantee Programme (YG) with few LLL subprograms. The main goal is activation of potential workers, by encouraging young people to reach their full potential and to seek suitable positions in the labour market.

In Plovdiv FR, the YG programme is provided by the Plovdiv Employment Agencies. The LLL policies' local goal is to overcome the

rejection of young adults up to 29 years of age from different social groups and ethnic minorities by providing work placements up to six months. During this period, the young person works in a real work environment and receives a monthly salary covered by the LLL policies. The expected outcome is that young people will gain the necessary skills and after the end of the programme, they could be employed on a permanent contract with the same employer.

Katya is a 26-year-old woman from one of the Bulgarian minorities who has accessed diverse YG measures. She completed higher education, settled permanently and worked in Plovdiv. She has a bachelor's and two master's degrees. She struggled to establish herself in the labour market, but she was trapped in the LLL policies' loop—between 2013 and 2015, she has participated in three YG subprograms. Instead of the expected positive effect, the constant participation in LLL policies doomed Katya to a series of failures. She emerges more disappointed—having acquired new knowledge and skills, but not able to find a permanent job or being satisfied with the salary. Gradually, the horizon of Katya's aspirations extended and becomes more unattainable.

Katya was born and raised in a small, Muslim, mountain town with religious and traditional views on life. She described her childhood as good in a family of four and had a very strong relation with her twin sister. Their father insisted that higher education was not necessary for girls, but the mother strongly encouraged the twins to continue their education in Plovdiv. Katya was aware that as a representative of an ethnic minority, she had to put a lot of effort, persistent preparation and a serious attitude towards the educational process. Only in this way could she gain the in-depth knowledge and skills she needed for professional and personal establishment in Plovdiv.

During the bachelor's programme, Katya began planning her professional future and she got information about LLL policies integrated in the YG scheme. Her first attempt to get a job through LLL policies was unsuccessful. This led her to serious disappointments and doubts about her own abilities, but she did not give up. She got her first master's degree. Soon after that, Katya got her first job as a junior expert in the Plovdiv Employment Agency under the LLL policy. After the end of the period of the programme,

she returned to the starting position—a young unemployed woman from an ethnic minority, trying to establish herself in the big city.

Soon, Katya applied for another LLL policy, she was approved and worked in an insurance company. At the end of the programme, she got a permanent position in the same company with a permanent salary, and she fulfilled the LLL policy's main goal. Two months later, she left due to verbal aggression and psychological harassment at the office.

Katya made her next attempt to apply in YG scheme. She was selected for the third LLL policy and started in another insurance company. At the end of the programme, she got a permanent position in the company, but her salary was seriously reduced, and she left. The analysis of Katya's life path at that stage shows she felt lost being a "long-lasting LLL client" and it could entail negative effects on the possibilities of getting a suitable professional career.

Then Katya got a job in a private factory. She decided to focus on further qualification and gained a second master's degree and qualifications from two IT courses. Meanwhile she took out a bank loan and bought an apartment. This makes her finally settled and planned her life and career in Plovdiv.

Surprisingly, her university lecturer offered her a job in an NGO. She was convinced that the efforts she showed during the bachelor educational process was the reason he called her. Katya took the job, but she was already burned out as a result of several LLL policies participations, university degrees, courses and job changes. When she rethinks her life so far, she underlines her disappointment as a result of a combination of circumstances: her ethnic origin, the individual experience of adapting to the changing needs of the labour market, the constant need to cope on her own without the daily support of her family and her limited financial resources.

Katya's case reveals many difficulties that young people in Bulgaria have to deal with and illustrates the complicated life paths of young adults from ethnic minorities who usually rely only on their own abilities to build their own life project and to pursue their own aspirations. LLL policies participation does not always lead to the achievement the main goals of the LLL policy. Young people often are trapped in the loop of education-training-work-education-training-work, does not lead them to

a stable outline of the future. In other words, what is initially perceived as an opportunity to emancipate from disadvantage paradoxically turns out as a further constraint.

4.3 Comparative Analysis

In this section, we analyse the stories of Maria, Katya and Paul, highlighting similarities and differences concerning individual aspirations and resources as well as the structures of opportunities and the constraints they meet. In doing so, we adopt Bartlett and Vavrus' (2017) comparative case studies approach that follows the multi-scalar perspective where people, place, space, and time are tightly linked. This approach makes the three-dimension measurement through three types of axes more visible: the horizontal axis that compares how similar policies unfold in distinct locations; the vertical axis that pays attention to and across policies' scales; and the transversal axis that tracks the processes through time. These three axes have different contextual and contrasting features such as the different levels of qualification, the different young people's subjective meanings attached to the participation in LLL policies, and the diverse resources available for supporting life-planning.

The main factors shaping the three young people's professional paths refer, on the one hand, to the social, economic and political condition of their contexts; on the other hand, young people's decisions are often influenced by "significant others", social and symbolic capital in family context and formal education. What they have in common is that they are young people who seek their fulfilment both personally and professionally, applying the participation to LLL policies as a support to their "biographical work" (Chamberlayne et al., 2000), although with different approaches.

The horizontal axis of comparison highlights the differences in the local labour market in the three countries and the way it accepts (or segregates) educated young people. Paul deals with a flourishing labour market in the Rhein-Main FR in Germany, where the assumed shortage of skilled workers orients labour policies mostly towards the activation of unused workforce, like young people with low or no educational

qualifications. Maria faces a labour market in Genoa FR that is unable to absorb many highly qualified young people and where the most resourceful ones often try to deal with this structural problem through further individual training. These trends characterize generally the Italian context, but some of them are even more evident at the local level in Genoa, given the higher local youth unemployment rate and the higher average age of workers occupying relevant job positions. And a labour market often segregated along ethnic and class lines with low wage levels is approached by Katya in Bulgaria. It is particularly true for Plovdiv FR, where youth unemployment is one of the main problems, particularly for youths from ethnic minorities, who have to deal with stigmatization and difficult economic and social living conditions.

Different social and economic contexts gave rise to different ways of going through the planning of life stages, including the educational process. The three young adults' starting conditions differed greatly. Maria was supported by her family from the beginning, and she was a very good student. Katya belonged to an ethnic minority, and she had to assert her wishes against those of her family and ethnic stereotypes. Paul grew up in a negative, almost hostile family and school environment that he experienced as destructive. Not determined but influenced by these initial conditions, different opportunity structures and aspirations emerged for the three young people, affecting their coping strategies.

Maria and Katya strove very consistently for higher education and the life opportunities that were expected to come with it. While for Maria this went hand in hand with the motive of self-realization through work, for Katya this path seemed to be the only way to realize social advancement. Paul, on the other hand, saw himself massively restricted by his (especially familiar) environment and could not initially establish a perspective outside of it. Due to his sufficient school leaving qualification, the high demand on the labour market and the pressure from his mother, he completed vocational training despite his reluctance.

The common aim of the three LLL policies accessed by the three young people is to enable young adults to get specific practical training to be able to later find their place in the labour market. Following the vertical axis of comparison, we see how this overall aim is pursued by the same model, as in the three cases it is understood as passing various levels of

education, training and participating in various LLL policies, namely following the local institutional opportunity structures. However, is this enough for establishing oneself in the local labour market?

Katya and Maria have several university degrees. They both refuted the dominant public discourses in their countries. The Italian one stresses the unwillingness of the youth to grow up, painting them as inactive and unresponsive. The dominant social and cultural stereotypes in Bulgaria focus on young ethnic minority women as likely early school leavers. However, structural factors beyond their control, such as the local labour market negative features, impacted on the actual opportunities for realization. Indeed, despite their high level of education, both faced several obstacles in the transition to the labour market: Maria faced problems related to the inflation of skilled profiles within the "static" local labour market; Katya kept on participating in various LLL policies to be employed and to earn income. Paul's transition to work can be defined as "theoretically successful" because of his training in a sector where employees are needed. Due to his personal experiences, however, Paul lived this exclusively negatively. In all three cases, it was the needs of the local labour market that required the young people to adapt: their own life plans were somehow negotiated on the basis of their different fit with the needs of the market.

The transversal comparison brings to the fore the personal motivation and the differences in terms of access to LLL policies as well as how the unfolding of individual trajectories was shaped by the participation in LLL measures, showing the relational dimension as pivotal in modelling their trajectories. Katya and Maria actively sought to participate in LLL policies. Institutional opportunities came up and both women took them because they associate them with opportunities to get closer to their goals. Katya associated further education and first experiences on the labour market with participation in the policy, even though she feared being labelled as someone who cannot make it on her own and has needed a variety of support measures. Maria also saw the possibility for further training and otherwise associated the measure primarily with extending her network of professional relations. This shows their ability to navigate very consciously in given structures. On the contrary, Paul did not want

to work as a cook, but he was forced to follow the instructions of office workers to receive funding from social welfare.

There is no doubt that in all the three cases "significant others" emerged as crucial in shaping their biographies, shedding light on the importance of focusing on the micro-sociological processes through which individual trajectories unfold in light of the power relations in which individuals are engaged, which may change over time depending on opportunities (Baillergeau & Duyvendak, 2019). Looking at the availability of different forms of interactions and how they were navigated by individuals, in the case of Katya we reveal social interactions that undermine the development of the "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2004), which emerged from her strained relationship with her father and then her employers. In Maria's biography we can identify "interactions that inspire" (with her mother and teachers), that is, by providing ideas about desirable futures through the "cultivation of imagination" (Nussbaum, 2016), based on critical reflection of what is problematic in her life. In Paul's biography, this happened just after his participation in the policy measure, when the Job Centre employee succeeded in getting him to talk about his problems, helping ideas to mature, by translating them into plans.

Lastly, in relation to the different meanings attributed to participation in LLL policies, Katya's biography showed that participation in LLL policies is often recognized as a way of overcoming ethnic, cultural and institutional constraints faced by young people from minorities in Bulgaria. On the other hand, in her case she ended up in a "trap" of a permanent cycle of further education, training and work experiences. In Katya's case, the accumulation of diplomas and certificates did not lead her either to a sustainable accumulation of skills or to a stable professional establishment. Despite the acquired qualifications, she remained in the same place, with no prospects for successful development in the near future. At only 26 years of age, Katya has experienced a lot of disappointments and losses in personal and professional terms. Although her last job position satisfied her, she did not perceive it as a dream job but as something from which she received a salary to cover her living expenses in the big city.

Paul's biography showed that participation in LLL policies can contribute to reducing the influence of institutional demands (work in the learned profession and the acceptance of any reasonable work), and that

alternative biographical and professional trajectories can be developed. The prerequisite for this is sustainable working alliances between professionals and young people which can compensate for the lack of social support, impacting on the opportunity structures they deal with. Both Katya and Paul cannot set specific goals to pursue; neither knows what the future holds for them professionally, but they both have a clear perspective that they need to make changes to develop their professional life. The difference is that Paul found support in the LLL policy, while Katya's experiences with the outcome of the LLL policy were negative.

Maria seemed to be able to cope with the challenges of life and feels satisfied with what she has achieved so far, even if this implied sacrifices and personal challenges, such as quitting a poorly fulfilling permanent job. Trying to counter the dominant local rhetoric about young people's inactivity with a strong investment in training and job experiences was still not enough to fully support her personal aspirations. Indeed, the possibility of drawing on personal resources (namely "outside" the provided institutional opportunity structures) was crucial in her story. She is still living in her parents' home, consistently with the Italian family welfare state context. This is a point in which both cultural aspects of the transition and more structural ones converge in determining what is referred to as "the delay of the transition" (Pastore, 2017). The main differences with regard to the other cases are the broader resources at her disposal. Relying on a good amount of economic, cultural and social capital, and constant family support, Maria succeeded in using the LLL policies to accumulate further social contacts. This expanded her opportunities for finding fulfilling employment in the future.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

The chapter has explored different processes for life plan making applied by three young adults who interact with different contexts, via analysis of three case studies. We explored how young people's capacity to cope with challenges and their ability to actively navigate obstacles are influenced by the wider discursive and institutional opportunity structures in which they unfold their life paths. The heterogeneity of individuals' experiences

in relation to the nexus between schooling, learning and labour market outcomes emerged, showing the social, cultural and economic factors at play in exercising their navigational capacities. The three axes of comparison (horizontal, vertical, transversal, Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) used to analyse our cases showed how context should not be defined as place or location, but rather be conceptualized as something spatial and relational.

Referring to the theoretical perspectives adopted to analyse our cases, we can focus on some emerging issues. Following the capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2021), two complementary dimensions emerged: the provision of adequate means—resources (cash or in-kind benefits), qualifications or education (training programmes provided via school or the like)—and context on the one hand; freedom to choose the life one has reason to value on the other hand (Bonvin & Moachon, 2008). The two dimensions are interdependent insofar as their disjunction leads either to paternalism (providing means to promote youth capacity to act, but not granting freedom to them to exercise this capacity) or to purely formal freedom (the importance of young people's life choices is promoted, but young people are not provided with the means—resources, opportunities—to implement them, Otto et al., 2017). If young people are deprived of such resources and if they are trapped in an unfriendly environment, that does not entitle them to lead a life they have reason to value, then the enhancement of their capabilities is missed.

In terms of temporal horizons, the analysis of young adults' expectations for the future showed how young people make their life choices according to their "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai, 2004) and (potentially) applying the LLL policies as a "tool" for compensating for inequalities. This could be stated in terms of both the structural constraints they struggle with, and the cultural stigmatization they often face. The inequalities could be contextualized in terms of capacity to aspire to the specific realm of inclusion and exclusion in the labour market and educational system. Being able (or not) to define a life plan thus potentially constitutes a "new" factor of inequality (Benasso, 2013). The existing capability set of a person restricts the capacity to aspire, even if it does not determine it. Indeed, the position of a person as a producer and income earner, their social contacts, their access to resources and control over

income and their knowledge all influence and limit their "capacity to aspire". In this sense, this capacity is conceived as both a "cultural capacity" and a "navigational capacity", which explores the "possibilities" and "probabilities" around one's social environment, nurtured by continuous interaction (Appadurai, 2004, p. 68). In the perspective proposed by Sen, this may be cast in terms of capabilities, including both states of well-being and other, more complex capabilities like agency or the ability to decide and act, within externally set constraints.

In this chapter, we spotlighted the structure of interactions whereby young adults negotiated the meaning of the LLL policies they entered. Analysis of the case studies revealed that the capability to participate in LLL policies and its impact on that person's biography are strongly influenced not only by his/her agency, but also by wider socio-economic, institutional and cultural influences, as well as by other actors' actions. The chapter argued that focusing on the relations that contribute to shaping young adults' aspirations is helpful to capture both the limits placed on their aspirations by their "horizons for action" and the importance of nurturing their aspirations (Moensted, 2020). Through their interactions with parents, teachers, employers and peers, young people become able to contemplate a wider set of options for the future (as happened in the life story of Maria). However, as the story of Paul has shown, these interactions may not provide such opportunities, or at least opportunities that can be seized. The life courses of these three young adults showed how face-to-face encounters with successful professionals can contribute to blurring the frontier between the so-called "hot" and "cold" knowledge about future possibilities (Smith, 2011): cold knowledge being formal knowledge provided by educational institutions and hot knowledge being "word-of-mouth" information gained from one's social and professional network (Baillergeau & Duyvendak, 2019). Indeed, the capacity to navigate young people's options results from structural differences in individual "archives of experience" (Gale, 2015); it consists of a dense combination of nodes and pathways, within which the interaction with "significant others" plays a key influence in setting the realm of opportunities to practise the use of navigational capacity, therefore shaping young peoples' choices and actions within systems of opportunity structures.

The three axes used to compare our cases allowed better contextualization of the intersection between the three young people's life projects and the LLL policies they accessed, clarifying the aforementioned different labels describing our cases and revealing the complex interplay between context, structure, policy and young people's navigation capacities:

- "being on track though with aspirations to deviate" for the German case: Paul formally met the requirements of the labour market. He was on his way, although it was a direction he could not relate to. Also pushed by the will to overcome his negative relation with his family, he abandoned the way provided by institutions and came into conflict with the activating welfare regime that wanted to keep him on the track. Only through a trusting working alliance and a low-threshold, tailor-made policy did he find an alternative way on a new track;
- "being in the mist, struggling to find a direction, though well equipped" for the Italian case: Maria was an excellent student and received great support from her family. However, since her qualifications were not in demand in the local labour market, she had to experience an odyssey through an opaque landscape that made it more difficult to identify proper directions, as she will pursue the aim of sustainable and personally fulfilling employment;
- "being in the loop and finding oneself at the starting point, despite having been active" for the Bulgarian case: Katya was trying very hard to make something of herself and to achieve social advancement from her original circumstances, despite a local labour market which was generally unable to stabilize the young workforce. However, she seemed to be caught in a loop, as in planning her professional trajectory she mostly depended on the possibilities provided by the support services (above all LLL policies), that proposed chances for training. This affected her self-perception too, as she felt "trapped" in "waiting loops" with no clear directions to unfold her professional and educational trajectory in a more linear way.

The case study analysis confirms the understanding of youth transitions as embedded within, shaped and influenced by a complex network

of relationships as well as of social and economic structures that constrain or enable young people's opportunities.

Notes

1. In November 2019, Germany's highest court declared the full benefit cut unconstitutional. A 30% reduction in benefits remains permitted.
2. For the concept of functional regions see Parreira do Amaral et al. (2020, pp. 21–29).
3. To safeguard the privacy of the interviewees, the official names of the policies and measures at the core of the case studies analysed in this chapter have been replaced by codes. Specifically, the codes report the abbreviation of the country name followed by "P" ("Policy") and a sequence number on the basis of the order of appearance of the policies in the book. The only exception is constituted by Youth Guarantee as it represents a broad international policy integrating different sub-measures at the core of the case studies located in Italy and Bulgaria.

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5

Exploring Young Adults' Lifelong Learning Policy Participation Styles: Comparative Perspectives from Finland, Scotland, and Spain

Jenni Tikkanen, Judith Jacovkis, and Ellen Vanderhoven

5.1 Introduction

A wide range of interventions and support measures—often taking the form of lifelong learning (LLL) policies—has been developed to tackle the significant challenges today's young people face in their transitions to

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adulthood and, particularly, to facilitate their progression through education and into the labour market. These LLL policies bring together active labour market strategies, vocational education and training policies, adult education initiatives, and social welfare and support measures (Rambla et al., 2020; Rodrigues et al., 2019). Across Europe, LLL policies targeting young adults differ in their understanding of "what the problem is" and how it should be solved. Therefore, they represent differing policy orientations, objectives, and timelines (Parreira do Amaral & Zelinka, 2019; Rambla et al., 2020). Furthermore, these policies are conveyed by varied youth regimes and modes of governance (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012; Walther, 2017), and they reflect different understandings of the problems related to transitions to work and foster different solutions to tackle those problems. Thus, the way in which policies unfold depends both on national and local contexts introducing distinct opportunities and constraints affecting the social realities of young adults (Parreira do Amaral & Zelinka, 2019). While individuals are not passively acted upon by such forces and instead make choices and compromises based on the alternatives before them (Elder et al., 2003), the negotiation and construction of life courses are always embedded in particular structural contexts providing varying kinds and degrees of opportunities.

In their national, regional, and local contexts, LLL policies interact with differing institutional and discursive opportunity structures within which young adults' agency "filters and influences the institutional policies and practices regulating youth transitions and social integration" (Kovacheva et al., 2020, p. 166). Despite an abundance of different LLL policies, many leave a lot to be desired. For example, measures aimed at young adults rarely begin by investigating the needs and wishes of their target groups, nor do they provide opportunities for young adults to participate in policy design, implementation, and evaluation (Kovacheva et al., 2020). Furthermore, the perspectives of policy experts and professionals do not typically align well with those of young adults (Rambla et al., 2020).

This chapter sets out to explore the meanings and motivations that young adults attach to their participation in LLL policies and, by adopting a comparative lens, aims to identify different LLL policy "participation styles" among young adults in three functional regions: Kainuu in

Finland, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Region (ACAR) in Scotland, and Girona in Catalonia, Spain. By drawing on qualitative interviews with both policy experts and participants, we examine these participation styles in relation to young adults' life course progression, social and agentic resources, and the central features of the LLL policies in which they participated. We ask whether there is room for young adults' own voices and initiatives within the LLL policies—and if and how young adults are able to negotiate and "customise" their policy participation in personally meaningful ways.

Based on previous research, we assume that if such space for negotiation and customisation exists, it is rarely formal or institutionally foreseen (Kovacheva et al., 2020; Rambla et al., 2020), which leads us to look for informal forms of leeway. Here, the concept of relational opportunity structures appears especially relevant, emphasizing the interplay between objective and subjective dimensions in shaping actors' choices and actions within systems of opportunity structures.

It is important to note in this regard that an individual's life course is a cumulative process and (dis)advantages do not occur randomly during a lifetime, instead following a logic of path dependence that begins with early (dis)advantages brought about by an individual's social origins. Also, psychological resources, such as cognitive complexity and flexibility, self-directedness, and personal control (Elder et al., 2015; Levy & Bühlmann, 2016), all of which relate to individual agency,[1] accumulate over the life course. Consequently, not all young adults are equally equipped with the social resources and agentic capacities to navigate purposefully their educational and occupational trajectories—or to negotiate LLL policy participation to meet their individual needs and wishes.

5.2 Methodology

This chapter draws on qualitative interviews with 21 policy experts and 27 young policy participants (Table 5.1). Policy expert interviews were thematic and followed a common schedule, opening with a reference to a key focus around which experts could construct their own narrative. In the case of young adults (aged 18–29), interviews were biographical,

Table 5.1 Summary of the sample

Region	ACAR	Girona	Kainuu	TOTAL
Experts				
Managerial experts	4	4	2	10
Street-level experts	3	6	2	11
Total	7	10	4	21
Young adults				
Male and non-FBP	4	5	4	13
Female and non-FBP	2	0	3	5
Male and FBP	2	4	0	6
Female and FBP	0	3	0	3
Total	8	12	7	27

Source: Author's own

Note: FBP = foreign-born parents

which allowed them to highlight and focus on the events, processes, emotions, and opportunities for agency that were most relevant to their personal transitions and policy experiences (Aaltonen, 2013). A narrative approach that did not prioritize chronology was used, recognizing that young adults' most notable life events and reflections might fall outside the critical transition points and chronological narratives commonly focused on in youth research (Aaltonen, 2013; Harding, 2006).

To describe patterns or regularities in the data and identify shared participation styles, we used qualitative content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2015). We chose this approach for its usefulness in "addressing not only manifest content but also the themes and core ideas found in texts […] [including] contextual information and latent content" (Drisko & Maschi, 2015, p. 85). The analysis was developed in a number of stages: firstly, each author conducted a first round of extraction on the interviews from their corresponding national context, meaning transcripts could be treated in the original language by a native speaker (Filep, 2009; Wong & Poon, 2010). We then summarized the content of the interviews based on pre-determined categories.[2] In the case of policy expert data, we analysed interviews in conjunction with policy literature to allow triangulation of expert responses with formal policy narratives.

Secondly, each author focused on one aspect of the analysis, synthesized the extracted content across policy cases to describe the opportunity structures in which young adults were embedded and the different participation

styles they adopted. Throughout this phase, we worked collaboratively to tentatively suggest, revise, and finalize analysis at frequent intervals, including revisiting and modifying analysis categories. This iterative approach based on "close teamwork" between co-researchers supported inter-subjective validity (Döös & Wilhelmson, 2014) and allowed the leveraging of both insider and outsider positionalities in the analysis (Chavez, 2008).

5.3 LLL Policy Landscapes

As an in-depth discussion of the national scale lies beyond the scope of this chapter, we focus instead on the features and challenges that are most relevant to the three functional regions.[3] Furthermore, we take care to present the context in specific temporal as well as geographical terms, profiling the regions as they were in 2017 at the time of data collection.

In order to understand how institutional policy settings shape the opportunity structures within which young adults form their life course, we focus on those elements of the LLL policy landscapes in ACAR (examined policies UK_P1[4] and UK_P2), Kainuu (FI_P1 and FI_P2), and Girona (SP_P1 and SP_P2) that set the limits and rules for policy participation. We highlight the most relevant commonalities and differences regarding policy goals, salient practices, and degrees of rigidity or flexibility in policy design.

5.3.1 Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Region (ACAR)

ACAR is located in the north-east of Scotland, housing 9% of the Scottish population (NRS, 2020). The region comprises two council areas—urban Aberdeen City and rural Aberdeenshire—which are united by the Strategic Development Planning Authority partnership. The regional economy is dominated by the oil and gas sector, attracting young people with high educational qualifications. In the most recent census, the share of people aged 16–29 in Aberdeen City was 25.6%, well-above the Scottish average (Scotland's Census, 2011). Furthermore, the share of

young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) has historically been well below national averages (Eurostat, 2020). However, the 2014–16 global oil price crash led youth unemployment rates to double in the area (Aberdeenshire Council, 2018), with recovery only beginning to take place at the time of data collection (Scottish Government, 2018). The downturn also contributed to widened inequalities between local communities, which further challenged limited institutional capacity for supporting young people in vulnerable situations.

The two selected policies in ACAR aim to smooth young adults' transitions within education and into the labour market and increase the desirability of vocational pathways as alternatives to higher education. Both policies target young adults from the end of lower-secondary education until their early twenties and tend towards leveraging participants' existing skills rather than developing new ones. Thus, in many cases—despite being formally universal—neither policy provides alternatives for young people that do not reach a threshold of required skills.

The policies primarily assume that young people and their families lack relevant information about labour market needs and educational and training resources. A website and newsletter (UK_P1) and provision of career guidance in schools (UK_P2) are the means adopted to improve information flows and availability. However, this information and guidance often focuses more on labour market needs than on young adults' own interests. A further goal of the policies is to improve collaboration among regional policy actors (e.g., companies, schools, and other public and private training providers). This often proves problematic as local actors lack a global view of the landscape and overlapping coordination mechanisms result in competition rather than collaboration.

UK_P1 offers a broad menu of alternatives to participants distributed weekly via its website and newsletter, while UK_P2 focuses on careers guidance and a narrower menu. In both cases, most options have strict access requirements, which are often too high for those young adults in the most vulnerable situations, leaving them outside the scope of these policies in practical terms. Some individualized support is available for policy participants when choosing from the different options, but most of the responsibility is on young adults to make informed decisions from the available options. If a young person is unable to access their desired

option, they are diverted to an alternative, but little support is provided to improve their skills prior to entry or alter the access conditions. Furthermore, UK_P2 provides no individualized support once young adults leave compulsory schooling. Neither one of the two policies has strong institutionalized relationships between practitioners and participants, but informally these relationships tend to be somewhat closer. In addition, as previously mentioned, practitioners are very distant from each other and from the higher levels of policymaking. Overall, these elements reveal a fragmented structure of intervention, subject both to the discretion of practitioners and participants' ability to establish sound relationships with them.

