

**Students' views of higher education in their
transitions to work in Portugal**

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Higher education has grown to mass proportions in the past two decades in Portugal, with the political expectation that it will contribute to the knowledge economy and social change. However, the predominantly low skilled productive system has led to increasing graduate unemployment and underemployment. The central question in this research is what higher education signifies for students and graduates in this context.

Higher education has the potential to change students' relationship with knowledge, developing critical thinking, autonomy and character (Barnett 1990). However, this potential for change depends on how individuals engage in it, according to their values and perspectives (Bloomer 2001). Moreover, knowledge is constructed contextually (Lave and Wenger 1991), and its relevance is not always clear when graduates start work. This longitudinal research therefore consisted of in-depth interviews with graduates to ascertain the meanings and values they attribute to higher education and how this changes in the transition to work.

In this study, participants' view of higher education was narrow, focussing on how it affected their labour market opportunities, rather than as a place for personal development, gaining generic skills and critical engagement. This affected how they acted on their educational opportunities and the criteria by which they measured the validity of higher education after their transition to work. Moreover, labour market limitations meant that graduates who did not find work in areas directly related to their degree devalued their education. This study concluded that individual paths from education to work are affected by social networks, resources and significant others, but there are no deterministic effects of social class, gender or field of study. A key finding was that in contrast to Bloomer's concept of learning careers (1997), graduates' embedded knowledge was insufficient for their new work contexts; instead they needed to reconstruct their knowledge according to their socio-cultural resources, and membership of multiple communities. This has significance internationally for research into transitions to work.

In general, broader perspectives of higher education by students and employers, greater support for the transition and greater labour market opportunities, would be beneficial for both graduates' self-realization and how mass higher education can affect the knowledge economy.

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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INTRODUCTION

1. HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORK: EXPANSION, STRUGGLE AND SUBJECTIVITIES

1.1 Introduction: Higher education and the context of knowledge

This thesis is concerned with the values and meanings graduates ascribe to higher education and how these change in the transition from university to work. It focuses on a private university in North Portugal, and is based on longitudinal research with a small group of graduates before and after the transition to work. The objective was to ascertain what their higher education means to them, and how this changes in the transition to work.

Higher education is supposed to get students to think critically, develop autonomy and change their relationship with knowledge (Barnett 1990, Scott 1995). However, the way that students act on educational provision (their studentship) depends on their experience, values, expectations and dispositions to knowledge and learning (Bloomer 1997, Hodkinson et al 2008). These values and dispositions are important, because they affect what and how students learn, the importance they give to their higher education and their later realization after the transition to work. Moreover, these values may affect how graduates take part in both the knowledge economy and the learning society. A “learning society” refers to society’s capacity to become adept at learning so that it can adjust to continual transformations (Schon 1973: 28); the “knowledge economy” refers to the use of knowledge to produce economic benefits (Drucker 1969). Therefore, the focus of this thesis is to gain insight into students' views of higher education in their transitions to work in Portugal, and the consequences for their individual realization and socioeconomic participation.

1.2 Background

Higher education in Portugal has recently expanded rapidly. It is expected by policy makers to be part of social change and economic growth. These are part of government’s aims for higher education in Portugal, and critical thinking is a key element. As minister for Higher Education, José Mariano Gago, said:

“Development begins with the qualification of people, in study and learning. Science and Technology are a pre-condition of economic progress, and also of cultural and social progress, as an instrument of growth, but also as the basis for a culture of truth and assessment, of international openness, as a pillar of critical thought and democratic life” (Portuguese government portal, 2005).

This assumes that qualifications are linked to economic growth, democracy, progress and critical thought, but does not consider how education is affected by the values and dispositions of its participants. Moreover, the idea that higher education leads to development is, according to Magalhães (2001b), one of several modernizing discourses that have been imported into Portuguese higher education policy without consideration of economic and institutional reality, leading to a continuous mismatch between the development of higher education and the national context. Indeed, graduates from the recent expansion have been faced with increasing underemployment and unemployment (GPEARI 2008, Permanent Youth Observatory 2009; see statistics in appendix 1.1 and 1.2; the growth of higher education in chapter 6).

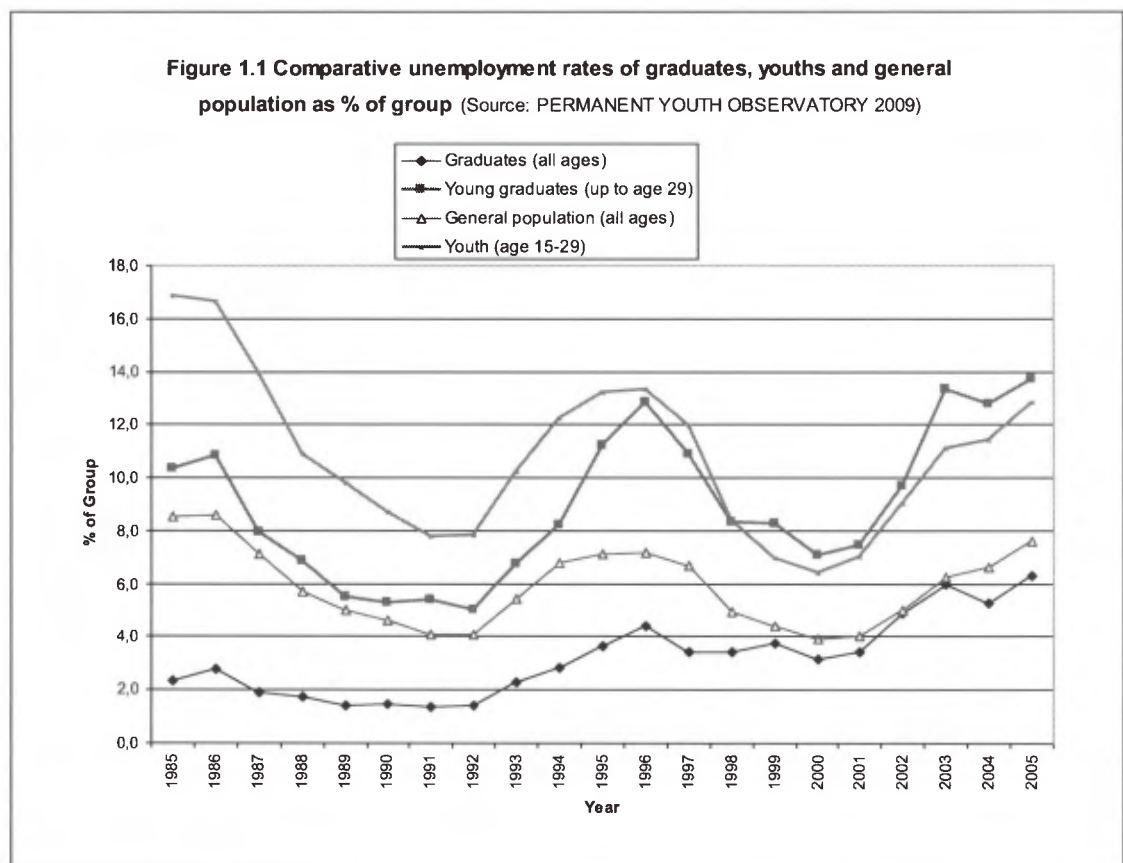


Figure 1.1 shows how young graduates have been most affected. In recent years, the unemployment of young graduates as a percentage of all graduates has surpassed the unemployment rate of all youths. However, graduates in general have lower unemployment rates than the general population.

The rapid growth of higher education has resulted in concern among educational observers (Arroteia 1996; Amaral et al 1996; TSER/HEINE 1998; Coelho Martins 2001; Alves 1998; Magalhaes 1998) regarding educational quality and graduate employment. Educational quality has been affected by three factors as higher education expanded; first, by the lowering of university entrance qualifications which had the effect of increasing the demand for university places; second, by the lack of qualified teaching staff, and third, by the growth of a new private sector to take up the demand for places that the state sector was unable to absorb, but mostly for degrees that were cheap to provide. The private sector is often alleged to lack quality, which has served to confirm the social prestige of traditional universities. The fees in public higher education are also much lower than the private sector, so, as places in public universities have expanded, demand for places in private universities has declined. Nevertheless, as the public and private systems offer similar degrees, graduates from each subsystem are in competition with each other in the labour market (Seixas 2000).

1.2 Higher education, a pivotal institution?

Higher education has an increasingly pivotal role in modern life (Barnett 1990:85). It is supposed to get students to think critically, develop autonomy and character and change their relationship with knowledge. Through knowledge and innovation, it is expected to improve economic competitiveness (Becker and Lewis 1992), and have a key role in social change through institutionalised reflexivity (Scott 1995), a process of questioning by individuals and social organizations. However, higher education is also a field of power in its own right, which is, according to Bourdieu (1990), an arena in which individuals struggle over meanings and values, with consequences for the nature of higher education and the effect on individuals in it (chapter 3).

However, there is no inevitability about how individuals perceive higher education. There are distinct ways of thinking, and talking in different academic areas that affect attitudes to knowledge acquisition and application (Becher and Trowler 1981). Critical thinking is more valued in social sciences whereas science and technology disciplines give greater value to the application of knowledge. Bloomer (1997) and Hodgkinson (1996) have argued that individual studentship (how individuals act on educational opportunities) is constructed according to "*the values embedded in their expectations, aspirations and dispositions to knowledge and learning*" (Bloomer 1997:137). This is framed by their "horizons for action", that is, what is perceived as possible and desirable, with actions limited by resources, opportunities and perceptions. Perceptions are affected by habitus, that is "*Durable, transposable dispositions, of how to act; social reality through practical social relations*" (Bourdieu 1986:68), which is both individually subjective and formed by objective social networks. Other limitations include economic, social and cultural resources, opportunity structures and learning cultures. Consequently, students act on educational opportunities according to what they think is relevant and possible for their lives (chapter 2). These dispositions to knowledge and learning evolve with time, experience and contexts (Bloomer 1997), so change in the transition to work (chapter 4).

The process of transition from higher education to work involves the perceptions of employers and graduates within cultural and economic contexts which shape and limit actions. Strategies used by graduates to find work that they regard as possible and suitable are related to their beliefs, expectations and resources. Their search for work is also limited by the labour market, management styles, recruitment, training practices and expectations of graduates' skills and knowledge, which vary according to national cultures (that is, the socially transmitted pattern of human behaviour and beliefs) (Schomburg and Teichler 2006).

Finally, the transition to the new working environment requires adaptation to the culture of the workplace. Knowledge is socially situated and socially constructed, relating to learning and being, (Bloomer 1997: 164, 174), so graduates need to recognise the relevance of skills, knowledge and insight in their new working environment, and opportunities to use this knowledge. As graduates become full participants in the "*Communities of Practice*" of their

working environment (Lave and Wenger 1991) they reconstruct their identities, values and knowledge. As Wenger (1998:52) says: *"Even if we know something very well, we constantly renegotiate the meaning of the situation... we produce again a new situation, an impression, an experience, to reinterpret, modify or conform... the history of meanings of which they are a part"*.

1.3 Research questions

The aim of this longitudinal research was to develop an understanding of how the idea of higher education is socially constructed by graduates before and after the transition to work. It was concerned with processes, perceptions and individual resources (social, cultural and economic). Qualitative research was regarded as most useful to permit the expression of ideas that the researcher may not have anticipated, and to let individuals express the aspects of their experience that they felt to be most pertinent without imposing a structure that assumed choices were made rationally. Using semi-structured interviews, its aim was to compare the main benefits of higher education before and after the transition to work.

This researcher's experience and access was within the private university sector, which is where much of the expansion of higher education has taken place. Its position in the institutional hierarchy gives particular challenges to its graduates. As the time available, resources and research methods limited the research sample, it was taken from a single institution in this sub sector, from within four degree courses (representing different academic orientations). Individuals were interviewed before and after the transition to work. The main research question is:

- **How do graduates' ideas of higher education change before and after the transition to work in Portugal?**

Sub questions include:

- What expectations did the graduates have of higher education?
- What significance do individuals ascribe to their experience of higher education?
- How do graduates construct their sense of transition to work?
- How do individuals construct their identities as private university graduates?

1.4 Conclusions

The expansion of higher education is expected by policy makers to be part of socio-cultural change and economic growth through the development of people. This is a policy that has been criticised as one imported into Portugal without consideration of economic and institutional reality (Magalhães 2001b), resulting in growing graduate unemployment. Moreover, the development of people does not only depend on institutional provision, but on the resources and experience of individual students. This affects development of individual perceptions about what higher education means, what and how students learn, as well as the importance individuals give to their higher education after the transition to work. This may affect both individual realization and participation in the knowledge economy.

This thesis explores how individuals in the Portuguese context construct their individual meanings of higher education, and how this changes in the transition to work. Higher education is a process, within a historical, social, and economic context. By identifying the process of the construction of meaning we can understand what higher education is for graduates in Portugal, as well as how to open up possibilities to what it could be.

PART ONE: TRANSITIONS TO WORK

2. SELF, CHOICES AND THE MEANING OF EDUCATION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with how individuals make choices in education, act on their learning opportunities and assign meaning to their educational experiences. The idea that individuals make choices and act on their educational opportunities presupposes that they have some degree of agency, that is, they “*actively shape some important dimensions of their experience*” (Evans 2002b). However, contemporary theories of structure and agency differ in their perspective of how deterministic social structures are, the importance of individual feelings of control, and how far individuals are able to act rationally according to the situation in which they find themselves (Evans 2002b).

This chapter starts with a discussion of rationality as an explanation for individuals’ decision-making in education. Although rationality underpins some key contemporary theoretical perspectives, it is insufficient to explain how people make choices. Social structures are also influential, whether through geography, socioeconomic class, gender and ethnicity or time. Hodkinson (2004) claims that tacit dispositions towards work and career, strongly influenced by significant others, lead to horizons for action which enable or constrain choices and affect studentship (Bloomer 1997), that is, how individuals act on their educational opportunities. Forms of capital and dispositions, in the form of habitus (Bourdieu 1967), are vital in explaining the development of attitudes and values in education, and how they may change in different contexts. However, habitus underestimates the role of language, which is not only a tool for reflection and understanding, but also, according to Bruner (1990), a cultural narrative that shapes individuals’ beliefs and expectations.

2.2 Rationality and agency

Traditional perspectives on agency arose from the Enlightenment philosophies of Locke (Schouls 1992:117-172) and Kant (Honderich 1995:18, Emirbayer and Mische 1998:965). These earlier writers considered that agency was conscious and rational, involving the

examination of knowledge, developing individual autonomy and a voice of one's own, leading to rational choices. In this way, reason was seen as an agent of progress, and the key to individual freedom (Schouls 1992:213).

These suppositions still remain in neo-classical economic theories such as Human Capital Theory (Becker 1964, Becker and Lewis 1992), which is one of the most influential theories affecting educational policies (Coupal 2004), including higher education policies in Portugal (Pacheco 2001, 2009, Stoer et al 1990). It assumes that people make rational decisions to maximise their welfare as they conceive it, anticipating consequences of their actions according to their own values and attitudes. This behaviour is said to be both forward-looking and consistent over time. Individuals who invest in their education and training are alleged to benefit from improved employment and salary prospects because of increased productivity.

Rational choice theories (Friedman and Hechter 1988, Coleman 1988, Goldthorpe 1998) claim that we act and make choices with predictability and regularity in order to maximise benefits to ourselves. Goldthorpe's theory has different levels (from strong to weak). At its most extreme, people are assumed to understand the range of choices and their consequences in the present and future. Yet even in its weakest form, people are described as acting systematically and rationally in the situations in which they find themselves, even if this is on the basis of mistaken beliefs.

There are several problems with this perspective. First, it says nothing about how values attributed to choices and actions arise; empirical studies show the importance of social networks, values and organisations in shaping action (Coleman 1988). Second, the focus on conscious rationality ignores that people use tacit knowledge of how to behave in a culture. Hall (1989) argues that aspects of our culture are taken for granted and opaque, and behaviour can be the result of emotions rather than rational reflection. Third, it ignores the role of unconscious mental processes that influence judgements, feelings and behaviour (Wilson 2004, Damasio 1994).

Empirical research supports the idea that educational choices are not made in a social vacuum, but according to local choices and information, childhood ambitions, and personal experience frames of reference, (Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, 1999). Perceptions, emotions, and social structure all play a part, implying that the decision-making process is rational (depending on *what* they know, and *who* they know and trust) but bounded by emotions. Bloomer and Hodkinson's research argues that three interlocking dimensions underline choices: pragmatic rationality, a social dimension, and unpredictability (chance is a key element). Pragmatic (rather than technical) rationality is tacit, embodied and emotional, based on partial information from trusted individuals, and involves several people rather than just the decision-maker (Hodkinson 2008:6).

Both rationality and emotions are evident in decision-making; Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997, 1999) argue that choices take place around turning points, where individuals take stock, re-evaluating themselves and their situation, either at institutionalised or structural junctures, or because of personal factors. These turning points are interspersed with routines, which can confirm or contradict choices, socialise an individual into the routine, or endow individuals with a social identity that they dislike. Thus educational decisions are affected by social positions, experience and dispositions to learning (Hodkinson and James 2003, and Hodkinson 2004). They are the result of the interplay between social structures and individual agency (defined as "*individual, creative and proactive behaviour, resisting external pressures*", (Rudd and Evans 1998), without the dominance of either.

Recent neurological research supports the idea that emotions underlie rationality and decision-making. Wilson (2004) shows how the "adaptive unconscious" filters information, sets goals, and makes judgements and decisions. These processes may lead to both thoughts and actions, so conscious thoughts may be only rationalizations of unconscious processes. Damasio (1994, 1999, 2003) demonstrates that patients whose emotional reactivity is impaired (through damage to the prefrontal cortex or the anterior cingulate cortex) have immense difficulty making decisions. This difficulty exists despite patients having full knowledge of decision outcomes and normal intelligence. Their difficulty arose from their inability to assign values to the options

available, leading Damasio to propose the Somatic Marker Hypothesis. This describes how the brain is positively or negatively affected by experiences from socialization, connecting rationality, emotions and the self. Knowledge, says Damasio, is thus deeply dispositional. However, this is not a behaviourist mechanism; somatic markers do not cause decisions, but form the neurological basis of a personal value system. According to Damasio (1994), emotions have precedence neurologically over rationality. As not every aspect of behaviour is conscious, not everything is open to rationality. Paradoxically, this means that rational decisions can be made subconsciously, using a value system formed according to emotional reactions.

This has important consequences, as rational decisions do not only arise from abstract knowledge, but are linked to emotional biases. These lie partly in the unconscious domain, thus tacit knowledge is important. It supports the idea of a pragmatic, bounded rationality in which relationships and trust are important. Thus socially rational behaviour is not necessarily conscious, and conscious knowledge does not necessarily lead to rational behaviour. Neither knowledge nor emotions lead to socially rational decisions on their own, but emotions, as markers of social values, are an essential part of decision-making. Yet explanations of decision-making may only be an illusion, a rationalization after decisions have been made unconsciously (Wilson 2004).

There are similarities between Damasio's (1994) Somatic Marker Hypothesis, and Bourdieu's habitus (Von Scheve and Luede 2005). Bourdieu regarded dispositions as arising from bodily schemas and from practical engagement in the world, producing a "habitus", that is, "*a durable, transposable schema of thought*" of "*perception, appreciation and action*", "*the product of the internalisation of culture*" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 31, 40, 179). Dispositions are a tendency to pay attention to some facets in preference to others, rather than a fixed, inflexible filter, and develop with ongoing experiences. Habitus is, suggests Swartz (1997:100), "*a deeply structured cultural grammar for action*", like Chomsky's generative grammar. Therefore choices and learning are embodied and related to the whole person in social context, leading to the reproduction of social structures.

However, critics of the approach claim it is overly deterministic and mechanical (Jenkins, 1992:175). Bourdieu's theory is apparently unable to explain why everyone in the same family or social class fails to adopt the same practices (LiPuma 1993), leading Nash (1999:179) to conclude that Bourdieu's theories are "*riddled with contradictions, ellipses and evasions*". However, it is possible that the class-based interpretations are over-generalised, whereas habitus was conceived as an active structure adapting to fields, institutions, and other people, rather than a "*docile clay where society leaves its stamp*" (Lizardo 2004). Nash claims that Bourdieu has two sets of theories: a specific theory, relating to actual class practices, and a general theory, based on statistics, which gives no explanation of individual successes. Yet there is a difference, Lizardo argues, between habitus as a "*perceptual and classifying structure*" and "*habitus as a generative structure of practical action*". It is probably as a generative structure that the concept of habitus has gained most credibility.

