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Part 4

Working towards mobility

David Cairns

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Lisboa, Portugal

Mobility in training and employment contexts is of high importance for many young people, who may wish to use spatial movement as a means of facilitating transitions not only from education-to-work but also education-to-training and training-to-work, taking advantage of opportunities that may not be available close to home, potentially strengthen intercultural skills and employability at the same time. As with student mobility, much of this movement takes place within institutional structures and involves learning in internationalized groups, taking advantage of the dynamics such environments offer for exchange and collaboration (see also Cuzzocrea et al., 2021). But while universities do host certain training courses and work placements (as we shall see later in this section), specialist training providers feature more prominently, introducing a new set of protagonists into the mobility equation, along with employment agencies, local and national authorities and entrepreneurial partners (see Nienaber et al., 2021). Therefore, as well as taking into account individual young people's views, and the influence of universities and national and supra-national policymakers, these other parties also help hold together migration trajectories through hosting projects and placements, and in this part of the book we wish to represent some contemporary experiences.

More specifically, the chapters in this section acknowledge the significance of vocational training to young people; a durable topic for researchers in different national and regional contexts, but especially in Europe. In Chapter 23, Maria-Carmen Pantea looks at Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Romania, the different types of mobility that exist

at this level and the meanings that young people in VET attach to going abroad. This enables us to look at the development of mobility, and by extension migration, dispositions within the 16-to-18 year old age group, and its role in stimulating the imagination of learners, in addition to the acquisition of practical skills. In this chapter we also have an opportunity to consider what mobility means in a relatively mainstream context, among those who have only recently exited secondary education, acknowledging both the personal and professional value of geographical circulation at this point in the life course, providing a riposte to the view that mobility in VET is ‘just’ a default option for those facing harsh socio-economic conditions (Pantea, 2021).

Chapter 24 provides further insight on VET in Europe, focusing this time on Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany and France. This discussion, by Birte Nienaber and colleagues, makes many pertinent points regarding the need for cross-border co-operation in VET, considering that opportunities are not evenly distributed within or between countries, and the prospect of international commuting in regions that share borders. Tabea Schlimbach, Karen Hemming and Valentina Cuzzocrea meanwhile consider VET in Germany, a system which has traditionally been seen a point of reference for other service providers from across Europe. Focusing on mobile German apprentices aged between 18 and 29 years old, they explain how their stays abroad are largely short-term group exercises, with institutionally predefined features, often taking advantage of funds from European programmes (Schlimbach et al., 2021).

Chapter 26 by Peter G. Ghazarian meanwhile looks at temporary work schemes in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, and some of the costs and benefits for participants. This includes an elaboration of how temporary worker programmes function, the restrictions on who may participate and the prominence of these programmes in the national discourses of the host countries, alongside discussion of the experiences of individual participants (Ghazarian, 2021).

While employment, or at least heightened employability, is being actively sought by participants, intercultural skills are another consideration, harking back to a theme discussed previously in this book (see, e.g., Skrefsrud, 2021). Sophie Cranston, Emma Bates and Helena Pimlott-Wilson look at the development of intercultural skills in international work placements. One of the benefits of moving abroad for work is believed to be the development of a global mindset; skills and attributes that enable a person to work with individuals from other cultures. These abilities are formed through working and living abroad, focusing in this chapter on placements situated inside existing undergraduate degree programmes. As Davide Filippi and Sebastiano Benasso also make evident in Chapter 28, the value of these short-term mobility exercises may however be largely symbolic, as markers of distinction on a CV rather than a means of moving towards job security, and even when young people do migrate for work, they continue to face precarious circumstances (Santoro, 2021). In this section, we therefore have examples of old and new migration narratives intermingling; mobility being used, and abused, by institutional and political interests, a theme that will be expounded upon further in Part 5 of this book.

An important aspect of these chapters is providing in-depth discussion, most often provided by qualitative evidence from participants in various work and training programmes. The inclusion of these topics reflects the importance of these subjects to the contributors to the book, establishing an appreciation of mobility in some of the most formative aspects of a career. With mobility in VET and work placements generally seen as the poor relation of student mobility in the youth mobility research field, it is therefore hoped that we can move beyond the idea that mobility starts, or ends, in tertiary education, or is confined to relatively elitist contexts. Equally important, some of the participants in these exchanges have representations of their experiences provided here, even though there is still obviously much to be explored.

Among the benefits to emerge are intercultural skills, alongside formal learning, emphasising the value of living in other societies (see Cranston et al., 2021).