5.3.2 LLL Policies in Girona

Girona is a densely populated province of Catalonia in the north-east of Spain, accounting for 1.6% of the Spanish population (INE, 2020). As an autonomous community, Catalonia has regionally devolved powers over education and youth policy and partial powers concerning the labour market. Embedded in infrastructural connections between France and Barcelona, Girona is relatively affluent, with higher per capita income and lower unemployment and poverty rates than in Spain overall (Eurostat, 2020; INE, 2016b). Catalonia accounts for nearly a quarter of Spain's tourism (INE, 2016a), which dominates the regional economy of Girona. The region is also characterized by high levels of immigration and an above-average share of foreign-born young people. The social and economic integration of this demographic group and the poor quality of employment opportunities available to young people are significant regional challenges.

The main goals of the selected LLL policies include increasing young adults' employability and helping those without a lower-secondary education certificate to attain one. The two policies assume implicitly that young people in vulnerable situations lack the personal and social resources to enter the labour market and, thus, the policies aim to provide young adults with guidance, training, and networks to improve their chances of finding employment. The primary target group is young adults

aged 16–24 with NEET status. For some of the policy measures, participants are required to have at least a lower-secondary education certificate, but this is not always mandatory. In both policies, the participants are required to register in the Youth Guarantee Scheme, although this is not compulsory for some parts of the SP_P2.

Regarding their practices, both policies combine group and individual guidance sessions with short training programmes and apprenticeships. The participants are also provided with space and support for improving their CVs and searching for employment. Practitioners conduct labour market forecasting to assess the most salient labour market needs that can be fulfilled by low-skilled adults and work to establish permanent relationships with companies in the area. Options are rather limited within the two policies. In SP_P1, when participants express interest, practitioners try to offer some vocational courses, but face bureaucratic hurdles as providing training of this kind requires legal permits and funding. Participants of SP_P2 must decide which course they want to access before entering the policy, after which no changes can be made.

Provision is more individualized in SP_P1 than in SP_P2 and is oriented towards improving participants' self-confidence and self-knowledge. Conversely, participants' relationships with practitioners appear to be closer in SP_P2, which is more established and well known in the area. Thus, it can also provide young adults with some informal support beyond policy participation. SP_P1 is a more recent policy and has regular practitioner turnover, which could hamper relationship-building between practitioners and participants. In both cases, requirements for participants' active involvement vary, except when they undergo training, and the policies are therefore adaptable to participants' changing circumstances. Policy managers decide the options on offer, while trying to avoid overlap with other relevant organizations in the area.

5.3.3 LLL Policies in Kainuu

Kainuu is a mostly rural and sparsely populated region in north-eastern Finland, with its largest urban centre, Kajaani, having only 38,000 inhabitants (total regional population 72,000; Statistics Finland, 2017a). From

2004 to 2012, the area operated under the "Kainuu Model", which unified all the region's eight municipalities under one political body and informs regional governance to this day (Regional Council of Kainuu, 2015). In 2017, both youth unemployment (22.8%) and the NEET rate were above national averages (Eurostat, 2020; Statistics Finland, 2017b). Limited employment combined with few post-compulsory education opportunities contribute to significant out-migration of young people and to relatively low proportions of inhabitants from migrant backgrounds. Therefore, primary regional challenges lie in providing attractive opportunities for young locals and encouraging in-migration from across Finland and abroad to fulfil the demand for a skilled workforce and maintain the region's vitality.

The overall goals of Kainuu's selected LLL policies are reducing youth unemployment and social exclusion. At the participant level, policy goals are adapted to each participant—although the ultimate aim is typically to build their capacities for entry into education or the labour market. The target group of these policies includes young adults struggling to define their own life plans and mid-term goals, as the policies provide support to define and work towards goals with participants.

The target groups of these policies differ mainly in the severity of their vulnerable life situations and the educational attainment required of them. FI_P1 focuses on young adults with upper-secondary education who are struggling to either find employment or a suitable vocational field for further study, typically due to a lack of self-confidence and self-awareness. In contrast, FI_P2 targets young adults in the most vulnerable situations and, thus, is not a preventive policy measure. Instead, it aims to bring young adults "back" from social exclusion resulting from various and often accumulating factors. Irrespective of their target group, the two measures adopt a highly individualized approach, which translates into practices and methodologies that work to develop participants' autonomy in defining their own goals and commitments.

Both policies contribute to larger LLL policies. These overarching policies have broader target groups, but, when necessary, all their support services are available to participants of FI_P1 and FI_P2. Accordingly, both policies offer a broad range of options from which participants can choose. Many of these options are provided in conjunction with a wide and strong

network of regional policy actors (e.g., educational institutions, employment officials, health care professionals). The options are typically not mutually exclusive but can be cumulative depending on young adults' particular (changing) situations. In this context, relationships between practitioners and participants are close in both policies, although the need for non-bureaucratic relationships is especially emphasized in FI_P1. While there are no formal mechanisms for young adults to alter either of the policies, the boundaries on what is offered are not strongly defined and activities depend greatly on the individual plan created for each participant.

Table 5.2 illustrates some key dimensions of the policies. Thus, it is not an exhaustive list depicting all the measures' characteristics but focuses on those features that provide us with clues for understanding the different participation styles of young adults. Regarding the autonomy and motivation expected of participants, it is important to note that we do not refer only, or even mainly, to the access criteria of the policies, but to the entire process of policy participation. Interestingly, despite the formal policy goals of activating young people and promoting their educational and occupational prospects and trajectories—and despite the policies' varying expectations for autonomy and motivation—the six examined policies did not seem to produce any significant added pressure regarding the life choices of the policy participants. On the one hand, for those young people with lower levels of autonomy and agentic capacities, the policies provided typically the support and encouragement that the participants needed and wanted, and, in the interviews, they did not express feelings of being pressured by policy experts to make certain choices or perform in certain ways. On the other hand, regarding those young people who were well-resourced and displayed high levels of agency, it was more common for them to put pressure on the policies to give them what they already knew they wanted, rather than the other way around.

5.4 Young Adults' Policy Participation Styles

Here, we present four LLL policy participation styles identified from the 27 young adult interviews. These styles are discussed in relation to how young adults found their way into the policy, their goals and motivations

Table 5.2 Central features of the LLL policies regarding young adults' participation

Policy	Target group and accessibility	Available options	Expected autonomy and motivation	Nature of relationships	Available support
UK_P1	Broad target group within a strict age limit, varying accessibility	Broad menu of options	Intermediate autonomy, low motivation	Formally weak, informally intermediate	Formal standardized, with some individualized support
UK_P2	Broad target group within a strict age limit, flexible but demanding access	Limited menu of options	High autonomy and motivation	Formally weak, informally intermediate	Standardized support varying between institutions
SP_P1	Specific target group, access limited to most disadvantaged	Limited menu of options with possible add-ons[a]	Intermediate autonomy and motivation	Formally strong, informally intermediate	Individualized support
SP_P2	Specific target group, access limited to most disadvantaged	Limited menu of options	Intermediate autonomy and motivation	Formally intermediate, informally strong	Formal standardized support
FI_P1	Specific target group (broad in the overall policy), flexible access	Broad menu of options	Intermediate autonomy, high motivation	Formally and informally strong	High degree of individualized support
FI_P2	Specific target group (broad in the overall policy), flexible access	Broad menu of options	Low autonomy, intermediate motivation	Formally and informally strong	High degree of individualized support

Source: Author's own

[a] If a critical mass of participants is interested and the related bureaucracy can be accomplished

for participation, their gains from participation, and the social resources and individual agency displayed in their life stories—as well as some central features of the LLL policies.

5.4.1 Proactive and Purposeful (*n* = 10)

The first participation style, "proactive and purposeful", is characterized by young adults' clear, tangible goals for policy participation, such as pursuing an apprenticeship or finding a job in a particular field. Furthermore, the ten young adults with this participation style displayed relatively high levels of agency. They had most often deliberately sought out the policy and made an informed decision to participate based on their learning preferences and career goals. They were, therefore, able to realistically reflect on their educational and occupational interests and abilities as well as suitable or preferred ways of learning—and adjust their plans accordingly. Many of them had family connections to their aspired vocational fields, which gave them further advantage. The interview excerpts below illustrate some of the proactive and purposeful features of this participation style.

> I just decided for myself [to pursue an apprenticeship], there was never anybody from the school encouraging you to do it, and when I was in school I didn't do any technical […] workshops. And I decided after, while I was doing my exams, I want to do [work in a certain vocational field], just because I thought that would be interesting and my dad does it, and I just thought if he can do it I can do it. (UK_Y8)

> I thought that I'll come here [to the policy], because I get to do work [in a vocational field] here, so that I can do that to refresh my memory about that stuff a bit [before entering further vocational training leading to employment accessed with policy support]. Yeah, I contacted this place by myself. (FI_Y1)

> [S]o I have been back here this week with the counsellor, and she is helping me to look for a job and to see how things go. Because staying at home makes no sense, and if I work, then maybe someday I can [afford to] attend [aspired vocational institution]. I would really like that. (SP_Y11)

Regarding social background and life course progression, these young adults can be divided into two groups. In the first group, the young adults were generally better off, and their life stories did not include any major accumulation of disadvantage. They were from stable middle- or working-class families with whom they had positive relationships, and who provided support and guidance. They did not have physical or mental health issues, nor did they mention any developmental challenges (e.g., learning difficulties, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder). Furthermore, these young adults reported no significant challenges or interruptions in their educational pathways, but they did express their disinterest in academic learning, preferring practical, hands-on learning. By contrast, young adults in the second group were from more disadvantaged social backgrounds. Even though they had mostly positive relationship with their families, they did not provide significant support in educational and occupational decision-making. These young adults also had more fragmented pathways in education and the labour market (e.g., dropping out of vocational education and training, irregular employment), which motivated their policy participation.

It is hardly surprising therefore that these young people tended to participate in policies that demanded high levels of autonomy and self-management, allowing them to exercise agency and reflexively progress towards their goals. Relationships between policy practitioners and participants were typically intermediate in closeness for this group, and more standardized support was sufficient for their needs. The young adults who displayed this participation style benefitted from policy participation in two main ways: by gaining positive learning experiences, which further validated their choices, and attaining professional gains, such as labour market connections, increased professional confidence, concrete progression towards the aspired occupation, or finding employment.

5.4.2 Supported Capacity-Building (*n* = 9)

The distinguishing feature of the second participation style, "supported capacity-building", was young adults' motivations for participation. The majority wanted to study or work but were unsure which vocational field

to pursue and were looking to policy participation for direction in their lives. Many also sought personal growth gains, such as significantly improving their self-confidence or social skills, in order to enter education and, later, the labour market. Another characteristic of this participation style was that the young adults were guided to the policy by employment officials, youth workers or other experts. Correspondingly, and in contrast to the first participation style, the young adults in this group displayed lower levels of agency in their interviews. While they were motivated to move on with their lives and exit unstable educational and occupational situations (e.g., early school leaving, NEET periods, severe long-term consequences of being bullied at school), they either lacked the intrapersonal resources to do so, or were not able to explore options and make decisions without external support:

> So, life has been more like this kind of searching, and I haven't had the courage to apply anywhere, and I haven't really known where I could apply to. [---] I'm kinda running out of faith, like where to, like I want to study and work, but I don't really know where, what I would like to do. (FI_Y3)

> I thought "let's see if I can exit the [vocational field where was working before policy participation]", because I was fed up with it. [---] At least here you develop a routine, you come here, know the adults, you do something useful, you talk with the counsellor to see where you are going. (SP_Y6)

The policies in which these young adults participated most often required intermediate or low levels of autonomy, provided participants with individualized support, and fostered close practitioner-participant relationships, at least informally. The young adults themselves came from working-class backgrounds or socially disadvantaged families. While most had positive relationships with their families, the support they received varied notably from having one very supportive parent to being abused—and certainly not supported—by the family. Roughly half of the young adults identified themselves as facing developmental challenges, mental health problems, or both, which were clearly reflected in

their life course progression. As such, individualized support and close relationships with practitioners met many of their needs and facilitated progression towards intangible goals, for example, by increasing their functional abilities and social trust. Indeed, many of these young adults indicated that their agency had increased during policy participation. More generally, young adults' gains from policy participation can be described as personal growth as they became more aware of their personal interests and strengths as well as possible educational and occupational pathways:

> Yeah, I have changed a lot as a person [due to policy participation] and become stronger and braver. (FI_Y8)

> Truly, the programme saved my life a bit, because it gave me quite an important opportunity, let's say. I did this [course], and I liked it pretty much, I learnt many things and I liked the experience I had, and all this. (SP_Y3)

5.4.3 Arbitrary and Incidental (*n* = 4)

The "arbitrary and incidental" style of policy participation was displayed by four young adults who were looking to be occupied, rather than continuing to "do nothing". Participation was arbitrary in that it was not initially motivated by any tangible or intangible goals related to studying, working, or improving intrapersonal resources. It was incidental in that the young adults came into contact with the policy only because of external guidance and would have accepted any opportunity presented to them; the young adults' participation in a given policy was largely a question of happenstance. One slight exception was a participant who was invited to join a policy and told that it would provide eligibility for benefits, which then became an important motivator. The first interview excerpt below is a rather typical example of the motivations expressed in the interviews, while the second shows how little information the young adult in question had about the policy upon entry, which was typical for this participation style.

> Mm, [the policy participation] gives me a reason to wake up each morning. (FI_Y7)

> I went to Skills Development, and they brought up [name of organization]. I only really knew it was a 12-week course. It's like a 12-week employability course. (UK_Y3)

The only shared feature of the policies in which these young adults participated was their relatively low expectations of autonomy and motivation from participants. Therefore, it is unsurprising that policies such as UK_P2, which expect high levels of both autonomy and motivation, did not have young adults with this participation style. However, despite initially displaying a low level of agentic capacities, particularly in relation to planning and pursuing particular trajectories, these young adults' interviews indicated increasing agency during policy participation. Indeed, despite entering with low intentionality and no discernible goals, all of them reported that they had gained some form of personal growth, such as increasing independence, social trust, or self-confidence.[5]

> When I ended [a language course], I was recommended to enrol in the Youth Guarantee, and so I registered there, and they recommended that I do a course, any course. [---] I chose [a course], and the worker was very good with me, because I'm very shy and she helped me a lot: "You need to do it this way, you need to try to speak". (SP_Y5)

The family background of these young adults can be described as either working-class or socially disadvantaged, and while their family life had not been very stable in most cases, they had some family members from whom they got at least some emotional support. Their life courses included several disruptions and severe challenges, and three out of the four young adults had either developmental challenges, physical health problems, mental health issues, or a combination thereof. Out of the four participation styles, this group, while sharing some similarities with the previous one, was overall in the most vulnerable situation due to low agency and the multidimensional accumulation of disadvantage in their life courses.

5.4.4 Selective Utilization (*n* = 4)

The fourth participation style identified from the data is "selective utilization". A distinct feature of this group was that the four young adults felt that they did not *need* policy participation, tending to state that they could "do it by themselves" when reflecting on their educational and occupational goals. Nevertheless, these young adults did have reasons for participating, but their goals were quite "narrow" in comparison to the actual scope of the policies. For example, one young adult used policy activities to support mental health recovery before applying to higher education—despite the policy being targeting young adults with limited future planning capacity. Another young person hoped to readjust to a normal working pattern following long-term physical illness before enrolling in higher education, instead of developing job-seeking skills and employability in line with intended policy goals:

> I came here also because, like, to be able to get myself prepared for studying five days a week. Like getting prepared for that, so that I'll be capable of coping with going to the [higher education institution] five days a week. (FI_Y4)

Gains corresponded with young adults' goals, but also outstripped them in some cases, as aspects of participation were unexpectedly enjoyable and useful to participants. Typically, prior to participation young adults had been progressing rather smoothly in their educational (or occupational) pathways, before facing abrupt and unexpected blockages or disruption. This often led to further challenges, such as depression, feelings of social isolation, or anxiety. Examples of disruption included not being able to access higher education, post-recession unemployment, and serious physical illness. The young adults who adopted this participation style came from working- or middle-class backgrounds and had positive relationships with their stable and supportive families.

All young adults in this group displayed high levels of agency and typically recognized their distinction from fellow participants with significantly fewer agentic resources and abilities. This was also recognized by practitioners, as illustrated by the second interview excerpt below:

> At first, I didn't feel at all like I belonged here. More like, not because the other participants were mean of anything or not accepting me, but because of their backgrounds. Like I feel that I've had a good childhood and everything has been going really well for me. And then, what they've, it's nothing like what I have experienced. Like up to now I haven't had any problems or anything. (FI_Y9)

> She [the practitioner] helped me in finding jobs. She always called me: "I have sent your CV there", but she told me that I didn't need her help. (SP_Y8)

In the case of the two Finnish young adults displaying this participation style, the policies in which they participated had flexible access, a high degree of individualized support, and close practitioner-participant relationships. Therefore, it was relatively easy for these "selective utilizers" with high levels of personal agency to negotiate access to the policy and be "selective"—despite not really corresponding to the target group or sharing the institutionally foreseen policy goals. Nevertheless, both access and selectiveness required space for negotiation and relatively trusting relationships with the policy practitioners. Thus, what made selectiveness possible was a combination of the policy features and their own agency, which was further supported by high social resources.

While the two Spanish young adults belonging to this group also had high levels of personal agency and positive family relationships, they differed from the Finnish young adults in that their social resources were lower and, in that sense, they corresponded to policy target groups. However, their selectiveness was not based on any particular negotiations with practitioners and their motivation for participation differed. For one individual, enrolling in the policy was only one of many things they had done to improve their skills, expand their social network, and find employment. The other Spanish "selective utilizer" used participation to break with bad habits and gain routines while planning next steps. Table 5.3 presents the distribution of participation styles among the examined policies.

Table 5.3 Participation styles by LLL policy

Participation style	Policy					
	UK_P1	UK_P2	SP_P1	SP_P2	FI_P1	FI_P2
Proactive and purposeful	2(1)	4(4)	–	3(1)	1	–
Supported capacity-building	–	–	4	2	2	1
Arbitrary and incidental	2(1)	–	–	1	–	1
Selective utilization	–	–	1	1	1	1

Source: Author's own

Note: The number in brackets indicates the number of policy participants able to customize the policy to their individual needs and wishes (see the next section)

5.5 Agency and Access to Informal Leeway

During analysis, a pattern emerged from the data related to the existence and accessibility of informal leeway to adapt and customize policies to participants' personal needs and wishes. While the four individuals adopting the "selective utilization" participation style displayed comparatively high agentic resources through somewhat instrumental participation, other young adults were able to go a step further in leveraging informal leeway within the policies by actually altering the conditions of the policy offer. These seven young adults (see Table 5.3) enrolled in LLL policies in ACAR and Girona not only selected aspects of the policies but also customized them to meet their individual needs, deviating from what was institutionally foreseen.

The leeway that these seven young adults utilized was indeed informal in nature. Thanks to the relationships they built with policy actors (whether policy practitioners, policy managers, or employers), they were able to access a degree of customization that was not typical for the policy. Therefore, it is not surprising that this kind of customization was not found in the Finnish cases, as the original policy designs offered such a high degree of individualization and flexibility that any changes made by young adults could not be considered informal. Instead, in the Spanish and Scottish cases, these young adults were able to leverage trusting and positive relationships with policy actors who had the power and resources to find pockets of leeway within the policies and make adaptations on a case-by-case basis. In some instances, these relationships were the result of existing family connections, indicating the role of social advantage in accessing informal leeway:

> Actually, I came in [to dad's workplace], asked for an apprentice or a job, and I was told to come back once I'd finished all my exams. So, the next, second time I came in, I was told to come in on Monday to work. […] Even though I have failed my maths, I have been allowed to just stay on my apprentice. (UK_Y6)

In every case, the customization took place at the interface between training and employment components of LLL policies, with young adults able to shorten training periods (in order to begin working or achieve qualification more quickly), alter working conditions, or organize desired work placements outside the usual channels.

> I had done my exams and then decided that I was leaving […], but then, before I left, I set up a summer job at the [company] that I am at just now. […] And then, I was coming up to the end of my summer job, and then I said to the boss, I have got into college. […] But I said I could go three days a week to that and, if I can, come and work two days a week [contributing to LLL qualification]. Then I would do that, if you would let me. […] So the two days I worked paid my fuel, obviously to get there [to college], so that was good. (UK_Y5)

> I didn't even finish the [policy participation]. It would have lasted three months, and after one and a half months I was already working. I kept attending within my availability, but I started working. [--] The [policy practitioners] they saw I was really serious in the course, I was trying very hard and they got me an interview in this [company]. (SP_Y10)

Six out of the seven customizers adopted a "proactive and purposeful" participation style,[6] which is hardly surprising. The high level of agency, clarity of purpose, and strong interpersonal skills required to build relationships, formulate desires outside the confines of the policy, and articulate and pursue these goals with policy actors are notable and correspond to the characteristics of this group. Furthermore, where these young adults made use of existing family connections to help achieve customization, it indicated a high level of social capital and family support, which were also more typical of this group. Nonetheless, there was one unexpected case of an "arbitrary and incidental" customizer. This young

person described how policy participation itself increased their confidence and agency to the point where they felt able to make a request of the policy practitioner, who, impressed by the young person's progress in the policy, went out of their way (and pre-existing policy mechanisms) to secure the young person's work placement of choice.

> I asked […] if I was able to get a [work experience] place at [a company that the interviewee visited often as customer]. He [policy practitioner] tried his hardest to get this placement for me, and he got it for me, and I couldn't be more happy. (UK_Y3)

Interestingly, the process of customization itself further empowered some young people, as the recognition, validation, and fulfilment of their needs bolstered self-confidence.

5.6 Discussion

The four different LLL policy participation styles identified from the data illustrate the relevance of agentic and social resources stemming from social background and previous life course experiences (c.f. Dawson, 2012; Elder et al., 2015; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Levy & Bühlmann, 2016) for how young people orient to, and participate in, LLL policies. As expected, participation styles also reflected certain features of the surrounding institutional and discursive opportunity structures (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2015) formed by the policies and their local/regional/national contexts (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012; Parreira do Amaral & Zelinka, 2019; Walther, 2017). Successfully accessing and manoeuvring in these policy opportunity structures requires varying degrees of autonomy and agency, and the structures afford varying levels of formal and informal leeway to young adults.

Some leeway in the policies can be perceived as institutional or formal, such as differing menus of options for participants. These options are not always (equally) well communicated; thus, making informed choices requires knowledge of the options' existence and meaning. Making choices—instead of being directed to a policy option—also requires a

certain amount of confidence and agency from participants. There was also "hidden" or informal leeway in most of the policies, which was revealed by the experiences of the seven Scottish and Spanish "customizers" and the two Finnish young adults who adopted the "selective utilization" participation style. Regarding the latter, what made their rather instrumental selectiveness possible was a combination of highly flexible and individualized policy features and their own agency, which was further supported by their relatively high social resources.

In addition, for those seven who were able to customize policies, this was only possible thanks to relationships that young adults fostered with policy actors. Furthermore, the importance of these relationships for the trajectories of these seven young adults is something unaccounted for by either discursive or institutional understandings of the opportunity structure. Formally, this leeway was not a feature of the policies, nor was it a product of broader social norms about the policies and their participants. Instead, these adaptations emanated from the micro-level of policy implementation, where personal relationships between individuals fostered self-confidence, trust, and mutual dedication. It is notable that this informal, relational leeway comes into play when individualization and flexibility has not been institutionalized in the policy design (as in the Finnish case study). In other words, most of the policies under study, even those that were institutionally more rigid or pre-determined, did offer a degree of leeway for customization, but when not formally offered, it could be achieved through informal, relational means. This has important consequences for equity, as, based on our results, only those young adults with the highest agentic resources were able to articulate and pursue a desire for customization, resulting in unequal participation experiences and outcomes and further disadvantaging of more vulnerable policy participants (Palumbo et al., 2019; Palumbo et al., 2020). The Finnish policies follow a universal individualization approach, thus supporting fruitful experiences for participants regardless of their ability to foster personal relationships with policy actors. In contrast, the Spanish and (even more so) Scottish policies adopt a universal standardization approach that requires participants to be able to build close relationships with policy workers in order to move beyond standard policy goals or mechanisms.

In conclusion, our findings confirm the assumption that how young adults orient to LLL policies and the policy participation styles they adopt reflect both their personal capacities and resources and the opportunity structures formed by the policies. Furthermore, in line with previous research (Rambla et al., 2020), our findings show that the meanings and motivations young adults attach to their participation in LLL policies do not always align with formal policy objectives. This observation is not particularly surprising given that LLL policies rarely provide opportunities for young adults to participate in design or implementation (Kovacheva et al., 2020). Lastly, in general, those young adults who were most motivated and positive about their LLL policy experiences and who exercised the most autonomy over their participation were those who had greater social resources and, as a result, were more able to adhere to a formalized and standardized LLL pathway. By contrast, young adults with more disrupted life courses and fewer sources of support were more likely to continue with a disrupted trajectory under the LLL policies they participated in, reproducing processes of social exclusion (Alheit & Dausien, 2002; Kotthoff et al., 2017).

Notes

1. While life course research typically views structure and agency as analytically distinct (Eteläpelto et al., 2013), we eschew this unproductive dualism and adopt a more Bourdieuian understanding (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Instead of viewing agency simply as "bound" by structures, we understand individuals as coming into being through active engagement with systems of power relationships and agree with Coffey and Farrugia (2014, p. 472) who emphasize that "Youth studies cannot simply continue to celebrate actions that resist existing power relationships as manifestations of agency. To do so results in conceptual frameworks that portray young people who do not resist as lacking active subjectivity, erases the efforts that these young people are making to build lives in conditions not of their own choosing, and imposes pre-existing normative commitments on young people to whom they may not be relevant".

2. Expert interviews: policy description; goals; target groups; collaborative mechanisms; dimensions of leeway in the policy.

   Young adult interviews: family and social background; accumulation of (dis)advantage in the life course; events leading to policy participation; policy participation (reasons, goals, impacts); displayed agentic abilities.
3. For more information on the regions, see Kotthoff et al. (2017) and Scandurra et al. (2018).
4. To safeguard the privacy of the interviewees, the official names of the policies and measures at the core of the case studies analysed in this chapter have been replaced by codes. Specifically, the codes report the abbreviation of the country name followed by "P" ("Policy") and a sequence number on the basis of the order of appearance of the policies in the book.

   The codes attached to the quotations from interviews report the abbreviation of the country name followed by "Ex" ("Expert" for street level professionals, policy managers, and policymakers) or "Y" (for young adults) and the sequence number attributed by the different research teams while collecting the interviews.
5. It is important to note that while virtually all the young adults in our sample stated that they had experienced some gains from policy participation, some of them also expressed criticism, such as insufficient timeframes or narrow menus of options. However, these complaints were not predominant for any one participation style and none of the styles was defined by a critical stance among the young adults. It is also necessary to emphasize that the young adults who agreed to be interviewed were likely those who had a positive attitude towards the policies and were relatively eager to share their life experiences and views.
6. The reason we do not propose that these young adults display a distinct participation style is twofold. Firstly, in other regards, their participation style is a good match to the participation style groups discussed above. Secondly, the customization that they were able to achieve did not define their whole participation style but was a narrow—although significant—aspect of their policy experience. While we define participation styles by the different meanings and motivations for participation that young adults attach to LLL policies, here, we particularly look at the extent to which they could alter the very definition of the policies through their relationship with policy actors.