Bourdieu (1977) refuted claims of determinism, contending that it is the interrelationships between habitus and field that result in practice; particular practices arise as individuals, with particular dispositions and resources, navigate fields of power. The social conditions that affect individual perspectives are not necessarily the same as those that structure the fields of social practice, (Dubar 1997:77). The result is that as individuals navigate new social fields, such as those encountered in higher education, irreducible opportunities for freedom are opened.

However, Bourdieu's focus on routine practices leads to a dominant view of agency as "*habitual, repressive and taken for granted*" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:963), and neglects how agency arises from the interplay of overlapping structural contexts and the flow of time. According to these authors, actors are embedded within many temporalities, simultaneously oriented towards the past, present and future. "*The key to grasping the dynamic possibilities of human agency is to view it as composed of variables and changing orientations within the flow of time*" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:964). Thus agents reproduce past thought and actions reflexively (monitoring social structures), but unreflectively (not contemplatively). They respond to current dilemmas with wisdom gained from reflexive appreciation, making conscious decisions, and negotiating with others, thus transforming situations. The projective dimension,

which is the least researched area according to Emirbayer and Misch, is concerned with imagined future possibilities, including hopes and fears. Agency arises as individuals move between unfolding contexts, recomposing their temporal orientations, and thus changing their relationship to structures.

2.3 Language and self

According to Emirbayer and Misch (1998: 974), the capacity for agency is grounded in the structures of the self, and is narrative in nature "*an internal conversation possessing analytic autonomy vis-à-vis transpersonal interactions*". Both Bourdieu and Damasio have been criticised for their neglect of the role of language in reflection (Jenkins 1992:152-174; Sierra 2000). Narrative constructions are important in communication with others, which increase an actors' capacity "*to make considered decisions that challenge received patterns of action*" (Emirbayer and Misch 1988:989), to create maps of action and imagine new resolutions. Giddens' "*reflexive project of the self*" emphasises the role of language "*a process whereby self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives*" (Giddens 1991:244). This narrative self appears to affect learning and choices in education (Banks et al 1992, Bloomer 1997, Evans 2001, 2002; Bloomer & Hodkinson 1996; Ball 2000; Heinz & Nagal 1997, Evans & Rainbird 2002, Tedda and Biesta 2007).

Dennett (1991:113) argues that there is more than one set of beliefs based on our internalised discourse. Streams of discourse, like multiple uncompleted drafts, are related to contextual consciousness and a sense of identity. Thus, events get distorted as they are retold, and the self is reinvented according to the latest stories we tell about ourselves. Indeed, for Dennett, one's identity doesn't exist beyond the stories and beliefs one tells about it. Individuals re-interpret their personal biographies, according to current consciousness.

"Selves are not independently existing soul-pearls, but artefacts of the social processes that create us... The only "momentum" that accrues to the trajectory of the self... is the stability imported to it by the web of beliefs that constitute it, and when those beliefs lapse, it lapses, either permanently or temporarily" (Dennett 1991:423)

Arguably, there is no consistent "self" on which to base decisions, as it changes with time and contexts. This is contested by Archer (2000), who argues that selves are not "*dissolved into discursive structures*" and Damasio (1999:225), who counters Dennett, saying:

"The shadows of the deeply biological core self and of the autobiographical self that grows under its influence constantly propitiate the selection of drafts that accord with a single unified self."

Thus self-narratives are not arbitrary reinventions, but based on some inner sense of continuity. The failure of continuity is pathological, as in Korsakov's syndrome (Sacks 1985:105) in which recent autobiographical memory disappears.

Damasio hypothesised three neurological levels of the self, which explains how we can remain the same, yet change with time and context. The first level is the stable, but unconscious, proto-self, present before birth (1999:154); the second level, core-consciousness (1999:16), leads to a sense of self in the present moment, and is the source of emotions (1999:219) and is stable across a life time, under strong gene control. The third level, extended consciousness, associated with autobiographical, narrative self (self-identity), is an awareness of the lived past and anticipated future, language and memories playing a key role. It developed later evolutionarily than core and proto-self, and is dependent on core consciousness for its existence. Thus thought and learning are not limited to language, nor does language give access to the whole of consciousness. Although there is a tendency towards multiple stories about the self, the deeply biological self selects drafts according to a unified sense of self. There are limits to how this unity can be maintained in all contexts at all times, and there are instances when conflicting conscious and unconscious desires may change the direction of this self. However, Damasio argues that there is a tendency to "return to base".

McAdams (1993:6) emphasised the development of an emotional identity, a personal myth that "*provides meaning, unity or purpose*" which makes lives a "*purposeful and convincing whole*". McAdams emphasises early constitutive elements of the self, through affect, which colour and shape later developments. The ideological setting comes from what we believe to be true and good in adolescence. Yet this is not unchanging: McAdams research indicates that "*one's*

personal myth continues to develop and change through most of our adult years”, though coloured by earlier emotions and relationships. As Archer says (2000), *“We are who we are because of what we care about”*.

Narratives are not only used to construct self-identity, but to construct meaning. According to Bruner (1990) cultural narratives are:

“A system by which people organise their experience in, knowledge about and transactions with the social world” (1990:35).

These narratives are cultural perspectives how of things should be, and guide perceptions as well as legitimising events according to common expectations, thus shaping intentional states. This is important in higher education; a particular cultural narrative about its meaning may predispose individual expectations. For example, in the UK there is a cultural narrative about how higher education helps individuals’ personal development (Leathwood et al 2000) and capacity to think critically and analytically, (Drew & Payne 1992). This not only sets up students’ expectations of the process of higher education, but also their later satisfaction after the transition to work, as well as employers’ expectation about what a graduate is.

There are power relations hidden within such narratives (Stierer 1994:75), as language is value laden and heteroglossic (populated with the intentions of others). The language that shapes our identities and beliefs relates to social context and power (Fairclough 1988). So for individuals to use language to achieve their own meaning potential, rather than being passively shaped by it, they must struggle against the centripetal forces of authoritative discourse (Graddol 1994). The ‘struggle’ for voice takes place as “individuals resist the ideological effects of the text they consume” (Fairclough 1988). In the case of narratives about higher education, this happens as individuals use language as a tool for critical reflection, rather than reproducing social beliefs.

2.4 Social structures

There seems to be little doubt that social structures, such as class, gender, ethnicity, and geography, are important in shaping beliefs and perspectives (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 2005, Bloomer and Hodkinson 2000b, Evans 2001a). On the other hand, Hodkinson (2004) argues

that these are by no means deterministic; instead, individuals are positioned geographically and socially in a way that evolves with time.

2.4.1 Geographical positioning

Geography affects both the structure of opportunities, (the local labour market), opportunities for education, (Banks et al 1992), as well as how these opportunities are perceived. In some areas, youth only consider the local labour market, whereas Hodkinson (2004) showed that in others, young people would consider moving in order to take up opportunities. Even after taking into consideration school success and social class, Payne (2003) says that geographical differences are still an important influence on student decisions, related to the strength of local demand for qualifications. But this is not a mechanical relationship; perceptions of the nature of the labour force are also significant, and are affected by family and peer group.

For example, Fevre, Rees and Gorard's (1999:117-139) research indicates three ways that people use education according to their local labour market and socio-cultural environment. Some avoid education if it gets in the way of early employment (immediate earnings are more important than future potential). Others use education to gain credentials, without concern for its content. Yet others use education to improve themselves in order to improve employment performance, more typically in countries with strong group loyalties, such as Japan.

2.4.2 Social positioning

There is significant evidence that social structures such as class, gender and ethnicity continue to influence people's lives and decisions, with deep and pervasive inequalities in educational and labour market success (Banks et al 1992, Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997, Evans 2002b, Hodkinson 2004, Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 2005, Payne 2003). Moreover, class, gender and ethnicity seem to have significant bearing on the development of dispositions to learning (Bloomer and Hodkinson 2000). For example, women are more likely than men to think about domestic considerations when making career choices (Hodkinson 1997), although they are also more likely to show a higher degree of agency (creative and proactive behaviour, Rudd and Evans 1998), to actively shape their experience (Evans 2002b:258).

It used to be assumed that individuals were socialised into class-based trajectories (Ashton 1988:5, Rudd 1997a). The role of education, argued Bowles and Gintis (1976), was to merely reproduce and legitimate existing class structures, despite widening access to higher education. Indeed, even though access to higher education has been widened, students from disadvantaged families are more likely to attend less prestigious institutions, or to avoid higher education altogether (Furlong and Cartmel 2005).

Yet a deterministic view of social structures has been largely refuted on the grounds of growing evidence that individuals are not passively socialised into particular trajectories, but have agency. Willis' (1977) and Jenkins (1983) showed how working class pupils use their own culture, relationships and resources to understand the ideology of school. Willis claimed that the prevalence of jobs that did not require qualifications meant that working class lads resisted middle-class school culture as irrelevant to their needs. Brown (1987) argued that a unitary working-class structure could not explain individual orientation to school, but that youth negotiate sub-cultures and perceive advantages of education at times of high unemployment. This is supported by a cross-disciplinary study by Banks et al (1992) showing how trajectories to class-based destinations involve choices. In other words, individuals have agency.

Moreover, simplistic class models cannot explain variations within classes (Ashton 1991; Beck 1992, Beck et al 1994; Hodkinson, 2004). Hodkinson suggests that individuals are initially 'positioned' through class, gender, ethnicity and geography, but that individual action and choice in constructing progression is significant. Moreover, starting positions are not enough to explain different perceptions that individuals have within a particular class or group, for example, how education and work opportunities are perceived. Beck (1992) claims that lifestyles, subcultures, social ties and identities are increasingly diverse, and cannot easily be envisaged as arising from socio-economic group. Similarly, Ashton (1991) argues that cultural resources are not defined by one's parents' occupations, but by a wide variety of cultural resources outside school, including the culture and practices of significant others within the immediate neighbourhood. He says:

“Perhaps even more significantly, it is now established that young people negotiate their way through the various institutional structures with which they are confronted, and through the process, contribute towards their reproduction and change” (Ashton 1991:9)

This is increasingly so as individuals have become disembedded during late modernity. Lyotard (1979) goes as far as claiming that class structures have lost their predictive capacity. Consequently Beck (1992) sees individuals as at the planning centre of their own lives, making choices to maximize opportunities and minimise risk.

This is contested by Furlong and Cartmel (1997, 2005) and Ball et al (2000) who counter argue that social inequalities are stable, and that success and failure can still be attributed to social class. Risks accumulate at the bottom of the class structures and opportunities at the top, thus there are class based attitudes to risk, based on social, economic and cultural resources. The choice of university can be risky for the working class, and they tend to have lower achievement, lower expectations of the type of university they can get into (it may be beyond their cultural resources) and are more likely to enrol in less advanced or prestigious courses than their more advantaged peers because of their additional financial, geographical and social obstacles. Subsequently, they are much more likely to be unemployed, and less likely to get good graduate jobs (Forsyth and Furlong, 2000).

However, research suggests that feelings of control do not indicate true agency, suggesting that individuals are not aware of the limitations facing them. In Bates and Riseborough’s research (1993) individuals felt agency despite limitations of their actual choices. Evans et al (2001c) and Rudd (1998), found that those in a depressed labour market are as optimistic, and feel as much independence and control, as those in more buoyant labour markets. Thus young people are seen as *“reconstructing fate as choice”* (Rudd and Evans 1998), internalising responsibility for outcomes despite the lack of structured opportunities available. On the other hand, Evans says that most individuals recognised limits imposed by class positions, and that *“Forms of social capital were seen as being convertible and expandable through qualifications, making new connections and taking chances”* (Evans 2001). Moreover, Behrens and Evans (2002)

demonstrated that in structured environments such as in Germany, failure is more likely to be attributed externally as opportunities are only open for those who follow certain routes.

Similarly, Furlong and Cartmel (1997, 2005) argue that increasing individualism merely gives the illusion of control, whereas in reality individuals continued to be constrained by their resources (financial, social, and cultural), their geographical position, the labour market, education, and laws and regulations. Thus, Furlong and Cartmel concluded that despite weakened class identities and individualised lifestyles, "Chains of human interdependence remain intact". Yet Furlong and Cartmel's emphasis on cultural and economic resources does not consider how critical reflexivity gained in higher education could affect social reproduction (chapter 3).

2.4.3 Temporal positioning

There are indications that the shift in the local and global labour market is affecting educational decision-making, thus positioning can also be temporal. As economies have become progressively open to global influences, flexible specialisation has increased, ending the relative stability of large-scale, standardised production, which previously encouraged early school leaving. This has led to the growth in demand for educated labour, so it has become more important for people to become qualified.

According to Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991), this has resulted in an increased sense of individual responsibility and risk and individuals have become disembedded from traditional social networks and constraints. The world is now seen as a riskier place, as it is more unpredictable. Everyone, including graduates, may experience periods of unemployment, but, Beck argues, individuals see themselves as responsible for their own solutions, including acquiring new skills and qualifications. Indeed, research by Evans et al (2001a, b) indicates that qualifications are now a universal goal for young people of all social groups. Beck argues that collective identities have weakened in favour of individualism; individuals try to maximise their opportunities and minimize their risks in constructing their individualised life-paths. Yet, as

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) have pointed out, attitudes to risk are still class-based, being dependent based on resources.

2.5 Capital and dispositions

Economic capital is a significant factor in constraining or enabling choices. Forsyth and Furlong (2000, 2003) found that representation in higher education is the highest amongst young people from wealthy districts and lowest amongst those from disadvantaged areas. Where disadvantaged students succeeded in going on to higher education, a lack of funds and a fear of debt meant that they enrolled on shorter, more vocational courses that would lead them quickly into paid employment. They were also more likely to choose nearby courses, in order to reduce travel and accommodation expenses, and to take on part time jobs in order to help with their expenses. The same financial barriers led to students dropping out of their courses, as the fear of debt and unemployment increased. This is probably linked to the increased sense of risk felt by students at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum.

Bourdieu (1986:46) regarded the possession of economic capital as an insufficient explanation for the structure and functioning of the social world, and reintroduced the idea of cultural and social capital. Social capital consists of the resources attainable from social contacts, networks and group membership that can help individuals achieve their goals (Bourdieu 1986:51). Cultural capital exists in the form of cultural goods (such as books), in institutions, and in an embodied form through dispositions. Embodied cultural capital includes knowledge, skills, education, attitudes and beliefs that help individuals succeed in specific social fields. Social and cultural capital facilitates the acquisition of economic capital, affects both individuals and whole communities, improving the success of children at school, shaping attitudes to innovation and change, and protecting its members from external shocks (Coleman 1988, Field 2003a).

Economic, social and cultural resources have been consistently found to affect choices and scholastic success (Furlong & Cartmel 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson 1999; Bloomer 2001, Ball et al 2000; Davies 2003; Evans 2001; Teixeira Fernandes 2001; Field 2003a), although these do not have a strongly predictive character (Bloomer 2001), as other factors are involved. These

include; achievement and level of trajectories, with the most active being high achievers in top trajectories with strong social networks (Evans et al 2000, Hodkinson and Bloomer 2000), changing social and cultural contexts (Bloomer 1997); institutional culture (Hodkinson and Bloomer 2000); chance events (Bloomer and Hodkinson, Bloomer, Hodkinson 2004); significant other people (Bloomer and Hodkinson) and the strength of social networks (Evans 2001a).

Forms of capital are acquired as individuals develop their biography (Hodkinson 2004), especially through education, although this depends on attitudes and beliefs about what is possible and acceptable. These beliefs mean that conversion from one form of capital to the other is not equally easy in all directions (Swartz 1997). For example, the possession of economic capital means does not mean that an individual can acquire cultural capital. Individuals may believe they have freedom despite a lack of real opportunities, but their habitus serves to legitimate their position in the field; feelings of individuality and control are no predictors of success. However, high social groups tend to be well endowed with all three forms of capital, giving their possessors more freedom of action and choice.

A combination of structural positioning and forms of capital affect individual horizons for action, that is, future actions are perceived as possible and feasible through individual habitus and constrained by resources (Hodkinson 1996, Bloomer 1997). It is through these horizons for action that individuals develop their studentship, which is how individuals act on their educational opportunities (Bloomer 1997). Studentship is affected by the decisions and actions of others, developing through routines and turning points (Hodkinson 2004). However, outcomes are not predictable, as they are limited by both habitus and external opportunity structures (Bloomer 1997:143). Horizons for action are related to feelings of control, that is, whether chances of success are ascribed to internal or external causes (Baron et al 1980: 484), and how far individuals believe that one has the ability to carry out the actions needed to manage situations (Bandura 2001), affecting engagement, motivation and beliefs. All individuals face obstacles, according to Hodkinson (2004). The ability to overcome them depends on a combination of position, disposition, capital, self-confidence, and influences from significant others. However, rational reflection and decision-making can also be improved though

education, information and discussion, with language as a mediating factor (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, Archer 2000, Hodkinson and Bloomer 2000 and Rudd and Evans 1998).

2.5 Conclusion

The way in which individuals make choices and act on their educational opportunities is not a simple phenomenon, and is affected by many factors affecting beliefs, attitudes and real opportunities. There is little evidence that individuals make educational decisions and act on their educational opportunities on a purely rational and conscious basis. First, social networks, cultural values and the nature of organisations affect actions and decisions (Coleman 1988, Hall 1989). Second, choices are made according to local choices and information, childhood ambitions, and personal experience frames of reference, (Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, 1999). Third, geographical, temporal and social positioning affect the real and perceived nature of opportunities facing each individual (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 2005, Bloomer and Hodkinson 2000b, Evans 2001a, Banks et al 1992). Fourth, individual resources (economic, social and cultural capital in specific social fields) limit how individuals can engage with opportunities (Bourdieu 1986, Furlong & Cartmel 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson 1999; Bloomer 2001, Ball et al 2000; Davies 2003; Evans 2001). Fifth, decisions and behaviour are not always conscious and rational (Wilson 2004, Damasio 1994, 1999, 2003) but are linked to emotional biases and tacit dispositions (Bourdieu 1967, 1977, Hodkinson 2004). These lie partly in the unconscious domain, thus tacit knowledge is important, supporting the idea of a pragmatic, bounded rationality in which relationships and trust are important. Sixth, individual agency comes about through the interplay of past habits and routines, present contingencies and anticipated futures (Emirbayer and Mische 1998); a process that is reflexive, reflective and dialogical, involving social contexts and cultural narratives (Bruner 1990).

Finally, there is evidence to suggest that learning is about self-identity and self-realisation (Banks et al 1992, Bloomer 1997, Evans 2001, 2002; Bloomer & Hodkinson 1996; Ball 2000; Heinz & Nagal 1997, Evans & Rainbird 2002), yet the idea of the self has been made problematic, seen by some (Dennett 1991) as narrative illusion. However, the unconscious,

continuous emotional self continues to affect engagement throughout life (Damasio 2003, McAdams 2003). So, there is a self to realize, although the tools with which to do it, rationality, language and culture knowledge, are inextricably linked to social values.

What does this imply for higher education? First of all, individuals have different perspectives of it according to their resources and positioning. Any discernible self-identity that higher education has will inevitably be filtered through these perspectives. An individual's self project affects how individuals make choices in and through their education. Second, the socially constructed field of higher education will affect individual paths through it. Third, how an individual negotiates these paths may be pragmatically rational, but emotional experiences will affect which paths are more valued, and those which seem possible or desirable (in other words, their horizons for action). Higher education in particular is seen as increasing individual capacity to think about the world, so could play an important role in increasing rationality and reflexivity. However this depends on the nature of higher education itself. It is to this we now turn.

3: HIGHER EDUCATION: WHOSE MEANINGS?

3.1 Introduction

The idea of higher education once seemed to be unequivocally about “*the pursuit of true judgement*” (Smith and Webster 1997:3) and the higher intellectual and cultural development of individuals (Barnett 1990). However, higher education has modernised and expanded, one of a number of modernisations that are mutually interrelated (Scott 1995:168). There are now more diverse demands on higher education from the state, the economy, from within academia and from students themselves, who are now far more numerous and from a wider range of backgrounds (Watson and Taylor 1989, Seixas 2003, Magalhães 2001b). Graduates are increasingly expected to have knowledge and transferable skills that are useful for the economy, (Watson and Taylor 1998:14) and to be part of economic and social development, (NCIHE 1997) thus the traditional emphasis on becoming cultured, or truth seeking, has become less important. Consequently there is no single defining idea about what higher education means.