In keeping with the overall theme of mobility as nested migration introduced elsewhere in this book (Cairns, 2021a, 2021b), we can also see that movement for work and training purposes provides more key migration building blocks. This can be imaginative, with an introduction of ideas and a broadening of future parameters taking place, or more literal in cases where involvement in one mobility phase facilitates access to others. We can also see that the temporality of this work is purposeful; for example, in his chapter, Ghazarian (2021) outlines some of the legislative aspects which attempt to keep young people's mobility separate from the migration of 'adults,' including in some cases exclusion from the 'permanent' labour market. This kind of chauvinism, if directed towards certain national or ethnic groups, or to women for that matter, would invite fierce criticism, but when directed at youth, structural inferiority of migration condition and status seems politically acceptable. And as Ghazarian (2021) also remarks, employers who make use of temporary youth workers abroad have often seen the vulnerability of these workers as an inherent part of their value. We therefore might want to temper our enthusiasm for these mobility practices where exchanges are managed to the benefit of host institutions rather than individual participants.

While the neoliberal underpinnings of student mobility are fairly self-evident, especially the privatization of risks and costs (Cairns et al., 2017; Cairns et al., 2018), some of the same issues may also apply to work and training trajectories. From a positive point of view, we can view this as a part of a 'social identity of choice' or 'do-it-yourself biography,' as argued in individualization theory (Beck, 1992, 1994), but vulnerability and unsustainability feature so prominently that such thinking needs to be tempered. Multiple factors contribute to this situation. For example, temporary migrant worker programmes create, by design, contractual asymmetry in the hopes of reaping benefits from migrants' labour and economic activity for

employers, enabling them to avoid the costs of public services and welfare (Bauböck, 2011). Heightened risk and precarious are not accidental, or incidental, but are rather integral parts of mobility governance, and a reflection of the aforementioned neoliberal values. As further noted by Gzaharian (2021), the temporary status of these workers prevents them from being able to escape these conditions in a way that permanent migrants might have been able to, explaining the need for youth migrants to be codified as such, instead of being marginalized through being labelled as mobile youth.

‘Work’ itself is no escape, given the endemic precarity that seems to have enveloped young people’s employment, especially skilled and highly qualified professions. Points of labour market entry become semi-permanent liminal spaces rather than temporary staging posts on the path to something better, and for mobile workers, attributes such as interculturality become diluted to a point of meaninglessness (Cranston et al., 2021). Young professionals themselves become complicit in their marginalization through representing themselves as idealized neo-liberal archetypes, both in the workplace and in representations of their value; a valuation that is expressed in concrete form on their CVs (Filippi et al., 2021). This extends to tying together the disparate elements of a career into a coherent whole; the post hoc editing of this trajectory to create the impression that there is, and always has been, a trajectory rather than a series of singular and unrelated work experiences. This perspective is of course entirely consistent with the broader conceptualization of migration introduced in Chapter 1 (Cairns, 2021a), hypothesising that a migration trajectory can be comprised of a series of seemingly unrelated mobility episodes via post hoc deduction. Just as failures are obscured by successes in a CV, the discontinuities of piecemeal migration trajectories are glossed over when trying to be recognized as a bona fide migrant.

Why then do so many young people embark on what they must know are exploitative mobility exercises abroad in regard to training and work? We might argue that with the practice

becoming normalized as a kind of rite of passage for youth, a kind of stoic acceptance of hardship becomes part of the 'deal.' Pantea (2021) also connects mobility with the celebration of hard work and economic stability for family formation. In more theoretical terms, in Chapter 28, Davide Filippi, Sebastiano Benasso and Luca Guzzetti relate the process of constructing migration trajectories back to ideas related to reflexivity and precarity, acknowledging the symbolic value of including mobility experience on one's CV as a mark of distinction in competitive labour markets. An ability to soak up and surpass mobility-related hardship might even be viewed as a desirable attribute. This just demonstrates how dysfunctional certain forms of youth migration had become in the pre-pandemic years. On the other hand, Monica Santoro's work on young Italian migrants in Manchester, at a slightly later point in the life stage compared to the research discussed in other chapters, provides a more positive perspective on labour market integration. Of particular note is the comparison these professional migrants make with what might have happened in their home country had they stayed; their present situations, they felt, were much more promising than what was on offer in Italy (Santoro, 2021). Some places, in this case, the United Kingdom, are evidently less precarious than other starting points in life. However, the UK has now, perhaps irrevocably, changed after Brexit and the pandemic, undermining one of the main advantages that could once be gained there: a relatively high level of job stability.

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