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6

Institutional, Economic-Material, and Discursive Opportunity Structures Influencing Support and Guidance Policies for Young People in Austria, Finland, and Scotland

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6.1 Introduction

A relevant number of Lifelong Learning (LLL) policies targeting young adults across Europe focus on providing support and guidance to smooth the transition from education to employment. Most of these policies are

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promoted at the supranational level (i.e., European Union), but these are usually reframed into national political discourses and institutions. However, in most European countries these nationally reframed LLL policies are implemented—and more importantly enacted—in a variety of regional contexts. Flexible solutions are usually required to allow regions to adapt to a wide range of socioeconomic factors that influence youth education, training, and employment opportunities. Therefore, even if similar LLL policy goals and approaches are disseminated across countries and regions, the final enactment is likely to vary depending on national institutions, perceptions, discourses, and regional socioeconomic structures, all of which partly influence the problematization of the situation.

In this chapter, we analyse the extent to which national education institutions and regional socioeconomic contexts influence the objectives (i.e., explicit goals) and orientations (i.e., interests, ideas) of LLL policies focused on supporting young people in the transition from education to the labour market. We also focus on the influence that the meanings attributed to these LLL policies have on governing young adults' educational and employment trajectories. Our approach assumes that the objectives and orientations of LLL policies are influenced by a set of institutional, discursive (Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015) and economic-material opportunity structures, which subsequently influence the governance of youth educational and early labour market trajectories. Throughout this chapter, we disentangle how each type of opportunity structure influences the objectives and orientations of LLL policies, and their subsequent configuration at the regional level.

To conduct our analyses, we employ the skills formation regimes classification laid out in the "Political Economy of Skills Formation" (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012) to identify different national institutional and organizational forms of skills formation for young people. These are based on differing historical pathways, understandings, and meanings (Jessop, 2010) attributed to LLL and skills policies.

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While Austria belongs to the collective regime (social partners collaboration), Finland can be classified within the statist model (state-led), and Scotland in the liberal regime (market-led).

For each country, we focus our analysis on two socioeconomically contrasting regions, allowing us to compare a variety of regional economic-material opportunity structures within and across countries. The main regional factors of variation are the comparative level of demand of intermediate skills (i.e., those typically acquired in vocational education and training—VET) and the existence of a predominant economic sector (e.g., gas and oil in Aberdeen). The selected policies are enacted in the Austrian regions of Upper Austria (AT_P1[1] in a context with high demand of intermediate skills) and Vienna (AT_P2, low demand for intermediate skills); the Finnish regions of Southwest Finland (FI_P3, high demand) and Kainuu (FI_P4, low demand); and the Scottish regions of Aberdeen (UK_P3, high demand) and Glasgow (UK_P4, low demand). For each region, we analyse a LLL policy that meets two criteria. First, it targets young adults and, second, its main focus is supporting young adults' transition from education to the labour market (e.g., career guidance, mentoring).

Our empirical comparative analyses are based on the information collected from interviews with relevant national and regional stakeholders. The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. First, we discuss the analytical framework employed to conduct our analyses. Second, we present the methodology and data used for the analyses. Third, we discuss our empirical analyses based on the three relevant opportunity structures identified (i.e., institutional, economic-material and discursive). Finally, we summarize and conclude the chapter by pointing out the policy implications of the findings.

6.2 Analytical Framework

In this chapter, we analyse how a variety of national and regional institutional, economic-material, and discursive opportunity structures influences the objectives and orientations of LLL policies targeting young adults at the regional level. To distinguish between the different types of opportunity structures, we build on the discussion and conceptualization

proposed by Dale and Parreira do Amaral (2015). Building on Koopmans et al.'s (2005) ideas of opportunities and constraints, this understanding of opportunity structure argues that there is a set of structures that allow for what can be potentially said and/or done in a particular political area and context. In other words, opportunity structures are a set of potential actions available under certain structural circumstances. These opportunity structures (i.e., opportunities for action) vary across countries and, as argued by Dale and Parreira do Amaral (2015), "the governance of educational trajectories is embedded in discursive and institutional frames, which take different national forms and help shape its outcomes" (Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015, p. 24). Based on this idea, we employ opportunity structure as a tool to disentangle the (in)direct influence of institutional and discursive opportunity structures on LLL policies objectives and orientations that intend to partly govern young adults' educational and early employment trajectories.

In addition to the proposed institutional and discursive opportunity structures mentioned above, we also consider the regional economic-material opportunity structures. We understand this as an additional relevant type of opportunity structures influencing the objectives of LLL policies and, subsequently, young adults' educational and labour market trajectories. While the institutional and discursive opportunity structures are based on a long historical process involving cultural, social, and political assumptions, the economic-material opportunity structure of the regions are driven by medium- to long-term socioeconomic processes. While previous research has focused on the influence and interaction of opportunity structures between the supranational and national levels for LLL policies (e.g., Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015), and on the influence of EU on driving the LLL agenda (Rasmussen, 2009), we contribute to previous studies by incorporating the influence of the economic-material opportunity structure to this equation, as well as by shedding light on the relevance of the regional level for the study of the opportunity structures.

Therefore, we consider the following three types of opportunity structures in our analyses and disentangle the extent to which each one of them influences the objectives and orientations of LLL policies:

- *Institutional and organizational opportunity structures* are understood as the opportunities for action resulting from long historical processes of formal institutionalization of cultural, social, and political assumptions, values, and norms in a society. The national level becomes especially important, as it is where the most relevant institutional and organizational educational features tend to be shaped. A clear example is the formal education systems across European countries, and the type of skills these generate. A useful classification of this long historical process of institutional formation is the variety of skills formation regimes proposed by Busemeyer and Trampusch (2012). They employ variation along two dimensions to understand the different solutions to 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, while a higher commitment of the state will go beyond financial support to include its certification and standardization, as well as the recognition of VET as a viable alternative to academic higher education. The combination of these two dimensions results in four types of solutions: (1) the liberal solution of narrow on-the-job training (e.g., the United Kingdom); (2) the segmentalist solution of firms' self-regulation (e.g., Japan); (3) the statist solution of state-run training (e.g., France); and (4) the collective solution where firms, employers' and workers' associations, and the state collaborate in providing and financing skills (e.g., Germany). According to this classification, economies that combine high public commitment and high employers' involvement in skills formation will tend to be associated with high to intermediate skills, and a high level of adjustment between the skills of the workforce and job requirements (Estevez-Abe et al., 2001). Thus, we expect the objectives of LLL policies to differ across skills formation regimes.
- *Economic-material opportunity structures* are understood as the set of educational and socioeconomic relations that facilitate employment opportunities. The demand for skills in a particular region and the degree of (mis)match with the available supply of skills are the key elements in understanding this opportunity structures. Previous research on skills mismatch has traditionally been dominated by economists and functionalists' views of the labour market. Most of them have

heavily relied on the supply side fundamentalism of the human capital theory (HCT) (Becker, 1964), which assumes that people invest in education and training to get economic returns in the labour market once their skills are put into full use. Since HCT also assumes that both individual workers and employers are willing to fully utilize skills and maximize productivity, a perfect match between skills supply and demand is regarded as the final situation, with skills mismatch being only temporary. However, on several occasions, the reality has been shown to be far from the ideal skills match. In addition to the influence that the level and type of educational investment "chosen" by individuals (i.e., supply side) might have on their labour market situation, employment possibilities very much depend on what employers are looking for, the number of jobs available (i.e., demand side) and the pace of matching these with the supply of education and skills (Lauder et al., 2012). Therefore, given our selection of socioeconomically contrasting regions, we expect that the cross-regional variation in the demand of skills partly influences the differences in the objectives of LLL policies across regions.

- *Discursive opportunity structures* are understood as a set of meanings, rules, and practices that orient the possibilities of the construction of political and social relations, but which are not necessarily formalized in a document or institutional setting. Discursive opportunity structures refer to the meaning and interpretation that actors and stakeholders attribute to a situation in a particular context. For instance, as noted by several authors (e.g., Jessop et al., 2008; Robertson, 2008; Lauder et al., 2012) at the European level in the field of education policy, the rhetoric of the knowledge-based economy has become a necessary condition to justify any policy change or development. According to Hay (2010), "Interests do not exist, but constructions of interests do" (Hay, 2010, p. 79). Policies are promoted by individuals in a particular context, influenced by ideational foundations about what is feasible, legitimate, and desirable according to their perceptions (Hay, 2010, p. 69). Thus, we expect the orientations of LLL policies to vary across the selected regions given different meanings, rules, and practices attributed and mobilized by national and regional actors.

6.3 Methodology and Data

In line with our analytical framework, we organize our research questions and analyses according to the three types of opportunity structures proposed. First, we look at the influence that the national skills formation regime has on the objectives of LLL policies at the regional level. Second, we focus on the influence of the regional educational and employment context on LLL policy objectives. Third, we place the focus on the influence that the interests and meanings attributed to LLL policies by national and regional stakeholders have on the governance of young adults' educational and early labour market trajectories. Our analyses address these three analytical dimensions by providing answers to the following three research questions:

- to what extent are the **objectives** of LLL policies influenced by the **national** skills formation regimes (i.e., liberal, statist, collective)? (institutional opportunity structures);
- to what extent are the **objectives** of LLL policies based on the **regional** demand for skills (i.e., employer engagement) ? (economic-material opportunity structures);
- to what extent are the **orientations** of LLL policies influencing **youth** educational and employment trajectories? (discursive opportunity structures).

We selected our empirical cases based on three main criteria. First, to allow for cross-national variation, we chose three countries with different skills formation regimes (institutional opportunity structures) (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012). Austria fits into the collective regime of skills formation (i.e., high degree of firm involvement and high degree of public commitment), while Finland corresponds to the statist model (i.e., low degree of firm involvement and high degree of public commitment), and Scotland (UK) to the liberal regime (i.e., low degree of firm involvement and low degree of public commitment).

Second, to allow for cross-regional variation, we selected two socioeconomically contrasting regions per country (i.e., six regions in total)

concerning their educational and labour market contexts (i.e., economic-material opportunity structures). For instance, in Austria, the dominance of the industrial production in Upper Austria contrasts with the prevalence of the service sector in Vienna. The high share of young people with upper secondary education qualifications in Upper Austria and their high employment rate differs from the highly polarized youth qualifications landscape (i.e., low vs high) in Vienna and the comparably high youth unemployment rate among young people with low qualifications and skills.

In Finland, we can also find some contrast between the two selected regions. Southwest Finland's economy mainly consists of marine industry, metal construction and the service sector, whereas the most important sectors in Kainuu relate to the metal, forest, and mining companies. Southwest Finland offers a strong and diverse range of educational opportunities for young people that translates into a comparably low youth unemployment rate, while in Kainuu, educational opportunities are limited and youth unemployment is comparably higher.

We also observe contrast between the two Scottish regions. Aberdeen is well known for its oil and gas industry, which attracts young people with high qualifications, while the most relevant economic sectors in Glasgow are services and retail, human health, social work, and education. Both regions are economically active and show levels of (youth) unemployment below the Scottish average, but they differ significantly in their population profile. Aberdeen is characterized by a well-qualified youth workforce and, generally, a high presence of apprenticeship positions, while Glasgow displays one of the highest shares of socially disadvantaged people and/or with no formal qualifications in Scotland.

Third, to focus our analysis on a specific and relevant policy dimension of LLL for young adults, we selected ongoing policies that have supporting young people in the transition from education to the labour market as the main objective, allowing us to look at the underlying orientations (i.e., interests, ideas) of this set goal (discursive opportunity structures). In Austria, we selected AT_P11 policy in Upper Austria, and AT_P2 policy in Vienna. AT_P1 targets young adults aged 22 or above who have professional experience but have not gained an apprenticeship certificate or been employed in a trained profession for more than five years. Its

main intention is to facilitate the certification of informally acquired skills. It does so by providing short work-based learning (WBL) courses and officially certifying young people's skills. Similarly, AT_P2 in Vienna also aims at facilitating youth employability, but it does so by providing transitional work activation (e.g., transitional employment, coaching, and specific training). The target group of this policy is young people who are aged between 18 and 24 on needs-oriented subsidies (i.e., registered at the Austrian Public Employment Service), and who are unemployed despite participating in training and actively searching for jobs.

In Finland, we chose FI_P3 policy in Southwest Finland and FI_P4 policy in Kainuu. FI_P3 in Southwest Finland targets all students who are undertaking on-the-job training, with a special emphasis on those that present special support needs (e.g., mental health). It assigns each student a work life coach who supports them from a holistic perspective. Although the focus is on getting suitable and relevant learning experience in a business and ensuring completion and/or continuation into formal education or employment, this holistic approach also allows for individual coaches to provide support in other life domains (e.g., financial support). In contrast, FI_P4 in Kainuu targets unemployed young adults who are having difficulties in finding employment or a suitable study place. The main intention is to improve young adults' employability through WBL courses that will certify their skills, as well as improve their self-confidence and job-searching skills.

In Scotland we picked the "Developing the Young Workforce" (DYW) policy in both regions (UK_P3 in Aberdeen and UK_P4 in Glasgow). This is a Scottish flagship education, training, and employment policy (2014–2021), nationally promoted by the Scottish government but implemented (and enacted) at the regional level by local and regional stakeholders (e.g., chambers of commerce, city councils) working in partnership. This national-regional-local approach aims at allowing national priorities to be flexibly implemented across regions to meet local demands and needs. As its title indicates, the principal objective is to better prepare young people in Scotland (i.e., 16–24 years old) for the world of work, highlighting the vocational and technical elements of education. It mainly does so by providing career guidance and facilitating access to apprenticeships in regional businesses.

Table 6.1 Number of interviews by region and interviewee profile

REGION/ COUNTRY	Street-level practitioners related to the policy	Regional experts and relevant stakeholders or policymakers	TOTAL
Upper Austria (Austria)	2	5	7
Vienna (Austria)	3	5	8
Southwest Finland (Finland)	2	3	5
Kainuu (Finland)	2	3	5
Aberdeen (Scotland)	2	4	6
Glasgow (Scotland)	3	5	8
TOTAL	14	25	39

Source: Author's own

We based our analysis on data collected by three coordinated research teams in the corresponding countries. Table 6.1 above displays the number of interviews and interviewees' profile by region. The interviews were conducted face-to-face between January and July 2017. Some of them were conducted by telephone or Skype call due to the remoteness of the area or the availability of the interviewees. Preliminary analyses drafted in national reports (Capsada-Munsech & Valiente, 2017; Doyle, 2017; Pot et al., 2017a, 2017b; Rinne et al., 2017; Tikkanen et al., 2017) and systematic policy profiles of the selected policies served as a basis for writing this chapter. However, we went back to the original interviews transcriptions when required.

6.4 The Influence of Skills Formation Regimes on LLL Policy Objectives

We first address the research question, "To what extent are the **objectives** of LLL policies influenced by the **national** skills formation regime?". One common feature across the selected policies and countries is that they all try to engage with employers, but the extent to and the ways in which they intend to reach them clearly differ. In the following sections,

we discuss the extent to which these different degrees and forms of employers' engagement are influenced by their national skills formation regimes.

Starting with the Austrian case, we can clearly identify a connection between the skills formation regime and the main policy objectives. Austria displays a collective skills formation system where both employers and the state jointly organize and govern the initial VET system. It is characterized by a high degree of involvement of firms and high commitment of the state, leading into a logically articulated system. This established institutionalization of the cooperation among actors clearly sets up the rules of the game. While this is obviously an advantage for those whose educational and employment pathways fit into this linear trajectory (i.e., VET course, on-the-job training, apprenticeship certification, employment), it is more challenging for those that have diverted from it for different reasons (e.g., family commitments, school dropout) or have been incorporated into the system later on (e.g., immigrants, refugees).

We argue that this is the main reason why Austrian policies have redirecting young adults into the main education and training system as a key objective. For instance, in Upper Austria we see that the main objective of the AT_P1 policy is certifying skills that young people most likely already possess, but that need to be formally recognized to be considered by employers in this highly institutionalized system. This is mostly done via short WBL courses focused on employability skills. Some of the participants are immigrants whose educational attainment has not yet been officially recognized by the Austrian system. Similarly, in Vienna, the AT_P2 policy aims at activating young adults who have no employment and depend on basic subsidies. Employability training and coaching are part of the activation package, as well as transitional employment.

From another perspective, the statist skills formation regime system in Finland also presents a clear influence on the policy objectives. In comparative terms, Finland shows a high degree of public commitment to the VET system in combination with a lower degree of involvement from firms. Although employers' demands are considered in the VET system, the state plays a more relevant role in the articulation of what is to be taught and for what reasons. Even if the policy objectives might look like those in Austria and Scotland (i.e., promoting and facilitating

employability courses among young adults), the Finnish approach is more holistic. Both policies in Southwest Finland (FI_P3) and in Kainuu (FI_P4) consider a wide range of life dimensions. Even though the entry point differs—coaching young adults while transitioning into employment in Southwest Finland, and the need to find employment for unemployed young people in Kainuu—in both regions the policy goals go beyond the education and labour market sphere. They both focus on other relevant life dimensions (e.g., mental health) that might be preventing access to education, training, and employment. Moreover, both policies have a broad target group—on-the-job-training students in one of the largest municipal VET institutions in Southwest Finland and unemployed young people in Kainuu—allowing people with different circumstances and profiles to benefit from the policy and get personalized support. Therefore, this statist-driven approach provides some evidence of resistance towards fully marketing social inclusion in a capitalist society via education and employment.

In Scotland we can also identify some areas where the institutional liberal skills formation regime influences policy objectives at the national and regional levels. In comparative terms, the liberal skills formation regime is characterized by a low degree of involvement and commitment by businesses and public institutions in the initial VET system. One of the results of this limited coordination in the initial VET system is that the predominant and normative pathway tends to be academic, as it is socially recognized as more prestigious.

However, challenges arise for those that do not want—or that are not allowed—to follow the traditional academic pathway due to insufficient educational achievement.

This is almost explicit in the national documents of DYW, as the main objective of the policy is to prepare young people for the world of work providing VET alternatives to those that are not following the academic path. However, the problematized group—and the one targeted by the policy—is young people who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment. People in this target group are assumed to be in unemployment partly because of the 2008 post-recession scenario, but also because of their individual lack of employability skills. While those that follow the academic path are more commonly successful in securing employment,

those that do not are regarded as lacking skills, and VET is proposed by DYW as an appropriate way to "fix" their problem. Therefore, the main objective of DYW is partly influenced by the existent limitations of the initial VET system in Scotland.

It is important to highlight that due to this initial low degree of firm involvement and state commitment in initial VET in Scotland, ad-hoc policies are designed and promoted across the country to coordinate different relevant actors in the initial VET system. Although the general objective of DYW is to promote this further involvement of both public (i.e., schools, colleges, city councils) and private (i.e., businesses) stakeholders into the VET system, it does so by transferring the responsibility to regional and local actors. This can be envisioned by some as an advantage that allows regional and local actors to tackle specific problems, whereas others might see it as a disadvantage, as it relies on regional and local actors' initiative and capacity, which might reinforce already existing regional inequalities.

6.5 The Influence of the Regional Supply and Demand of Skills on LLL Policy Objectives

We now move to the second research question: "To what extent are the **objectives** of LLL policies based on the **regional** demand for skills (i.e., employer engagement)?". Thus, in this section we discuss the extent to which the objectives of the selected LLL policies are aligned with the socioeconomic reality of the region, paying special attention to the (mis) match between the supply and demand of skills.

Starting with Austria, we can see that in Upper Austria the regional educational and labour market context is characterized by a high presence of industry requiring VET skills and a good number of available apprenticeship positions. While the youth employment rate is comparably high, the main challenge is making sure that those young people who have basic skills levels attain a formal certification of their technical skills. In most cases, these young people come from a disadvantaged social background. According to one of the interviewees

> the central question is how to reduce this target group [young people with poor skills and certificates] and become a less selective system. It is a problem that these young people we are talking about are really, they are children from lower or less educated classes. (AT_Ex1)

As noted by another interviewee, in some sectors (e.g., IT) this might even translate into a skills shortage:

> we have branches, divisions and areas where our companies are desperately looking for staff and, of course, for apprentices. (AT_Ex2)

Therefore, it seems that the intention of the AT_P1 policy, which is to certify informally acquired skills via short WBL courses, is a good match with the actual demand for skills in the region.

Conversely, in Vienna, the lower presence of available apprenticeship positions challenges the youth employment situation, especially for those with no formal certifications. The main goal of the AT_P2 policy is to reinforce employability skills, as well as providing coaching and mentoring opportunities for those that are seen as lacking formal qualifications. However, the limited availability of apprenticeships and adequate jobs for VET skills challenges the effectiveness of this policy. According to one of the interviewees

> the biggest challenges are people with insufficient qualifications versus a lack of budget. (AT_Ex3)

This is also combined with a relevant share of young people who do have valid and relevant educational qualifications, but who find themselves unemployed due to the scarcity of apprenticeship positions and jobs. Thus, this mismatch situation between the supply and demand of skills brings the objectives of the Viennese policy into question.

In Southwest Finland, a region characterized by a diversified economy and a comparatively low youth unemployment rate, the main challenges the FI_P3 policy is trying to address are dropout and late completion of VET courses. This is considered a critical stage in young people's educational and employment trajectories that must be supported to avoid later

challenges. As argued above, the policy takes a holistic approach, providing support and coaching to facilitate completion and certification of studies and skills. Therefore, we could argue that this is a "preventive" approach, aiming to reduce the number of young people that disengage from formal education and/or employment. This seems to be particularly important for promoting employment among young people in some sectors such as the growing marine and metal construction industries, which display a shortage of workers with VET skills. While most young people have found these sectors unattractive, the mentoring and career guidance provided by the FI_P3 policy might partly address this issue, increasing the number of young adults who complete VET courses and gain employment. Moreover, as suggested by one of the interviewees (FI_Ex1), this policy also supports employers in taking young people with on-the-job training, as this makes them more confident that students will finish their VET courses. Taking on new learners involves a substantial investment of time and commitment from the employer's side, which might not be always productive to them if the student does not formally complete the course.

In the contrasting region of Kainuu, where youth unemployment is comparably high, there are more limited educational opportunities (e.g., no university level education) and apprenticeship positions. This usually means that those who leave the region seeking educational and employment opportunities rarely come back. The selected FI_P4 policy targets unemployed youth and provides them with opportunities to improve their employability skills. The effectiveness of this approach might be questioned in a region where education and employment opportunities are already very limited, as improving youth employability skills might not lead to employment due to the scarcity of jobs. Nevertheless, the main contribution of this policy is that it first addresses social inclusion issues (e.g., poverty, health conditions) that are preventing youth from engaging in formal education and employment. The policy target includes young people with severe functional physical and/or mental challenges, for which employment is not a realistic option in the near future but will be once the main barriers preventing it are addressed.

In both regions in Scotland, the DYW policy (UK_P3 in Aberdeen and UK_P4 in Glasgow) aims at promoting VET education and skills

among youth by reinforcing employers' engagement and involvement in VET. However, the (mis)match between the supply and demand of skills is very different in both regions. In Aberdeen, most young people are comparatively well-qualified and there is a substantial number of available apprenticeship positions, whereas in Glasgow there are larger number of young people with low qualifications and a lower presence of available apprenticeship positions. Unsurprisingly, the challenges these two regions face differ. As stated by all regional experts interviewed in Aberdeen, the main challenge is that a significant number of young people are not willing to look for alternative career paths beyond the oil and gas industry, while in Glasgow it mainly relates to overcoming poverty barriers to access VET and a limited demand for apprentices in the regional economy. Since the DYW allows for flexibility to adapt to the regional challenges, policymakers and practitioners can adjust their actions and priorities to the regional needs. Decisions about regional priorities are based on labour market intelligence information. For instance, in Aberdeen the strategy proposed by the experts interviewed is the promotion of new sectors among the youth, as well as engagement with employers from different sectors (e.g., construction, food and drink industry). Even if the oil and gas industry is still (in)directly employing a lot of people in the region, the diversification of risk across economic sectors and industries is considered as an important strategy, especially in the aftermath of the 2014 oil crisis. Despite this, the challenge remains in making young people and their families confident in investing in these new sectors.

As expressed by all regional experts interviewed in Glasgow, the policy priorities are improving links between industry and educational institutions and getting more young people into apprenticeships and employment. However, the cross-cutting element is ensuring equality, meaning that the policy objectives in the region also support young people in overcoming other barriers (e.g., poverty, mental health) that are preventing them from engaging with formal education and employment. Yet, one of the interviewees also clearly stated that

> the employers will only engage if they have a need. They won't create a position for somebody. It has to fit in with what their needs are, (UK_Ex1)

highlighting the relevance of the regional demand. While there are still some young people leaving the education system without a formal qualification, there are some fields that experience skills shortages (e.g., ICT and digital skills) and young people who are employed in overqualified positions. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon situation in many European urban regions, which clearly shows the relevance of the regional (mis)match between the supply and demand of skills for youth education and employment trajectories.

6.6 The Influence of Regional Policy Orientations on Youth Educational and Employment Trajectories

In this third section of findings, we move into exploring the question: "To what extent are the **orientations** of LLL policies influencing **youth** educational and employment trajectories?". We discuss how the meaning and understanding attributed to LLL policies by relevant stakeholders (e.g., policy practitioners, policy experts) might influence youth educational and early labour market trajectories.

Starting with the region of Upper Austria, interviewees suggested that the way the policy is enacted not only serves to certify young people's skills, but also as a way of raising their self-esteem. Identifying and validating skills they already gained shows young people that they were "on the right path", although they had to formally certify it. Moreover, it shows that there are alternative (and shorter) routes to the traditional formal educational pathways that can also lead into employment. Thus, in terms of the governance of youth trajectories, the selected policy seems to provide valid and feasible alternatives to the formal skills formation system, successfully leading into (sustained) employment. According to one of the interviewees (AT_Ex1), the low threshold accessibility and the practice-based approach of the AT_P1 policy are the keys to its success in influencing youth trajectories. According to the same interviewee, one of the positive effects observed for young people participating in the policy is a rise in their sense of self-worth and self-esteem, as they see what they can accomplish, regardless of negative experiences they might have faced

before. In some cases, this has even provided young people with enough confidence and motivation to continue into further education and, as noted by one of the interviewees (AT_Ex5), it can be understood as a second chance programme. The same interviewee argues that part of the success of this policy is because of its personalized approach, identifying the skills each youth already possesses but which need certification, as well as those that need development. This individualized approach reduces the time of retraining, while increasing the usefulness and relevance participants see in it. Furthermore, employers also benefit from this shorter and targeted training, as these were some of their original demands.