Despite this ambiguity, higher education has an increasingly pivotal role in modern life (Barnett 1997:29, NCIHE 1997). This is because knowledge and human resources, especially in the fields of science and technology, are increasingly seen as the key to economic competitiveness in a globalised economy (Becker 1964, Schultz 1963, Romer 1990, Kurtzman, 2001). The rapid pace of change in the global economy has brought other challenges, affecting the nature of work, social organisation and the boundaries of the nation state (Avis et al 1996, Readings 1997). Work is increasingly temporary, fragmented and intensified, (Brown and Lauder 2001) social classes are less distinct (Lyotard 1979, Beck 1992, Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 2005) and the rate of change in technology and society is accelerating. This means that graduates' roles, jobs and identities are less predictable, so they now need to be prepared for a volatile social and economic future (Barnett 1997).

This chapter is concerned with the scope of the mission of higher education, as it now

encompasses a range of objectives, which are interpreted by institutions and individuals in a number of ways. According to some writers, higher education is supposed to develop critical thinking, autonomy and character (Barnett 1990:22), to get students to think (Ainley 1994:184) and to institutionalise doubt (Scott 1995:175), a process of questioning by individuals and social organizations. If this is true, it means that graduates not only have knowledge of a specific academic area, but can also engage critically with the world and themselves, questioning existing knowledge and creating alternatives.

However, as the previous chapter discussed, there can be no inevitability about the effect higher education has on students. Aspects which have been shown to make a difference include national cultures (Reybold 2001), institutions (Ahmed et al 1999; Hodkinson and Bloomer 2000; Bekhradnia et al. 2006), pedagogy (Rosie 2000) assessment methods (Scouller 1998) and academic discipline, (Becher 1997). Also important are students' perceptions (Gordon 1995; Bloomer and Hodkinson 1999), expectations (Byrne and Flood 2005; Henderson-King and Smith, 2006, Batchelor 2006), personalities (Furnham and McManus 2004), learning styles (critically reviewed by Coffield et al 2004; Pheiffer et al 2005; Cassidy and Eachus 2005), academic self concept (Ommundsen et al 2005), age (Redmond 2006), social class, (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Forsyth and Furlong 2000, 2003; Furlong and Cartmel 2005; Cooke et al 2004), gender (David et al 2002, Smith 2004; Leathwood 2006) and ethnicity (Ball et al 2002, Connor et al 2004; Davis et al 2004, Broecke and Nicholls 2007).

All these factors affect students' experiences and perspectives about higher education, therefore how they engage with learning and knowledge. Ultimately, this affects the meaning they give to higher education. But what is higher education? Barnett argues that there is a degree of continuity in its core values going back to Plato (Barnett 1990), which has consequences for the developments that have followed.

3.2 The changing meaning of higher education

"Truth, a subtle, invisible, manifold spirit, is poured into the mind of the scholar by his eyes and ears, through his affections, imagination, and reason; it is poured into his mind

and is sealed up there in perpetuity, by propounding and repeating it, by questioning and re-questioning, by correcting and explaining, by progressing and then recurring to first principles” (Newman 1854)

In Newman’s day it was clear what becoming a student at university meant. It was about the pursuit of truth within the company of like-minded men, about developing culture and becoming a civilised gentleman. This was possible because the nineteenth-century university was free from economic demands. (Magalhães and Amaral 2000). At that time, state steering in Europe controlled nearly all aspects of universities (access, study contents, examinations, appointment of staff), justified in order to protect the university against external interests (Amaral and Magalhães 2001:9), but individual academics were autonomous. This allowed universities to develop a very particular identity, principally concerned with the pursuit of knowledge, truth and reason. The idea of university became synonymous with universal reason in the sense that its truth claims were accepted as universal, institutions were (theoretically) open to everyone, ideas could be debated by anyone, and there were no limits to reason (Barnett and Standish 2003:4).

As higher education has expanded, this identity has been progressively eroded on two main fronts, epistemologically and sociologically (Barnett 1990:11). Firstly, relativistic theories of knowledge mean that truth claims can no longer be accepted as universal (Barnett 1997a:29), instead there is “*incredulity towards grand narratives*” (Lyotard 1979). Objective knowledge, within the conceptual frameworks of academic literature, had previously been central to higher education, so one of its central tenets has been challenged. (Barnett 1990:10).

Secondly, it has been undermined sociologically, as academic autonomy has been lost in the changing relationship between the state and higher education. Whereas once the role of higher education was to protect and develop national culture, protected by the state (Readings 1995: 13-15), now the boundaries of the nation-state are disappearing. Not only is “truth” no longer attainable in an absolute sense, but academics are no longer completely free to try and obtain it, constrained instead by the need to be relevant to the needs of the economy and society so as to attract students as consumers (Smith and Webster 1997). Universities now have to compete for funds, to demonstrate publicly their managerial performativity as measured through

efficiency, effectiveness, quality and accountability. Performativity, according to Barnett (2003b), is the new grand narrative, and is only strengthened through criticism (Standish, in Barnett and Standish 2003:216), meaning that criticism leads to the improvement in performance, but does not challenge it as a narrative. Performativity is "*the best possible input/output equation*" (Lyotard 1979:46); it is not concerned with insight, wisdom and understanding but with measurement and control. Higher education's new mission is to be relevant to the economy and to compete to attract students and funding and attain "excellence". This is more about accountability than truth (Readings 1995:13).

The loss of academic autonomy has arisen for several reasons. (Scott 1997:36). Firstly, the changing nature of work has led to an increasing demand for access to places in higher education as other routes to employment have become riskier. As it has grown, funding methods have changed. This means that institutions now compete with each other for students, who are now fundamental to their survival. But as higher education is not the only site of post compulsory education, competition is intensified.

Higher education has also lost its position as the principal producer of knowledge. Knowledge is now produced beyond its boundaries in multiple sites, no longer being just theoretical knowledge (mode 1) but problem-based knowledge (mode 2, Gibbons et al 1994). Output is increasingly measured, and higher education is in competition with other sites of knowledge production, including commerce and industry. With this, the idea of what counts as knowledge is also changing.

Ideologies also undermine higher education's search for truth, and are able to thrive "where previously they were largely absent" (Barnett 2003:4). These are destructive because they introduce partiality into academia. For example, projects to promote equality are ideological, but equally ideological are meritocracy and other projects, tacit or explicit, which have favoured some social groups in relation to others. Consequently, as research and teaching cannot be said to be disinterested, reason and truth cannot be said to be at the centre of higher education. Instead, there are now multiple narratives about higher education, both from within and beyond

academia (Scott 1995), without consensus on core elements. Although higher education has lost some of its power and freedom, in another respect, this was always compromised through the power structures that have shaped what counts as knowledge and who has access to it.

3.3 The end of truth?

The university, as a major institution of higher education, is in ruins, according to Readings (1997). Its identity has been compromised, universality has been undermined by the lack of universal truths, and its mission has been subverted by aims other than the pursuit of truth. Students are now clients, with all the rights of consumers, and institutions and academics need to publish marketable knowledge, thus valuing performance rather than the search for truth. Previous models are now seen in a somewhat utopian light, as if previously academics were truly disinterested, and transparent truth was the only aim. Bauman (1997) argues that there is no aim shared between different faculties and departments in higher education except to supply students, now regarded as clients, with recognized certificates of entitlement to jobs.

The pursuit of truth may have appeared at the centre of university, but there may be no single, universal truth, as all truth relies on relative frames of reference such as language, history or culture. Instead, social constructivist theories of knowledge have emphasised ontological relativism, that is, all knowledge is linked to conceptual systems. In other words, there can be no search for truth as these systems are historically and culturally situated. However, many scholars reject extreme forms of relativism (such as proposed by Margolis 1991) on the grounds of internal contradictions (Honderich 1995:757). So, rather than threatening academia, the continuity of debate about the nature of relativism is a sign of the contested nature of the philosophy, which ensures the health of the university's mission.

Readings' (1997) claims that the role of university to defend and develop national culture, protected by the state, has been eroded. Yet this avoids discussion of whose version of culture this was, and the power structures, values and ideologies that promoted one form of culture over another. For example, in Britain, middle class values have dominated education at all levels; working class schools were long ago eliminated (Ashton 1991) and a British ethnocentric

version of education has been dominant (Viswanathan 1987, Stubbs 1991). The fact that now much more counts as culture suggests the beginning of openness in higher education, not the end, as cultural diversity brings increasingly democratic perspectives into academia.

Moreover, there was not, and still is not, anything universal about access to university. Women were directly excluded until recently. The first degrees were awarded to women by London University in 1878, and it was only in 1974 that women were admitted to previously male-only colleges at Oxford University (and men admitted to female-only colleges). Additionally, different social classes have been excluded in more indirect ways. Higher education in the past was for a privileged elite; recent expansion may give the impression of democratisation, but in Portugal and the UK alike, those from manual occupations are still disproportionately excluded (DFES 2003:9, Cabrito 2001, CNASES 1997), and their choices continued to be compromised by a lack of access to resources (chapter 2).

Barnett (2003) has charged the university as being overrun by pernicious ideologies where they were previously absent. Ideologies, according to Barnett (2003:7), contain beliefs and “*seek to persuade others of the rightness of those claims by becoming projects for change*”. Ideologies are the body of “*ideas behind a social, political, or cultural programme*” (Penguin dictionary 1982). However, as ontological and epistemological relativism have shaped the pursuit of truth, and access to academia has been limited to an elite, ideology has always been present.

According to Bourdieu, all action is interested (Swartz 1997:42), a strategy “*oriented towards the maximization of material or symbolic profit*” (Bourdieu 1990:209) not as a calculated pursuit but tacit, pre-reflexive, a political economy of culture. For academics, this may be more the pursuit of cultural than economic capital, gaining the symbolic power, and being able to define what counts as knowledge and legitimate particular social categories. This, for Bourdieu, is symbolic violence:

“All pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977:5).

According to Bourdieu, this symbolic violence expresses itself in a number of ways. First, higher education is a field of power in which intellectuals are able to legitimate what counts as knowledge (Bourdieu 1990:209). Higher education reproduces power relations in the mechanisms for accepting new faculty members, in the habitus inherent in their outlook, and in the marginalisation of non-orthodox viewpoints, so individual academics are not really free to question accepted truths. Those who do are branded heretics, although eventually heretical truths may gain support and become a new field of power (Swartz 1997:124, 226). Students are even more restricted, dependent as they are on approval by their tutors to gain the credentials they need to continue either academic or professional routes. The emancipatory role of higher education (Barnett 1990:23) depends on individual minds becoming free in the critical search for truth. Yet students may be marginalised within the academic community;

“Most university teaching and learning practices are not about inclusion, but tend to position undergraduate students as permanent novices, never attaining full membership of a community of practice” (Lea 2005:193)

Secondly, Bourdieu asserts that how individual students are positioned in relation to the dominant culture serves to include some and exclude others. Barnett (1990:107) recognises that *“the internal life of academic institutions serve to sustain, reinforce and reward class-related forms of style, language and behaviour”* leading to cultural reproduction. This means that students from minority ethnic or class backgrounds can feel alienated, a phenomenon that has been widely researched (Ball et al 2002, Lynch and O’Riordan 1998, Forsyth and Furlong, 2000; Mahoney and Zmroczek, 1997).

Those who hold that higher education is in ruins rue the end of liberal education, the pursuit of culture and the disinterested pursuit of truth. However, this may never have actually existed. Academia has long had its interests, its cultural and social biases, exclusions, and has played a role in social reproduction. Yet Barnett (2003:8) argues that the difference now is how higher education is connected to the wider world so that the *possibility* of disinterestedness and objective truth is compromised. On the other hand, Delanty (2001) sees this positively, arguing that a new identity is emerging based on communication and new conceptions of citizenship.

Scott, (1997:168), argues that the current openness of higher education means that cognitive values and social practices are no longer shaped within academia, but in interaction between academia and the community, mediated through markets and state policy. As there have been a number of simultaneous modernizations alongside the massification of higher education, (in society, culture, science, technology and the economy), this means that there is no single totalising idea of higher education (Scott 1995:170), which ostensibly leaves individuals free to bring their own meanings and definitions to it.

Nevertheless, this apparent freedom to interpret higher education according to individual needs and meanings is socially constructed. There is evidence of great variation across national cultures (Schomburg and Teichler 2006), with differing emphases being placed upon developing a broad base of knowledge or more vocational preparation. Historically, in Britain, going to university meant becoming a gentleman, and a crucial aspect was the personal development of the student, knowledge being the vehicle of communication with the tutor (Barnett 1990:104). In contrast, in Germany, where university education is still more vocationally orientated, the key aspect was the pursuit of knowledge, with a view to the students' intellectual development, and human interaction was secondary (Barnett 1990). However, Barnett points out that despite the different social functions of graduates, universities in both cases were concerned with enlarging the mind. But it does mean that the approach to knowledge and the meaning given to education varied with each cultural construction.

These historical constructions have contemporary consequences in the way higher education is seen by students, affecting the growth of tertiary education, how graduates are recruited and expectations of them (Brennan et al 1996: 50-51). For example, although both in Portugal and the UK, the main policy focus is on employability and preparation for work field specific knowledge, there are cultural differences. According to Murdoch and Paul (2007), the UK emphasises free choice and practical learning, while Southern European countries focus on theoretical, field specific knowledge. Studies in the UK emphasise the role of university in personal development, unlike those of Portugal. British graduates report feeling personal development and increased confidence, as well as having gained subject specific and generic

knowledge and skills (Leathwood 1998); students feel they have become "*critical, detached, analytical and open minded*" (Ainley 1994), and that their minds and horizons have broadened through learning how to think (Drew & Payne 1992). It is worth noting that research does not evaluate how far students have actually become critical or learned how to think, but only graduates' reaffirmation of the British cultural view of University. These cultural perspectives are also important in shaping how individuals act on their learning opportunities; if individuals see higher education as an opportunity to learn to think critically, they may measure their success as graduates by opportunities to do so. If they see their degree as denoting knowledge useful only in specific professions, this significantly limits opportunities for realization in the transition to work, especially in Portugal where opportunities are limited (chapters 1 and 6).

Academic tribes are also important in shaping undergraduate learning experiences (Becher and Trowler 1981). There are distinct ways of thinking and talking, and distinct student responses in different academic areas, affecting attitudes to knowledge acquisition, application and integration. Critical thinking is more valued in social sciences whereas science and technology disciplines give greater value to the application of knowledge. This led Snow (1964, cited in Barnett 1990:106) to declare that there were two cultures in higher education, behind which there was a fundamental difference in what higher education stood for.

3.4 Markets and identities in Higher Education

In the UK and Portugal alike, the state steering of higher education has transformed into a hybrid model of market mechanisms and state supervision (Amaral and Magalhães 2001:14). State monopolies have been broken up, and responsibility for regulation, finance and supplying diversity and choice has been shifted to institutions. Students as consumers have also been empowered through information about choices (Bridges and Jonathan, 2003, and Cardoso et al 2007). This has been accompanied by a shift of financial responsibility to institutions and individuals. In both countries, students have been faced with increasing tuition fees, and institutions depend on student numbers for finance. These factors are changing the meaning given to higher education, leading to fears of The MacDonaldisation of Universities (Ritzer

1996), in which underpaid university teachers are “*more concerned with reproducing existing knowledge than producing new knowledge*”

The diversity of courses is affected by market factors. In the UK, financially unviable courses and departments have recently closed (for example Mathematics at Hull, Chemistry and Music at Exeter) despite their significance for society, culture and the future of the economy. In Portugal, the expanding private sector has been accused of lacking diversity (CNE 2002b), as private institutions have tended to supply degrees such as social sciences requiring a lower initial investment, but for which there is a great demand (chapter 6)

Students have to pay fees and forgo paid employment, so may regard a degree as an investment in their professional future rather than an investment in the deeper issues of education (such as developing a critical awareness of knowledge, self and society). The increasing costs of higher education also mean that it is riskier (chapter 2). Students from disadvantaged families are more likely to enrol in local, shorter, less prestigious courses in order to avoid the financial risks involved (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 2005, Forsyth and Furlong, 2000). Thus markets in education differentiate those with the capacity to participate from those who do not (Brown and Lauder 2001).

There is an assumption by those in favour of market mechanisms that behaviour is both informed and rational (Bridges and Jonathan 2003), and that this leads to optimal choices. Dill (1997:180) argues that inequities and poor choices are caused by market imperfections. He argues that these can be reduced through the supply of information about institutions and their courses “*objective measures of the value added by a particular academic program*”. Yet these measures of value include potential earnings, status, job security, but not insight and understanding. In the UK, university league tables are published as an aid to choice. Despite the growing dependence on them (Catley 2004), they are insufficient for students to make informed choices (Bowden 2000). In Portugal, where there are no league tables, choices are also based on an institution’s perceived quality (CNASES 1997, Teixeira Fernandes 2001); rather than any objective measure. Yet even when more information is provided, it is never

completely transparent, being perceived through social frameworks. Rationality is dependent on local factors and individual perspectives, involving emotions and socially rooted perceptions, and educational choices are about human identities in social context (chapter 2).

Bridges and Jonathan (2003) argue that marketers are confused about the nature of education; the discourse of institutional productivity and the quantity of educated students implies that knowledge can be transmitted, rather than reflexively understood. Moreover, they say that markets imply competitive values such as individuality and enterprise, rather than communities and equality. However, values may be a reflection of the broader organisation of economic life, emphasising individuality, rather than arising from educational markets per se.

Markets arguably have the potential to change pedagogical relationships. As clients, students are empowered in relation to their institutions and the teaching staff, and may blame teachers for their own failures (Smith & Webster 1997). Institutions may change the curriculum and its delivery in order to maintain students as clients, providing entertainment rather than teaching, potentially avoiding unpopular or difficult subjects. They may avoid challenging students' existing perceptions of the world, thus maintaining the status quo. Discipline, deadlines, timetables and assessment criteria may be harder to enforce with students as clients. This shift from student to client is already apparent in Portugal in the aggressive marketing tactics used to attract students, especially by the private sector (Cardoso, Carvalho, Santiago 2007).

The danger is that if cultural authority is projected onto the market, then student identities may become predetermined for economic instrumentalism (Barnett 1994 ch.4) and what is consumed in higher education may be only what has immediate market relevance. This is problematic, argues Reich (2004), because if developing new knowledge is foregone in favour of applied knowledge, the economy's capacity for problem solving and innovation is compromised. Moreover, graduates developed with discrete skills, through fractured, discontinuous contexts, may not have the integral wholeness needed for flexibility, leading to a lack of preparation for an unanticipated future. Students may consume what they see as relevant, while being cut off from deeper issues and change.

On the other hand, students perceive education according to their class-based habitus and horizons for action (chapter 2). In other words, obstacles to learning are not only created by markets but also through access to social and cultural capital relevant to the field of education. So students learn what they see as relevant, and it cannot be assumed that the market shapes identities and transforms students into mere passive consumers of education. Moreover, we cannot presuppose that, just because degrees are now essential credentials for meaningful work opportunities, they are seen as only that. We must first understand the meaning and the value that graduates really give to higher education.

3.5 The skills debate

The pivotal role of higher education has led to the demand for the development of graduate skills through higher education. The skills debate focuses on graduate employability through the development of generic transferable skills. This is because specific disciplinary knowledge may become quickly out of date in volatile and risky economic environments (Scott 1997: 42-43), whereas advocates such as Assiter (1995) claim that the skills approach gives greater flexibility to graduates in adapting to work environments.

Assiter (1995) claims that schools and universities have the responsibility to help students find jobs by providing the core skills required by employers, as graduates are under-equipped for employment and require more adaptability. However, there is little consensus amongst academics that university should be geared to skill development, as it limits graduates to a mere instrumental role in the productive system, rather than being part of the process of change. Moreover, as Holmes (2001) has pointed out *"it is by no means clear that employers should want skills per se; rather, they want the graduates they recruit and employ to perform in desirable ways- competently and effectively."* It is incoherent to have competences (behaviours defined by others) for an unpredictable world (Barnett 1994 Ch5). Assiter alleges that this resistance to teaching skills in universities arises because they are seen as low level and routine, appropriate only for the lower classes. In reality, she claims, universities are concerned

with broad cognitive skills; intellectual, critical, imaginative, understanding, judgement, communication and social skills, which have intrinsic and not just market value.

This view assumes that skills can be added on to individuals, regardless of their perceptions, and used appropriately across contexts. However, transferability and generality require metacompetences, that is, the generic ability to develop competence in specific situations (Brown, in Assiter 1995). This is “an expert practitioner” (Candy and Crebert 1991), that is someone who has a set of co-ordinated skills, strategic thinking and the ability to recognise appropriateness and bring past experiences to bear on current action. However, Barrow (1999:130-142) disagrees. Skills are not generic, he asserts, and cannot be exercised in any context, not even critical thinking. *“It takes an understanding of science to recognise what is contradictory in a scientific argument and where the syllogistic reasoning is valid or invalid”*. Similarly, Barnett (1994 Ch3) doubts the existence of metacompetences, and whether they can be independent of contexts, form, traditions and expectations, and Lave and Wenger (1991) claimed that all learning is context specific.

Nonetheless, as individuals do bring knowledge to new situations, even if it is reconstructed, there must be some degree of transferability of knowledge between contexts, requiring individuals to recognise its relevance in different settings, a skill that may be enhanced through higher education. Marginson (1997) argues that individuals gain the awareness of context and the capacity to move between viewpoints, and with self-reflection, learning how to learn.

The Delphi Report (Facione 1990:2) advocates the development of critical thinking skills through liberal education (learning to think and learn for oneself) in multiple domain specific areas of knowledge.

“The eighties witnessed a growing accord that the heart of education lies exactly where traditional advocates of a liberal education always said it was – in the processes of inquiry, learning and thinking rather than in the accumulation of disjointed skills and information”.

This includes both skills (analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation) and dispositions (inquisitive, open minded, judicious, systematic and analytical, truth-seeking, confident in reasoning). It also embraces critical self-reflection and analysis, the emphasis being on developing a person as a critical thinker in multiple contexts. However, Facione offers no evidence on how these can be transferred to civic and economic life, nor does he consider the possibility that the relationships implied in liberal education may be culture-specific.

A curriculum geared to skill development is also contested because other areas of the curriculum are neglected, further eroding the boundary between university and the interests of state and society (Barnett 1994: 64). "*Merely skilful*" is limiting, claims Barnett (ibid ch.4), as wisdom is substituted by behaviour (skill, competence, outcome, information, technique and flexibility). Barnett argues that a curriculum biased towards an increasingly limited interpretation of skills is displacing the notion of objectivity and truth, which are the traditional values of academia. However, as higher education is also concerned with practical matters, Magalhães and Stoer (2003) suggest a continuum rather than a dichotomy between emancipatory pedagogy and skill-driven performance, in which skills and personal qualities are both useful for personal development and economic performance.

3.6 Students and learning styles

According to Barnett (1997), critical thinking consists of cognitive acts by individuals and leads to new productive capacities, possibilities, flexibility and efficient strategies, but mere thinking is not enough, he says. Corporate critical thinking is task-orientated and instrumental, rather than internally orientated. Its strategic role is for organisational domination, and skills are performed with a range of acceptability, and as such, are limiting. Critical thought implies thinking and collaboration and comes from sustained interchange around collective standards, but does not necessarily relate to "*action with the wider world of social arrangements*" (Barnett 1997:104). As social change requires the involvement of a student's whole being, through action, reflection and reason, and involving emotions and courage, it is not just critical thinking skills that should be developed, but the whole of their "critical being" (Barnett 1997)

This critical agency is a development of the traditional role of the reflection by the university on society, reclaiming the university from the limitations of economic necessity. It can be seen as an academic attempt to regain autonomy through individual agency. There is a similarity in this to Jung's suggestion (Fordham 1953) that we embrace the shadow of humanity's collective psyche, through facing our world as well as ourselves. The shadow cast by economic and scientific progress can be confronted, rather than ignored, for a wholeness and balance in society. Barnett (1998: chapter 12) asserts the need for responsibility and wisdom, the ability to take up multiple perspectives, and "*life world becoming*", which incorporates reflexive knowing, openness, and continuous dialogue, with a value orientation for the common good.

However, the desire of the student to become "critical beings" is not considered (Tapper 1999:135). Nor are the practical possibilities of doing so once the realities of post university economic life are upon them. Barnett's arguments are philosophical rather than sociological (Skelton 1999:128, Tapper 1999:133) and take no account of gender, race, class etc (Skelton 1999:129). There is no consideration either of whose version of responsibility and wisdom truth he is talking about (Hughes 1999:131). Finally, it is hard to know how to develop this practically (Tapper 1999:134),

There is some evidence that students need to have further opportunities to engage critically with knowledge. This is required in the knowledge economy (see chapter 4), but is also a necessary part of reflexivity, which is how "*an individual [or institution] monitors what is happening and anticipates how she/he can use this for change*" (Scott 1995:176-8). This links mass higher education to change, as new perspectives form the basis of future action (Scott 1995:116, 162). This is part of reflexive modernity (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994), but it is only one of the many modernisations currently in process.

Yet Phillips and Bond (2004) and Mann (2001) argue that opportunities to develop criticality are underdeveloped. Mann argues that students are consistently estranged from the language, culture and discourse of the context in which they find themselves. This leads to surface or strategic learning, involving memorisation and a lack of reflection rather than deepening their

understanding. She explains this as a process of alienation from the subject and process of study. This may happen more with students who find themselves in higher education for socio-economic reasons rather than through a desire to understand. They either have to engage in the world of academia and thus lose their capacity to connect with their own desire and voice, or withdraw.

Surface and strategic learning may take place when students do not see the relevance of a discipline (Gordon 1995) or if assessments (such as multiple choice exams) appear to require surface rather than deep learning (Scouller 1998). However, students who perceive themselves as proficient (Cassidy and Eachus 2000) are less likely to engage in surface learning, but may engage in strategic learning, that is, undertaking perceived requirements but with the aim of achieving higher grades rather than deepening understanding. Deeper learning is more likely to take place with dialectical pedagogy (Rosie 2000). However, these styles are not stable characteristics of students themselves, but vary according to teaching approach (Biggs 1999), and the students' personal situation (motivation, workload and other personal commitments). Sometimes surface approaches to learning are more relevant (Ramberg and Karlgren 1998). The important thing is that students need to understand when deep, strategic or surface learning is more appropriate, (Coffield et al 2004) and to have the skills and opportunity to engage in deep learning when necessary. However, it is higher education's role to provide those skills and opportunities.

3.7 Whose meanings?

This chapter started with the assertion higher education now has an ambiguous identity, so that students nowadays may not have a clear idea of what it is all about and how it can affect their lives. The idea of higher education, argues Barnett (1990: ix) derives from common conceptions going back to the first universities, although he does not argue that this version of university ever actually existed. It is this idea of higher education that is currently threatened by epistemological and sociological changes. Opportunities for engagement and pursuit of the truth have been compromised through the lack of academic freedom and the relativity of truth, together with the shift to market trends and a focus on skills.

There are new sets of meanings of higher education to be negotiated for contemporary students; avoiding unemployment and gaining credentials, acquiring relevant skills, investing in themselves and becoming a consumer of higher education, and becoming someone. Higher education is now open to women, a wider variety of ages, classes, and ethnic groups, but the culture of institutions may be alienating for some, and unobtainable for others. Learning opportunities are negotiated according to each student's perceptions and horizons, so individual meanings and values of higher education may not be close to any common understanding of the term. British graduates still believe that higher education has taught them to think critically (Leathwood 1998), whether or not this is really the case, but this is a cultural view of higher education, which may not have much in common with perceptions outside Britain.

Higher education has the potential to transform students' horizons and their perceptions of themselves (Barnett 1997, 2003), and is linked to reflexive modernity (Scott 1997). However, only a few studies have explored how students are changed through higher education (Ainley 1994) or what they most value about it (Henderson-King and Smith 2006, Honkimaki et al 2004, Furnham and McManus 2006, Waller 2004).

As an institution, higher education is capable of changing the relationship that individuals have with knowledge, the world and with themselves. This is not just a question of rational reflection, but of participation in the social world, in which relationships, resources, contexts and chance opportunities have an effect. Consequently, the meaning and value of higher education may change with the transition to work, and graduates' experiences may be shaped by opportunities and limitations in the changing world of work. The question is whether their experience of higher education continues to be influential after graduates' transition to work, and whether they perceive this to be so.

4. GRADUATES' TRANSITIONS TO WORK

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have argued that higher education has the potential to change individuals' relationships to knowledge, developing them intellectually and culturally, although individual perceptions of higher education depend on positioning and participation in the social world, in which relationships, resources, contexts and chance opportunities have an effect. This chapter argues that perceptions continue to be important in the transition to work as graduates decide what relevance higher education has for the world of which they become a part, and that these perceptions are shaped by opportunities in the economy and workplace culture. So the process of transition from higher education to work is not just about finding a job, but involves the subjectivity and perceptions of employers and graduates within cultural and economic contexts which shape and limit actions.

The majority of research into transitions to work is concerned with graduate employment, reflecting a growing concern over whether the expansion of higher education is being met with a commensurate expansion of opportunities in the labour market (Sanyal 1987, OECD 1992; Vincens, 1995; Moscati & Pugliese 1996; Lin et al 2000, Harvey et al 1997, Brinkley and Fauth 2006, Felstead et al 2007, Brown and Hesketh 2004). Human capital theorists (such as Schultz 1963, Kurtzman 2001) claim that the supply of educated labour is a part of the creation of the knowledge economy, thus implying that increasing education levels leads to increased productivity and the creation of work.

The transition to work is also affected by employers' recruitment practices, (Brennan 2000, Harvey 2003, de Weert 2007, Allen and Veldon 2007), and is influenced by class, gender and ethnicity (Elias et al 1999, Harvey 2003, Brown 2003, Brennan and Shah 2003, Connor et al 2004, Brown and Hesketh 2004, Furlong and Cartmel 2005, Salas Velasco 2007, Einarsdottir 2007). Employers' expectations of graduates' skills and knowledge, which varies according to national cultures, are also important for recruitment (Schomburg and Teichler 2006, Allen and

Veldon 2007, de Weert 2007). Once in work, cultural attitudes and barriers in firms (Evans, Taylor and Boss 1992, Senker 2002, Evans and Rainbird 2002, Harvey 2003) and management styles (Hofstede 1996, Cameron and Quinn 1998) lead to limits on how graduates can act on their knowledge in the work environment.

The strategies used by graduates to find work that they regard as possible and suitable is a process related to their beliefs, expectations and resources (Evans and Heinz 1994, Evans et al 1999, 2000, Evans and Furlong 1997, Reyneri 1999, Harvey 2003, Brown and Hesketh 2004), and also to their social networks (Field 2003a, b). Once in work, graduates need to adapt to the culture of the workplace, learning appropriate skills and values, (Lave and Wenger 1991, Candy and Crebert 1991, Hodkinson et al. 1996, Holmes 1998, Lawy 2000, Bloomer and Hodkinson 2000 a, b, c, Hodkinson and Bloomer 2002, Harvey 2003, Crebert et al 2004, Murdoch and Paul 2007). Student expectations, life goals (Garcia-Aracil et al 2007), and the perception of experience (Lawy 2000) are all important in this process. Also important are social networks, both for building new skills (Field 2003a) and for innovation and knowledge exchange (Maskell 2000).

4.2 The economy of opportunities

One of the driving ideas behind education policy in Portugal (chapter 5), and much of the rest of the world (Brown, Green and Lauder 2001), is that national competitiveness depends on having a highly-skilled workforce capable of producing high value-added goods and services. Schleicher, in the Lisbon policu brief, claims:

“Evidence shows- consistently, and over time, that countries and continents that invest heavily in education and skills benefit economically and socially from that choice... OECD studies show that money spent on obtaining university qualifications pays dividends higher than real interest rates” (Schleicher 2006:4).

Increasing access to education is supposed to be better for individual income and employability (Becker 1964) and the economy as a whole (Schultz 1963, Romer 1990) through increasing knowledge, productivity and capacity for innovation. Romer argues that knowledge is the basic

form of capital, and that economic growth is driven by the accumulation of knowledge; new ideas lead to the creation of new objects or services, the improved efficiency of organisation and different uses of objects.

There is substantial empirical evidence showing that educated workers in general are more highly paid than the less educated (Becker 1964, Wolf 2002:15). Graduates are more likely to be employed than non-graduates (Brinkley and Fauth 2006); are less likely to experience long-term unemployment (Brennan et al 1993, 1996, 2000, Connor et al 1997, Stavik and Arnesen 2007), and have financial advantages (Brennan et al 1996, Felstead et al 2007), although at a variable rate of return (Ashton and Green 1999:64-5). Moreover, US research suggests that higher education increases professional employment by legitimating new forms of knowledge and expertise (Fiala 1991). Trudeau and Martin (1999), using econometric regression analysis, claimed that university research together with increased graduate productivity provided a major increase in GDP in Canada.

However, although educated workers have greater pay and higher employment, this is not necessarily a reflection of productivity. Salaries also reflect "*sectoral, organisational and social factors*" (Esland et al 1991:22). For example, graduate salaries and employment vary according to gender and the prestige of universities attended, suggesting that power relations shape definition and recognition of skill (Brown, Green, & Lauder 2001:22). There are also other factors that can increase productivity, including motivation, attitudes and discipline, (Woodhall 1988:27). Qualifications are thus seen as a sieve for preferable motivation and attitudes to authority, which employers sometimes see as more important than actual skills. Yet certain skills, especially literacy and numeracy, are more important for work than educational qualifications according to longitudinal studies on the stability of employment (Wolf 2002:34).

There are good reasons why education and training have increased in importance in modern economies. The production of goods and services can now be carried out anywhere in the world, so it is increasingly difficult to compete on the basis of low-cost labour alone. Instead, human capital theorists argue that competitive advantages come from innovation in a

knowledge-driven economy, which is "*one in which the generation and exploitation of knowledge play the predominant part in the creation of wealth*" (United Kingdom Department of Trade and Industry, 1998). This seems intuitively true; rapid changes in modern technology require multi-skilled workers, (Felstead et al 2007) who are potentially easier to retrain and adapt to the changing needs of the economy. Advanced economies are restructuring away from manufacturing towards a greater number of service industries. Although service industries do not always require high skills, the professional occupations that do, such as medicine, management and education, are increasing in number (Wolf 2002).

According to the theories of the knowledge economy (Romer 1990), educated workers are the source of innovation and change, thus future wealth. However, first, this argument neglects the role of capital resources to bring new ideas to market and risk-taking by entrepreneurs for developing new innovation (McCullagh 2006). Secondly, there is an overemphasis on education as a factor of growth while other factors are disregarded, such as investment, political stability and physical resources (Hutton 1996, Mullan 2004). Thirdly, claims that education is correlated with economic growth (Schultz, 1963; Trudeau and Martin 1999) do not prove that one causes the other. Indeed, the direct relationship between the two is strongly contested (Ashton and Green 1996, Brown, Green and Lauder 2001, Wolf 2002). Mullan (2004) argues that the role of technological advance is underestimated, so growth does not arise from the sum of discrete components, such as labour and capital, with education accounting for the residual element.

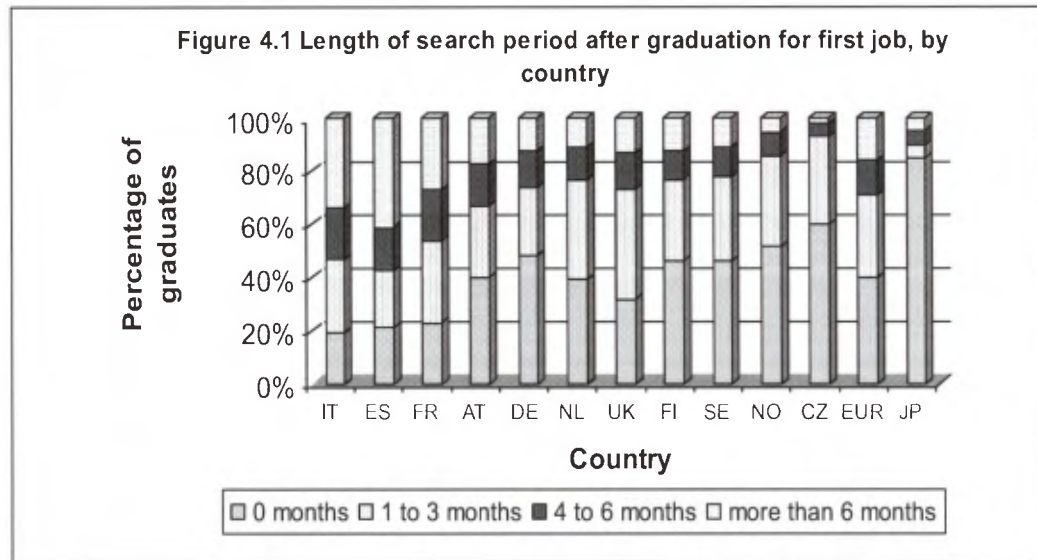
Finally, whereas some developed economies require a wide distribution of skills throughout the labour force, others are successful with an elite group of highly skilled workers. According to Brown, Green and Lauder (2001:142-147), at one extreme, competitiveness in high skill societies (such as Germany) comes from scientific elites and high quality intermediate skills, and a generally high level of education of the population. At the other extreme, there is a polarised high skill/low skill model (such as in the UK and USA), in which competitiveness is based on a combination of innovation and productivity in some high tech industries and services, and low skills/low income in others, mediated through flexible labour markets and capital productivity.

Moreover, there is evidence that economic growth comes from the demand for educated labour, not its supply (Avis et al 1996, Coffield 2002, 2004). Finegold and Soskice (1988:214-257) have argued that British manufacturing typically involves few skilled workers and graduates, and a relatively uneducated management, which makes it difficult for industry to respond to the global economy and new technologies. Moreover, they say that managers do not always value education, leading to a cycle in which "*poorly trained managers and workers produce low-skill goods and services*". The situation in Portugal is similar (chapter 6); only a small percentage of firms have highly skilled management, and the rest produce low cost goods using relatively uneducated labour. However, low-skill production is moving to economies where the cost of labour is lower and labour market regulation and trade unions are weaker (Brown and Lauder 1996:32), leading to increasing unemployment, especially among youth and the less educated.

There are arguments that the need for knowledge workers is greatly exaggerated, reflecting "*dominant political and economic interests in sustaining the belief that people have to learn for a living to maintain their livelihoods*" (Evans 2009:3). Murphy (1993:12) maintains that graduate employment follows the economic cycle rather than leading it, suggesting that economic growth is necessary for graduate employment rather than the other way round, so education is a consumer good rather than an investment good. Lower unemployment of graduates may simply be the result of qualification inflation (Keep and Mayhew 1996a: 94, Brown and Lauder 2001), rather than any change in the use of graduate skills. Brown and Hesketh (2004) argue that the expansion of higher education leads only to status congestion as an increasing number of graduates compete for a few fast-track management positions. A degree is not enough to ensure employability, they say, as "*credentials do no more than permit entry into the competition for tough-entry jobs rather than into the winner's enclosure*" (ibid 2004:2).

Yet large-scale surveys seem to show that the expansion of higher education has not led to a deleterious relationship with the labour market (Elias et al 1999, Belfield 1999, Teichler 2007a). Transitions to work across Europe do take longer now (Brennan 2000, Teichler 2002, Schomburg and Teichler 2006), but most graduates faced positive employment prospects, with

an average six-month-search period (Schomburg and Teichler 2006). Employment one year after graduation, even in jobs unrelated to the degree, is an important indicator of whether graduates will be in employment four years after (Stavik and Arnessen 20007), although initial destinations and pay after graduation are not a good guide to future employment (Connor and Pollard 1996, Elias et al 1999). A long search after graduation was unlikely to lower the quality of the work four years after graduation (Schomburg and Teichler 2006).



However, there are differences between countries, according to the CHEERS 12 country study (Teichler 2007b,c) with few difficulties in the transition from university to work in the Netherlands, Germany and Japan, but serious and lasting difficulties in others (such as France and Spain), as shown in figure 4.1. Employment for new graduates is more precarious in Italy, France and Spain (Allen and Velden 2007). Some of these differences can be attributed to legislation regarding employment protection. Stavik and Arnessen (2007:79), summarizing various factors, claim that graduates find employment more quickly in countries where employment protection is less strict, where there is more part time and temporary work, and where there is lower unemployment in the general population.

There are also differences according to subject studied (HECSU 2006, Elias et al 1999, Schomburg and Teichler 2006, Stavik and Arnessen 2007, Elias et al 1999:9), in pay and unemployment with the lowest unemployment/highest pay for maths and computing and health (except in Spain), (see figure 4.2) and vocational courses (Ling et al 2003) and highest

unemployment for arts, humanities, social sciences and law, although the class of degree and institution are also important. In Portugal, unemployment is lowest for health, computing and maths, but the disciplinary areas with the highest unemployment include social sciences, environmental engineering, and education, especially in the north of the country (GPEARl 2008).