By contrast, in Vienna the enactment of the selected policy is more complex. As stated by one of the interviewees (AT_Ex3), the actual target group of the policy is rather diverse. While the provision of WBL to improve young people's employability skills might be useful and adequate for those with low skills and unfamiliar with the Viennese educational and employment landscape, it might be irrelevant to those that already possess a wide range of skills and qualifications but are negatively affected by the shortage of jobs and apprenticeships. As pointed out by one of the interviewees (AT_Ex6), policy managers were surprised when they first realized that a non-negligible proportion of those that qualified to be beneficiaries of the policy (i.e., young people receiving minimum income subsidies) were in possession of high-level qualifications. However, even more complex situations are faced by those that have an immigrant and/or refugee background, as additional barriers prevent them from engagement in education and employment. As discussed by one of the interviewees (AT_Ex3), these young people do want to work, but most of them have unrealistic and outdated professional goals, aspirations, and expectations. This unrealistic approach to the current labour market opportunities is partly addressed by this policy. As argued by one of the interviewees (AT_Ex4), the AT_P2 policy can be viewed as providing an opportunity for quasi-employment to young adults for about ten months. During this time, young adults can train and reflect on their employment opportunities without experiencing the immediate pressure of finding work.

In Finland, the policy orientations also have a clear influence on the governance of youth trajectories. In Southwest Finland, most interviewees think the "success" of the FI_P3 policy can be attributed to, first, its holistic approach to young adults' circumstances and, second, the easily accessible and universal support provided to students in this critical stage of their lives. Beyond the formal objective of providing mentoring to support VET completion and gain employment, interviewees stated that one of the positive aspects of the policy is that it allows professionals to know more about young people's personal issues and circumstances, and better personalize the support they receive. The logic behind the policy is that young adults must reach a certain level of functional abilities, skills, and well-being before the main goal of the policy can be reached (i.e., successfully completing VET and entering the labour market). As stressed by one of the interviewees (FI_Ex3), this personalized approach supports young people in order to better "market" themselves to potential employers. Another good example of this personalized approach is that mentors encourage young people to share with their employers the personal challenges and circumstances that might be preventing them from fully engaging with education and work at certain times. Mentors are also in touch with vocational subject teachers and on-the-job learning tutors during the WBL period. This support deliberately intends to influence the relationship between young adults and employers, as according to one of the interviewees (FI_Ex1), when young people do not want to disclose their issues with employers, it makes it difficult for employers to understand the challenges they are coping with, usually leading to disagreements and conflicts.

In Kainuu, where a relevant proportion of the youth face several barriers to engaging with education and employment, the enactment of the selected policy seems to be particularly relevant to those who are most discouraged from education and employment. As argued by one of the interviewees (FI_Ex2), this is likely to be due to the influence the policy has on their self-esteem. Even if there are limited and sometimes unattractive job opportunities in the region for youth, the interviewee suggested that the selected policy raises young people's self-esteem by providing them with a purpose, improving their job searching skills (e.g., showing them "hidden" jobs) and encouraging them to continue looking

for jobs even after a few rejections. However, another interviewee (FI_Ex3) pointed out that the positive effects of the policy are more difficult to observe among those with poorer health conditions, experiencing a cumulative generational disadvantage in their families, or previous work-related burnouts.

Finally, in Scotland we can see that the enactment of the regional policies also has some consequences for youth trajectories, although these seem to be more general and less personalized than in the previous cases. Since the intention of the policy is to promote VET as a valid alternative to gain education and skills and avoid/reduce youth unemployment, the main form of enactment in both regions is providing information about the existing educational and career paths in the region, and the current labour market situation affecting those sectors. The aim of supplying information is to provide young people with the adequate tools to make "informed choices". One of the interviewees in Aberdeen clearly stated that

> what I am trying to do is enable young people to get access to employers to make the right choice. (UK_Ex2)

Still, the final choice resides in the individuals themselves, as do the responsibility and "consequences" of their choices. In both regions, the provision of adequate information to make these "informed choices" and promoting VET as an alternative involves matching schools with regional businesses. Business representatives usually deliver a few information sessions in the matched school, providing students with a general idea of what a career in that local business and sector looks like. As expressed by the same interviewee in Aberdeen,

> all I think that we do as part of that is, we ask the head teachers what they need in their schools. We understand what the region needs in terms of skills for the future, and we join it up making sure that the employers and schools are getting what they need. (UK_Ex2)

This is understood by some interviewees (UK_Ex3) as an advance in career guidance, because in addition to information about specific field of study choices, employers' views are also integrated in the equation.

Within this logic, it improves young people's chances to make "informed choices" and potentially gain employment.

In Aberdeen, this is focused on diversifying information about alternative economic sectors and fields of study beyond the oil and gas industry. The same interviewee mentioned that

> what they did hear was an oil and gas person coming in and speaking about engineering. So, they have missed something. So, what we need to do is make sure that each of these young people get touched by all kinds of those key sectors across their school life. At least then they can make an informed choice rather than a choice based on the sector that has got the most money or the most people. (UK_Ex2)

One important point is that the policy intends to match the current employers' needs to young people's decisions, influencing the governance of their educational and employment pathways. As suggested by one of the interviewees in Aberdeen,

> the local authority in conjunction with the school run the work experience model. How we get involved is, we might find employers who are willing to offer work experience, and we make referrals. […] we would encourage the company to offer work experience as part of the ongoing relationship and experience they can offer to young people. (UK_Ex3)

As noted by the interviewees in Glasgow, the connection between schools and regional companies is very much reliant on the policy steering group and their connections, indirectly influencing the "options" and information that youth will have at their school as part of this policy. Part of the employers' engagement activities also consists of making employers aware of available funding for having apprentices in their businesses. While this might benefit many local businesses and young people, this information might not reach them all. As noticed by one of the interviewees (UK_Ex4), the policy steering group in Glasgow is known as "the Glasgow Employer Board", clearly stating the profile of its members and their interests. The same interviewee expressed that they were trying to provide "the right opportunity at the right time" to young people, and another one similarly stated that their main responsibility is

> to bring on board as many new and small to medium businesses in the city who are willing to engage with education and young people to improve their employability skills. (UK_Ex1)

However, this is obviously from an employer and policy perspective, leaving young people to finally make their "informed choices" based on what was available, definitely influencing their educational and employment trajectory.

6.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have analysed the influence of institutional, economic-material, and discursive opportunity structures on the objectives and orientation of LLL policies supporting young people in their transition from education to the labour market. We have focused on the influence of these opportunity structures at the regional level, where the analysed policies are ultimately enacted. Based on the analyses of the interviews with relevant national and regional stakeholders, our findings provide evidence that three types of opportunity structures influence LLL policy objectives and orientations and, subsequently, the educational and early labour market trajectories of the beneficiaries of these policies.

First, we discussed how a variety of national skills formation regimes influence policy objectives at the regional level. In Austria, the policy focus is on certification of apprenticeships and making sure that young people are ready to "fit into" the existent (collective skills formation) VET system. In Finland, a state-led skills formation model, policies present a more holistic approach, prioritizing young people's needs from a comprehensive perspective rather than simply looking at employers' needs. By contrast, Scottish policies focus on increasing the involvement and commitment of private and public actors in the VET system, to compensate for the limitations of previous educational stages and the general academic orientation of the formal education system in this liberal skills formation regime.

Second, we analysed how the (mis)match between the regional supply and demand for skills might bring the effectiveness of LLL policies

objectives into question. One policy approach can be successful and aligned with the regional socioeconomic situation affecting a region (e.g., Upper Austria), but a similar one might not be as effective if the regional employment opportunities differ (e.g., Vienna).

While no simple solution exists, allowing for regional flexibility to adapt LLL policies' priorities seems to be the best option to "match" the regional economic-material conditions to the policy objectives (e.g., Aberdeen and Glasgow). Another alternative is using LLL policies to address other barriers beyond the educational and employment deficits, even if the socioeconomic context is not favourable (e.g., Kainuu).

Third, we discussed how the orientations of LLL policies (in)directly influence young people's educational and employment trajectories. In most cases, interviewees noted the positive effects of the policies on young people's self-esteem and employability skills, especially when their effectiveness and usefulness in securing employment very much depends on the regional economic context. Yet, in regions where educational and employment opportunities are limited, LLL policies might be a good strategy to engage the youth and address other barriers (e.g., health, financial) preventing them from participation in education and employment.

In sum, our findings suggest that LLL policies targeting young adults and intending to support them in their transition from education to employment must consider the influence of these three dimensions (i.e., institutional, economic-material, discursive) at the regional level. Although LLL policies might be nationally designed and promoted, they need to consider cross-regional differences to ensure their effectiveness and suitability.

Note

1. To safeguard the privacy of the interviewees, the official names of the policies and measures at the core of the case studies analysed in this chapter have been replaced by codes. Specifically, the codes report the abbreviation of the country name followed by "P" ("Policy") and a sequence number on the basis of the order of appearance of the policies in the book. The

only exception is constituted by Developing the Youth Workforce (DYW) as it represents a national policy with different applications at local level, which constitute the core of the case studies located in Scotland.

The codes attached to the quotations from interviews report the abbreviation of the country name followed by "Ex" ("Expert" for street level professionals, policy managers and policymakers).

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7

Analysing Subjectification in Lifelong Learning Policymaking: A Comparative Analysis from Portugal, Germany, and Croatia

Jozef Zelinka, Ana Bela Ribeiro, and Monika Pažur

7.1 Introduction

As Dale and Parreira do Amaral have observed, young adults' educational trajectories evolve across and intertwine with biographical and institutional stages and transitions, which vary from site to site and from region to region (2015, p. 23f). These school-to-school and school-to-work transitions are embedded in complex sets of institutional settings,

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economic and labour market structures, educational landscapes, as well as socio-cultural contexts. All together, they compound living environments in which young adults develop and pursue their life projects and where they choose from various opportunities available. When lifelong learning (LLL) policymakers design and implement educational policies in these environments, they necessarily interpret the social problems they observe from a particular discursive perspective (Kitsuse & Spector, 1973). During this interpretation, processes of subjectification emerge, as the target groups of the policies need to be identified, selected, discursively constructed, and institutionally addressed. We explore these processes of subjectification in LLL policymaking by focusing on three unnamed policies located in functional regions (FRs) of Portugal, Germany, and Croatia, with the aim to establish an initial position for further research and analysis, since for now subjectification remains a blind spot in the debate on educational policymaking, regarding in particular its impact on and during transitions and life courses of young adults. To approach this research gap and address the processes of subjectification in LLL, we seek to understand how, based on what ideas, and according to what discursively produced categories young adults follow their life courses and participate in LLL programmes. In addition to structural and institutional opportunity structures, how does subjectification impact their decision-making? Especially with regard to young adults in vulnerable positions, how do processes of subjectification establish and contribute to their current situations?

In our study, we explore the discursive processes of subjectification in LLL as follows: first, we provide a brief conceptual overview of the terms and methods used in our analyses and present the policies studied; second, we provide independent analyses of the policies and develop initial local patterns of subjectification; third, we juxtapose and compare the cases studied, outlining the most prominent features of subjectification produced in the discourses on LLL policymaking, looking in particular for common signs and local effects.

7.2 Concept of the Study and Cases of Comparison

In this section, we define the concept of subjectification, present the two basic theoretical approaches, and introduce the policies studied.

Subjectification has become almost a buzzword in many recent studies and critical analyses. It refers to technologies of power that seek to shape the conduct of individuals and make them conform to certain ends (Foucault 1988, p. 18). Unlike the idea of subjectivity as a personal process of construing and responding to what individuals encounter in the world beyond them (Billet, 2010, p. 7), we assess subjectification as a discursive product and power technology through which subjected individuals are governed according to hegemonic discourses and understandings of the political (Mouffe, 2005). In our study, we focus on young adults as a specific group of individuals exposed to discursive processes of subjectification. The heuristic category of young adult describes the transitory stage between youth and adulthood (Stauber & Walther, 2016) and it is often used to frame the addressees of LLL policies, especially those in vulnerable positions. In their transitions to adulthood, young adults face difficult structural arrangements, especially given their housing transition (Beer et al., 2011; Forrest & Yip, 2013) or insecure employment opportunities (Stuth & Jahn, 2020), but they might also experience individual discomfort with regard to their ethnicity, migration status, religious beliefs, or gender (Reynolds, 2011; Hunner-Kreisel & Bohne, 2016; Leathwood & Francis, 2006). Besides structural and individual aspects that cross and shape these transitions, young adults are involved in discursive processes which take place in their everyday lives (Waldschmidt et al., 2007) and which need to be thoroughly revised in order to address the local and regional educational inequalities and inform the relevant stakeholders in LLL policymaking.

While addressing and critically examining the processes of subjectification in LLL, we have adopted two complementary theoretical perspectives. First, with the concept of subjectification, we refer to Michel Foucault's notion of power and subject (Foucault, 1978; Foucault, 1982). Within this perspective, subjects appear as mere effects of discursive

practices that produce desired expectations, ideals, ways of self-conduct, rationales, logics, and norms to be followed. In this regard, individuals can become subjects of discourse by a process called subjectification. It is important to mention, however, that individuals are not automatically subjects to any discourse that co-creates their social reality, such as the discourse on LLL. Nonetheless, they are exposed to numerous attempts to steer their self-conduct and submit to certain ends, be they educational, political, or economic. Therefore, the goal of our analysis is to explore and unveil the discursive processes of subjectification and show how they affect young adult's decision-making and shape their educational opportunity structures. In this case, however, we focus on the discursive construction of subjectification, rather than young adults' responses to these processes. By doing so we do not consider them as passive recipients or mere observers of LLL discourses but attempt to carefully describe the discursive landscapes they live in and interact with.

Second, we relate our study to the Critical Political Economy (CPE) approach, which acknowledges the role culture plays in the articulation between the economic and the political (Jessop 2010, p. 337) and places the triangle of economy, politics, and culture in a broader set of social relations (Sum & Jessop, 2013). CPE thus integrates the critical discursive analysis of cultural and societal influences, including the discursive dimension of LLL, with the dominant political and economic trends, and analyses their embeddedness in institutional arrangements, policy practices, and hegemonial powers. The CPE approach informs us that LLL policymaking develops in limited local environments and is reduced to a selective choice of interpretations, understandings, and explanations of educational problems and solutions needed. Thus, why and how a particular LLL policy emerges and becomes institutionalised depends on specific local contexts which include the economic condition of the particular region, the current labour market situation, and the dominant socio-cultural habits and norms. In this regard, we approach our policies as contingent, temporary phenomena, with local variations and specificities and examine them accordingly.

The combination of both approaches helps us create the theoretical foundation for our analysis. Foucault's notion of subjectification as a power technology, for example, has shifted our view on discursive

processes and sharpened our critical lenses to perceive the latter as a powerful means to steer young adults' self-conduct. The contingent nature of LLL policies, as perceived from a CPE perspective, has supported us in carefully examining the local meaning-making processes and understandings of how LLL policies and programmes emerge, and local policymakers perceive and address educational issues on site. In this way, both approaches complement each other and enable us to delve into the discursive practices of subjectification.

Against this theoretical background, we aim at providing a comparative analysis of three policies located in FRs of Portugal, Germany, and Croatia. In the following, we address these policies in the multiplicity of educational, cultural, political, and socio-economic actors, relations, and aspects involved in LLL policymaking and conceptualise them as interactive and relational cases, using for each of them a code letter for better distinction (A—Portugal, B—Germany, C—Croatia). Our three cases represent various socio-economic conditions, different education systems, and diverse political landscapes, thereby providing an excellent opportunity to observe and compare discursive processes of subjectification on site. With our cases we refer to previous studies (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2018), which have thoroughly examined their structural and institutional landscapes as well as individual experiences of young adults. These studies have mapped and reviewed our cases in their local contexts and sought to understand the construction of their underlying orientations, objectives, target groups, success criteria, and solutions proposed on the one hand, as much as the views, visions, wishes, expectations, and desires of young adults on the other hand, resulting in complex comparisons on living conditions of young adults (Scandurra et al., 2017; Rambla et al., 2018).

Before applying a fine-grained analysis, in which we decipher the most relevant information for the subsequent examination of the processes of subjectification, we briefly present our cases.

Case A, located in the FR of Vale do Ave (Portugal), consists of upper secondary vocational education provision, and is highly labour-market oriented. This provision is part of a set of measures directed at competitiveness, growth, and employment of young adults and seeks to fulfil its goals by adjusting the training offer to the priorities and needs of

different socio-economic sectors and regional/local labour markets, accentuating the permanent interaction between schools and companies. It is an educational policy aimed at preventing early school dropout and youth unemployment, targeting mostly young people above the ninth grade. As a state-run, long-term LLL policy measure it is executed by public and private secondary schools and private professional schools in association with companies, NGOs, and other private and public institutions. Regarding its funding, it receives direct support from the Portuguese government and the European Social Fund (ESF), as well as indirect funding by companies and other institutions where curricular internships take place (Alves et al., 2016; Rodrigues et al., 2018).

Case B is located in the FR of Bremen (Germany). It started in 2009 and it was co-funded by the ESF. Its main objective is to extend schooling by one year beyond the regular duration of secondary education for young adults with specific learning needs and disadvantages and to prepare them for entrance into the skilled craft sector of the vocational education and training (VET) system. Young adults can participate in this LLL policy after completing their secondary education and the policy offers them more practice-oriented curricula and internships. By doing so, it connects secondary education with VET and enables the students to regain basic skills for further education and/or job positioning. Thus, the policy seeks to prepare young adults for apprenticeships by teaching them how to set goals, structure their daily schedule and learn to be tidy and punctual. Since the policy is mainly practice-oriented, young adults have many opportunities to get practice and work with various professionals and teachers. Almost 85% of participants receive a school-leaving qualification, which strongly reduces the rate of dropouts in this FR. However, the policy depends heavily on support from the city of Bremen as well as of the ESF, which is why it cannot guarantee stable operation in the future (Bittlingmayer et al., 2016; Verlage et al., 2018).

Case C is located in the FR of Osijek-Baranja (Croatia) and is considered a labour market policy. The purpose of this LLL policy is to enhance users' competences, to increase competitiveness and restore the balance of skills supply and demand. It seeks to do so mostly by increasing the availability and quality of lifelong career guidance services to all Croatian citizens and by providing appropriate support to different target groups at

local and regional levels. The policy is a centralised measure that provides information on educational and employment opportunities, enables independent searching for recent job vacancies, and supports the use of different online tools. In cooperation with partners and other stakeholders, and using various forms of provision, including counselling, thematic workshops, lectures, presentations, seminars, and panel discussions, it provides necessary information on education, employment, lifelong career planning, and other self-development possibilities. The main challenge for career guidance counsellors is that of aligning personal ambitions and mobility possibilities of young adults with local labour market opportunities and getting them through limited or unattractive options. Its main funder is the Croatian Employment Service, and its work is financed by national as well as European funds (Bouillet & Domović, 2016; Bouillet et al., 2018).

All cases selected are supported by the ESF and are operated at the intersection of education and labour market. When applying the CPE approach, the short description of the cases shows that different settings can offer different possibilities of support and provide policymakers with various tools for LLL policymaking, depending on what is considered the main local/regional challenge. We now look at the discursive dimension of LLL policymaking and describe the discursive processes of subjectification in a more fine-grained analysis.

7.3 Case Analysis: Capturing Patterns of Subjectification

In this part, we provide an in-depth analysis of the cases and their underlying discursive processes. Capturing and describing local and regional discursive processes that accompany the design, regulation, and provision of LLL policymaking yields the information necessary for further analysis of the forms and patterns of subjectification. We explore these patterns according to their effects, logics, and rationalities that determine the self-conduct of young adults.

7.3.1 Case A

With regard to Case A in the FR of Vale do Ave, its core upper secondary education policy was first developed in the context of high rates of youth unemployment and lack of adequacy of young adults' qualifications, aiming at combating early school leaving in a socio-economic context of crisis. However, when analysing the policy's instruments, it appears that it mostly offers market-oriented (re)training with the objective of helping young adults to continue their studies and/or enter the labour market. While practising in various job positions, young adults are meant to experience how their knowledge, skills, and attitudes align with different training offers. A double certification programme grants students the opportunity to gain both academic and professional skills and allows them to continue their studies in higher education and/or to seek a job in their specialisation. The policy focuses on three kinds of students: (i) those who want a specific, practical training in a given area; (ii) low achievers; and (iii) school dropouts, or those at risk of dropping out of school. Besides promoting motivation, as well as professional and personal fulfilment, the policy attempts to qualify them for concrete skills demand. It has been designed to combat and prevent economic decline, high unemployment rates, and school dropouts and it does so by adjusting young adults' skills and abilities to the labour market needs, thereby producing adjustable subjects ready to account for the economic inconsistencies that occur over time. However, while it instrumentalises education as a means to obtain economic sustainability, it at the same time reduces its potential to promote social change and transformation (Desjardin, 2015).

As mentioned, this LLL policy is directly funded by the Portuguese government and the ESF. In some cases, whenever public funding is not enough to cover the regional demands for qualifications, it is complemented by private funding. Indeed, companies can associate with schools, as well as other institutions and actors, and fund new courses or more classes in existing courses if needed. Consequently, some companies become part of the management and/or advisory boards of the schools and can validate and oversee their pedagogical work. This makes room for

structuring school curricula and navigating educational programmes by private funders. When interviewed in previous studies, some experts tended to acknowledge that without private funding, young adults would have to return to regular education, thereby experiencing frustration and losing their vocational guidance. As it could be observed, the national and European support of the policy is reinforced by indirect support of local/regional companies, which, by additionally subsidising selected courses, use the institutional infrastructure of the schools, their structural conditions, and young adults' precarious situations to create their own workforce, accounting both for the need for low unemployment rates (political objective) and the need for high-performing future workforce (economic objective). When critically assessed, while this case might appear as a good cooperation between private and public sectors, it runs the risk of suppressing more humanistic school curricula, infiltrating LLL with neo-managerial rationalities of accountability, flexibility, and productivity, and fabricating self-entrepreneurial subjects (Bröckling, 2015).

Further, this policy allows young adults to get professional qualifications, increase employability with respect to their actual interests, abilities, and skills, and enhance their motivation to study and work. However, it carries with it one strong handicap, especially in relation to young adults. Engaging in this LLL policy is very often associated with the notion that such educational pathways are offered to students who fail in attending regular education and have low academic abilities and achievements. This image, culturally nurtured in families and among friends, is generally widely accepted—even public-school teachers regard this policy as an alternative pathway for low achievers. At this point, social and cultural expectations enter the complex relationships between economy, education, and politics. Young adults are expected to follow traditional, standardised, and well-structured educational schemes to account for and sustain the image of successful and established life projects. In this sense, academic (under)achievements are deemed to relate directly to life (under)achievements, enabling the processes of subjectification to take place simultaneously in school-to-work transition and in the life projects of young adults.

7.3.2 Case B

The LLL policy of Case B focuses on young adults who had troubles continuing school education and grants them extra time during their transition, which is extended not only in terms of education, but also in terms of a more general construction of their life courses. As previous qualitative analyses have shown, many young adults enter this policy demotivated, disoriented, and disillusioned, with low self-esteem and no ideas about their own (career and family) future. After getting lost somewhere in the school-to-school and/or school-to-labour market transition, the policy becomes the last chance for them, while trying to compensate for inconsistencies in the formal education system. In that respect, its undeclared goal is to address young adults that would otherwise experience additional demands in their educational and career lives. Although they have become formally lost, since they are out of the standard educational path, and need special attention, the policy indicates that there is still a chance for them to restart.

While participating in the policy programmes, young adults are disciplined and trained to be punctual and well-structured. Out of the complex network of relationships that build and define the institutional and discursive opportunity structures, young adults are considered the most manageable part. They can be governed by direct orders, for example, by parents, teachers, peers and so on, but also indirectly, for example, by proposed school curricula, innovative teaching techniques, digital learning, and structured daily schedules. Young adults are thus channelled to the best choice they can make—to catch up with the others and continue a standard path—although it remains unclear whether they agree with this goal and are invited to debate over other possible ways of gaining competencies and skills.

The policy focuses particularly on young adults with disadvantages in terms of learning, but also on those with physical impairments, experiences of being bullied, migration background, missing language skills, difficult family situations, and so on. In this regard, a learning disadvantage (Ger. “Lernbenachteiligung”) can easily be considered a person’s state, rather than a discursive construction. Thus, while the policy seeks

to cover the gap in the educational trajectories of participating young adults, it risks presenting them as vulnerable individuals and not as individuals living under vulnerable conditions. Further, individuals who submit to such self-perception, that is, who start considering themselves as vulnerable, disadvantaged, and in need of assistance, indeed might become vulnerable; that is, they can delegate control over their educational and life trajectories to other authorities, whether parents, peers, or schools. This applies especially to those young adults who depend more heavily on other people and experience more friction and detours in their life courses. While their environment makes them appear vulnerable, the self-acceptance of this subjectivity indeed makes them behave like vulnerable.

7.3.3 Case C

LLL policies, including the core policy of Case C, entail a variety of stakeholders: public authorities, public employment services, career guidance providers, education and training institutions, youth support services, business, non-governmental sector, employers, trade unions, and so on. All the actors involved in regional LLL policy development, with an emphasis on content and type of skills, recognise the importance of more intensive and allied cooperation between educational institutions and the real economy. However, this case is characterised by the fragmentation of career guidance services (e.g., those in schools, universities, and non-governmental sector), the lack of a database about the youth labour market activity, and a lack of infrastructure which is responsive to different groups of young people and to their changing needs. Because of the policy's lack of a proper coordination between different educational stakeholders and governmental bodies, career information becomes quite fragmented and non-transparent, making it difficult for young adults to reach out for the data they need. This has implications for both their geographical and social mobility and their career opportunities. Sharing fragmented pieces of information on career options might respect existing administrative boundaries but remains worthless for making informed career decisions. Regarding the policy provision, its practitioners are

mostly detached from the decision-making processes and unfamiliar with other types of similar policies in their respective field. In addition, systematic evaluation of the policy is missing and regular statistics about its activities and users are also unavailable. Along with the lack of evaluation, databases about the labour market demands, their connection to the existing educational programmes as well as other data which could enable a more balanced view of the labour market situation and shed light on young adults' career options, are also missing. Against this background, the institutional rigidness and the lack of transparency creates elusive mechanisms of guidance and help, offering only limited, scarce information for further career decision-making.

The lack of structural cooperation between educational sector and businesses, in turn, leads to an insufficient offer of educational programmes which are receptive to labour market needs. Consequently, employers are unsatisfied with young adults' skills and competencies which they gain through their education and are not willing to employ them without practical experience. This missing link in the transition from school to the labour market creates further confusion among young adults, not knowing what to study and where to invest their energy and interest. Consequently, instead of building their life courses according to their wishes and desires, the randomness of the educational and labour market offers pushes them to look for the options they find more accurate to their current situation. In turn, demotivation and distrust that the proposed measures will lead them to a successful employment can be seen as an indirect effect of the lack of cooperation—something young adults would expect—between the government, educational institutions, LLL policies, and other actors involved in their school-to-work transition. In this way, young adults subordinate to the subjectivity of victims waiting for external forces to create and navigate their life courses. Paradoxically, the more offers and options they are provided with, the less they believe in their usefulness. Here, personal responsibility, agility, and willingness to pursue one's own life course cannot be applied to their full extent and are replaced by a rather pragmatic and utilitarian decision-making.