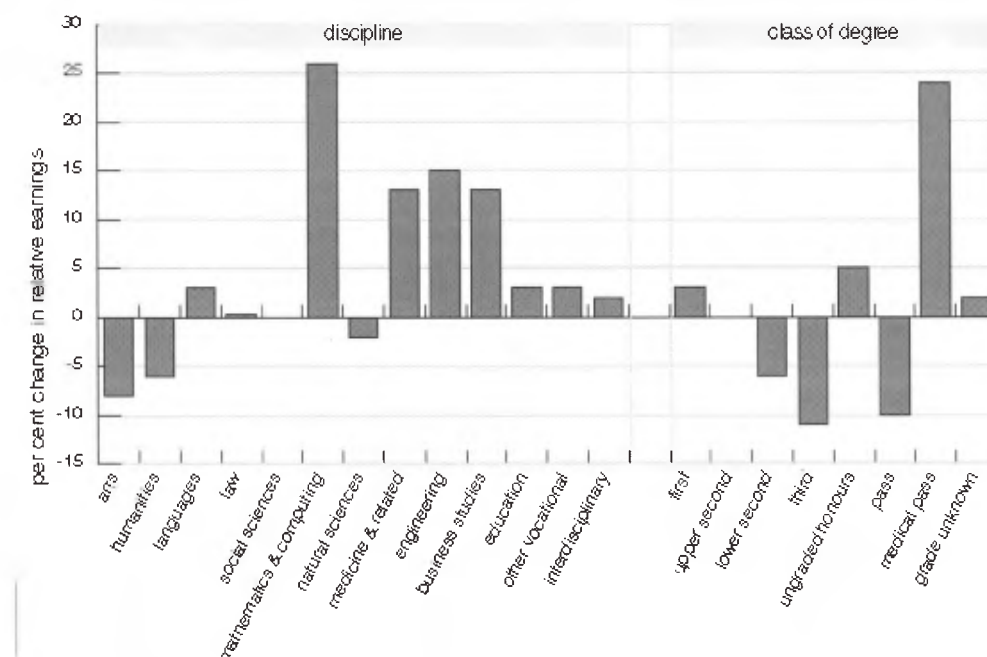


Figure 4.2 The impact of degrees on earnings three and a half years after graduation, from Elias et al 1999:9

Higher education is still relevant for most graduates in the EC in order gain access to typical graduate work. In only a few advanced economies have middle level jobs been upgraded to graduate entry jobs (Brennan 2000). By four years after graduation, most graduates find work that requires knowledge and competences from higher education (Murdoch and Paul 2007), and continue to have greater satisfaction and responsibility (Brennan 2000, Furlong and Cartmel 2007). This is true across Europe (Mora et al 2007, Schomburg and Teichler 2007b) despite labour market conditions. The majority feel that their skills are useful, with 20% seeing little or no use in the knowledge and skills that they gained in higher education (Teichler 2002), and 74% feeling well equipped for the labour market. However, UK graduates increasingly regard a first degree as the basic minimum necessary to get a job, with postgraduate qualifications as a bridge into better jobs (Brooks and Everett 2009). On the other hand, in

Portugal, where mass expansion of higher education has taken place in an economy which is comparatively underdeveloped (chapters 5 and 6), the latest employment figures for graduates in Portugal show that graduates are increasingly underemployed, in precarious employment, or unemployed at rates above the rest of the population (GPEARl 2008) (chapter 1 and appendix 1.1).

4.3 Constructing the transition,

With changing opportunities in the labour market, the transition to work has become more complex and precarious especially in southern Europe (Allen and Veldon 2007). Consequently, graduates are increasingly moving into areas that did not traditionally employ them. Elias et al (1999) claim that graduates must increasingly create their career routes rather than just follow traditional graduate career patterns.

The type of labour market can affect agency. Behrens and Evans (2002) showed that in labour markets in which employment opportunities are structured, open for those who follow certain routes, such as in Germany, failure is more likely to be attributed externally. People see highly structured environments as reducing possibilities for individual proactivity (Evans 2009). On the other hand, in deregulated labour markets such as in the UK, people show greater personal agency, are more pro-active in their search for work, but feel more responsible for outcomes, even in labour markets that are depressed (Evans, Behrens, Kaluza 1999, Evans 2001, Evans 2009). In other words, individuals, internalise responsibility for outcomes despite awareness of the lack of opportunities. This is "bounded agency", that is, individuals are aware of barriers beyond their control that prevented the expression of their agency (Evans 2009:47).

Greater agency and risk taking are shown when individuals are socially supported (Behrens & Evans 2002), so social resources are important in the process of job search. Social capital refers to the resources that people gain from relationships with others (Field 2003a). In terms of job search, those with strong social networks have advantages in the labour market, with many people gaining work through their personal contacts rather than recruitment agencies. Firms who recruit using the personal contacts of their existing workforce gain greater stability in their

workforce (Field 2003b: 51-52). However, although employers said they use both individual and structured contacts as part of their recruitment channels (de Weert 2007:229), they predominantly used advertisements.

There is some evidence that graduates' expectations of work affect their transition behaviour. De Weert's (2007) analysis of the CHEERS study found that graduates in southern Europe (Spain and Italy) prefer to work in their home region and not travel, so recruitment is regionally based. Reyneri (1999) found that graduates in southern European countries, including Portugal, are less likely to accept unskilled jobs because of the low social status associated with them, preferring instead to live with their parents until they find work opportunities they consider suitable. This implies that graduates' "horizons for action" (Hodkinson 1996:127) include perceptions about the nature of graduate work, and that they are able to resist economic pressures to work in areas considered unsuitable. The situation is different in Ireland and the UK, claims Reyneri, where graduates either find graduate-level work or displace less educated people in the competition for lower level jobs.

Expectations of the transition also vary with the values individuals have of higher education itself. Analysis by Garcia-Aracil et al (2007), using data from the CHEERS study, identified relationships between life goals, job prospects and subject of study. They found that social background and gender affected not only the choice of degree but also life goals, such as academic enquiry, money or prestige. For example, graduates in humanities were mostly female, more interested in a varied social life, personal development and academic inquiry than in making money or social prestige. They wanted opportunities to apply their knowledge in a creative way and do something useful for society. Engineering graduates, mostly male, were more interested in professional development, academic enquiry and money. Medical graduates, influenced by the high educational background of both parents, thought that working in medicine was their life goal; professional development and helping society were also important, and they claimed that money was less so. The implications are that educational background influences the value given to higher education, and the type of career path that graduates expect after graduation.

Cultural capital (the educational, social, and intellectual knowledge gained from one's life course) also affects educational choices, so individuals from the most prestigious degrees have a greater percentage of parents who have been to higher education (Johnston and Little 2007). Cultural capital continues to have an effect during and after the transition to work (Elias et al 1999, Brennan and Shah 2003, Furlong and Cartmel 2005). Similarly, Brown and Hesketh (2004:4) say that cultural capital gives advantages to some graduates as they construct strategies to manage their employability in fast track recruitment processes. Brown and Hesketh identified different transition strategies, including "purists" who rely on meritocratic competition, and "players", who sell themselves in the job market, drawing on the similarities of their cultural capital to those responsible for recruitment. Those with less cultural capital relevant to the field are at a disadvantage as they lack the social education enabling them to compete.

4.4 Management and culture

There are considerable differences across Europe in terms of the skills and qualities expected by employers of graduates (Teichler 2007b:2). In some countries, a university degree is a guarantee of knowledge and skills, especially in hard sciences. In others, it is seen as the ability to learn, take on tasks, organise their day; as a sign of intelligence and maturity, reasoning; attitudes (evidence of hard work and commitment); and field specific knowledge, especially in continental Europe (De Weert 2007). In Britain, Harvey (2003) says that graduates are expected to understand underlying principles rather than specific knowledge, even in engineering. They are also expected to have academic abilities of analysis, reflection, critique, and synthesis, but these are viewed in the context of "intelligent, rounded people" rather than as discrete skills. This is similar to Brennan's findings in 1996 and 2003, and also mirrors graduate expectations of British higher education, that they should learn to think critically and broaden their horizons (Leathwood 1998, Ainley 1994).

According to the CHEERS study (Allen and Veldon 2007), employers' selection criteria are mostly based on personality and field of study (the latter more important in southern Europe). The field of study is more important for degrees in health, law, and engineering, and less in

social sciences, arts, and humanities. Some degrees are seen as a screen for other capacities, such as analytical skills (in engineering degrees). Institutions are also important as a screening tool especially where they vary more greatly (De Weert 2007). In interviews, employers across Europe look for a mix of personal qualities and technical capabilities (reliability, sensibility, aptitude to learn, work in a team, fit into company culture), but in the UK technical skills are less important as employers tend to hire generalists and train them (De Weert 2007). However, according to Brennan (1996) employers are now less willing to bear the costs of graduate adaptation to work, although this varies with the size, nature and culture of individual firms, even within the same organisation (Harvey 2003).

Graduates are considered important for developing companies' activities (De Weert 2007, Harvey 2003). Graduates shape their work tasks and become agents of innovation within the organisation of work through their generic competencies, thus increasing the scope for further graduate employment (Teichler 1999:308, Kehm and Teichler 1995, Harvey et al 1996, De Weert 2007). Senker (2002:129) argues that firms cannot innovate unless they employ staff with knowledge of science, technology and modern management methods. However, learning processes may be constrained by the firm's culture, to which new graduates need to adapt, but which also needs to adapt if new knowledge is to be accommodated. Both Senker and Harvey argue that there needs to be a trade off between fitting in and transforming a company's culture, but graduates cannot do this without the support of the organisation, which can provide an environment for the application of transformative skills.

Yet this does not always happen, depending on the type of firm and the culture of the organisation. Hofstede (1980) describes culture as a type of mental programming that determines peoples' behaviour, cognitions and affective relations as well as the type of organisational management adopted, and may account for some of the country differences noted by the CHEERS study (Teichler 2007:2). Human resource management that emphasises command, control, surveillance and the disposability of people allows little creative space, and devalues the knowledge and contributions of individual workers. Managers who themselves have little education and training are also unlikely to value a highly educated workforce.

Management values may also be a cause in the recruitment biases according to gender, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and institution, which have been observed by several researchers (Harvey 2003, Valesco 2007, Brennan 1996, Brown and Hesketh 2004, Elias 1999, Connor 2004, Furlong and Cartmel 2005, Johnston and Little 2007, OECD 2007). Women have higher unemployment rates than men (OECD 2007), slower transitions to work (Valesco 2007), lower pay and status (Brennan 1996). This is also the case in Portugal (GPEARl 2007). Some of the biases are a result of social positioning and resources. For example, women are more likely to be responsible for childcare (Einarsdottir 2007). The socio-cultural background of candidates is also exposed in recruitment, giving an advantage to those from more privileged backgrounds.

4.5 Reconstruction of knowledge and identity

The meaning of higher education is constructed via individuals' paths through it, affecting what and how they learn. But there is no reason to expect that this will stay the same after the transition to work. Once in work, graduates need to adapt to the culture of the workplace, using relevant skills and knowledge acquired in higher education, acquiring appropriate dispositions, attitudes and other work specific skills. Although higher education is not designed to produce work-ready graduates, employers sometimes assume that it should (Harvey 2003), but in reality they go through a process of adaptation.

The process by which knowledge is transferred from one context to another is not well understood (Evans and Rainbird 2002), but research demonstrates that contexts are vital for how individuals engage with their learning, and that learning is central to how we see ourselves in the social world. A growing body of research regards learning and knowledge as socially situated rather than context free, as socially constructed rather than transmitted, as part of the development of individual biographies rather than as an instrument for the future (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998, Hodkinson 1996 Bloomer 1997, Fevre et al 1999, Ball et al 2000, Lawy 2000, 2004, Davies 2003). Learning takes place where individuals see it as necessary for their social roles and identities, so *"learning, as it normally occurs, is a function of the activity,*

context and culture in which it occurs." (Evans and Rainbird 2002) Therefore knowledge is not *"fragmented, decontextualised, cerebral and reified"*, but situated, and related to learning and being (Bloomer 1997: 164). Knowledge can be explicit (codifiable and easy to communicate) and tacit, which is *"experiential, subjective and personal and substantially more difficult to convey"* (Evans 2001).

Two concepts are useful here; the first, "learning careers" is the development of a student's dispositions to knowledge and learning over time (Bloomer 1997), and involves changes in the relationship between a learner's personal identity, material and cultural surroundings and dispositions to learning, and is marked by continuity and change, affected by both habitus and contexts (Hodkinson and Bloomer 2002). It is useful as a way of understanding how adults reconstruct knowledge and identities (Gallagher et al 2002). Additionally, the concept of Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998) has been highly influential in this area. Social identity develops as members become full (legitimate) participants and share the goals of the community. Practice is linguistic, practical and tacit, and all activity involves learning, creating generative social practices. Therefore identities develop in a particular context, with the growing and changing social relationships that are part of a particular community of practice. The practice and meanings are negotiated in the community, thus history, context, participation, practice and language are all part of changing and developing identities. As Wenger says:

"Even if we know something very well, we constantly renegotiate the meaning of the situation... we produce again a new situation, an impression, an experience, to reinterpret, modify or conform... the history of meanings of which they are a part"

Wenger (1998:52)

Thus practice is constantly emerging yet resilient, as a result of on-going situated learning, disrupted by new members, boundary meetings with members of different communities of practice, and re-negotiated aspects of other dimensions of the community.

This makes the unambiguous transfer of knowledge problematic; meanings and knowledge are negotiated rather than transparent, and in each situation they are renegotiated. Candy and

Crebert (1991) considered the context and transfer of knowledge from university to work, and concluded that there were differences in learning opportunities and individualisation between the two. In university, learning tends to be formal and planned, whereas at work it tends to be either non-formal and opportunistic (in on the job training) or accidental (through chatting to colleagues, for example). However, they underestimate the social conditions that shape learning in higher education learning; the nature of perceptions through habitus means that despite the apparent formality of learning in higher education, it may also be informal and opportunist. It is the social context of work that is different.

Hall (1989: 132) claims that practice is wholly context bound, so it cannot satisfactorily be transferred. School learning, he says, is presented as abstract memorised rules, which individuals have difficulty putting together in new contexts. This is more acute when alternative cultures are involved, such as when learning a foreign language, because languages also involve a tacit understanding of culture, which students might not learn in the classroom. However, Hall may have underestimated people's ability to use knowledge gained in the classroom in new situations; this depends on recognizing what is appropriate and useful in different contexts. For example, language learnt in the classroom does not define practice completely, but can be used as a resource in context, although it is incomplete. The transition generates a "self in practice" (Bruner 1990:119), in a variety of culturally specific contexts, generating meaning out of use.

However, the way that graduates adapt their knowledge and skills, then learn new ones, may be related both to cultural and social capital. Field (2003a) found that people use social capital to gain skills and knowledge in a number of ways, including how to do new things; attitudes and reputations are also developed through social capital, and it helps individuals to adapt to change.

Holmes et al (1998), Holmes (2001), studied graduate identity, as affirmed or disaffirmed, through qualitative interviews in transition to work. Their research supported the idea that graduate identity and knowledge in the transition to work were constructed through the joint

activity of employer and graduate, involving the expectations of each. They criticise the skills approach, which *does "not help us to understand why the graduates act in the ways described, that is, how such ways of acting relate to the graduates' understanding of what is involved in being a graduate"* (1998:6). This research is important in showing how graduates' expectations and identities adapt to social context and affect their agency in their work environment.

Apart from Holmes, research into transitions from higher education to work has not studied extensively the process of reconstruction of knowledge. There is no knowledge of how the meanings and values of higher education change in the transition to work, or what constitutes a successful transition. For example, Geyde et al (2004) studied geography undergraduates in Plymouth, most of whom expected their degree to improve their career prospects. Only 60% thought it had done so after graduation, and 35% got the type of work they had expected. It is also harder to define what graduate work is; nearly 50% of graduates who said their job was career related had not needed a degree on entry, and 25% who said the job was not career related had needed a degree to get the job (Elias 1999).

Jenkins et al (2001) studied the long run effect of a degree on graduates' lives, and claimed that the course content is less useful over time than the whole college experience. They identified oral communication skills and self-confidence as being more important factors after a number of years as. However, this appears to relate to just the British case in which higher education puts greater emphasis on personal development and skills, rather than the case in continental Europe.

Schomburg and Teichler's (2006) 12-country-study (the CHEERS study) found that most graduates thought that higher education was useful for coping with jobs. Many did not see a close link between study and employment, although time may be important, as graduates increase their use of knowledge and skills gradually over the first few years (Elias et al 1999). The highest links were for medical students (Murdoch and Paul 2007). Kellerman (2007) analysed the surplus and deficit of competences in higher education, that is, the differences in competences acquired and those needed for the job. He found that graduates in Europe have a

surplus in foreign language proficiency, field specific knowledge, manual skills and broad general knowledge. Graduates have a deficit in most areas but especially in negotiating, planning, coordinating, organising and computer skills. General cognitive and systemic competences are most developed for work, but there are big differences between countries in how prepared they are for work.

4.6 Conclusion

Although political expectations are that the expansion of higher education will lead to the development of the so-called knowledge economy, it is unlikely that supply side changes alone can lead to this. On the other hand, large-scale surveys have found that graduate employment has not deteriorated, and graduates are generally satisfied with their work and more likely to be in employment than their non-graduate counterparts. This does not mean that there is a causal relationship between higher education and graduate jobs; it is more likely that graduates follow a cycle of expansion than lead it (Murphy 1993:12).

The transition of graduates to the work place is not just a question of getting a job, and not just a function of the labour market. The transition also involves a number of subjective elements, including personal values, attitudes, social networks and resources of both potential employers and graduates. These include the process of job search, ideas of what constitutes suitable work, values and objectives (life goals of graduates and institutional goals of the firms). Finally, the process of transfer of knowledge and skills from higher education to work is not straightforward; graduates need to adapt to the culture of the firm, recognise the similarity of contexts or the relevance of their knowledge in order to apply their knowledge, but there are commercial and strategic areas in which they typically have few skills and need to adapt. How they adapt will also depend on the nature of the communities of practice, and how they are located within them; whether at the periphery, (participating as newcomers), or elsewhere. Adaptation may also depend on their social resources, in order to adapt existing skills and learn new ones.

However, there is not very much known about how graduates change their relationship with knowledge in the transition to work. In a British context, the idea of higher education of both graduates and employers seems to be matched, in that both (to some extent) expect that it develops academic abilities such as analysis, reflection, critique, and synthesis (Harvey 2003), and graduates generally do not feel misled about the purpose of higher education (Brooks and Everett (2009).

On the other hand, the CHEERS study seems to indicate that employers in southern European countries expect field specific knowledge; yet many graduates do not find work in areas that require this, leading to greater unemployment and underemployment. If these graduates fail to recognise the relevance of the skills gained in higher education, they may fail to use them, or feel dissatisfied with their educational career. Their educational values may not only affect how they act on their learning opportunities while in higher education, but also their perception of what constitutes suitable work, their negotiation of the transition to work, their recognition and understanding of their own skills, their attitude to knowledge after graduation, and ultimately, their capacity for reflexivity and change.

5. THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND THE POLICIES FOR HIGH-SKILLS IN PORTUGAL

5.1 Introduction

Portugal is characterised by one of the least qualified workforces in Europe, with 72% of the adult population having no more than lower secondary education, compared with the European average of 30% (OECD 2009). Yet, with growing globalisation, Portugal can no longer compete on the basis of low cost, and has been attracting comparatively little foreign investment ("The Economist" survey of Portugal, 2-12-00). One of the policy responses has been to increase education and training at all levels, in order to improve innovation, employability and performance.

The expansion of higher education in Portugal, unlike other more developed European countries, did not occur in the wake of Post-Fordist changes (TSER/HEINE 1998:16) but on the wave of democratic and economic reforms initiated after the 1974 revolution. This means that there was a comparatively underdeveloped productive system although, the *"belief in the modern narrative made political projects and political action blind to the Portuguese reality"* (Magalhães 2001:247). The majority of firms are small (95% of firms have fewer than 10 employees, INE 2007b: 317), run by managers with low qualification levels (61% have lower secondary level qualifications or less, GEP 2009). These managers are not aware of the need to innovate and adapt; and tend to recruit staff with few qualifications and offer little training or development (CEVAL 2009). This socioeconomic context and the history of education in Portugal are important, as they affect the meanings and values attributed to higher education by students, graduates and employers.