Each of the cases studied offers a slightly different perspective on the local and regional LLL landscapes young adults interact with. The dynamics of life courses vary according to specific sets of relationships that play

a central role in designing and conceptualising LLL policies. In this section, we have tried to bracket out the concurrence of various factors, paying attention to the discursive production of the processes of subjectification.

7.4 Case Comparison: Signs and Effects of Subjectification

In this last step, we juxtapose the cases and identify the main signs and effects of subjectification. By comparing the cases, we look at how different discursive processes shape the subjectification on site and impact the self-conduct of young adults. The previous analysis has shown that the processes of subjectification share several common signs while at the same time preserve their specificity. We start by showing their similar signs and continue by debating their various local/regional effects and peculiarities.

7.4.1 Common Signs

Regarding the common aspects between all three Cases, we can say that the discursive processes in LLL policymaking produced subjects that are able to learn. While targeting young adults with disabilities, NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), dropouts, underachievers, or disoriented youth, they have implicitly addressed them not only as subjects in need of assistance, but also as subjects capable of learning, retraining, and returning to standard educational and occupational paths. LLL, in that respect, generated a discursive regime of learning, absorbing, and making use of as much individual capabilities as possible, thereby attempting to change the individuals into self-organising learners (Tuschling & Engemann, 2013).

Moreover, the LLL policies, except for Case C, were keen on reducing subjects' biographical uncertainties and filling in the gaps in their educational and life trajectories. By offering various extra-curricular activities, re-training, and constantly feeding them with new information, the policies have tried to enhance their employability and activate their

self-development. In doing so, they have introduced a view on (educational and working) life as a continuous, sequenced, and logical set of phases and states. Seen from the neoliberal perspective that dominates the educational policymaking worldwide (Chitpin & Portelli, 2019), interruptions caused by turbulence in transition emerge as blind spots and weaknesses to be fixed. Penetrated by corporate practices of accountability and self-responsibility (Stahl, 2019), the educational discourse in LLL nudges young adults to make use of and document their transition, since only what is visible, known, and documented—via certificates, credentials, or job experiences—can be utilised and counts on the labour market. Thus, the pervasive, yet subtle demand of the neoliberal discourse to document educational trajectories, biographies, and life projects might indeed discourage young adults, especially those in vulnerable positions, who experience disruptions in their transition and miss educational or job opportunities.

The local discourses not only expect young adults to maximise their productivity and effectiveness and take part in a continuous race of optimisation (Ball, 2009), but they also support them in self-accountability by imposing an internal mechanism of reward and punishment, expressed in an urge to be active and committed on the one hand, and to feel depressed and frustrated, if things fail, on the other hand. Young adults are not only made responsible for seeking to catch up with the majority, but also accountable to themselves for not being active, involved, or passionate enough to reach their goals.

7.4.2 Local Effects

Juxtaposing and comparing the cases brings out local peculiarities and effects of subjectification.

When compared to other cases, Case A relies more strongly on private investments in school curricula and LLL programmes. In this way, businesses invest in skills and competencies of young adults, expecting to generate a future labour force trained to cope with unexpected developments in the labour market. This steady marketization of LLL policymaking leads to the "enactment of radical and innovative *solutions* to

policy problems" (Ball, 2010, p. 134, emphasis in orig.) and supports "*workforce versatility*, which enables high levels of job mobility, premised on a high level of general and technical training and a readiness to add new skills in order to make change possible" (Olssen, 2008, p. 39, emphasis in orig.). These productive rather than critical subjects are thus obtaining skills for further optimisation of their self-entrepreneurial engagements, but not skills and abilities necessary for understanding and thinking about the challenges, needs, and difficulties they and other people face. Fixed to their self-actualisation, they are not taught to question the very conditions that their local and national environment is built upon and, in the end, to recognise the cause of them being seen as unemployed, underachieving, or dependent subjects.

Taking Case B into consideration, its most discerning characteristic has been the care for subjects with learning disadvantages. On the one hand, this local LLL discourse potentially essentialises young adults' vulnerability as a personal trait and causes further stigmatisation and aggravation of their status (Parreira do Amaral & Zelinka, 2021), turning a blind eye on the vulnerable conditions they live under (Burghardt et al., 2017). Additionally, it portrays vulnerability as a solely negative condition, disregarding its potential for productively transforming the individually experienced, undesirable social phenomena, including injustice, inequality, oppressing power structures, or gender biases (McLeod, 2012). It is therefore vital to distinguish between vulnerability to (negative condition) and vulnerability for (positive condition) something. The condition of vulnerability for something acknowledges young adults' positive role in shaping their own life courses and environments. Instead of being passively and helplessly exposed to the latter, their ability to perceive various kinds of injustice can encourage and empower them to actively participate in designing their educational pathways. At the individual level, their cognitive skills, emotions, interests, capabilities, physical abilities, and experiences can be either equipped with neoliberal practices of self-discipline, time management, self-accountability, optimisation, and so on, to be utilised in the labour market, or they can become part of a greater transformation of oneself and the society.

Compared to Cases A and B, Case C can be characterised by an elusive educational and labour market infrastructure which leads to overlaps,

mismatches, and redundancies among LLL policy programmes. From the point of view of local policymakers, young adults' transition from one stage to another is disturbed by poor cooperation but can be fixed once better connections between various governmental bodies, and also more transparency, are established. Critically seen, the argument of flawed conditions for a smooth school-to-work transition underpins the necessity and relevance of LLL policymaking. However, if the lack of cooperation is the cause for disruptions in the life trajectories of young adults, then the latter appear simply as governable subjects. In other words, this local LLL discourse subjectifies not only young adults, but also their life trajectories, their future, visions, and even challenges, which supports the idea of "neoliberal governmentality that steers the subjects indirectly or at a distance" (Ball, 2010, p. 135.).

After juxtaposing and comparing the cases to show common signs and local effects, we now conclude with a few overall remarks.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have questioned how certain forms of self-conduct become central in the life trajectories of young adults, and how discursive processes impact their decision-making and steer their life projects. By separately analysing and subsequently comparing three distinct cases, we have shown that LLL represents a global discourse for the flexible preparation of subjects (Olssen, 2008, p. 38) and that it entails specific local variations, depending on what aspect becomes central. Further, we have seen that the observed LLL discourses fit into a general dispositive of activation (Kessl, 2006), which seeks to remedy structural inconsistencies and regularly emerging dysfunctionalities by enhancing individual skills and capabilities (Parreira do Amaral & Zelinka, 2019). Finally, we have studied the discursive dimension of LLL policymaking, showing how processed of subjectification relate directly to young adults' life trajectories, visions and challenges, but also emotions, frictions, and vulnerabilities.

To conclude, subjectification presents a powerful technology through which LLL discourses create and justify their objects of governing and with which young adults must cope and interact. Whether young adults

accept or resist the attempts to steer and colonise their life projects remains a matter of extra investigation. In any case, this study has revealed three problematic findings worthy of further exploration.

First, subjectification touches on manifold aspects of young adults' lives, from their life projects, visions, and futures to their thinking, decision-making, and acting, and even to their cognitive skills, emotions, and bodies. Moreover, this process blurs the lines between private and school or work life and it is strengthened by other neoliberal discourses, such as those promoting preventive healthcare or job activation. In this way, the neoliberal practices of subjectification encompass the lives of young adults from multiple angles and, consequently, these multiple angles need to be taken into consideration when trying to vitalise and inform the local/regional policymaking.

Second, young adults' voices aren't seen as relevant features to include in the debates on further development of education. Instead of speaking about them, policy research and, in particular, policymaking should concentrate on listening to them, if for no other reason than that of educating them to actively change their lives and take the responsibility for their futures and the futures of the regions and countries they live in.

Third, according to issues presented, there are at least two actions that could be implemented to answer to the needs of young adults. LLL programmes, on the one hand, should resonate more profoundly with young adults' visions and expectations. On the other hand, their harmonisation with the labour market has to be addressed and conducted at the local and regional levels, taking into consideration how discursive processes create educational goals and expectations.

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8

Negotiating "employability" in Europe: Insights from Spain, Croatia and Portugal

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8.1 Introduction

The notion of employability resonates in the education, training and labour market policies of the European Union. It is present in the Education and Training 2010 and 2020 programmes (Nóvoa, 2010, 2013), and it informs the dominant discourses about unemployment

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circulating at European level, intertwining with the notions of activation and flexicurity. The "push" towards individualisation prompted by the discourse on employability ascribes to individuals the responsibility for the problem of the lack of employment (Crespo & Serrano, 2013). In other words, it transfers to individuals the responsibility of tackling the social state crisis (Nóvoa, 2010) and affects the rhetoric about its "proper" solution. Consistently, the European Union's interventions in the fields of labour market and social policies are moving away from the provision of social security, to promote individual deficit-oriented actions, which resonate with the idea of a "deserved citizenship" achievable through work as a "civil duty". In pursuing work integration as a duty, personal adaptation or self-assurance is thus required from individuals in the light of changing labour markets (Crespo & Serrano, 2013).

However, the notion of employability has not remained static along its history. Despite employability having been defined from "relational" or "interactive" perspectives and addressing aspects related to the individual, his/her personal circumstances and supply- and demand-side factors, many European and national policy documents and measures draw from an individual-focused and supply-side understanding of employability (Brown et al., 2003; Llinares et al., 2016; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). The European Union's labour market policies have increasingly articulated employability around the idea of "competences" and related to the individual, defining it in a triple sense deal with the problem of unemployment. Employability was firstly understood as "matching" the individuals' competences with the needs of the labour market; secondly, as "prevention": labour insertion problems were framed as consequences of wrong job-seeking strategies or a lack of information about their own potentialities or the opportunities available in their environments; thirdly, as "activation": labour insertion problems were ascribed to inappropriate attitudes and motivations towards work (see Crespo & Serrano, 2013).

Employability, therefore, informs the construction of labour market, education and social policies on problems and the solutions to be provided (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). This notion has influenced the orientation of several lifelong learning policies (LLL) across Europe (Kotthoff et al., 2017). From a governance perspective, LLL is one of the policy areas where the balance of responsibilities among international, national,

regional and local levels is needed. To be useful to young adults, the governance patterns should enable collaboration that includes joint and coordinated actions from a broad range of partners, including educational programme providers, trade unions and local and regional authorities, as well as youth representatives. It means that vertical and horizontal coordination needs to adopt flexible, systemic, open and user-centred modes of interaction with diverse participants, based on local or regional specificities and needs (Parreira do Amaral & Dale, 2015).

Based on Bartlett and Vavrus' (2017) proposal about comparative case studies, the purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on how different patterns of governance contribute to the contextualisation of three LLL policies oriented towards employability in three different local systems. Specifically, the governance perspective can help us to be more sensitive to: (a) both supply- and/or demand-side aspects involved in the idea of employability present in those policies; and (b) the interaction among the actor constellations involved in their processes of policy contextualisation.

We will follow three axes (transversal, vertical and horizontal) to explore and compare our cases. The transversal axis will help us to historically situate our cases and to explore how they have evolved across time, including their governance patterns or the history of LLL policies. The vertical axis will serve to analyse the role of different actors on different scales that shape policy practices. Finally, following the horizontal axis of comparison, we will explore how those policies are socially produced and how they unfold in different contexts and result in similar or different practices and expected impacts.

Furthermore, the opportunity structure perspective will contribute to enhancing the analysis of our cases. In school-to-work transition studies, opportunity structures have been employed to explore the ways in which different interrelated structuring agents, such as labour market processes, family background or education, frame young people's choices and accomplishments (Roberts, 2009). The notion of Opportunity structures has also been used to shed light on the complex governance of the educational trajectories of young people, which are shaped not only by young people's agency, but also by wider socio-economic, institutional and

cultural influences, as well as by other actors' actions (Parreira do Amaral & Dale, 2015).

The employability discourse can be understood as a central element of the discursive opportunity structure in many European countries, constructing and fostering solutions for the problem of the lack of employment. Policy regulations and actors' decisions contribute to framing the institutional responses, influencing young adults' access, progression and completion in LLL policies such as the ones at the core of our case studies. Therefore, the opportunity structure perspective provides us with a theory and an analytical tool to improve our understanding of the structural opportunities and constraints that influence the decisions and behaviours of the actors involved in our cases, as well as their results in specific contexts.

8.2 Main Directions of Analysis

The main goal of our chapter is to explore how different governance patterns and dynamics contribute to contextualising different LLL policies in the contexts in which they are embedded. In order to do so, we will explore different approaches of the actors involved in their provision to meet different expected impacts and interact with against the background of a common exposure to the wider discursive and institutional opportunity structures and governance landscapes.

Information from policy documents, semi-structured interviews and policy roundtables with different actors (i.e., policymakers, managers and street professionals) allocated on different governance scales will serve to trace the transversal, vertical and horizontal axes of comparison among the three analysed case studies: one in Spain (functional region of Malaga), one in Croatia (functional region of Istria) and one in Portugal (functional region of Vale do Ave). These are three homologous cases (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) that share a set of characteristics: the LLL policies analysed find employability within their orientations (Kotthoff et al., 2017; Valiente et al., 2020); are located on the supply side of the skills formation system, that is, in the provision of training and skills; and seek to foster their participants' labour insertion as their main impact. However,

following different typologies (e.g., Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012; Hodgson & Spours, 2012), our cases show differential governance patterns and landscapes that will enrich our comparison (Capsada-Munsech et al., 2018).

At the core of case study in Spain, the SP_P3[1] LLL policy is implemented by actors (e.g., local city chambers) who prepare specific projects based on the pre-established national or regional frameworks. It is targeted at unemployed young adults who have usually experienced school dropout or early school leaving. The normative regulation of SP_P3 and the interviewed manager and street professional involved in its implementation converge, in that SP_P3 contributes to improving young adults' labour insertion chances by increasing their skills and labour experience through training and apprenticeship periods. However, former reforms introduced other expected impacts of SP_P3, such as the increasing of young adults' opportunities to re-enter the education system.

The LLL policy at the core of the case study in Croatia, HR_P1, was founded in 1995. It is implemented by a local institution that offers different types of programmes aimed at professional training or retraining and acquisition of vocational qualification. HR_P1 works outside the formal education system and deals with different types of users, such as people who have not completed education, unemployed people wishing to retrain or employed people who want another level of education. HR_P1 is one of the main stakeholders in the field of transition of young adults from education to the labour market at the local level. Its goal is compatible with the goals of other stakeholders in the field, which is to raise young adults' employability. HR_P1 pursues this goal by developing young adults' skills and enabling them to find a satisfying job.

The case study in Portugal is built around a policy, PT_P1, aimed at over 15 people that have completed the 9th grade. The policy consists of high-school level courses that allow students to access higher education. The nature of this policy grants a special connection to labour contexts and a special relationship with regional institutions and companies. Also, it encompasses a pedagogical model that is easily adapted to the young adults' educational paths, thus helping to combat dropout and failure rates.

In the following, the three cases will be analysed and compared according to the three main research questions:

- How have patterns of governance evolved across time and how do they contribute to the contextualisation of LLL policies in a specific local context (transversal axis)?
- What are the patterns of collaboration among actors while producing, implementing, resisting, and appropriating policies to achieve a particular goal (vertical axis)?
- Which patterns of governance foster or limit perspectives on young adults' labour market insertion?

8.3 Actors' Approaches to Governance and Expected Impacts

This section summarises the main results of our analysis. Tracing the transversal and vertical axes of comparative case studies, we first build up our cases by paying attention to the discursive and institutional opportunity structures in which they are embedded. The transversal and vertical axes are combined with the horizontal in Sect. 8.4, where we explicitly compare our cases.

8.3.1 The Case Study in Spain: Managers and Streets Professionals Broadening Employability

The SP_P3 LLL policy belongs to the vocational training subsystem in Spain, which has experienced a progressive process of decentralisation (e.g., Andalusian Government, 2003). Therefore, the policy was firstly regulated by the national government (1988–2003) and later by the regional one (2004–onwards).

According to its governance pattern, the implementing institutions of SP_P3, such as local city chambers, are in charge of preparing and managing specific projects on the basis of the national or regional regulations (Andalusian Government, 2016b; Spanish Government, 1988). Among

other activities, these projects combine training with paid apprenticeships where young adults hired by the implementing institution work in activities with a social interest for the community. As mentioned by some of interviewed managers and the street professionals, young adults enrolled in SP_P3 have usually been trained in traditional crafts and construction professions because of the high relevance of these sectors in the area:

> This region has been a construction, services, hospitality, gardening… area. Therefore, we knew that maybe not 100% but 90% were going to be able to find a job (…). Then, it was not even necessary to do studies [skills demand prospections] (SP_Ex1)

SP_P3 is implemented in the functional region of Malaga, which is a set of 13 municipalities that give form to a residential and labour market, with the city of Malaga acting as the nucleus of reference. Malaga airport and the railway services play a key role in the articulation of the territory and in opening the region towards the outside. In 2017, the region included a total of 891,366 inhabitants (MADECA Foundation, 2019). Its economy is predominantly based on the service sector, especially since the Great Recession, where the construction sector and its related activities collapsed: the service sector represented the 75.23% of the GDP of Malaga province in 2008 and increased to the 83.66% in 2015, while the construction sector decreased from 15.27% to 7.38% during the same period (IECA, 2019).

Prior to the 2007–2008 Great Recession, young adults' transitions into employment were fluent because of the high number of vacancies in construction and related activities. Companies even contacted young adults while they were still enrolled in SP_P3, but paid apprenticeship periods contributed to maintaining young adults in the policy. Implementing actors mention that the SP_P3 policy was well known in the local area due to its long-standing presence and its high labour insertion rates, so young adults and local companies trusted its work.

However, the aftermath of the Great Recession entailed the need for significant changes on the policy's regulation. As the labour market provided young adults with less opportunities, especially because of the

collapse of construction work (Herrera, 2017), the regional government informed the SP_P3's staff that new projects were not allowed to train young adults in professions belonging to that sector anymore:

> they said, in one of the last public calls, that we could not ask to teach traditional crafts (SP_Ex4).

In addition, the regional government reforms on the regulatory framework of the policy (e.g., Andalusian Government, 2016a, 2016b) involved: (a) less activities, economic resources and duration of the projects, following economic rationality; (b) a competitive tenure procedure between providers to receive funding, justified as a more transparent process; (c) a higher relevance of the regional government in the selection of skills, classifying the professional certificates to be taught in the projects as priority; and (d) the offer of skills now being organised around professional certificates, so implementing entities need to pass accreditation processes to teach them. Some of these reforms (e.g., competition and certificates) were in line with other national regulations (Spanish Government, 2008, 2015).

Regional decision makers defended these reforms in the policy roundtable: since the projects are much cheaper now, more entities could benefit from them. They also showed mistrust in local implementing entities, mentioning that they sometimes prioritised their own needs in the social projects of the apprenticeship periods over young adults' real training needs. At the same time, the manager and the street professional showed their resistance to these reforms:

> Our idea is to maintain the concept of the policy, despite the fact that the new regulation…. does not benefit it (SP_Ex3).

These professionals point out that the SP_P3 activities, duration and resources have been severely reduced, which sets limits on the wider impacts they sought for young adults. Beyond employability, they believe that SP_P3 might contribute to social justice:

> to create opportunities for people who, because of their social situation, have not found them (…) it is a policy that reduces social injustice a little bit (SP_Ex2).

But, in their opinion, the different kinds of opportunities provided by the policy have been narrowed by reforms: personal development opportunities were reduced because of the lack of time to establish a personal relationship with young adults and to promote their personal development (e.g., responsibility); training and labour chances became narrower because training has been reduced to its professional-technical version (suppressing other activities), and the apprenticeships periods were shortened; the educational opportunities were reduced because activities aimed at supporting young adults in re-entering the education system have been withdrawn. They even mention that

> this is not SP_P3 anymore (SP_Ex 4).

On the other hand, the managers and the street professionals claim that local entities have lesser resources because of the Great Recession; therefore they are not always able to invest in accomplishing the criteria required to teach the certificates that best meet the demand for skills in the surrounding area or the interests of the young adults involved in the policy. In 2017, 6 of 16 of projects of this policy in the area taught specialities in the field of administrative work (Andalusian Government, 2017a), which, in their opinion, is far from the learning styles of their addresses, and this can limit the impacts of the policy. Moreover, the access criteria have changed (Andalusian Government, 2017b): some dimensions of young adults' employability (e.g., teamwork skills) are now measured prior to entering SP_P3, and not only aimed as an outcome.

The managers and the street professionals make attempts to "resist" these reforms. They consider that the regional government did not listen their suggestions, which were channelled through an association of professionals. In addition, while they recognise the relevance of the professional certificates, agreeing with the regional decision maker, they call for other solutions to foster the capacity of local institutions to achieve the

labour insertion goals of the policy. For instance, one manager suggests creating intermunicipal centres able to gather more resources to teach more specialities. Further, he suggests including apprenticeship periods in companies and developing local prospects of skills among those companies. On the contrary, a street professional seems to distrust those companies more, as she thinks that they took advantage of young adults during the crisis, offering them precarious positions:

> When the crisis started, some of them [companies] came to SP_P3, but only a few; many of them because they wanted to pay low wages [to the young adults] (SP_Ex6).

She considers that the policy needs to train them again in the construction field as it is demanding workers again, and that the policy would benefit from being regulated again in a way similar to what it was several years ago.

Lack of vertical (e.g., scales) and horizontal (e.g., public-private) coordination, a less receptive labour market, reduced resources and increased pressure for the local entities seem to be reducing the labour insertion chances of young adults who experienced early school leaving and who took part in the SP_P3 policy.

8.3.2 The Case Study in Croatia: Focusing on Young Adults' Employability to Meet Labour Market Demands

The HR_P1 LLL policy was founded in 1995, when it carried out training focused on workplace safety. Nowadays, this local institution, called an open university, offers different types of programmes aimed at professional training or retraining and acquisition of vocational qualifications. Some of the courses, but not all, include training periods in local companies. HR_P1 works outside the formal system of education and deals with different types of users, such as people without any completed education, unemployed people wishing to get retraining or employed people who want to attain another level of education.

The policy is implemented in the functional region of Istria. This region is situated on the north-west coast of the Adriatic Sea and includes a large part of the Istrian peninsula. The county is surrounded by the sea, except for its northern borders that are close to two big cities, Trieste in Italy and Rijeka in Croatia. Administratively, the region consists of 41 territorial units of local self-government: 10 towns and 31 municipalities. Within the county of Istria, the rapid growth of some urban areas has caused further disruption and differences between the towns and the countryside. This is especially emphasised in the relationship between coastal towns and inland Istria. Such cases are evident in the richer and more developed coastal area, compared with the less developed and poorer rural inland. The county of Istria is one of the most entrepreneurial and economically best developed regions in Croatia. With 214 thousand inhabitants, amounting to 4.8% of the population of Croatia, and almost 7200 registered business entities, this region accounts for 9.16% of the total number of Croatian entrepreneurs. Its economy is diverse: the leading activities are manufacturing industry, tourism, and trade, but other important economic sectors are construction, real estate and business services.

The Croatian labour market is characterised by a low activity rate, a pronounced problem with long-term unemployment and a high structural disproportion between labour supply and demand. HR_P1 is one of the main stakeholders in the field of transition of young adults from education to the labour market at the local level. Its goal is compatible with the goals of other stakeholders in the field, which is to raise young adults' employability. The policy provides facilities and trained professionals to other stakeholders in order to create and deliver support to unemployed young people or to those that want to change to a different career or to continue with their education, supporting them in an individualised manner (e.g., small working groups and inclusive methods). The purpose is to achieve a joint goal: enhancing user competences in order to increase competitiveness and restore the balance of labour supply and demand.

In Croatia, all programmes of secondary education are financed by the Ministry of Science and Education, with the possibility of including the county or other founders in co-financing. Higher education programmes

are also financed with public funds, but there are study programmes that students can finance with their own resources. However, programmes provided by open universities, enrolling mostly young adults without qualifications, are financed by the students themselves. The programmes carried out within some EU-funded projects designated for the implementation of active youth employment policy measures are exceptions to this.

The regional staffs of the policy and some local authorities are responsible for the implementation of national legislation and policies at the local and regional level. The relative abundance of educational possibilities in the county of Istria (and in the skills training) does not automatically ensure their relevance for the labour market (the skills use markets). There are a number of obstacles to the effective delivery of HR_P1 to support young people through their career. Some of them are the high level of centralisation of the system, the lack of a system of information which would permit the availability of information and its exchange and, finally, underdeveloped protocols of cooperation between institutions from different sectors, more precisely, from the education sector and the labour market.

An additional difficulty for the system of mutual coordination is the fact that institutions are focused on the implementation of programmes and policies which stem from the interests of their founders, whereas the horizontal and vertical coordination among providers of educational services occurs sporadically, mainly in the course of the preparation and realisation of short-term and unrelated projects and programmes. The repercussions of the lack of cooperation in the system result in young adults who are unprepared and often without any support in their transition from education to the labour market system. They are unaware of possibilities in their local community and in their region, they are not familiar with programmes that different institutions are offering, and they are focused on developing practical skills which will help them get a job or leave the country with any qualification.

The employability approach embedded in the regulation of the policy and in its expected impacts is strongly related to the notion of "matching"

labour market demands. From the perspective of the actors involved in its implementation, the contribution of the policy to their participants' employability is, again, affected by the coordination dynamics with other actors and by funding issues. Moreover, despite the fact that HR_P1 cooperates with different stakeholders, like the Croatian Employment Service and some secondary schools, mainly in identifying deficit or surplus in the supply of some professions, there is also lack of cooperation between different open public universities, which also contributes to the presence of skills mismatches. The competition arises between them instead of cooperation because they offer similar programmes:

> we talk to young people about retraining, and in the end all open public universities offer the same programmes. We all have commercialists, transport technicians… when they come to the school, I ask them: Did you maybe hear about any other programmes out there? (HR_Ex3).

Programmes provided by open public universities, enrolling mostly young people with no qualifications, are financed by the students themselves. This circumstance significantly affects the institutional opportunity structures they encounter and hampers the access of the most disadvantaged, such as those in a NEET condition, as they do not possess the resources to finance those programmes. One exception is the programmes carried out within EU-funded projects or programmes designated for the implementation of active youth employment policy measures.

From the perspective of HR_P1' staff, its users have different types of motivation for enrolling in training and retraining programmes. Users' motivations vary from getting employed, achieving a better job to obtaining another level of education in order to enrol in higher education. However, participation in the programmes does not ensure the acquisition of competences needed in the labour market, because the education supply and education programmes do not adjust to the changing needs of the market fast enough; and the lack of vertical and horizontal coordination between different actors does not contribute to this end. The content of most existing curricula and teaching programmes offers little opportunity for the students to acquire contemporary competences,

because their modernisation does not keep pace with the development of new knowledge and technologies.