5.2 History

Portugal can only be understood in relation to its historical context. From 1928-1974 it was ruled by a dictatorship under Salazar that, in a Marxist perspective, was structured for the repression of the majority in the interests of the capitalist classes (Corkhill 1993:3-4, 20-21). Rural and colonial interests benefited a minority, and the traditional values kept the majority in poverty and

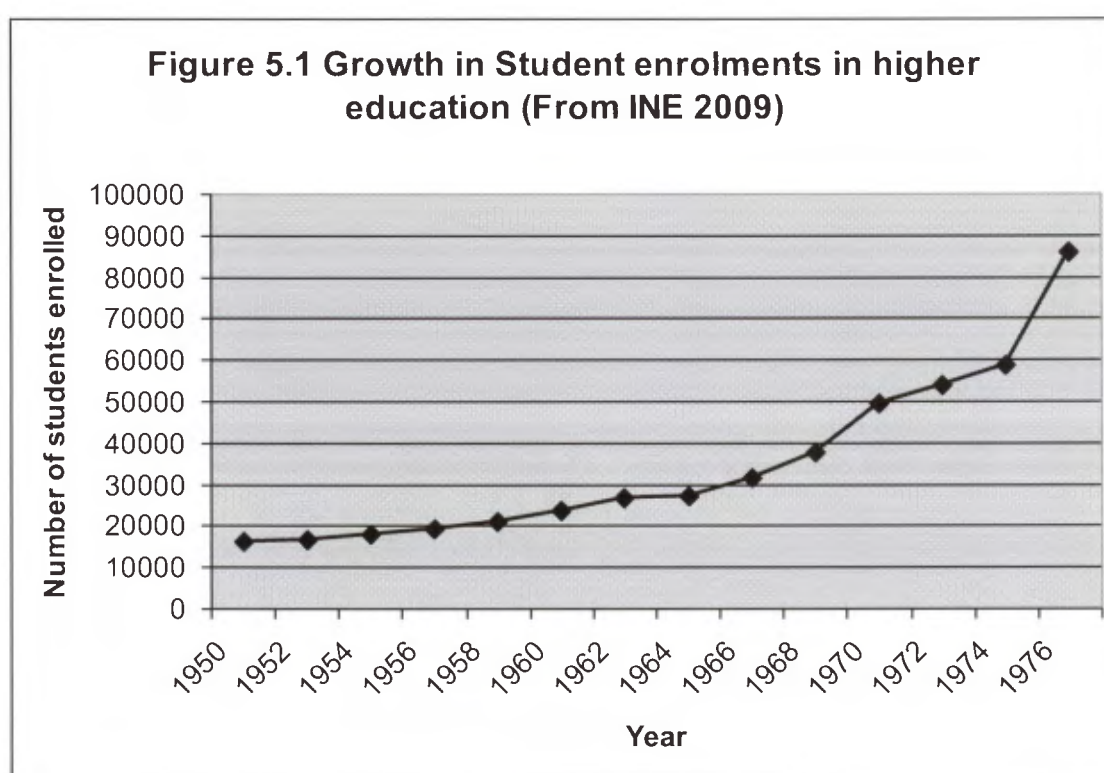
ignorance, and reserved education of any type, especially higher education, for a restricted elite. In 1960, only 1% of the population had access to higher education (Barreto 2000). At first, the country was characterised by high illiteracy, a negligible working class and largely rural population. As industrial interests developed, new educational strategy policies led to the development of a newly educated class. In order to counter the growing demands of this group, state repressive apparatus, such as the secret police, grew (Stoer 1986).

According to Stoer (1986:69), the development of the Portuguese education system in the 20th century was split into four periods. The first, following the military coup (1926) until 1945, involved the dominance of the ideology of “*God, Homeland and Family*” during which “*teaching was little more than ideological inculcation*”. Salazar believed that the main objective of the education system was the development of elites for public administration posts and large companies (Arroteia 1996). Nevertheless, he expanded the network of primary schools during this period, with the minimum period of schooling being 4 years, though in practice this was not widely enforced (Corkhill 1999:183).

During the second period, from 1945-1974, according to Stoer, education was expanded to serve the interests of economic growth. Minimum education was expanded to 6 years (in 1959), access to secondary schooling and higher education was expanded, and opportunities for work increased. However, the interests of the state and top corporations remained dominant, and despite mounting unrest arising from the newly educated classes, Portugal remained a dictatorship. These changes, according to Stoer (1986:69), led to “*the gradual incapacity of the corporate regime to inspire, organise and articulate civilian society*”, and repression became more overt, culminating in the revolution of 1974.

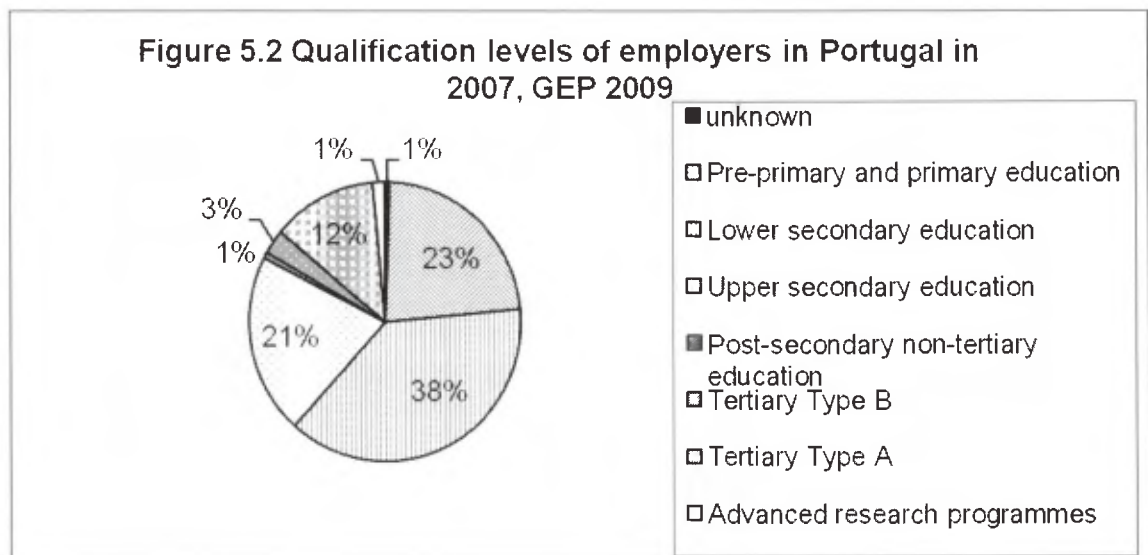
Other major factors included the political and economic difficulties of maintaining an army in its warring colonies. Trade and industrial development were doubly affected by these colonial wars, and the 1973-4 world oil crisis. Increasingly, future development envisaged closer links with Europe through an export-oriented strategy. The dictatorship, now under Salazar's successor, Caetano, eventually fell under the pressure for change (Corkhill 1993:33)

Stoer refers to the third period as running from the revolution in 1974 to the first constitutional government in 1976, which was a tumultuous period in which the fight for power and ideologies was paramount. Existing power structures were destabilised in favour of apparent greater equality through education. As Stoer says: “*Education became a means for the construction of a democratic, socialist society*” (1986:70). During this period, access to university was relaxed and it was expected that university should play a role in the construction of a socialist society in Portugal (Arroteia 1996:75). Figure 5.1 depicts the growth in student enrolments from 1950 to 1976, showing a sharp increase in the post revolutionary period.



Economically it was a disastrous period; the growth rate was negative in 1975, and unemployment and inflation increased. This was partly a consequence of destabilisation and decolonisation and state generated inefficiencies and obstacles to growth. It was also aggravated by the oil crisis, the loss of colonial trade, poverty and the lack of education and training, and the concentration of economic power in a small number of private groups (Silva Lopes 1996:22-28). Many of the previously powerful families left the country, temporarily, ruling by proxy any business interests that had not been taken over by the state.

In the fourth period, after 1976, economic interests began once again to regain dominance in education, connected with the European model of meritocracy (Stoer 1986). Previously powerful families returned to reassert their business interests, which are still significant in Portugal. However, Portugal is now characterised by a proliferation of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), comprising 99% of total firms, 83% of employment, 50% of exports, and 77% of income (Corkhill 1999). Employers are largely undereducated and use unskilled labour with low value added production. Figure 5.2 below shows the predominantly low qualification levels of employers in Portugal, with only 16% having tertiary education.



5.3 Low skills

At the Lisbon Summit in 2001, Portugal indicated that its objectives in the next 10 years were “to become an economy based on knowledge, more dynamic and competitive in the world, able to guarantee sustainable economic development with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (CNE 2002a:28). This drive to increase the qualifications and performance of its human resources is an increasing area of concern, given the growing difficulty in competing on the basis of low cost. Low levels of education, skills and productivity are problematic across all sectors in Portugal, alleged to be “a situation without parallel in other European countries” (Teodoro 2001:69). It is regarded as holding Portugal back, reducing the development of high

value added, quality production. Portugal has the greatest percentage of low trained workers in the EC (figure 5.3, below, and appendix 5.1, for a worldwide comparison). In 1999, low-skill workers made up 36% of the 25-59 cohorts in the EC, but 78% in Portugal (CNE 2002a: 44; Teodoro 2001:64-67), falling to 72% in 2009 (OECD 2009).

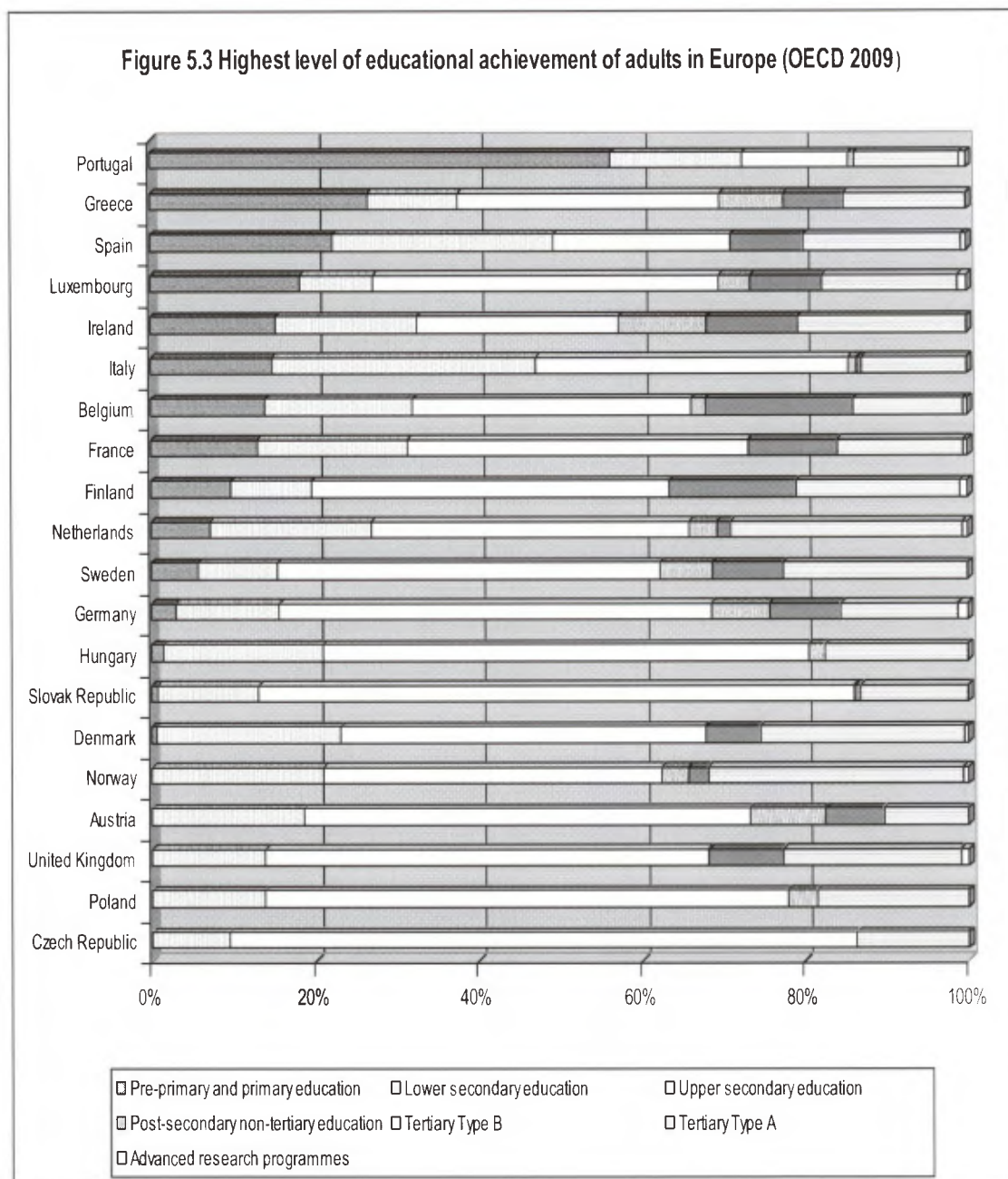
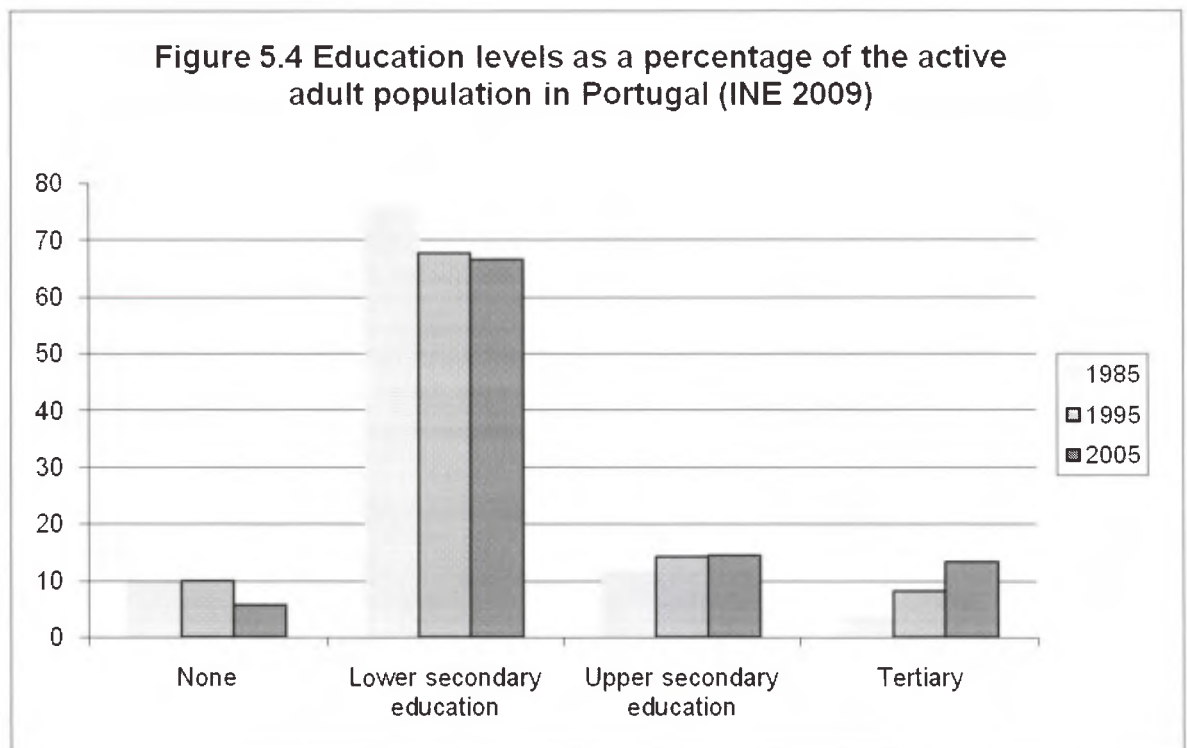


Figure 5.4 (overleaf) shows the evolution of educational levels of the active adult population in Portugal from 1985 to 2005. While the level of education had increased by 2005, 5.6% were still illiterate, and a further 67% had 9 years or less of education (INE 2009). If the whole population

is included, then over 80% have 9 years or fewer of education, and 11% are illiterate (Teodoro 2001:69). Furthermore, a study by the ICS has shown that over 50% are functionally illiterate and innumerate, that is, they lack the literacy and numeracy skills to cope with the demands of everyday life. In comparison, 20% are functionally illiterate in the UK (UN 2009). A study of literacy levels of the population aged 15-64, by Benavente et al (1996), showed that 10.3% could not process textual information of any type and 69.1% could only understand simple documents. Another apparent failure that is often cited is the TIMSS (The Third International Maths and Science Study) study, in which Portugal attained poor results comparative to other countries and the lowest result in maths (Teodoro 2001:70-71).



The continuing low skill levels in Portugal, according to a European survey (Cabrita 2008) are due to several factors. First, there is resistance by the productive and entrepreneurial sectors to adopt strategies based on high skills. There is a continuing low-skills equilibrium, whereby companies favour the production of low quality products with low added value, using standard technologies and low paid, poorly qualified workers. Few employers give further education and training to their workers (see figure 5.5). Second, there is a high drop out rate from the education system; 16.1% of students leave school during the 5th - 6th grade and 19.2% during

the 7th - 9th grade, due to factors such as lack of cultural capital relevant for the field of education among poor rural families and a lack of infrastructures and access to schools. At the same time, the existence of work requiring no qualifications, in civil construction, agriculture (Corkhill 1999) and factories (CNE 2002a), encourages early school leaving. Third, there is little investment in education and training. Fourth, there is a slow generational renewal of the labour market, meaning that the low educational levels from the past continue to have an effect.

	Total		Male		Female	
	2001	2006	2001	2006	2001	2006
EU-27	7.1	9.6	6.6	8.8	7.6	10.4
Euro area	5.2	8.2	5.2	7.9	5.2	8.6
Belgium	6.4	7.5	6.9	7.4	5.9	7.6
Bulgaria	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.3
Czech Republic	-	5.6	-	5.4	-	5.9
Denmark	18.4	29.2	16.1	24.6	20.7	33.8
Germany	5.2	7.5	5.7	7.8	4.8	7.3
Estonia	5.4	6.5	3.8	4.2	6.9	8.6
Ireland	-	7.5	-	6.1	-	8.9
Greece	1.2	1.9	1.2	2.0	1.1	1.8
Spain	4.4	10.4	4.0	9.3	4.9	11.5
France	2.7	7.5	2.5	7.2	3.0	7.8
Italy	4.5	6.1	4.4	5.7	4.6	6.5
Cyprus	3.4	7.1	3.4	6.5	3.4	7.8
Latvia	-	6.9	-	4.1	-	9.3
Lithuania	3.5	4.9	2.3	2.9	4.6	6.6
Luxembourg	5.3	8.2	5.9	7.6	4.7	8.7
Hungary	2.7	3.8	2.2	3.1	3.1	4.4
Malta	4.6	5.5	5.8	5.5	3.4	5.6
Netherlands	15.9	15.6	16.5	15.3	15.2	15.9
Austria	8.2	13.1	8.7	12.2	7.7	14.0
Poland	4.3	4.7	3.7	4.3	4.9	5.1
Portugal	3.3	3.8	2.9	3.7	3.6	4.0
Romania	1.0	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.0	1.3
Slovenia	7.3	15.0	6.7	13.8	7.9	16.3
Slovakia	-	4.3	-	4.0	-	4.6
Finland	17.2	23.1	14.7	19.3	19.7	27.0
Sweden(2,3)	17.5	32.1	15.4	27.9	19.7	36.5
United Kingdom	20.9	26.6	17.5	22.0	24.4	31.2
Croatia (3)	-	2.1	-	2.0	-	2.4
Turkey	1.0	2.0	0.7	1.6	1.2	2.4
Iceland (3)	23.5	25.7	19.0	21.6	28.1	29.8
Norway	14.2	18.7	13.8	17.2	14.5	20.2
Switzerland (3)	36.0	26.9	41.8	27.4	30.2	26.5

Figure 5.5: Percentage of the population age 25 to 64 participating in education and training, (from Eurostat yearbook 2008: 181)

The problem is also caused by employers' failure to train. According to a study by the Employment and Vocational Training Institute (IEFP), only about 8.9% of SMEs carried out any type of professional training. Of these, more than half (55.6%) were carried out with official support, which means that these small companies are still dependent on subsidies. 8.2% of these small companies consider that they have an excess of labour while 23.7 per cent say that

they have a lack of qualified labour (Expresso Emprego 11 January 1997). Yet most Portuguese entrepreneurs still see training as a cost and not as an investment, according to the Ministry for Qualification and Employment (MQE), which “*is pressing employers to see training as an investment, so that their workers are up to date and can carry out their work competitively*” (Expresso Emprego 7 June 1997). A study by the MQE showed that more than 66% of all national companies (large and small) do not give any type of training to their workers (90% in the extractive industries). This means that, compared to the rest of Europe, few workers are involved in life long education and training (see figure 5.5, on previous page).