8.3.3 The Case Study in Portugal: Local Cooperation and Coordination to Address Young Adults' Employability and Regional Skills Mismatches

PT_P1, the policy at the core of the case study in Portugal, is a LLL policy aimed at over 15 young people that have completed the 9th grade. The policy consists of high-school-level courses that allow students to have access to higher education. PT_P1 introduced this innovation in 1989, contributing to overcome the monolithic model of the public school, and enabling the existence of a new, more dynamic, practice—and labour-market—oriented educational offer. In 2014, and as a response to the economic crises, the offer was widened, both geographically and in terms of the professional areas covered. The nature of this policy grants a special connection to labour contexts and a special relationship with regional institutions and companies. Also, it encompasses a pedagogical model that is easily adapted to the young adults' educational paths, thus helping to combat dropout and failure rates, the latter being one of the main challenges identified as being faced by schools in the region, according to the experts interviewed. In this vein, unlike regular education, these courses are very much labour market and job oriented, concerning both their offer and their curricular approach.

The policy is implemented in the Vale do Ave functional region, in north-west Portugal. It comprises eight municipalities located alongside the river Ave: Cabeceiras de Basto, Fafe, Guimarães, Mondim de Basto, Póvoa de Lanhoso, Vieira do Minho, Vila Nova de Famalicão and Vizela. These municipalities are organised in an institutional association called the Intermunicipal Community of Vale do Ave, which is a regional public entity aimed at promoting intermunicipal projects. This region covers an area of 1541 km^2 and has 419,119 inhabitants (PORDATA, 2015), corresponding to a density of about 275 people per km^2, one of the highest in the country. The region is very close to the Porto Metropolitan Area (the second largest in the country) and has very good access to its

international harbour and airport; it is also served by railways and highways. This is one of the largest and oldest industrial regions in the country. It has its roots in ancient flax processing traditions, which evolved into textile production. Vale do Ave currently has strong industry, specialised mainly in textiles, agro-food and metallurgy and metalworking. Yet the region is rather heterogeneous. There is a quite rural area in Vale do Ave, with lower population density and an older population, there is the transition Vale do Ave, between the rural and the industrialised and there is a deeply industrialised Vale do Ave, with a higher population density and a younger population.

The socio-economic context of the Vale do Ave region encompasses some real challenges for young adults. This is a rather young and industrialised region and, in spite of this, young people from Vale do Ave face similar challenges to those from the rest of the country, such as unemployment, due to the lack of specific training that meets the real needs of the region, and precarious work.

PT_P1 is a national policy, but locally implemented according to the specific needs of each context. In Vale do Ave, this policy plays a significant role in fighting the lack of skilled young adults in the region, lowering unemployment rates and increasing its participants' personal and professional fulfilment. The policy appears to be a consensual measure in Vale do Ave. Its main objective is employability, that is, to qualify young adults to make them capable of being integrated in the labour market. This objective resonates in the discourses of the managers interviewed, where employability is again linked to its "matching" meaning: synchronising young adults' training to the needs of the regional labour markets and addressing skills mismatches. The policy has been identified as contributing to addressing such mismatches and to the improvement of employability in the region, mainly thanks to the cooperation and coordination with other local actors of the areas where is implemented. This cooperation transcends the selection of skills to be taught and in improving the policy resources, both human and funding ones.

Regarding the selection of skills, departing from the results of the Qualifications Needs Assessment System report, the institution responsible of displaying PT_P1 (e.g., schools and educational agents), in partnership with schools and companies, make an exhaustive mapping of the

education and training needs, and how they match with the labour market needs. Many companies are also called for this prospection, as their needs for skills will indicate which courses' areas are more likely to be planned. Moreover, these same companies provide professional training and jobs for the young adults who attend those courses. These companies also contribute to the private funding of the courses whenever public funding from the ESF or the Portuguese government is not enough to respond to the regional needs of qualification.

This cooperation and synergies in the region between all municipalities and between actors and institutions promote the engagement of young people in vocational training courses in the entire intermunicipal area, and not only in their municipality, although there are some municipalities that are more rural and isolated, which makes mobility more difficult for young adults. In any case, proximity relationships are significant in the region:

> this proximity enables us to be near the institutions and to have the human resources. (…) This means that our technical professors have the possibility of being part of the training groups of the companies. Also, they give training to companies and there is sharing of knowledge here, which is very valid, because then they bring the knowledge and contents to the curriculum we have developed, to make it as close together as possible (PT_Ex5).

The fact that some schools positively respond to a policy implemented in the core of the Vale do Ave industry creating partnerships with the companies gives a sense of immediacy that not only allows the institutions to be nearby, but also to have the human resources necessary for the jobs, translating this into socio-economic development for the region. In sum, the success of this policy in Vale do Ave may rely on various factors: first, the synergies and the close work between the actors and institutions involved in this measure; second, the large potential that the region has, as it is highly industrialised and provides many employment opportunities; and, last, the private funding from companies, which complements the public funding. This policy allows young adults to have early contact with

the labour market, which may be highly motivating, and have high rates of employability in the region, and lower rates of early school leaving.

8.4 Comparison of the Case Studies

The three explored case studies have LLL policies at their core with more than 20 years of existence. Their governance patterns have, however, evolved differently regarding their degrees of decentralisation and the dynamics of collaboration or competition with other actors. Spain has experienced a progressive process of decentralisation in the vocational training sphere towards regional governments, which is also reflected in the SP_P3 policy. Prior to the last reforms (2016), the local public implementers of the policy collaborated with other public actors, which worked to shape wider development projects for the surrounding regions, but that were suppressed. Collaboration with companies does not seem to be fluent nor relevant in the governance pattern of SP_P3. Indeed, the last regional regulation of the policy includes the possibility of collaborating with enterprises, but it is not taken into consideration in the competition to receive funding. Increased competition reduced economic resources of local entities and harder criteria to teach certificates seem to make it more difficult for SP_P3 to meet the demands of the labour market.

In contrast, the HR_P1 policy has remained strongly framed at the national level, with strict regulations (e.g., contents and characteristics of the programmes), despite local implementers having room to choose the teaching methods that are most suitable for their users' interests. Like SP_P3, cooperation with other actors in HR_P1 does not seem to be portrayed by the interviewed actors as highly relevant in reaching its objectives. In this case, cooperation with national authorities is mainly related to administrative issues and the matching of the skill supply with the labour market seems to be made more difficult by the unavailability of data about the needs of the labour market and by the competition with other versions of HR_P1 with a similar training offer. Differently, the transformation of PT_P1 across time came along with a higher collaboration with local companies in order to produce a strong labour-market-oriented educational offer. Therefore, this national policy implemented

Table 8.1 Youth unemployment rates (15–24) by NUT2 level and EU28

	2007	2013	2018
European Union 28	15.8	23.8	15.2
Andalusia	23.2	66	46.7
Adriatic Croatia	21.5	45.2	24.6
Norte	16.8	35.4	19

Source: Eurostat (2020)

at the regional level by paying attention to the specific skills demands of each context, which is related to its high success in reaching its objectives (address skills mismatches, increase employability) and in creating a consensus among actors.

During the Great Recession of 2007–2008, youth unemployment, the main problem that the analysed policies try to tackle, rose in the three regions where the policies are based (Table 8.1.)

The consequences of the Recession and the new reforms in policy design increased mistrust in the governance landscape of the case in Spain: (a) between some actors from SP_P3 and local companies; (b) between these local actors, who encouraged the staff of the new versions of SP_P3 to resist 2016 reforms, which they deem narrowed its impacts, and regional decision makers, defending their changes and criticising the previous selection of the skill provision from the SP_P3's implementers. Competition and bureaucratic collaboration in the case study in Croatia seem to make addressing youth unemployment more difficult too. Conversely, the long-standing strong collaboration with local companies is at the core of the appropriation of a national policy for the case study in Portugal and the PT_P1 policy is characterised as a consensus measure. Fluent and significant participation in the policy design and implementation seem to foster a stronger accomplishment of the expected impacts of the cases and to reduce possible resistance during their appropriation.

The solution to tackle the problem of youth unemployment in the three cases is mainly framed around the notion of employability. In all cases, employability seems to be developed mainly in terms of "matching" young adults' skills with labour market demands (Table 8.2). Despite this common "supply side" understanding of employability, which

Table 8.2 Expected impacts and their relationship with regional governance landscapes

	SP_P3	HR_P1	PT_P1
Aspect	Malaga, Andalusia	Istria, Adriatic Croatia	Vale do Ave, Norte
Main expected impact	Promote participants' labour insertion		
Other expected impacts	Creation of education and labour opportunities, restoration and wider personal development	Training contributes to personal development and to increased personal capabilities of adaptation	Increasing personal and professional fulfilment
Main understanding of employability	Matching + more interactive, comprehensive approach	Matching	Matching + more interactive, comprehensive approach
Regional governance landscapes affecting expected impacts	Increasing employability and wider impacts are hampered by the effects of the 2008 Recession, the new policy regulatory design and competition between providers	Increasing employability is hampered by competition between providers and limited public funding	Increasing employability is fostered by strong local collaboration with companies and the regional industrial sector

Source: Own elaboration

focuses mainly on individual-related aspects (i.e., skills deficits), actors in Spanish and Portuguese cases seem to work with a more interactive and comprehensive perspective on employability, referring to other aspects beyond young adults' skills. Concerning the SP_P3 policy, they refer to limitations or advantages to young adults' labour insertion due to the situation of the labour market or to young adults' personal circumstances; in the case study in Portugal, they highly value the direct offers of vacancies by the companies involved in the policy implementation.

Actors involved in the three cases indicate collaboration rather than competition in the provision and funding of VET as the most effective dynamics for addressing skills mismatches. Competition dynamics seem to be related to the cases in Spain and Croatia with survival strategies by providers, which could prompt to teach skills that are not related to the interests or learning styles of young adults (e.g., administrative work for early school leavers involved in the SP_P3 policy) or that are already widely offered by other providers (as in the Croatian case). In the case study analysed in Spain, these competition dynamics are intersected with the effects of the Recession on the economic resources of the implementing institutions and with higher standards required to teach professional certificates. In the case study analysed in Croatia, providers compete to obtain young adults' economic resources, which are the only source of funding of those courses not funded by the ESF. In contrast, strong collaboration with local companies in Portugal (which even contribute financially to the courses) seems to be at the core of the high success of the analysed policy. This type of strong collaboration is also sought by actors in Croatia and Spain to address such skills mismatches, although with some discrepancies in Spain.

Finally, young adults seem to face other difficulties when accessing the policies and, therefore, in increasing their skills. In the Portuguese case study, they seem to be related to issues of mobility from remote villages. In the Spanish case study, there is possible increased pressure among the implementing institutions to enrol the most prepared young adults because of the new competition procedures. There is also the need to justify young adults' labour insertion a few months after the participation in theSP_P3 policy, and there has been an inclusion of new individual factors of employability among the access criteria to the policy. Higher levels of some of these individual employability factors, such as teamwork skills, were previously conceived in terms of impacts to be achieved through the participation of young adults in SP_P3 and not in terms of prerequisites. This can also reduce less prepared young adults' opportunities for enrolling in the policy and improving their skills. In Croatia, they are related to the fact that young adults' need to fund their participation in the HR_P1 policy, which can limit the access of the most disadvantaged, such as those in a NEET condition.

8.5 Concluding Remarks

The goal of our analysis was to elaborate on how different patterns of governance contribute to the contextualisation of lifelong learning policies in a specific social and structural context. In order to do so, we followed the three axes of comparison (transversal, vertical and horizontal) to undertake comparative case studies (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). The exploration of our cases shows how a governance perspective analysis, enhanced through the opportunity structures perspective, can provide useful insights to better understand the multiple ways in which different actors at different scales produce, implement, resist and appropriate policies in specific contexts.

In this vein, our analysis portrays how different governance patterns support the contextualisation of three LLL policies based on employability in three different European regions. The notion of employability that resonates in our cases, framing a discursive opportunity structure is, however, differently contextualised. Progressive decentralisation does not always mean increased collaboration, participation and trust between actors in different scales or spheres (public-private). This is the case observed in Spain, where the reinforcement of the idea of employability in the policy design has limited the wider impacts that the actors involved in the policy expected from their work, narrowing them towards supply-side factors. Moreover, project- or initiative-based coordination (Capsada-Munsech et al., 2018) does not always lead to close relationships with other local actors that are effective in addressing skills mismatches of regional labour markets or including demand-side aspects (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005) when addressing young adults' employability which is reflected in the case analysed in Croatia. On the contrary, in the case in Portugal, where collaboration and coordination with local companies is characterised as framed by consensus, the policy seems to be more effective in addressing youth unemployment and in contextualising employability in a more comprehensive and interactive way, including those demand-side aspects through relations of proximity between actors in the local context. Trust between actors on different scales and in different spheres and coordination rather than competition seem to foster the

perspectives on labour market insertion. This collaboration is demanded by some of the actors even where it is not currently developed (e.g., the case in Spain).

The work of the actors involved in the implementation of the cases is also influenced by the institutional opportunity structures they are inserted in, so they can shape different levels of opportunities for young adults. In the Spanish case study, the activities and duration of the policy have directly been reduced through the reforms in policy design, which are strongly linked to the discursive opportunity structure framed by the notion of employability, but these actors claim that they will try to resist to these changes and create other opportunities for young adults. In the Croatian case, they find difficulties in accessing wider information and there is a lack of cooperation protocols. In the Portuguese case study, on the contrary, they deal with funding issues through the support of local companies and their close relationship with them.

Young adults' participation in our cases and, therefore, some of their opportunities to increase their employability, can be also hindered by the institutional opportunity structures they face regarding their access to the explored policies. For instance, it can be limited through the introduction of more demanding access criteria to the LLL policies, competition, limited resources and survival strategies between providers, limitations in young adults' mobility to the training centres or their need to fund their own training. Attention should, moreover, be paid to other demand-side aspects of the regions where our cases are embedded, such as the different opportunities that young adults find in regional labour markets, which also influence their employability (Cefalo et al., 2020).

Note

1. To safeguard the privacy of the interviewees, the official names of the policies and measures at the core of the case studies analysed in this chapter have been replaced by codes. Specifically, the codes report the abbreviation of the country name followed by "P" ("Policy") and a sequence number on the basis of the order of appearance of the policies in the book.

The codes attached to the quotations from interviews report the abbreviation of the country name followed by "Ex" ("Expert" for street level professionals, policy managers and policymakers) and the sequence number attributed by the different research teams while collecting the interviews.

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9

Governance Patterns and Opportunities for Young Adults in Austria, Spain and Portugal

Ruggero Cefalo, Mariana Rodrigues, and Rosario Scandurra

9.1 Introduction

Policies and multilevel governance patterns are said to have a relevant role in shaping youth transitions and labour market integration (Piopiunik & Ryan, 2012). Institutions and policy interventions configure opportunity structures which condition young people's agency (Roberts, 2009),

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influencing the transitions between the education system and the labour market in several ways. A key point here is the attainment of vocational and professional qualifications that can help young people enter the labour market or improve their position in it (Raffe, 2014). In this chapter, we focus on the role played by different governance patterns in shaping youth transitions from education to work and within the labour market (Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015). In doing so, we use governance and policy studies as an analytical lens to apply the general framework of institutional opportunity structures.

We compare specific policies as forms of cooperation among central state, local authority and private actors, and their impact on the opportunities of young people caught in the transition from education to work in different national and local contexts. The criteria for comparison were derived from the adoption of a governance and policy studies perspective. Following Bevir (2011), we look at interventions aimed at contrasting the impact of social risks, analysing the design of the interventions, the target group, the aims, the specific output, and the contribution to wider outcomes of the policies in terms of aggregated labour market integration and educational attainment. Moreover, we pay specific attention to the scalar levels of the actors and to the interdependence between public and private actors involved in the provision, respectively defined as the vertical and horizontal axis of coordination (Øverbye et al., 2010; Bache et al., 2016). How are the policies designed, justified and what are the actors involved in the implementation? What are the outcomes of the measures and how do they contribute to shaping youth opportunities in the selected regions?

A deep insight into particular cases can explain how specific patterns of governance at the national and/or local level contribute to the desired or unexpected effects of lifelong learning (LLL) policies. We compare policies adopted in functional regions from three European countries, concretely two southern countries, Portugal and Spain, and Austria. Austria has widely been identified as positive example, as far as integration of youth in the labour market is concerned, given the occupational performances and the structure of the VET and LLL systems (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020). On the other hand, Portugal and Spain have suffered greatly from the impact of the Great Recession and face high and sustained rates of youth unemployment (Scandurra et al., 2020a).

The following policies were selected for comparison. In the Upper Austria region, the policy intervention selected (AT_P3[1]) aims at recognising and improving qualifications for people that have not completed apprenticeship training. In Girona (Catalonia region of Spain), the selected programme (SP_P4) targets young people who are neither studying nor working, mostly early school leavers (ESL) and intends to improve education and professional qualifications. In Vale do Ave (Norte region of Portugal), the professional courses (PT_P2) selected are targeted at underqualified young adults, unemployed or not and offer compulsory education and professional certification, while giving access to further studies or the labour market. The cases stress the relevance of qualifications for youth with low education in accessing the labour market (Heisig et al., 2019). However, they are differently designed and are linked to the specific characteristics of their regional contexts (Valiente & Scandurra, 2017).

The empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews with experts (managers or street-level professionals) conveniently selected based on the scope of the selected LLL policies. On the whole, 21 experts were interviewed: 9 in Upper Austria (Austria), 7 in Vale do Ave (Portugal), and 5 in Girona (Spain). All participants gave their informed consent for participation in the research. These interviews were focused on the policy's design, implementation procedure and challenges, target-groups, actors and impact and stakeholder coordination, looking at the vertical multilevel structure and at the public-private interaction on the horizontal axis.

9.2 The Governance Perspective: Policies, Actors and Youth Integration

Access to the labour market is dependent upon individual decisions but is also shaped by the opportunities and constraints produced by economic conditions and the socio-institutional context (De Lange et al., 2014). Accordingly, the present chapter looks at cross-national and cross-regional institutional opportunity structures through the lens of governance and policy studies by exploring policy interventions that attempted to ease the transitions between training and work in local contexts of Austria, Spain, and Portugal.

Although LLL policies are confronted with similar problems related to training and labour market integration, the interventions address different actors and territorial levels with different powers and resources (Kazepov, 2010), resulting in various LLL landscapes across European countries and regions (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020). A governance perspective calls attention to regulatory structures, providing a useful lens to operationalize the institutional dimension of opportunity structures. Policy studies in this field set the focus on regulations, actions, and interventions aimed at contrasting the impact of social risks, analysing the design of the interventions and looking at the objectives, rules of access and resources; and the specific outputs, for instance in terms of participants and achievements, as well as in the contribution to wider outcomes of aggregated labour market integration and educational attainment (Bevir, 2011).

In all the phases of design and implementation, the provision of policies may involve not only the state, but also a broader set of actors (Ascoli & Ranci, 2003). Private companies, non-governmental and international organisations, political parties, other social partners, and individuals are capable of addressing societal problems. The governance perspective adds a specific logic to this, looking at the various public and private actors involved in policy provision, and at the mechanisms of interaction and coordination among these stakeholders (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020). In LLL landscapes, initial and further vocational training (VET) plays a major role, as it explicitly targets the passage from education to employment. Empirical evidence shows how different schemes and VET configurations are among countries, due to various mixes of school- and work-based training, degrees of involvement of private companies, social partners, and state regulations (see Eichhorst et al., 2015; Kazepov et al., 2020). Accordingly, specific configurations contribute to certain outcomes in terms of insertion into the labour market and equality of opportunities for youth (Bol & Van de Werfhorst, 2013). Several authors have compared groups of countries with similar institutional arrangements that shape the passage from education to work, identifying different typologies of school-to-work transition systems or regimes, or skill formation systems (Smyth et al., 2001; Pastore, 2015; Scandurra & Calero, 2020). Among these, Central European countries, like Germany or

Austria, heavily rely on the provision of vocational training through dual apprenticeships, tight links with an occupational labour market that value professional and educational certifications and the high involvement of private firms, all features associated with comparative high youth employment (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012). Conversely, Southern European countries like Spain or Italy present relatively high levels of youth unemployment people, associated with a fragmented provision of vocational training with weak links to the labour market (Pastore, 2015; Cefalo, 2019). In light of this, these countries recently engaged in several reforms of training policies, in an attempt to improve youth employment outcomes.

While governance refers to the interdependence between governments and the non-governmental, the concept of multilevel governance adds the dimension of scale, looking at the increasing interdependence between governments of different territorial levels (Kazepov, 2010). Political authorities are confronted with externalities that differ in territorial reach (Andreotti et al., 2012). These differences make it necessary for governance to also operate at multiple scales. The interdependence between public and private actors defines the horizontal axis of coordination; however, it takes place in multilevel systems of LLL education governance where the actors involved present typical "levels" with particular modes of action, ranging from supranational actors (like the EU) to national, subnational and local ones (Øverbye et al., 2010). Bache and Flinders (2004) define multilevel governance as the vertical (multiple levels) and horizontal (multiple actors) dispersion of central government authority. Therefore, the territorial coordination of responsibilities for training and labour market policies may bring about regional differences in policy provisions and outcomes (Bacher et al., 2017). Multiscalar institutions interact with the local economy, creating regional skills ecosystems (Dalziel, 2015) as locally contextualised configurations of policies and actors that impact subnational differences in insertion in the labour market for young people. Accordingly, recent evidence also emphasises intra-national variations as an under-researched issue in the research on education-work transitions, paving the way for cross-regional comparisons of policies and contexts (Rodrigues et al., 2020; Scandurra et al., 2020b). In this chapter, we compare policies using criteria derived from

the above-mentioned literature on policy and multilevel governance studies. This research suggests that different countries and regions provide particular contexts for the implementation of LLL policies and governance patterns. In turn, policy design, implementation, and the coordination among actors involved may have a significant impact on youth opportunities in the local labour markets.

9.3 Context: A Snapshot of Employment Outcomes of LLL Governance

In this section, we provide a very brief description of the LLL context for the three countries and three regions chosen for the analysis. We based this overview on a very short list of indicators such as youth unemployment, NEET rate, early school leaving (ESL) rate, and post-secondary education access. In Table 9.1, we report the average and the starting and ending rate together with the variation over the period of these indicators. On average, Austria has 59.9% of young adults employed (those aged between 20 and 34 years) with at least mandatory education, while Spain reports 62.4% and Portugal 77.2% for this indicator. Upper Austria reports a slighter higher rate compared to the country average; however, there was a decrease in employment for those with at least mandatory education of −7.6% between 2004 and 2018, indicating a poor trend in the integration in the labour market for this subgroup. In Spain and Catalonia there is also a negative evolution of this indicator, although for the case of Catalonia this is reduced (−10.6% versus −13.1). Portugal as a country registers a decrease as well, but this is not the case for the Norte region, where there was a slight increase of 1.7%. When we consider those who have upper secondary education, Austria and Upper Austria register a higher share of employment being respectively 89.7% and 86.7% with a positive evolution over the period. On the contrary, Catalonia, Norte, and their respective countries report lower initial levels and a reduction in this rate over the period. This amount of almost −8.1% in the case of Catalonia indicates a considerable loss of employment for this group. Employment for tertiary-educated young adults is generally

Table 9.1 Selection of key indicators at regional and national level

	Employment rate education 0–2 ISCED, 20–34 years				Employment rate education 3–4 ISCED, 20–34 years				Employment rate education 5–8 ISCED, 20–34 years				Early School Leavers rate, 18–24 years				NEET rate, 18–24 years			
	Average	2004	2018	Delta	Average	2004	2018	Delta	Average	2004	2018	Delta	Average	2004	2018	Delta	Average	2004	2018	Delta
Austria	59.9	57.1	65.4	8.3	86.7	84.3	87.7	3.4	90.1	93.5	90.4	-3.1	8.5	9.8	7.3	-2.5	9.3	10.8	8.1	-2.7
Upper Austria	65.3	75.9	68.3	-7.6	89.7	87.1	91.5	4.4	91.7	90.7	89.0	-1.7	8.4	8.8	8.9	-0.1	7.6	9.8	7.4	-2.4
Spain	62.4	86.4	73.3	-13.1	72.9	79.8	73.2	-6.6	81.9	87.0	89.2	2.2	25.8	32.2	17.9	-14.3	18.8	14.9	16.1	1.2
Catalonia	66.2	72.3	61.7	-10.6	75.4	85.1	77.0	-8.1	86.2	85.7	82.4	-3.3	25.9	34.1	17.0	-17.1	19.3	14.5	16.1	1.6
Portugal	77.2	82.7	80.5	-2.2	82.7	88.1	84.5	-3.6	84.8	90.6	87.8	-2.8	25.2	39.3	11.8	-27.5	14.6	12.4	11.7	-0.7
Norte	78.9	82.9	84.6	1.7	81.6	89.1	84.8	-4.3	83.1	89.9	87.6	-2.3	27.6	46.5	10.1	-36.4	14.7	12.8	11.3	-1.5

Source: Eurostat online database

higher in Austria and Upper Austria reaching 91.7% on average in this region while Catalonia reports 86.2% and Norte 83.1%. However, there is a negative trend in all the regions and country considered between 2–3% except for Spain, which gains almost 2.2% over the period.

When examining educationally excluded young adults (ESL) or those who are not studying nor looking for a job (NEET), we find a nuanced picture. All territories experienced a decline in the ESL rate, although the decline was smaller in Austria than in the rest of the territories analysed. This is because the Austrian LLL system historically shows low ESL and at the beginning of the period analysed, they start from a very low base. On one hand, Austria and Upper Austria respectively report a very similar average ESL rate of 8.5% and 8.4%. These territories couple a very low ESL rate together with a low NEET, which is 9.3% in Austria and 7.6% in Upper Austria. Moreover, they experience a decline of NEET for more than 2%. On the other hand, Spain and Portugal together with Norte and Catalonia experience a stark decrease in ESL over the period. They are two of the countries with a traditionally higher share of ESL and this was reduced by half in Spain and more almost 70% in Portugal on average. Both Catalonia and Norte reduced ESL even more than their respective countries, with Norte having the most remarkable reduction of −36.4% which represents a percentage change of almost −80%. However, when examining the NEET rate of these regions, we find that there is a very slight reduction in Portugal (−0.7%) and Norte (−1.5%) and an increase of 1.2% in Spain and 1.6% in Catalonia. This shows the negative long-term effect of job loss and the long path to recovery of both Portugal and Spain. This is also reinforced by their higher average over the period, 18.8% for Spain, and 14.6% for Portugal, while in Austria it is 9.3%. For the case of Spain, the path to recovery from the Great Recession took a very long time and the negative consequences are still tangible without a clear sign of reaching the previous level of young labour market access shortly.