Moreover, a study by the state education and training centre (Expresso Emprego 7 June 1997) showed that job vacancies are withdrawn because of a lack of qualifications and appropriate candidates, and at the same time, the labour market for new graduates is worsening, especially for non-technological courses (arts, humanities and law). This is one of the contradictions in Portugal. On the one hand, it still has one of the largest percentages in Europe of those who leave school early (35.9% leave before the official school leaving age, according to INE 2009), yet the percentage of those who now go on to higher education is comparable with the rest of Europe.

The consequences of these failures are a lack of economic development, low productivity, and low levels of high-skilled work. The percentage of labour in the high tech sectors is reportedly shrinking rather than growing (Eurostat 2000), not having taken up the resources available from the EC; the reasons given are the lack of qualified professionals in appropriate areas.

Nevertheless, economist and former minister for qualification and employment, Maria João Rodrigues, has said that the problem is not too many graduates, but a lack of qualified employment, deficient articulation between demand and supply of human resources and insufficient professional orientation (“O Expresso” 29 November 1997). As the National Education Council says:

“Investment in education and training will become more efficient and relevant if it is supported in a system of raising needs which is able to organise a dialogue between the

supply and demand of human resources with the perspective of the future and not merely a reproduction of the status quo" (CNE 1996:129).

These needs are embedded in a system of production and employment that still maintains a significant heritage from agriculture and traditional industries, although the developing service sector is rapidly changing Portugal's productive profile.

5.4 Changing production, changing culture

The primary sector contributes less than 4% to GNP (INE), yet employs 13.5% of the active population (Barreto 2000). 10% are in agriculture but up to 30% are dependent on it directly or indirectly in rural areas (Corkhill 1999: 127). It is an unproductive, traditional sector because of structural problems, low investment and uneducated labour; yet Portugal is the only EC country with a net contribution in this sector (CNE 2002b), CAP subsidies going more to the core countries, not to Portuguese specialities (olives, cork, wine, tomatoes). Furthermore, fishing is strongly affected by EC quotas (Corkhill 1999:130).

In 1974, 34.3% of the active population (Barreto 1999) were directly involved in agriculture, although many emigrated rather than find work in the towns (Corkhill 1999:169) after Salazar's protection mechanisms were dismantled. The continued significance of rural culture (Arroteia 1996) leads to resistance to school, and a continuation of "*paternal and marital power, women's roles in family work, and work culture involving children*" (Magalhães 2001). The practices of retaining small areas of land and the extended family act as a shock absorber in times of unemployment, protecting families from low industrial wages, wage fluctuations (Capucha 1998), and wage arrears (Corkhill 1999:172). Personal income is often comprised of a factory wage and agricultural production for commerce and personal consumption (Capucha 1998). Ironically, while protecting families and maintaining social cohesion, these traditional practices may facilitate the growing tendency for flexible work contracts in industry; the current tendency is for low skilled outworkers, part-time and temporary work (Coelho Martins 2001). In other

words, while doing what is perceived to be necessary and possible to survive, workers' horizons for action are reduced, and the structures do not change.

The low-skills profile exists in all three economic sectors (agriculture, manufacturing and service), including the growing service sector and the depleting industrial sector. Significant competitive sectors of industry include footwear, textiles and construction (Corkhill 1999:152). Most entrepreneurs (47%; Moniz 1989) show no intention of adopting new forms of work organisation and quality measures, and are more orientated to the modernisation of equipment (Murteira 1993), which tends to be imported along with intermediate high-tech products, benefiting supply countries (Coelho Martins 2001:15).

Textiles and footwear account for 30% and 4% respectively of industrial employment, 30% and 9% of exports. Although they were traditional areas of production, they grew significantly in the 1980s with EC support, but have competed on the basis of low cost associated with low wages, and have declined as labour costs have increased. They have been suffering from low-cost competition (Corkhill 1999: 158-161), low productivity and quality associated with under investment and training, especially in the large number of small firms. Textiles are particularly vulnerable because most (80%) are subcontractors, having little contact with the end client, and few own-brand products, although their image for quality has improved in association with production for famous brands. Similarly, in footwear, quality upgrading and product differentiation have helped to combat a poor brand image, but there is still fierce competition. Their geographical concentration, employing whole families (including children), means a devastating effect on local economies when they close.

Portugal is trying to escape its low-tech, cheap labour image and this is helped by the Ford-VW plant in Setúbal, with 50% of the components sourced in Portugal, adding 2% to GDP (Corkhill 1999: 160-163). But it is biased to final assembly and packaging, in other words, comparatively low-skill. High-skill management and marketing are controlled outside Portugal. On the other

hand the automobile industry in Portugal is now autonomous, so that if one major area closes, the industry still has systems and clusters to carry on. (Braga de Cruz in CNE 1996)

The service sector now accounts for about 68% of GNP (INE), but is characterised by a dichotomy between the highly qualified workers in banking and telecommunications, and the poorly qualified workers in retail and public administration (Corkhill 1999:137). Despite the predominance of hypermarkets, a large number of small family shops survive because of low urbanisation and government protection. Moreover, a large number of the small firms in the service sector are small cafés and restaurants, paying untrained staff the minimum wage. Tourism is Portugal's main export, accounting for 8.6% of total employment (*ibid*: 146), although some of this is seasonal. Yet it has suffered from a lack of quality service, infrastructures, trained staff and marketing, competing on the basis of low cost to increasing competition, although with EC support since 1993, these have been developing.

The primary sector and that of traditional heavy industries have been rapidly de-structuring in response to international competition and changing market demands (*ibid*:125) following Portugal's integration in the EC. This has led to territorial asymmetries (PNE 1999), the most development being on the Littoral coast between Porto and Lisbon, and a desertification of vast areas of inland Portugal, resulting in the increasing isolation of remaining populations and limited access to resources (cultural, educational), and increasing polarization. This restructurization and integration in the EC leads to a rupture of the social equilibrium, by altering

"The structural and functional elements which characterise Portuguese society, which, as a consequence, progressively reduces the pre-capitalist logic which still exists",
Martins (1999:38)

This is an indication of the contradictions facing Portugal; on the one hand, the traditional, Catholic, rural culture and extended family networks maintain social cohesion, peace and non-exploitation, yet on the other hand, these same values have been responsible for extensive poverty, ignorance and under-development. In the period 1926-1945, 80% of the population lived off the land in particularly poor and isolated conditions, nutrition and health care were so

low that the only solution for millions of Portuguese was emigration (Stoer 1986). There is still a continuing dependence on capital from millions of Portuguese emigrants in France, Germany, the USA and Brazil. Consequently, Martins (1999:38) and Sousa Santos (1993: 41-42) argue that it is the structure of consumption which is developed, but not the productive sector, due to non-capitalist forms of production and a significant parallel economy, plus capital from emigration and Community funds.

5.5 Culture in management and education

However, despite these changing structures, the national culture evident in organisations has changed little. Given the limited nature of tasks in most areas of production, the culture of the education and training system remains geared to the needs of the economy. Accordingly, Martins (1999:40) suggests that

“It's not strange that the type of training by the Education system is the type of training which transmits knowledge that socialises more for an uncritical acceptance than demands for quality”

According to Hofstede (1996), the resistance to the sharing of power and responsibilities, a culture of concentration of critical knowledge, and leadership marked by hierarchical distance, are classic characteristics of Portuguese organisational culture. There is some consensus on this position (Rodrigues 1994), for example, the Ministério do Equipamento (1999:IV-51) says

“There is a lack of marketing and customer-oriented entrepreneurial culture; there is management inefficiency, a lack of technological co-operation, a lack of resources and research and development. Management is very hierarchical and not very participative”.

More recently, an EC survey (Parent-Thirion et al 2007) similarly found low levels of autonomy at work in Portugal, compared with the rest of Europe, that is, freedom to exercise control over the work process, (order of tasks, the methods and rate of work, working partners, taking a short break). It also found low levels of functional flexibility and teamwork, (figure 5.6 overleaf).

However, this does not mean to say that the traditional values are the only ones in existence, and given the trajectory of the fields of power in Portugal, the crossing of trajectories with the returning emigrants and from the former colonies, it is likely that alternatives exist. Organisations are influenced by the broader cultural and social contexts, and vice versa, so political and organisational characteristics maintain the existing culture. In complex organisations the reality is of the overlapping of imprecise, fluid group cultures. In this perspective, in the same organisation overlapping and even contrasting cultures may exist, which can enrich an organisation (Cameron & Quinn 1998). However, these overlapping cultures have had little influence so far in relation to the dominant culture.

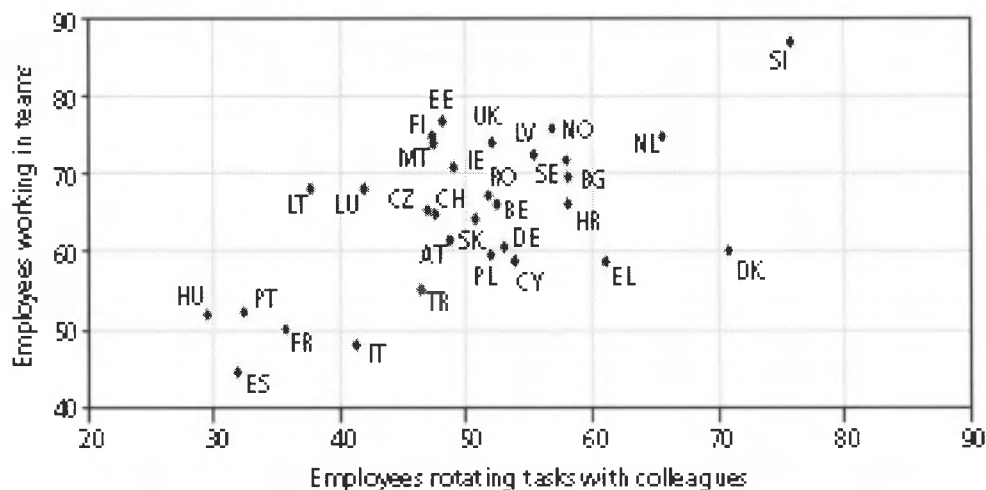


Figure 5.6 Basic functional flexibility and teamwork at work (Parent-Thirion et al 2007:52)

Portuguese businesses, especially SMEs, are family owned and controlled, leading to weaknesses in finance, management and the development of strategies. The family component is important even in major industrial groups (Martins 1999:38). As Corkhill (1999:185) says:

“The preponderance of small family-run firms reduces the incentives for investment in training in skills upgrading”.

However, one of the reasons for this is the low levels of education of this petit bourgeois class (Rodrigues 1994), leading some sociologists to believe that, given the large number of SMEs in national production, it is this social group that is holding Portugal back (Estanque 1997). However, it is the children of this group that dominate the private sector of higher education,

with cultural capital often too low (or irrelevant) to permit access to the public system (data in section 6.5.2 of chapter 6). Some graduates from private universities work in family firms, so that private sector education could be important in shaping the future of SMEs.

5.6 Policy

After 1974, policies aimed at social inclusion, welfare, and the right to work were developed, including the increase in social security, the reduction of the working week, a minimum wage, and the indexation of salaries to productivity and the cost of living. This increased costs for firms, but did not force productive restructuring to higher value production in the absence of a broad base of education and training. Firms either adapted to it or rejected it, resulting in a significant underground economy (Coelho Martins 2001). This still continues today, in the form of delayed salaries and child labour, and the highest percentage in Europe of falsely independent workers (self-employed) (PNE 2002: V-68). This is partly because of the practice of companies illegally employing full-time workers as if they were temporary, to avoid the social cost and contractual obligations. Additionally, in Portugal 22.4% of employees work on a contract of limited duration, the highest percentage of workers in precarious work in Europe (Eurostat 2009:272), making the Portuguese labour market the most flexible. Additionally, 51.7% work either part-time, self-employed or on temporary contracts (PNE 1999).

On the basis that productivity can only increase if firms are able to respond flexibly to the needs of the market, and that the sector needs restructuring for modernisation, this flexibility was increased still further (2002/3) by the right wing alliance (PP/PSD) through the erosion of worker rights, although this was resisted through the workers' unions. As discussed in chapter 2, this flexibility allows firms to intensify work and decrease costs, and leads to increased polarisation of core and peripheral workers, with greater insecurity of work for the latter, and discourages employers from investing in training. It effectively gives greater control to employers, with repercussions for wages and social stability, without necessarily increasing the investment in new forms of technology. In fact, with costs reduced through labour flexibilisation, this investment is less necessary than before, although more possible theoretically. Companies

invest very little, and carry out very little R&D, especially in SMEs, and are dependent on EC aid and foreign investment.

Policies to improve productivity and restructure towards higher value added production include the massification of education at all levels, including facilitating university access, raising the school leaving age to 15, with plans to raise it to 18. However, there is still a high drop out rate before age 15, because of the availability of work requiring no qualifications, poverty, and cultural expectations. According to OECD (2009) reports, 37% of Portuguese left school before the end of obligatory schooling in 2007, compared with an average of 4.5% in Europe. However, the nationally imposed curriculum leaves no possibility for negotiation with local needs and culture. Educational needs are assumed to be reflected in the (almost) homogeneous ethnic identity and language, local variations of which are ignored.

Corkhill (1999:185) claims that improvements made in education are having important productivity effects; one extra year of education improves productivity by 5 to 10 per cent. The OECD claims that "*closing the gap in average years of schooling between Portugal and other OECD countries might eventually raise relative productivity levels in Portugal by 13-26%*", but "*higher productivity depends on transforming ingrained habits and practices*". However, the owner/managers of the majority of the small (<50 workers), medium (<250 workers) and micro companies (<10 workers) are themselves undereducated (figure 5.2), and are not willing or able to radically restructure, and do not value training beyond the immediate needs of the firms. Multinationals have also invested in Portugal on the basis of the low costs, and have little incentive to upgrade; it is cheaper to move elsewhere, as marketing, management and design are controlled outside. In other words, education and training cannot solve the problem on their own.

The National Development Plan 1999 under the PS (socialists) stated "*the educational level of the country's population is a determining factor in its economic, social and cultural development*" (PNE 1999). Accordingly, the National Employment Plan (PNE) 2000, stated "*the general objective of the PNE is based on employability, but also to increase equality of opportunity*", and

was broadly a continuation of its earlier plans. The plan had four pillars; (1) increase employability through education and training (vocational training to young people, training courses for the unemployed, and increasing training according to employer needs amongst the employed, especially in SMEs), (2) develop entrepreneurship, (3) encourage adaptability in businesses and employees, and (4) strengthen policies for equal opportunities. It developed an earlier system of work placements aimed at getting experience for young people with lower secondary qualifications to university degree level, by paying basic salary rates and encouraging permanent employment through financial incentives. It also aimed to stimulate high skills jobs through modernisation, restructuring and conversion, and provided technical and practical assistance to SMEs.

Although the 1999 plan claimed that 30% of the unemployed had benefited from it, and youth and long term unemployed had decreased 20% comparative to the general labour force, the unions doubt these figures. Their initial reaction to the plan had been to criticise it for over emphasising education and training and not job creation. There is a lack of content of the training programme, of legal protection of workers, and of coordination with macroeconomic and labour policies. Moreover, an evaluation of the policies for the marginalized and unemployed groups claimed it could be shown that these groups did not have the same employment rights in practice, and that workers criticised the training programmes (Matos 1999). Despite these policies, unemployment has been increasing and shifting away from the goal of knowledge intensive work, and, with the current recession, moving to greater dependence on extended family agriculture. In other words, neither employability nor employment were significantly affected by the programmes.

Other obstacles to growth in Portugal include individual or group corruption (Vasconcelos 1998:397), a lack of transparency, of justice and liberty, of the prolongation of top-heavy, bureaucratic state apparatus, and continuation of closed systems of information, for example banks are linked to companies and industries while SMEs are passed over. There are also infrastructure deficiencies, bureaucratized political structures (Corkhill 1999:33) and a lack of

investment. (Porter 1996). Clearly this is not just a question of education, but of resources, structures and culture.

5.8 Conclusion

The drive of successive governments since the 1950s has been to raise skills in the interests of the economy, and, more recently, to improve its position in relation to Europe and the world economy. This has included expanding higher education, although the productive system has not expanded at the same rate. However, the governments' drive for skill development is not always successful, as people make sense of the world according to the resources that they have, whether social, cultural or economic. These resources are restricted by policies that make employment flexible and by non-participative management, as groups are made more insecure. At the same time, aims to improve social participation through minimum wages and worker rights have lead to a further disenfranchised group in the underground economy, as local firms do not have the resources to respond.

There are still many small companies that produce low value added goods and services through traditional technologies and poorly qualified workers. There are also larger companies that use the scarce skills and knowledge of a few, and the cheap labour and flexible work of a large number. One result of this is that many students continue to leave school early, and that low pay and low levels of training continue. Another is that, as higher education has expanded, graduate unemployment has been increasing.

The issue of the intended beneficiaries of the knowledge society remains. Theoretically, all Portuguese should benefit, although there are many who do not have access to education and training opportunities, and others (such as graduates) who are unable to benefit from their education due to the lack of structural opportunities available. There is a growing middle class whose children are now attending university and who want employment and a future that corresponds to their hopes. Whether these hopes, and these selves, are those of a democratic or increasingly polarised society depends on what happens in the structures beyond university.

6. THE MEANING OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL

6.1 Introduction

The massification of higher education Portugal has been rapid, considering the continuing low level of educational levels of the majority of the population, an elevated school drop out rate, and the comparative lack of development of the productive system (chapter 5). This lack of synchronisation with economic and social development in the rest of Portugal is nothing new, as Magalhães (2001b) has pointed out; modernising discourses have long been imported into higher education even in the absence of development in other sectors.

One of the main concerns is with graduate unemployment, although there is no explicit policy to ensure that graduates produced by higher education institutions match market needs (OECD 2008). Graduate employment has worsened considerably during the last decade following the first wave of mass enrolments, and unemployment of young graduates is now slightly worse than general youth unemployment (GPEARl 2008, see appendix 1.1 and 1.2). This is partly structural, due to a lack of economic development of areas requiring highly skilled workers (chapter 5) It is also partly social; graduates tend to stay with their parents and wait for work opportunities they see as appropriate (Reyneri 1999). Criticisms are also made of curricula that are out-of-date and misadjusted to the world of work. It is noteworthy that graduate unemployment in Europe in general is much lower than in Portugal; 3.6% of European graduates are unemployed, which is a third of the unemployment rate (9.2 %) of those with lower secondary education (Eurostat 2009: 283), see figure 6.1 overleaf.

There may be connections with the way culture is reinforced through institutions. The idea that graduates can affect economic and social life implies active participation, a permanent desire to learn and readiness to change. Implicit in this is critical thinking and action, in which individuals permanently revise knowledge and the environment. Yet little is known about how far these exist among graduates of higher education. Some attention has been paid to what individuals

want from university, and their later satisfaction in work, but scant attention has been paid to the social processes involved within institutions and how this relates to transitions. Knowledge, from university or work, is part of people and contexts (chapter 2 and 3). Thus attention needs to be focussed on issues of social identity and recontextualisation in the transition process. Full understanding of this involves the consideration of historical, social, political and structural factors.

A final consideration is with the process of massification through the increasing use of market structures, involving both the public and private system. These structures have been widely criticised, yet markets are a reflection of realisable choices, made possible through economic and field specific cultural capital. Rather than focussing on the social processes that have led to current choices, attention has been drawn to asymmetries in supply and demand, and to an apparent lack of quality in the private system.