To sum up, this snapshot description describes some important differentiation between contexts of LLL governance in these territories, by looking at outcomes on youth labour markets. These differences are well established in the literature of school to work transition (Walther, 2017) and skills formation (Scandurra & Calero, 2020). However, territorial

responses to economic challenges are relevant in shaping very different equilibria of youth transition and the allegedly assumed national homogeneity cannot be taken for granted.

9.4 Analysis of Local Case Studies and Governance Structures

9.4.1 The Case Study in Upper Austria

9.4.1.1 Target Group and Actors Involved

The AT_P3 policy is a social partnership project stemming from the collaboration between the local sections of the Chamber of Labour and the Chamber of Economy, with the support of the regional government ("Land") of Upper Austria. It was implemented in Upper Austria to facilitate the official recognition of informally acquired professional skills. Its target group is people who are 22 years or older, who (1) are employed and have acquired the skills of the respective occupational profile but do not hold an apprenticeship or (2) have not been employed in the training domain for more than five years. Although it does not specifically address young adults, it is highly relevant for them in a context that gives major importance to formal qualifications for labour market integration.

The policy relies on cooperation between the social partner, public institutional actors, and adult education institutions. It is funded by the government of Upper Austria and by the Chamber of Labour. The Chamber of Labour, the Chamber of Economy, the Public Employment Service, and the Upper Austrian authorities are the main actors involved in the provision of the service. Street-level coordination mainly takes place between the Chambers and education providers to organise training courses according to previous participants' skills assessment. The Chamber of Labour and the Chamber of Commerce mainly interact through the programme's steering committee. This cooperation among social partners is embedded within the Austrian social partnership culture of negotiations and concessions.

9.4.1.2 Justification and Aims

At the origin of the project was, on the one hand, the complaint from the Chamber of Economy about the so-called shortage in skilled workers and, on the other hand, the position of the department of education at the Chamber of Labour, that pursues the increase of accessibility of further education for unskilled workers. This lifelong learning policy is based on preventing future unemployment through additional training and recognition of previously acquired skills. Particular attention is devoted to young people who were not able to get a qualification through apprenticeship, because they abandoned the course or failed the final examination. In the Austrian context, where qualifications are highly valued by the employers, this is considered as a weakness to be addressed to allow people to develop a satisfying labour market career. Workers with apprenticeship certificates achieve higher wage categories and have other job-related rights when compared to unskilled employers. The expected impact of AT_P3 was to reduce the individual risk of unemployment and to smoothen life course transitions by certificating participants' professional skills.

9.4.1.3 Implementation

The project specifically applies to 20 occupational profiles selected by looking at the labour market demand for skilled workers in the specific branches. The profiles range from knowledge-intensive activities (IT, engineering), to manufacture (metalworking), to less knowledge-intensive and manual activities (bakers, retail, restaurant service employees, carpenters). After a skills evaluation, eligible persons acquire the missing skills—if necessary—in training courses and subsequently conduct a practical test to get a formal qualification recognising the skills possessed or acquired during the training.

Initially, the Chamber of Economy had some doubts regarding the AT_P3 policy, fearing that the programme might bring too "cheap" qualifications for the employees, without a strong value-added for employers. In the implementation phase, the disagreements between the social

partners emerging during the design of the measure seemed to leave space for a more coordinated effort, shifting the focus on the advantages coming from formal recognition and coherent training to complementing already existing skills.

9.4.1.4 Outcomes

According to the experts interviewed, the assessment carried out at the end of 2017 revealed that the project had called up a total of 700 participants. According to the Chamber of Labour, one-third of the participants are under 29, 59% are males and 41% females. The most important success criterion for AT_P3 is the number of participants attaining their apprenticeship certificate. The ratio of successful participants was between 70% and 80% in 2017 (Cefalo et al., 2018), which is close to the success rate of standard final apprenticeship tests. It was reported that from the start of the project, around 1,000 people in Upper Austria have completed an apprenticeship through this programme (BKA, 2020).

AT_P3 is seen as successful case by the experts interviewed, as the programme reduces biographical uncertainty by providing an officially recognised certificate.

> It just opens up many more opportunities than one has when working as an unskilled worker. Not only regarding the stability of one's job but also regarding income. Also regarding further education […] or whatever you can do afterwards. And also regarding social prestige (AT_Ex2).

Young participants benefit from more job security, higher pay levels, and more opportunities regarding further education. Companies seek their advantage by encouraging and supporting young people in their training, as they will get highly skilled staff and improve their reputation and the competitiveness of Upper Austria. The most innovative aspect of AT_P3 is related to its original approach in the field of Austrian activation and training policies (Lassnigg, 2011). Previous policies aiming at the formal qualification of unskilled individuals mainly focused on the learning of theoretical subjects, not considering the target groups'

existing practical knowledge. Also, unskilled workers and employees have often had negative learning experiences. In this case, positive learning experiences via practice-based and adult learning approaches have proven to readjust their image of learning. For some participants, this has led to further engagement in formal education, up to university graduation.

> Since [the participation in] AT_P3, I know that I can learn. No one had expected this from me, that I know something. But now, I proved it, the feeling of self-esteem has increased. […] We have one guy, who trained for two occupations via AT_P3 and he's studying law now, because he also did his university entrances exam […] Almost the most important thing is that people start learning. Because then they acquire a taste for it (AT_Ex 18).

The policy has been generally classified as very successful and has been transferred to other Austrian regions, although as "reduced versions". However, the standardisation of the action (as a best practice) in different regional contexts may prove to be problematic. The outcomes of AT_P3 seem to be significantly related to Upper Austria's economic structure, particularly the strong industrial sector and the persisting traditional corporative frame.

9.4.2 The Case Study in Girona

9.4.2.1 Target Group and Actors Involved

In 2012, the Catalan Employment Service (SOC in its acronym in Catalan) launched the SP_P4 as a revised version of a previous similar programme. Both of them were co-funded by the Catalan government and the European Social Fund. The SP_P4 is a 12–15 months programme aimed at improving the employability of unemployed and unskilled young adults aged from 16 to 24 by providing them with 3 months vocational training and 1 month of training in a work environment. It also provides career guidance and apprenticeship experiences to its beneficiaries. This improvement had to be attained through the provision of professional training, counselling, and opportunities to go back to school at least until the achievement of the compulsory secondary

education certificate. After two editions, the SP_P4 was subordinated to the deployment of the Youth Guarantee scheme all over Catalonia in 2014. This new framework does not seem to have produced contradictions between the objectives of the different policies as they formally share their concern about NEETs and offer different resources to deal with this situation.

9.4.2.2 Justification and Aims

The aim of both SP_P4 and its predecessor was to improve the employability of young people who were neither studying nor working (NEETs). The intention is likewise to encourage the attainment of the mandatory secondary qualification and provide support in job placement. Since 2012, the Youth for Occupation programme (JPO, in Catalan) has responded to many vulnerable young adults in Catalonia by providing them with short-term training and apprenticeship experiences along with counselling and guidance for improving their employment opportunities.

9.4.2.3 Implementation

As stated by different street-level workers interviewed, the programme has improved since its inception due to the increasing awareness in the SOC of its need for adaptation to improve its response to local needs.

> The law passed in 2015 goes in this direction, trying out these strategies that started in some territories, strategies that state there is an agreement between local administration, social agents, the different entities of the productive level, trade unions, whatever, well, they have to agree and say: "In this territory we need this, this and this" and "well, if you tell us we can also adapt these policies in the same direction". The law also wants to start a degree of decentralisation of these attributions, which are very concentrated on the Generalitat [Catalan Government], to decentralise them to the territories will probably adapt them better to their needs. […] this is also the way the European Union talks, referring to proximity, about making the policies fit the territories as closely as possible (SP_Ex5).

These improvements have led to the promotion of a new intervention strategy by the SOC, which started in 2018. This strategy intends to decentralise the activity of the Catalan Service and promote coordination and collaboration among local public and private actors in each territory. The shift seems to respond to two fundamental critiques from the local and organisational levels carrying out the programme. First, they complain of their lack of autonomy in managing the programme. This refers to the pre-established distribution of the resources they receive (fixed amount per beneficiary) among the different actions they develop but also to their lack of ability to modify some of the programme's rigidities to their own needs.

Second, they complain of lack of coordination among all the providers at the local level.

> Our theory is that, when we started the SP_P4 in this city, it was the only training offered to young people of this age. I received 224 applications in the selection process [for 20 places]. Imagine! And it was the same in 2013. Then we started to offer hotel and catering courses too. When the Youth Guarantee Programme came in 2014, more profit-making and non-profit-making organisations started to provide the YG scheme courses. And so, selection became a challenge. Since all providers were selecting, many thought: "I'll keep this youngster". Competition between this city and the one next door was reckless (SP_Ex11).

This problem started in 2014, when the YG scheme started its deployment in the region. While previously providers were already offering training to the same target group, competition among them became stronger with the introduction of the YG scheme. In this scenario, different public and private providers compete to recruit as many young people as possible, because their funding depends on the number of beneficiaries they recruit, meaning that there are overlaps and gaps in the training courses available in the area (the cheaper the course, the broader its offer). Moreover, in many instances this implies bad counselling practices by the suppliers, who seek their own benefit more than that of the young people.

Regarding the particular situation of the programme at the local level, some questions should be highlighted. Firstly, the programme depends

on the youth section of the City Council. The responsible technical staffs are aware of the difficulties faced by the young people in the region. Their trajectories are taken into account beyond their relationship with employment, and therefore a wider vision of their situation is expressed. Contrary to what seems to be the main political focus of the development of the YG scheme in Spain and also in Catalonia, the implementation of this programme pays attention to the different dimensions of the personal development of the young people, not only to those related to their employability. In fact, as stated by the person responsible for the youth section, the skills on which all the activities of the section are based are those defined by the World Health Organisation and UNICEF.

> I mean, the WHO [World Health Organisation] says "In the end, the most important thing is for you to be able to solve a conflict, for you to be able to work in a team, for you to be able to have proactive ideas, to provide something to the team in the work". In the end. This is the most important thing. Of course, training equips you with these tools, but the eventual outcome is mainly a question of emotional education (SP_Ex13).

These life skills are closely related with questions of self-satisfaction, motivation, stability, mental health, and so on and are considered as key abilities to address different questions such as education, democracy, gender equality, lifelong learning, and so on. This is an important difference in their approach compared to the focus of other administrations, which are more centred on "utilitarian" skills (employability, adaptation, etc.).

Secondly, and regardless of this focus on life skills, the actual implementation of the programme strongly emphasises individual interventions over contextual or social ones. Despite opening their focus from employability to "quality of life", the actions conducted through the SP_P4 programme are closely focused on each young person's capacity to overcome his/her situation. To this end, close relationships are established between street-level employees and mentored young people.

Thirdly, the functional region and particularly the territory covered by the city of Girona and surroundings is increasingly characterised by a public effort to improve coordination among private and public actors, and among different administrative levels.

9.4.2.4 Outcomes

Regarding the local labour force, 52% of the active population are foreigners, while this group represent 29.4% of the overall population in Catalonia. Therefore, in this local setting the target group for SP_P4 differs from the target group in other cities. We have no data on what percentage of the 230 beneficiaries of the programme from 2012 to 2017 were foreigners. However, despite the reluctance of street-level employees to make this claim, their indirect comments and our observations led us to think that foreigners are the clear majority.

In consequence, the official descriptions portray the beneficiaries as young people rather than unemployed, early school leavers or foreigners. Compared to the Spanish national and Catalan governments, this premise implies another understanding of the causes of the vulnerability of these young adults.

Actually, a loose regulation allows local authorities to implement SP_P4 by means of the specific practices that best fit with their political orientation. In this regard, the SP_P4 programme in this city differs from the instrumental orientation of the original purpose and confers more expressive elements to it. Strong emphasis is therefore placed on the importance of the programme not only for improving the employability of its beneficiaries, but also for offering them guidance and support in all spheres of their daily life.

9.4.3 The Case Study in Vale do Ave

9.4.3.1 Target Group and Actors Involved

Professional courses (PT_P2) are part of the Portuguese Vocational Education and Training (VET) provision, which are mainly targeted at young people aged over 15 who have completed basic education and seek more practical and labour market-oriented training, and/or pursue higher studies. These PT_P2 are seen by the experts and managers as addressing mainly young people who had difficulties succeeding and have no interest in continuing in regular school or are currently neither working nor

in education and training. This secondary educational pathway allows students access to dual certification, simultaneously granting a school certification of secondary education, and a professional certification associated with the qualification (Level 4). Based on a three-year structure, which is organised by modules, PT_P2 enable greater flexibility and adaptability to the students' learning processes. The curricular plan consists of three training components: sociocultural, scientific, and technical, which includes training in a work context (an internship of 420 hours) and a professional aptitude test. These courses are funded by the European Social Fund and the national counterpart, under the priority axis for promotion of youth educational success, reduction of early school dropout, and increase of qualifications. Their management is a joint responsibility of the National Agency for Qualification and Professional Education (ANQEP) and the Ministry of Education; however, on the ground, its implementation depends on the performance and collaboration of relevant local and national actors, stakeholders, and institutions, from schools to companies, under the coordination of Intermunicipal Community of VdA (CIM Ave).

9.4.3.2 Justification and Aims

The main challenges that the Vale do Ave (VdA) region faces nowadays are mostly related to young people's lack and/or inadequacy of qualifications, as expressed by the experts. This situation partly results from the high dropout and failure levels in the region and contributes to youth unemployment, NEET, and emigration. This is not just a local problem but also a national issue; even so, VdA differs from other national regions for being a considerably young and industrialised region. Industry is the main source of economic development, requiring a smaller workforce but more skilled than before and this is seen as problematic in a context of a lack of qualified workers. School disaffection, absenteeism, grade retention, and early school leaving before completing compulsory secondary education are the most pressing problems to be tackled by PT_P2. The dominant political discourse tends to justify these problems by using an educational deficit framework; therefore, investment in education and

training will improve youth academic and professional qualifications, which will decrease unemployment and reduce social exclusion, acting on a preventive basis. In the Vale do Ave region, the implementation of PT_P2 goes beyond the education sector and requires the involvement of the labour market and the social and youth sectors.

9.4.3.3 Implementation

The candidates are firstly interviewed by a LLL professional to collect their personal, educational, and professional experiences, and then they are invited to express their future expectations. Then, ideally, based on their personal characteristics and life courses, different hypotheses are presented to them. However, as expressed by some experts, the financing system is the main determinant of the available offer, which means that some young people do not have opportunity to pursue their initial goal and ending up choosing an available alternative. Educational institutions call for more funding, time, and autonomy to deal with the current educational challenges, but also to manage their education and training provision without neglecting their local specificities, given that the definition and implementation of PT_P2 are driven by the national government level, following European recommendations. In monitoring the match between the qualification supply and demand in the region, the companies' stakeholders and their needs and interests must be considered in the view of the educational managers, as an attempt to fit youth academic and professional qualifications to labour market demands. As stated by an expert:

> this work is done based on a diagnosis of needs, which is then compared with the diagnosis of CIM Ave. Our advantage is the strength that our education and training network has already acquired and the prestige acquired with the Ministry of Education, which often allows us to counter some guidelines that come from the diagnoses made by the IEFP, CIM Ave, and that we locally managed to advance with training in areas that were not considered as priorities in diagnoses, but which are validated by enterprises. It makes perfect sense for us to work this way (PT_Ex6).

The partnerships with the local economic and social stakeholders are particularly important to maximise the human and material resources available. All experts interviewed recognised the existence of conflict; however, it is easily solved. It is in the best interest of all partners involved to respond to the VdA needs:

> there is no point in having different interests; it's in everyone's best interest to be in the market, that each one does what they know best according to each one's quality and skills, and the answers should be those that the municipality and the region need, both in quantity and in diversity. To arrive at this final proposal, obviously, there is discussion, I would not say conflict. The result is positive; if this discussion did not take place, we would possibly be here running over each other and maybe we could not do a job with the quality and assertiveness with which we do (PT_Ex6).

9.4.3.4 Outcomes

Experts and young adults described the existence of social stigma around PT_P2. Young people who choose this educational pathway are commonly described as underachievers or as those with low professional aspirations. However, experts and managers also recognise an increased interest from young people in this educational alternative. Overall, the experts shared that is difficult to evaluate the outcomes of this educational policy, since it takes time to perceive change. Notwithstanding, they highlighted some aspects of the positive impact on personal, social, and economic conditions of VdA. It contributes to increasing the rate of young people who complete the secondary education, while obtaining professional training and qualifications that could help them to access the labour market. Besides, it has a clear effect on individual self-esteem, particularly by expanding their perspectives and options and enabling them for decision-making processes. The ultimate goal of these courses is to increase youth qualifications, and consequently their employment. The experts interviewed consider unemployment more than an educational issue, or an individual responsibility. Unemployment is a social and structural problem, which means that tackling uncertainty and vulnerability of youth life courses in VdA requires a systemic and decentralised response.

9.5 Comparison: Impact of the Interaction Between Governance Patterns and Context Specificities on Youth Labour Market Integration

In this chapter, we began by referring to research that suggests that different countries and regions provide particular contexts for LLL policy implementation and multilevel governance patterns, which in turn impact youth opportunities in the education and labour market. In this section, we present a brief comparative analysis of the three case studies to contribute to this discussion.

National funds and the European Social Fund are the main sources of funding, under the justification that this investment will reduce early school leaving, increase academic and professional qualifications, and consequently raise youth employability. Differences across cases were found regarding the criteria used to define the target-group, such as the required age, current early school living (in all cases), unemployment (in all cases), absence of compulsory certification (in VdA and Girona), lack of certificated professional qualifications, and immigrant status (in the Austrian and Spanish cases), among others. Even with the noted differences in the composition of the target-group, all cases combine preventive and activation strategies targeted at vulnerable groups such as under skilled and unqualified youth. In the three case studies, there is evidence of a strong connection between education, training, and the labour market. This means that all analysed LLL policies are characterised by a dominant focus on improving young adults' knowledge and skills relevant to the constant and dynamic demand of the labour market; however, they are also supposed to bring wider psychological benefits to the young beneficiaries. When looking at how LLL policies under study are put into practice, we found variations between cases, such as in their duration and structure. Besides these disparities, all LLL policies put emphasis on certifications recognising the skills acquired during training, as well as on practical learning and evaluation.

Looking at the vertical axis of coordination, all LLL policies analysed adopt a design based on a top-down approach, which means that the EU,

national and regional governments hold a key role in the implementation and evaluation guidelines to follow at local level; however, there is more or less space for decentralisation, which is regarded as essential to the adaptation of LLL policies to local economic and social landscape in all cases. All policies are based on a broad network of cooperating local actors and the adequacy of the regional and/or local configurations and specificities. In all cases, the horizontal coordination among the different stakeholders is mostly managed by a national or local public entity, like the Intermunicipal Community of Vale do Ave, the Economic and Labour Chambers in Upper Austria (usually regarded as semi-public organisations involved in the provision and monitoring of training), and the youth section of the Girona City Council. The actors involved are mostly public organisations, social enterprises, public and private education institutions, and companies, as is the cases of Girona and VdA. Given the variety of actors' roles and interests, the coordination among actors and its impact is evaluated in different ways. More concretely, in Upper Austria and Vale do Ave, the coordination efforts are described as successful, increasing the match between labour market skills supply and demand, and overcoming the formal system's rigidity; however, in Girona, there is evidence of a lack of coordination among local actors due to their competing interests (such as funding), which compromises practices and results.

Regarding specific outputs and outcomes, all cases are evaluated as particularly successful in their countries, even describing different results and limitations. In Upper Austria, a high number of participants achieved their apprenticeship certificate, which is seen as a condition to access to better economic, professional, and education opportunities. In VdA, the increased rate of youth who complete the secondary education, while improving professional qualifications is seen as helpful in accessing the labour market. While not as evident as in the previous cases, in Girona, the focus is not clearly on youth professional qualifications, but more on their personal development. As already mentioned, the main goal of these LLL policies is to prevent or reduce youth unemployment; however, young people have different living conditions in the three contexts analysed. In Upper Austria, the LLL policy seems to tackle uncertainty and vulnerability in youth life courses, contrary to what happens in Girona

and VdA, which represent two notable examples that youth unemployment is a social problem that goes beyond a greater investment in education and training.

9.6 Conclusions

This chapter shows that different governance patterns and policies influence the opportunities of youth to participate in education and the labour market, thus shaping youth transition patterns. Beyond differences in regulations, target groups and procedures, achievement and recognition of professional qualifications were identified as the main area of intervention to increase youth employability. The generally positive impacts on youth opportunities highlight a policy challenge for improving young adults' knowledge and skills such that they match the dynamic development of labour market demand.

The compared policies display different educational and employment outcomes and specific modes of governance, as forms of cooperation among state and private actors that interact with characteristics of national and local contexts. Beyond the common top-down design approach of the LLL policies considered, a significant trait is the existence of some degree of adaptation to local economic and social landscape. The horizontal coordination among local actors involved in the provision of LLL policies emerged as strategic. The mode of governance in Upper Austria shows how the long-standing tradition of cooperation between social partners can produce qualifications that match with both the specific labour market and individual needs. Coordination efforts were also part of a successful mode of governance in VdA, helping to overcome the formal system's rigidity. Conversely, in Girona, the lack of coordination among local actors, coupled with diminished institutional capacities and resources, partially compromised the expected results of the policy.

The policies analysed show the possibility of combining preventive and activation strategies, within different and context-based modes of governance, with a positive impact on the opportunities of vulnerable groups such as early school leavers. These opportunities should go beyond

employment outcomes, as they also open new learning possibilities, improvements in knowledge and self-esteem for the people involved, as well as foster a positive equilibrium for the local context at an aggregate level.

Note

1. To safeguard the privacy of the interviewees, the official names of the policies and measures at the core of the case studies analysed in this chapter have been replaced by codes. Specifically, the codes report the abbreviation of the country name followed by "P" ("Policy") and a sequence number on the basis of the order of appearance of the policies in the book. The only exception is constituted by Youth Guarantee as it represents a broad international policy programme integrating different sub-measures at the core of the case study located in Spain.

   The codes attached to the quotations from interviews report the abbreviation of the country name followed by "Ex" ("Expert" for street level professionals, policy managers, and policymakers) and the sequence number attributed by the different research teams while collecting the interviews.

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Part III

Conclusions

10

From Cases to Stories to Lessons: Exploring Landscapes of Lifelong Learning across Europe

Marcelo Parreira do Amaral, Sebastiano Benasso, Tiago Neves, and Dejana Bouillet

This chapter offers some concluding thoughts on the case studies by bringing together insights generated throughout the chapters in Part II of this volume. It does so by revisiting the themes dealt with in each chapter and relating them to the conceptual frameworks adopted to illuminate their overall contribution. Here, questions regarding the meaning and

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relevance of the discussions for life course research and opportunity structures of young people are dealt with. This chapter also includes an overview table highlighting the contribution of each of the cases to a better understanding of the landscapes of Lifelong Learning across Europe.

The first section situates the explorations undertaken in the previous chapters in terms of places, spaces, and cases, thus highlighting their relevance to researching landscapes of LLL policies. The second section is organised along the themes of the chapters, and also along the conceptual perspectives adopted—Life Course Research, Cultural Political Economy and Governance—and draws from the discussions and conclusions in the chapters in Part II of the book.

10.1 Exploring Landscapes of Lifelong Learning: Places, Spaces, Cases

Exploring landscapes of LLL in the previous chapters entailed giving careful attention to the different places and spaces inhabited by young people across Europe, in which they encounter LLL policies. Observing LLL policies through the lenses of discursive, institutional and relational opportunity structures yielded interesting insights not only into the widely differing realities across the European landscape, but also into the diverging ways young people deal—react or conform to, adapt or reject—with the perceptions of problems and solutions offered in LLL policies. Not least, it uncovered different ways young people relate to professionals in the field and the varying "styles" of their participation.

Focusing on cases helped us to do justice to the uniqueness of the various social formations to which LLL policies belong. In particular, the methodological choices made aimed at accounting for their multi-layered nature and at clarifying the interactive and relational dimension among actors and levels. Instead of taking cases for granted—as if they existed

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out there waiting to be examined—the chapters represented an exercise in case construction; indeed, an exercise in "casing". They were viewed as complex systems made up of countless relationships between the parts and the whole, which pointed to different configurations and constellations of complex and contingent phenomena at various levels. As such, each case can be regarded as a lesson; it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that a lesson stands in its own right in the first place. That is, we learn something specific to the phenomenon/situation at hand, something that shows the dynamics and interconnections that are contingent and unique. Yet, each case can also assist us in understanding each LLL policy "as a deeply political process of cultural production" (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 1), to which young people also contribute substantially.

In addition, examining the issues dealt with from the conceptual perspectives adopted throughout the volume—Life Course Research, Cultural Political Economy, and Governance—has also contributed to direct attention to the various dimensions of the phenomena examined. Life Course Research offers us a conceptual lens to focus on the individual/biographical dimension of the themes analysed and enabled us to assess how LLL policies are effective/ineffective in accounting for young adults' needs in constructing a meaningful life course. Governance research sharpened our attention to the coordination of different actions and agents partaking in these LLL policies—most likely influencing young adults in their decision-making processes. In its turn, Cultural Political Economy has been extremely useful in describing and making sense of the different objectives of LLL policies and, in particular, of the intended impact of LLL policies at national, regional and local levels.

The following section aims at highlighting the main insights yielded from the case studies.

10.2 Cases and Stories

This section draws on the discussions and conclusions in the chapters in Part II of the book. It is organised along the themes of the chapters, but also along the conceptual perspectives adopted—Life Course Research,

Cultural Political Economy and Governance research. The section includes a table with an overview of the insights gained in each chapter.

Linking to the metaphor that opens this book, that of the LLL pathways as three-dimensional spaces, and applying the narrative approach to the case analysis introduced in the third chapter of this volume, a "travelogue" of the exploration of the cases and stories presented in Part II is provided in the following. Indeed, although the three main theoretical perspectives come into play in each chapter, in the accounts developed by the authors we find different weighing of their relevance, different rationales for case construction and narrative entry points. From each chapter we gain the opportunity to observe the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of the processes of LLL policies delivering, and we do this through different points of view, levels, and temporal horizons.

Chapter 4 and 5 devote particular attention to the LCR perspective. In accordance with that, the exploration of the LLL landscapes is run in "first person", as the biographical interviews with young adults are their main source of information. The topics of individuals' aspirations, plans, and projections for the future, and how the participation in LLL policies impacts them are at the core of both chapters, which enable a reflection on the kind of subjective agency allowed (or hindered) by the formal aspects regulating LLL pathways.

The entry points for the exploration of the LLL landscapes in Chap. 4 are the biographies of three young adults who have accessed LLL policies. By following their trajectories, we can observe different combinations of subjective aspirations and policy aims. The negotiations that occur between these two dimensions result from the interplay of relational elements, "institutional" and subjective meaning-making, within the borders set by policy regulation, and tell us about the hardly standardisable nature of the processes of policy delivering.

Throughout the chapter we moved bottom-up from the singularity of the life stories to the upper levels of the structural and cultural features of their local, and then national, contexts. The biographies unfold in Germany, Italy and Bulgaria, and tell the stories of how their protagonists, in their search for fulfilling employment, access LLL policies to overcome structural and cultural problems affecting their movement towards the labour market: the rigidity of the German employment

system, the static nature of the local labour market in Italy, the scarce opportunities and the ethnic segregation of the labour market in Bulgaria. In all three cases, the overall aim of the LLL policies is smoothening the access to the labour market by traineeships and guidance, yet they lead to variable outcomes in that respect. The policy at the core of the German case provides individual, tailor-made support (e.g., guidance to everyday life management, competence training) to young people dependant on social benefits to prevent their definitive withdrawal from seeking a job or a VET place. Both measures assessed in the Italian and Bulgarian stories are integrated within the European scheme of Youth Guarantee and can be interpreted as attempts to compensate the "stagnation" of the local labour markets by keeping the youths "on the move" with experiences such as traineeships. The hegemonic discourse on activation seems to resonate in all these stories, where youths are responsible for finding their way through structural problems, notwithstanding the fact that they are related to scarce employment chances or the rigidity of the dual system. However, the most significant feature of the lessons is to be seen at the micro level of relations, as the three youths are able to widen the range of attainable opportunities by actively constructing positive relations with street level professionals and/or employers met within the LLL landscapes. Thus, the relational opportunity structure comes into play in these stories, introducing changes in the range of "visible" opportunities shaped by the discursive and institutional opportunity structures. Considering the LCR perspective, this is relevant as it also prompts changes in the subjective dimension of the aspirations for the future, which in the observed stories were limited by negative relationships with the education system and/or the labour market, experienced before the participation in LLL policies. It is again at the micro level that the protagonists of the three stories find a possibility to emancipate from dominant cultural assumptions concerning the supposed passive attitude of young people (in Italy), the inadequacy of workers belonging to ethnic minorities (in Bulgaria), the reluctance to take on the opportunities provided by institutions (in Germany). The building up of trust with professionals and the active commitment to the duties encountered during the participation in LLL policies have thus allowed to overcome stereotypical representations which, to some extent, inform the institutional vision of

the youths' attitudes and needs embodied in the processes of LLL policy-making, namely with regard to target construction.

In terms of governance, the policies accessed by the protagonists of the three stories present different aspects. In Germany, we observe elements of rigidity due to the relevance of formal qualification, which produce a formal "resistance" to the customisation of the LLL pathway and imply the need for an active individual solution devised by the protagonist to be by-passed. In Italy and Bulgaria, the networks built around the policies are limited by the distance between employers and education/VET systems in their local contexts.

In turn, Chap. 5 draws mainly from qualitative interviews with policy experts and young policy participants to build its cases. It devotes attention simultaneously to the "twin-tracks" of subjective agency and structure, questioning how their interplay shapes the biographical trajectories of the LLL policies' users. The amount of explored LLL landscapes in this chapter is higher than in the previous (six cases equally distributed in Finland, Scotland and Spain), and the reconstruction of different expressions of agency works here as the pivotal dimension of the cross-case analysis. By relating it to the processes of individual meaning-making of the aims of the accessed LLL policies, the authors identify different "participation styles" that result from different combinations of individual aims and policy objectives, and can prove useful for further analytical applications.

The two selected policies in Scotland aim to support the school-to-work transition by valuing vocational training as a suitable alternative to higher education, thus providing guidance and information about the opportunities in this field. The policies intervene at the conclusion of lower-secondary school and focus mostly on the development of the skills acquired so far by the youths. The policies in Spain base on guidance and training, mainly targeting 16–24 youths with NEET status. They provide support for attaining a lower-secondary qualification. The policies analysed in Finland are based on the understanding of youth unemployment as both cause and effect of social exclusion. Against the background of a general (mildly normative) aim of integration in the employment or education systems, both policies provide a tailored approach to the needs of their users. As a significant part of these young people deal with different

vulnerabilities, the very construction of their life plans often needs to be supported by the policies' professionals. Using a holistic approach, they work on increasing the youths' self-confidence and self-awareness before focusing on more employability-related issues.

Being able to "bend" the official policy aims to their own purposes is the most considered strategy of the youths' agency in these chapters. To be successful, this customisation demands a variety of individual resources, from material to immaterial (with particular regard for the cultural and social capital). Otherwise, and some of the participation styles belong to this condition, the risk for the insufficiently equipped LLL users is to be overwhelmed by the standardisation produced by the fitting of preferred solutions to culturally framed problems in LLL policy design. Here, "side effects" of further exclusion may result from participation in the policy, especially for those who have struggled to fit the preliminary requirements for accessing the policies. In other words, a potentially fruitful attempt to widen the range of reachable opportunities through LLL participation can actually turn into their increased narrowness due to rigid features fostered by the discursive and institutional opportunity structures that shapes the policy design and implementation. From the analysis of the case studies, the informal leeway for the adaptation of policy aims to the personal needs and aspiration, which sometimes paves the way for unexpected positive outcomes, seems to be as crucial as it is dependent on unpredictable contextual factors, such as coming across street level professionals willing to support the young adults beyond their formal duties. With the only exception of the Finnish case studies, where the LLL policies embodied flexibility from their original design, the cases have confirmed the difficulty to acknowledge (and put into practice) it for most of the LLL policies. On the one side, this suggests the need for further studies focused on the capacity of governance patterns to introduce elements of flexibility in the processes of policy delivering. On the other side, pointing it out as a central aspect may help in promoting a new consciousness about the role of relational opportunity structures in the knowledge produced by research as a support for policymaking.

The CPE perspective is the main "guide" for the exploration of the cases in Chaps. 6 and 7. As readers we gain information not only about the ways in which national institutions and socioeconomic contexts

contribute to shape the goals of LLL policies, but also about the governing, through discourse and power technologies, of the individuals accessing them. Here the topic of individual agency moves to the background, and the focus is on the impact of cultural and ideological assumptions on policy design and implementation.

In the analysis of the cases constructed for Chap. 6, we find a significant example of the multilevel exploration of LLL landscapes, which mainly stems from the integration of CPE and GOV perspectives. It makes visible how different dominant understandings of the meaning of LLL policies trickle down from the national to the regional contexts, producing different impacts according to the governance patterns arranged at local level. The six cases are located in Austria, Finland, and Scotland and are built around policies sharing the aim of smoothening the school-to-work transitions. Specifically, one Austrian policy targets young adults aged 22 or above who have professional experience though no formal qualification, and it tackles this lack by short work-based learning aimed at final certification. The second policy in Austria provides transitional work activation to unemployed youths aged between 18 and 24. In Finland, the first policy targets students who are undertaking on-the-job training, giving priority to those with special needs such as mental health problems. It pairs them to a work life coach who works on their needs through a holistic approach. The other Finnish policy targets unemployed young adults struggling with labour market integration. It seeks to enhance young adults' employability through work-based learning courses that certify their skills, in addition to actions oriented to improving their self-confidence and job-searching skills. In Scotland, the two policies belong the national policy "Developing the Young Workforce". They are run through a national-regional-local governance approach that seeks to meet local demands and needs by adapting the general framework of the national policy. It aims to prepare youths aged between 16 and 24 for the labour market by providing career guidance and facilitating access to apprenticeships in local businesses.

Via a CPE perspective, we can assess how, given the common orientation of the six policies, the analytical focus on the skills formation regimes (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2012) that shape institutional action in supporting and regulating those transitions enables highlighting

cross-national variations. Indeed, as according to this perspective Austria belongs to the collective regime (social partners collaboration), Finland to the statist model (state-led) and Scotland to the liberal regime (market-led), the cross-national comparison shows different ways of addressing both the users' and the market's needs with different logics of prioritisation, on the basis of varying understandings of the role of LLL policies within the skills formation regimes. Specifically, in Austria, the analysed policies work mainly on certification and apprenticeships to adapt their users' profiles to the opportunities available in the local VET systems; the Finnish policies, steered by the state, promote a more holistic approach to the youths' needs, with less emphasis on the immediate requests of the labour demand; in Scotland, the overarching goal of compensating for problems in the synchronisation between educational and employment systems leads to focus mostly on the coordination between private and public actors in the VET domain, in accordance with the ideological orientation of a liberal, market-centred approach. From another analytical standpoint, this chapter provides insights about the mutable synergies between discursive and institutional opportunity structures at national level, and sheds light on how they result from historical processes involving cultural, social, and political assumptions that intervene in the processes of LLL policymaking and delivering, affecting the overall orientation and objectives of the policies.

Furthermore, as each country's cases belong to different regional contexts, the analysis provided in this chapter shows the bearing of contextual features, here framed as economic-material opportunity structures, on the patterns of policy implementation; indeed, these are impacted by the characteristics of structures such as the labour market and the skill regulation systems at the local level, as well as by the predominant economic sector in the area. The focus is on the interplay between material contextual elements and governance patterns in different regions, and the exploration of the cases pointed out their different impacts on the effectiveness of the policies. This is due to their varying success in matching the local economic-material conditions and the patterns of coordination among the actors involved in LLL policy delivering. This latter strand of analysis constitutes an element of innovation when compared to the

more traditional approaches to discursive and institutional opportunity structures, which are usually carried out by referring to the national level.

Through its use of the LCR approach, Chap. 6 provides food for thought about how young adult's trajectories are influenced by the specificity of the LLL policy they meet, as well as by the more general interaction with different opportunity structures. We gain insights about this impact by drawing from the opinions of the interviewed experts, who have stressed how improving individual employability in contexts where the labour market is able to integrate fresh workforce might also produce positive effects in terms of self-esteem. On the contrary, in regions where the labour market is more static, participation in LLL policies has been framed by the experts as a strategic tool for engaging youths who are at risk of exclusion from the education and employment systems.

From Chap. 7 we learn a lesson about the realms of power crossing the LLL landscapes, bringing to light that such landscapes are not ideologically neutral spaces. Drawing from Foucault's work on the processes of subjectivation as a discursive product and power technologies, this chapter addresses the role of LLL policies in articulating dominant cultural understandings of problems and related solutions in the education and employment systems, consequently fostering the forms of subjectivities which better fit these landscapes. Since the analyses carried out are context-sensitive, such processes are also put into relation with the economic conditions of different regions, their particular labour market situation, and the prevailing socio-cultural habits and norms. In this way, the varying ability of an LLL policy to succeed and to be institutionalised is assessed.

The LLL policies at the core of the three analysed case studies focus on the connection between education and labour market, although dealing with different structural contexts. The policy in Portugal is an educational measure aimed at preventing early school dropout and youth unemployment. It focuses on the adjustment of the training offer according to the local market demand. In Germany, the case is built around a policy which pursues the preparation of disadvantaged youths for entering the skilled craft sector within the VET system by extending their training one year beyond the regular duration of secondary schools. The analysed policy in Croatia tackles the problems in the systems of skills

demand and supply by providing guidance services throughout individual careers.

The chapter enables deepening the relationship between the CPE and LCR perspectives. From the standpoint of the first, the cases show how the very targeting of youth in different conditions of vulnerability (from NEET and school drop-outs to individuals with learning disadvantages) embodies and reproduces an understanding of the users as subjects who should be prone to be assisted and "fixed" to regain the "right" direction lost somewhere along their allegedly "deviant" biographies. Here, the resonance of hegemonic normative assumptions about how individual life courses should unfold becomes clear as it intertwines with the neoliberal push towards self-entrepreneurship, and its consequences are often emphasised by the reactions of the policies' addressees. Through the LCR perspective, this chapter illuminates how participation in the analysed policies can impact the self-perception of the youths. Especially for those who have experienced difficult and/or interrupted relationships with the education systems, participation tends to take on the sense of a "last chance", even a kind of "redemption" to emancipate from previous mistakes and personal deficits and return to the "right track". A normative action towards (at least attempted) life course (re)standardisation is thus highlighted by the authors as a potential (side) effect of the policy participation.

The main element of governance in the analysis of Chap. 7 focuses on different models of cooperation between the education and employment sectors. When this coordination fails, the distance between market needs and the supply of VET actions increases. The authors point out how that this can further affect the youths' life course management, as it decreases the possibility to find a chance to pursue their desires in LLL participation given the haphazardness of the educational and labour market offers, which might lead them to select among the available options, seeking the most suitable to their current situation.

With Chaps. 8 and 9, we gain insights into the "material" dimension of the LLL pathways, as they mostly provide a governance analysis which metaphorically helps in tracing their "roadmap". The governance patterns applied in policy implementation shape the architecture of those

pathways, and the variable networks of actors supporting the policy delivering affect the structuration of the routes towards different opportunities.

In Chap. 8, the cases are constructed around three LLL policies in Croatia, Portugal, and Spain. They share a common orientation towards employability, and they are explored by giving particular attention to elements such as the systems of regulation of the match between skills demand and supply, and the interactions within the constellations of actors involved in the processes of policy contextualisation at a local level. In Spain, we find a policy targeted at unemployed young adults who have dropped out of or had to leave school early. It aims to increase their skills and labour experience through training and apprenticeship periods. The policy in Croatia is a local institution which operates outside the formal education systems and it offers professional training or re-training and supports the acquisition of vocational qualification. The Portuguese policy targets youths over 15 years of age who have completed the ninth grade and consists of high-school level courses that allow students to have access to higher education. In addition, as the three policies have been working for more than 20 years, the evolution of their governance patterns is taken into consideration in the exploration of the cases, highlighting the contrast between the cases in Spain and Portugal, where a process of decentralisation has characterised the VET national system, increasing the relevance of regional authorities, and Croatia, where the core regulation has remained at a national level. In a multilevel governance perspective, the overall aim of matching the educational system's responsiveness according to the variability of the local labour market's needs can be pursued by managing vertical coordination. It involves different policymaking levels, and horizontal coordination between different policy areas and coordination between stakeholders from public, private, and nongovernmental sectors. The analysed cases have shown different results in this sense, with the Croatian policy's implementation being affected by problems of lack of coordination, and that of Portugal being more effective, as it benefits from the synergy of the actors and institutions involved in the measure.

Adopting a CPE perspective, the authors shed light on the effects of the resonance of employability in the cases analysed. In addition to a

general imbalance derived from the policies' aims being more focused on the needs of the market, at the potential detriment of the users' aims, the "dominance" of the goal of increasing employability also intervenes on the processes of decentralisation, as it affects the collaboration, participation, and trust between the actors on different scales and spheres (public/private). For instance, in Spain, the focus on employability has narrowed the impacts of the policy on supply-side factors, while in Croatia it has contributed to increase the competition among the local actors providing employability-oriented measures.

Furthermore, from a LCR point of view, we can consider how such a strong focus on employability risks to produce a dominance of extrinsic motivations at the potential detriment of the intrinsic motivations of the young people participating in the policies, reducing the leeway for their subjective policy meaning making, and shrinking the fit between participation and their own life projects.

The analysis of Chap. 9 mostly focuses on the organisation of the addressed LLL landscapes, namely the governance patterns that have been implemented to provide three diverse policies aimed at easing the transitions between training and work in local contexts of Austria, Spain, and Portugal. The policy in Austria aims at recognising and improving qualifications for people that have not completed apprenticeship training. The policy in Spain mostly targets youths in NEET condition seeking to improve their qualifications. The policy in Portugal provides professional courses to underqualified young adults, leading them to compulsory education and/or professional certification.

Here, the core of the case study analysis is constituted by the mechanisms of interaction and coordination between the public and private actors that cooperate on policy delivery. It is undertaken by a multilevel governance approach, which devotes attention to the dimension of scale and the interdependence between governments of different territorial level. The cases are built around three policies which combine preventive and activation strategies targeted at vulnerable groups, such as under skilled and unqualified youth, and give relevance to qualifications in accessing the labour market. Furthermore, the comparative analysis takes into consideration the different transition and skills formation regimes of the national contexts where the policies unfold. The Austrian context is

quite prolific in terms of opportunities for youth employment and invests especially on LLL policies linking education and the labour market, like the vocational training through dual apprenticeships. The Spanish and Portuguese contexts face instead high rates of youth unemployment, and deal with the fragmentation of vocational training due to its weak links with the labour market.

The main lesson to be drawn here refers to governance issues. The three analysed policies are designed following a top-down scheme which gives pivotal role to (respectively) EU, national and regional governments in setting their aims, targets, general patterns of implementation and expected outcomes. Yet, to be able to adapt to the local structures, the policies need to introduce flexibility in terms of decentralisation. To different degrees, this is pursued in the examined cases mostly by relying on networks of local actors cooperating on the implementation of the policy, generally under the coordination of a national or local public entity. This point has proven crucial in terms of the actual adaptability of the policies. In the Austrian case, the well-established routines of cooperation between social partners have produced qualifications fitting the market's and the youths' needs. In the Portuguese one, the actions to improve coordination were also part of a successful mode of governance, helping to overcome the formal system's rigidity. The case in Spain, on the contrary, has shown how the lack of coordination among local actors has reduced the impact and the scope of action of the policy.

As seen through the CPE lenses, a common trait among the cases was the framing of professional qualifications as a crucial area of intervention to improve youths' employment. The underlying idea is that an effective synchronisation between education and employment can be pursued by institutionalising alternative pathways towards qualification, in parallel to the more traditional offers of the education system. Here, a challenge for future LLL policymaking is identified by the authors, who find in this solution a way to introduce greater dynamism in the skills supply to fit the variability of the labour market demand.

In terms of LCR, as stressed by the authors, it is important to consider that, given the preventive and activation strategies applied by the analysed policies in targeting youths in vulnerable conditions, a too narrow orientation towards employment outcomes might be reductive, or even

generate exclusion, as these youths are usually also in need for new learning possibilities, to gain improvements in knowledge, learning capacities and self-esteem.

In order to provide an overview of the exploration of the LLL landscapes provided in each chapter, Table 10.1 below is organised to recap the criteria for case selection in each chapter, the main lesson learned, and the most relevant findings resulting from the perspectives of LCR, CPE and GOV.

10.3 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have returned to the cases analysed in Part II of this book to enlighten how the stories deriving from their exploration were narrated, and distil the main lessons learned from them. The approach adopted by the authors has shown that there are different ways to weigh the interplay between the LCR, CPE, and GOV perspectives. Throughout the empirical section of the volume, we have thus gained a multidimensional reading of the case studies, which helps us to better immerse in the LLL landscapes, gain awareness of their material and immaterial features, and assess the relational dynamics which unfold in their respective contexts.

As the discussions in this volume showed, the life course in general and the educational trajectories of young people in particular comprise a high degree of complexity, as they take place in iterative, recursive and interactive negotiation processes in which numerous actors, institutions and discourses are involved. The chapters in this volume focused and compared different landscapes of lifelong learning in order to capture some of this complexity and they offered interesting insights by discussing the highly heterogeneous cases. In this volume, the complex relations among governance, discourses and structures of opportunity that impact the governing of the life course in general and educational trajectories in particular were discussed in order to show a nuanced picture of what it means for young people to pursue their life projects across Europe.

Also, as the chapters in this book made clear that LLL policymaking is extremely context specific. In that respect, more accurate insights depend on context-sensitive analytical categories, such as attempted throughout

Table 10.1 Cases, stories and lessons from Part II chapters

Chapter	Justification for the selection of the case studies	Main lesson from the case study analysis	Insights by the perspective of		
			LCR	CPE	GOV
4	Different match between individual life aspirations and LLL policies in contrasting contexts in terms of structural and cultural arrangements	A greater steering capacity on individuals' educational and professional trajectories can be "crafted" at the micro relational level, notwithstanding the predominance of the institutionalised paths towards the market	The construction of individual's aspirations is highly context specific: the local opportunity structures orient life plans towards the solutions devised by institutions; alternative solutions need to be actively "discovered" and negotiated through relations	The hegemonic representations about youths' attitudes in different cultural contexts (e.g., not being active/keen enough; not being suitable for labour market for ethnic reasons) often affect the LLL policies paths, shaping the range and the quality of the reachable opportunities	LLL paths designed by similar governance patterns produces different impacts on the users' biographies in relation to different local structures of opportunity

5	Contrasting LLL policy landscapes in terms of policy goals, salient practices, and degrees of rigidity/flexibility in policy design	Different "participation styles" to LLL policies result from the interplay of individual agentic and social resources, and the local features of opportunity structures. Successfully accessing and manoeuvring in LLL policies requires varying degrees of autonomy, and the structures afford formal and informal leeway to young adults' agency	The stronger and more consistent the individuals' life plans are, the better the match between policy and subjective aims works. Consequently, actions aimed at providing holistic approach to the users' empowerment, instead of interventions on their deficits, can prove an effective long-term "investment" for the LLL systems	The different dominant understandings of how LLL policies can contribute to compensate structural disadvantages shape their design, affecting the leeway for customisation according to the users' needs	Institutionalising the possibility to customise the participation in LLL policies requires a flexible though established coordination among a great variety of local policy actors

(*continued*)

Table 10.1 (continued)

Chapter	Justification for the selection of the case studies	Main lesson from the case study analysis	Insights by the perspective of		
			LCR	CPE	GOV
6	LLL policies aimed at smoothening the school-to-work transition although contextualised in contrasting countries in terms of skill formation regimes, and in contrasting regions in terms of economic-material opportunities	The discursive and institutional opportunity structures influence the objectives and orientations of LLL policies, and their subsequent configuration at the regional level can be better understood by integration of the economic-material opportunities	Different skills formation regimes contribute to prioritise the LLL policies' aims from the skill demand side from the users' needs	Different skills formation regimes differently influence policy objectives at the regional level.	Allowing for regional flexibility to adapt LLL policies' priorities improves the fit to the regional economic-material conditions of the policy objectives
7	LLL policies operating in different landscapes with the common aim of improving the synchronisation between education and employment	LLL policies targeted to youths framed as in vulnerable conditions might trigger subjectivation processes oriented to the production of dependent and "needy" youths	The participation in LLL policies targeted to youths in vulnerable conditions could contribute to interiorise social stigma and legitimise institutional actions of life course (re) standardisation	The discursive processes in LLL policymaking tend to produce subjects that are able to learn, or are meant to be "fixed" to adequate their profiles	Mismatches in the coordination among the main actors of the LLL landscapes might entail a further reduction of the adaptability of the policy aims to the users' ones

8	Employability-oriented LLL policies which have faced different processes of decentralisation during their vicennial story	According to different governance patterns, the processes of decentralisation produce variable effects on the integration of the policies in their local contexts	A strong focus on employability (extrinsic motivation) restricts possibility of young people to derive own meaning (intrinsic motivation) and design strategies consistent with own life projects	The focus on employability might produce side effects on the networks of actors involved in the VET systems (e.g., increased competition)	Coordination and cooperation among public and private local actors can improve the effectiveness of the LLL policies
9	LLL policies implemented in different transitions and skill formation regimes at national level, and combining preventive and activation strategies targeted at vulnerable groups, giving particular relevance to the qualification in accessing the labour market	To be able to fit the features of the local contexts, top-down designed LLL policies needs to introduce elements of flexibility by means of horizontal coordination among local actors involved in their provision	To intervene on the employability of youths in vulnerable conditions, measures able to provide a holistic approach to the users' needs can be more effective	The relevance of formal qualification and the different pathways for obtaining it is a crucial aspect for the synchronisation of education and employment systems	The actual contextualisation of the LLL policies can be better pursued by integrating top-down regulation with the support of local horizontal networks of stakeholders

Source: Author's own

this volume, which allow for a better understanding of the varying embeddedness of LLL policies in regional landscapes. Examining these contextual specificities more closely also revealed the interdependencies between the implementation of lifelong learning policies and the sedimented economic and socio-cultural arrangements, such as a focus on a single industry or long-term structural unemployment.

Moreover, the use of a narrative approach to policy analysis aimed to overcome a rather common constraint in the extant literature. Indeed, in this field there is a quite widespread use of narratives focused on the policy problem, which tend to reproduce the perspectives and conceptual frames of policymakers, or, more generally, of the people who design or implement policies, leaving little or no room for addressees' viewpoints (see Polletta et al. 2011). This tendency particularly emerges in situations in which different kinds of narratives are produced by different actors in a potentially conflicting scenario with different interest groups (e.g., McBeth et al. 2005), and it is quite usual in conditions of unbalanced power between countries (Roe 1994), or between addressees and implementers.

In trying to establish "relations between sets of relationships", the narrative approach allowed us to find meaningful sets of relations without a dramatic simplification of the reality, a price often paid by comparativists when making comparisons between overly abstract versions of reality. In other words, a serious limit to comparison is the strong simplification of cases needed to allow comparison itself, because generalisation is permitted only at such a high level of abstraction as to render the generalisation useless. On the contrary, by highlighting relations between sets of relationships, the storytelling approach shows, particularly along the biographical entry point, that the relationships between the designers', implementers' and addressees' points of view are sometimes divergent, especially when the activation paradigm seems to promote the so-called Matthew effect (Merton 1968), according to which only the less disadvantaged part of a target group can be supported. The approach also shows how sometimes the "right" choice is made by the addressees for the "wrong" reason, obtaining the intended results according to a divergent mechanism. This happens because young adults react in diverse ways to policies, internalising social expectations such as success and material wealth, yet the absence of equal opportunities to achieve those goals

generate a strain between the socially encouraged goals of society and the socially acceptable means to achieve them (cf. Palumbo et al. 2020).

The following sections close the chapter and point to some possibilities for future research which, based on our data and analyses, invite articulation with other theoretical domains.

One major analytical issue to emerge from the data generated by our multilevel, multi-method approach has already been hinted in Chap. 1, although it was firstly introduced as a metaphor. The imaginary of LLL policies as landscapes has enabled to focus on the unequal distribution of power and resources among the actors interacting in those "spaces", but it looks worth considering even in its literal meaning. Indeed, the materialisation of social (in)justice in the spatial organisation of the city—or, more broadly, the territory—as inequalities are reproduced and sometimes reinforced through spatial segregation, unequal distribution of resources, and geographically uneven systems of opportunities. Thus, a door is open for the development of research on lifelong learning policies through a critical geography approach which considers, but is not limited to, the Learning Cities movement (Facer and Buchczyk 2019).

A second paramount dimension brought to light in this volume is that of the need to overcome the standard monolithic representation of the youth recipients of LLL policies as mostly passive subjects. Indeed, not only "youth" is not a homogenous group, but its processes if re-subjectivation, personal empowerment, and political (in a broad sense) interpretations of their context are actually vastly diverse. This means that the topic of "participation styles", already put forward in this volume, can likely be expanded to encompass the ways in which youth civic and political participation articulates with LLL policies, namely with regard to their implementation (Biesta 2011; Malafaia et al. 2018).

Third, research on the important processes of youth rapport building with LLL professionals, highlighted at several moments throughout this book, would benefit from a micro, possibly ethnographic, approach to uncover the details of how such rapport is established. This might unfold in different directions, from the less common ethnomethodological and conversation analysis driven approach suggested, for example, by Drew and Heritage (1992) to the more standard viewpoint of network approaches (Grothe-Hammer and Kohl 2020).

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