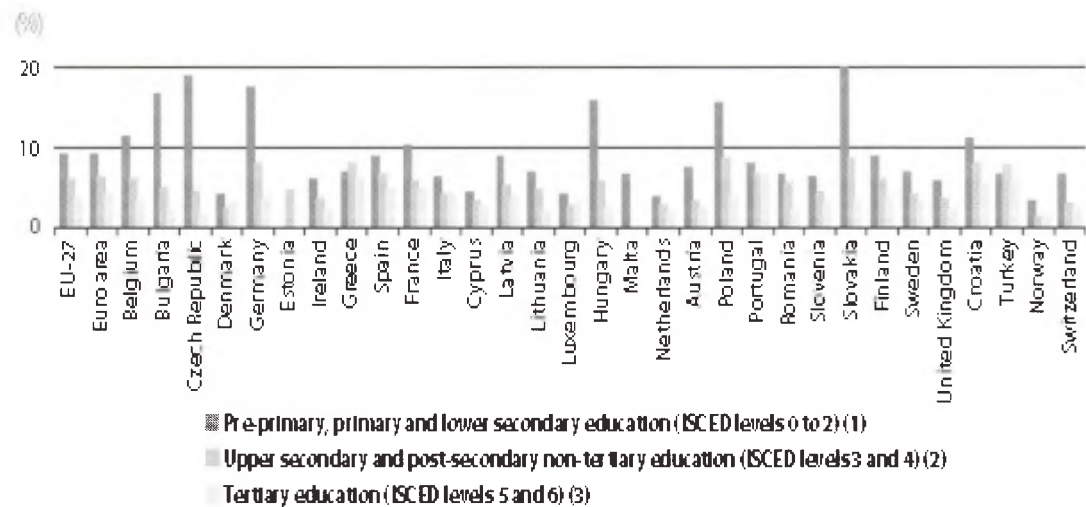


Figure 6.1 Unemployment rates 2007 (people aged 25-64) by levels of educational achievement, (Eurostat 2009: 283)

6.2 Transitions to work

Graduate unemployment in Portugal has been increasing and employment becoming more precarious during the last decade. There are more graduates than graduate-level jobs, leading to a decrease in the importance of degrees (Abreu 2001). Economists Castro et al. (1997: 78) claim that new graduates can only have been accommodated into non-graduate positions, leading to the situation of over-education, leading to lower pay in relation to educational levels

(Kiker et al, 1997). However, there is no information about how graduates approach these lower positions, and whether they have the opportunity to re-shape their work, thus increasing productivity, as they have been shown to do in international transitions studies (Senker 2002, Teichler 1989).

Alves' (2001) study of Lisbon Universities 1994-1998 showed that the time for searching for work has increased, with fewer starting work immediately, though those with higher final grades had less difficulty finding employment. The majority (68.9%) are employed within a year, 15.4% doing post-graduate courses, and 15.9% remain unemployed. Employment is more precarious with a tendency for short-term contracts rather than permanent employment. Similar results are shown by Duarte da Silva (2001), Santos Silva (2001), and Araújo (2001). Support in finding work has also shifted away from social networks towards institutions (Machado Pais 1998), although the use of contacts (teachers, family, friends) has remained a significant option (Alves 2001).

Traditionally, the largest proportion of graduates went into the tertiary sector (65.2%), mostly into teaching, and graduate unemployment was low (OECD 1992). By 2001, substantial unemployment was reported amongst teachers, suggesting the saturation of this market. Yet most graduates still go into education (37.8%), public administration (33%) and finance (23%). Unemployment for graduates has been worsening; employment centre enrolments show that 9% of the unemployed had degrees in December 2009 (GPEARl 2009), but the majority had been unemployed for less than 6 months. Over 50% were graduates aged 25-34, and 33% were looking for their first job, and the majority (71%) were female. Those with qualifications in business studies, social science and education had the highest rates of unemployment. Nevertheless, unemployment amongst graduates in general is lower than other groups; according to the permanent youth observatory (2009), in 2005 6.3% of all graduates were unemployed, compared with 7.6% of those without any qualifications. However, 13.7% of young graduates were unemployed, compared with 7.6% of the general population and 12.8% for youths in general (up to age 29).

However, unemployment rates are misleading, claim Cardoso and Ferreira (2001). They showed that in the 1990s employment expanded for university graduates across industries, but that some of the new jobs were unstable, with simultaneous job contraction and expansion. Their study demonstrated that between 1986 and 1997, employment for graduates expanded at a faster rate than the rest of the work force, but that the market was more fluid for graduates, forcing more frequent job changes.

Another major issue for researchers in Portugal is the relationship of employment to degree, which is related with graduate satisfaction with their area of study. There is considerable variation according to subject studied, but the relationship is closest in Medicine, and least relevant for arts (Alves 2001, Gonçalves 2001, Duarte da Silva & Marques 2001, Caires and Almeida 2001).

Research suggests that the opportunity to shape work tasks is limited. Teixeira (2001), in her analysis of graduate transition problems, claims that the majority of Portuguese companies managed by bosses whose cultural levels are very low, function on an overly hierarchical logic. These companies provide few opportunities for their members to develop their tasks in a personal form and to participate in organisational decisions, thus she considers it possible that conflicts between graduate expectations, identity and reality occur after transitions to work.

Two studies have been concerned with defining what a transition is. Alves (2001) suggested that it is not getting a job, but attaining a stable position in the labour market. Gaio Alves (2001) asked recent graduates and employers in interviews what a transition meant, with most suggesting it meant the capacity to develop a professional activity and emphasising its permanently unfinished nature. The majority of participants suggested that a university degree is regarded as a signal that a person possesses a set of basic knowledge or capacities in order to develop in the world of work. Thus Gaio Alves concluded that a degree and work are rationally chosen on the basis of the cost (of education) and benefit (of the working position), but are later socialised into working lives. However, asking graduates about how a university degree is seen (by others) is not the same as asking them what it has meant to them. Moreover,

there is a contradiction in the idea that educational choices are rational (implying agency) but choices of work are the result of socialisation, therefore passive. Moreover, there is no evidence from Gaio Alves' study that individual choices are technically rational.

6.3 The choice of degree and higher education

Graduate expectations of university and work have been the centre of a number of studies (Estanque & Nunes 2001; Gago 1990, Martins, Arroiteia & Gonçalves 1990; Cabrito 2001; Fundação de Juventude 1990; Martins 1999, 2001; Ministério da Educação 1º inquérito aos diplomados 1999; Teixeira Fernandes 1999 CNASES 1997). However, a researcher's initial hypothesis can appear to be supported by participants answering questions in predictable ways. Thus, Cabrito's (2001) question of whether University students expect to earn more from their degrees, which most replied to affirmatively, led him to assume that the only value of higher education is to earn more and have higher status, and does not question whether this changes across time or in transition to the labour market. Moreover, this tells us very little about how expectations of earnings is interrelated with other aspects of higher education and the way graduates act on their knowledge.

Alves' (2001) evaluation of data from a large scale study of youth and their values in Lisbon in 1997, found that higher education is a major objective to achieve, with 77.3% aspiring to it and 4.7% aspiring to postgraduate degrees. They had elevated expectations of social mobility, with the belief in the possession of a degree as a protection against unemployment and insecurity or as a strategy to neutralise social declassification. Martins (2001), similarly, says that the demand for university places is a result of individual aspirations to guarantee better social positions, and a strategy to escape unemployment, and that the excess supply of graduates to the labour market is a result of the lack of knowledge of the education, training and employment systems. The Ministry of Education (METEFP 2002) concluded that the reasons for study, whether for vocation, employment or academic interest, vary between courses. The method did not permit the exploration of how several elements can exist simultaneously, or how interchangeable they were. Moreover, the research did not consider how the reasons affected learning, and how this changed across domains.

For the Fundação da Juventude (1999), students' vocational orientations are evenly divided between studying a particular subject matter and being a professional in the area. Estanque and Nunes (2001) claimed that vocation is the first reason indicated (in a choice of three) for wanting to go to University, followed by prospective personal fulfilment. Their contribution to scientific development or society rated a poor third choice. However, as a result of the quantitative type of methodology, the study does not consider the inter-relatedness of choices, or how these change through a university career. Nor does it consider what students mean by personal fulfilment and what conditions they need to feel fulfilled. Moreover, Estanque and Nunes assume that (1) the more vocational orientation in higher education is the result of the increasing working class sector, and (2) the meaning of vocation is egocentric as opposed to altruistic. Estanque and Nunes conclude that the students are increasingly instrumental, seeing only the utility of having a degree and disinterested in the value it could have for itself. This leads to a lack of debate, apathy towards reading, and a desire only to memorise notes for exams. This tendency, they argue, has being exaggerated by the growing working class presence, who lack the cultural capital needed for success in education and are pressured by the families to live up to their expectations.

Yet the utilitarian attitudes seen by Estanque and Nunes may have arisen from student alienation within massified school systems, and from their resistance to the language, culture and discourse of the university environment (see Mann in chapter 4) as new classes resist or re-appropriate the structures for themselves. These social values have their roots in both historical development and current practices within higher education.

6.4 A brief history of the role of higher education

The first Portuguese University was established at the end of the thirteenth century in Coimbra, following church interests, the only body which was interested in education (Carvalho 1996:12-21). Its orientation was theological, but in preparation for this, instruction in encyclopaedic knowledge was needed. It was elite, other elements of society being concerned with survival and *"not being in a condition to understand the meaning of scientific or literary culture"* (ibid: 12).

However, the inquisition in the sixteenth century led to an intensification of Jesuit influence in education and politics, and Portugal tried to isolate itself from all foreign and heretical influences, by forbidding foreign study and controlling the import of books. The exodus of the Crypto Jews followed, according to Landes (1998:134), who took with them

Money, commercial know-how, connections, knowledge, and.... those immeasurable qualities of curiosity and dissent that are the leaven of thought

This resulted, according to Landes, in a loss of competence in those areas that the Portuguese had once dominated and a culture devoid of curiosity and independence of thought.

The Jesuit influence (“*a state within a state*”) was curtailed following Pombal's reforms 1699-1782, but education was given to other religious bodies, and enlightenment books were publicly burnt. Thus, says Magalhães (2001:233)

Modernity was doubly trapped: in the contradictions of the Enlightenment and the Enlightenment despotism, and in the contradiction between the high expectations created and the actual economic and cultural development of the country

Magalhães (2001b:229) argues that “*the Portuguese higher education system can only be considered as such following the 1910 Republican Revolution*” when scientific progress was institutionally accepted as a role of universities, and institutions were politically integrated by the state. Yet at the same time Coimbra university was a “*factory of politicians*” and the “*Fortress of political conservatism, of tradition, reflecting in and reflecting both the power of the Catholic Church and the ideology of absolutism*” (Magalhães 2001b:239).

The dictatorship ended political instability following the military revolt in 1926, but left control in the hands of a minority, who considered access to university as a privilege of the select few, even at the cost of basic literacy for the majority (Arroteia 1996:21). Indeed, Salazar saw illiteracy as part of popular Portuguese culture, and education as “*opening the way to crime*” (Alves 1998:44). Even in 1960 just 0.6% of the population had a university degree (Barreto 1996:89), that is, 1.2% of the active population (Stoer 1986:109). Universities were conservative places, access being limited not only to those who could finance themselves, but who had access to appropriate linguistic and social codes (Fonseca 1996:6). The dominant model of

teaching and learning was limited to the transmission of knowledge ("*mere instruction*", Carreira 1996) rather than critical discourse, and degrees were not connected to qualifications for the labour market. Jobs were largely obtained through personal sponsors, and the degree merely confirmed social status (Stoer 1986:53).

Expansion of higher education happened in three periods, and was the result of a "*credentialist and technocratic model*" (Seixas 2003:58). The first period of educational expansion from 1945-1977 was for both social order and economic development (Magalhães 2001b: 260), following a human capital approach. In the second period, 1977-1988, access was restricted through *numerus clausus* following indications of graduate unemployment. Contributing factors for this included the political and economic crisis, reductions in investment and recruitment, and an increase in highly qualified labour from the former colonies and army (Seixas 2003:73). The third period, from 1988, leading to current massification, arose from a change in access requirements, institutional autonomy, demographic growth coupled with general educational expansion, and pressure from the OECD and world bank for the diversification of higher education for economic development (Seixas 2003:78, Magalhães 2001b: 283-7).

The fastest period of growth was in the 1960s, in which general access to schooling and labour market opportunities increased. Seixas claims that families had strategies for maintaining or increasing family capital as structural changes challenged educational investment (although this analysis ignores other values of education). Politically, educational policies continued to emphasise a catholic, family and rural life, while the idea of university as a preparation for work was relatively new, and scientific and technical aspects of university continued to be underdeveloped. The emphasis in this period was to provide qualified technicians for the economy, thus introducing new values to higher education.

Although university students were a privileged group, they had no collective power to represent their rights, with academic power resting in the hands of deans and professors (Alves 1995:45). However, rebellious student groups developed in response to state repression and opposition to the colonial wars, and this was later followed by industrialists' opposition to the failure of state

control, and the emergence of divergent financial and commercial interests. (Stoer 1986:55) At the end of the 1960s, despite attempts at repression, rebellious students groups became one of the most severe challenges facing the regime (Alves 1995:45). Following this, a series of publications by Sedes Nunes claimed there was a crisis in traditional universities, which were failing to produce the skills and attitudes necessary for scientific and technological development (Stoer 1986:108-110).

It was the pre-revolutionary reforms of the minister of education, Veiga Simão, which specifically addressed the issue of the role of higher education. Universities were seen as isolated from social life (Teodoro 2001:270), and the reforms were intended to develop skills and qualifications and stimulate research, especially in the areas of science and technology (TSER/HEINE 1998:10) by the creation of new universities and institutes in diverse areas of the country, and by changing university teaching careers. New models of student participation seemed to be envisaged, including the development of “*a scientific, critical and creative spirit*” (Arroteia, 1996:30), though stressing the economic role of university graduates. Research and exclusive dedication to university careers were promoted, and lecturers were encouraged to study for their PhDs abroad, which would now be recognised in Portugal (Teodoro 2001: 272-276). At one point, doctoral degrees, which were usually only undertaken towards the end of an academic career, were such a rarity in Portugal that their possessors were automatically designated professors.

Through these reforms, education and democracy were linked to economic development, and despite a period of revolutionary change in 1974-76, these policies were further developed after 1977. After the 1974 revolution, a socialist agenda aimed to transform education away from hierarchical student-teacher relationships, no longer socialising students into the acceptance of the values in the dictatorship (TSER/HEINE 1998:11). Access to university was facilitated, envisaged by the communists as eliminating the division of labour (Stoer 1986.) Universities were expanded (data in figure 5.1, chapter 5); some developed outside the major cities and were expected to serve both economic and social needs of the population. However, during this period, unqualified teachers with particular political persuasions were installed by the

corresponding political parties, students were given credit for courses without completing requirements, activists destroyed buildings and furniture, and the atmosphere was “chaotic” (Alves 1995:45), with increasing demand for places, until the imposition of quotas in 1979.

After this period Portugal returned to the reforms started by Veiga Simão, also pressured by the World Bank. The Portuguese Ministry of Education’s aims for University Education, following on from Veiga Simão, were to stimulate cultural creativity, the development of a scientific spirit and reflexive thought. The policy states that it should:

“Produce graduates in different areas of knowledge, suitable to enter professional sectors, and to participate in the development of Portuguese society and collaborate in its continuous education. It should motivate research, the spread of cultural, scientific and technical knowledge, sustain the permanent desire for cultural and professional perfection, stimulate knowledge of the problems in the world today; provide specialised services to the community through reciprocal relationships, and continue the cultural and professional education of its citizens.” Ministério da Educação 1997

However, despite the ideals of 1974-76, there was little evidence of change in the models of knowledge transmission and dominance by university professors. Amaral (cited in Arroiteia 1996) suggests that, despite growing massification and new technologies, teaching methods have not adapted, students have excessively long timetables, and often there is no method of tutorial help for students. The lack of student success in higher education (an average of 33% in 2005, INE 2009) is always blamed on poor previous preparation. University lecturers have no pedagogical preparation, and this aspect of their role is only superficially assessed in relation to their scientific development through research (Amaral, cited in the JN 26-03-2002).

A survey by Rego et al (1998:79) found that only 23.4% of lecturers facilitate participation in class, 2% satisfactorily answer questions relating to the subject matter, and 2.1% relate to the students outside the classroom. Moreover, while 16.7% are seen as tolerant or pleasant, a further 13.5% of lecturers are seen as aggressive, treating students like children. Additionally, 83.1% of students admit that they copy in examinations (Martins, Arroiteia & Gonçalves

1999:36). The image persists of the authoritarian teachers who do not usually speak to students outside the lessons, nor encourage participation.

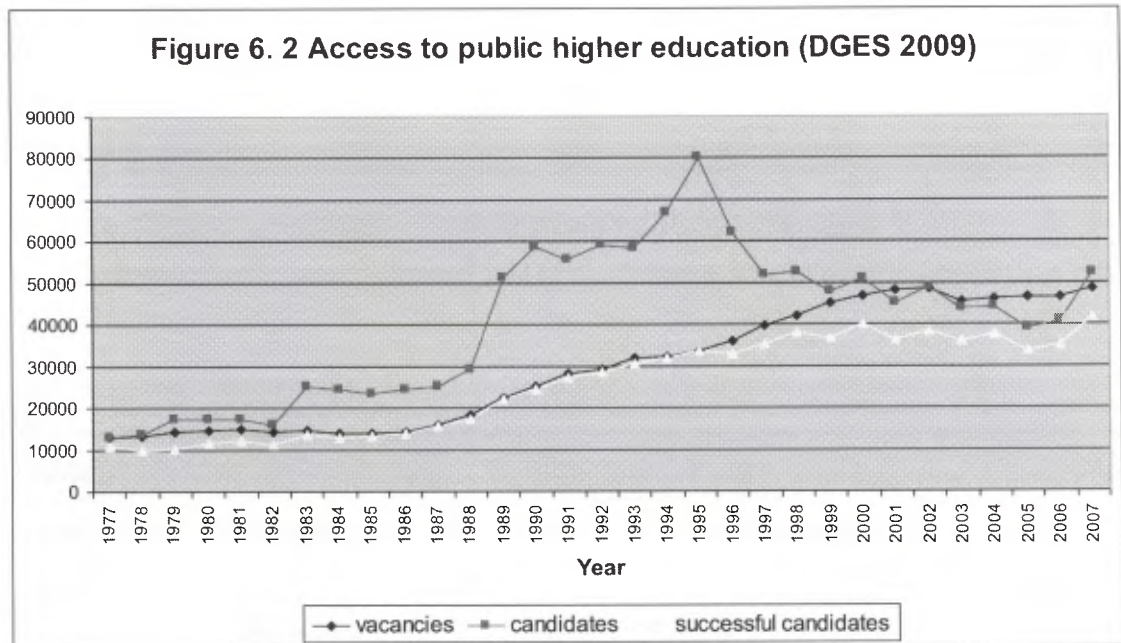
There has been some superficial attention regarding the development of critical thinking as a skill, following the recent importation of the skills debate, but analysis of its existence has been scant. Barros (2001) claims there is probably a lack of development of generic skills in general, but gives no evidence for this. 63% of young people of university age say critical spirit and creativity is reasonably well developed (Teixeira 2001) but there is no discussion about what they consider it to be. Despite lip service being paid to the idea of critical skills, Portuguese University education could be considered encyclopaedic rather than critical. It is not that critical thought does not exist within Portuguese higher education; prominent former graduates cite university as a place of debate and learning how to think (for example, Rebelo de Sousa, cited in "Mundo Universitário" 2004:22). However, others consider that the lack of democracy leads to a lack of openness and criticality (Taveira, cited in "Mundo Universitário" 2004:19). Indeed, relationships within academia tend to be formal and hierarchical, whereas critical participation requires teacher-student relationships that are less vertical (Jarvis 1992).

The verticalization of relationships is not only between professors and students. It is strongly reinforced by the students themselves. For example, university hazing ("praxis") is an old ritual of integrating freshmen in university life that frequently involves humiliation, abuse and domination of freshers by older students. Dissenters can be excluded from further participation in social activities. The "praxis" regularly makes the headlines due to its excesses, even injury to students (JN 22-10-1996, 09-01-2003). In other words, there are parallels between student practices and the lack of democratic relationships in academic and working life. These hierarchies seem to be further reproduced in the debate on the role and status of private higher education.

6.5 Private higher education

The Catholic University was the first private institution to be set up in 1967 (Gago 1994, and UC site) due to lack of supply of places in the public sector. During the turmoil of the revolutionary

period that devalued the credentials of the public system, the Catholic University was able to capitalise on an image of quality, organisation and elitism (Seixas 2000:56).



In 1989 centre right (PSD) education minister, Roberto Carneiro, expanded education by sanctioning the development of private institutions. The public sector was unable to satisfy existing demand, (Seixas 2001:228) but university entrance requirements were altered by ranking students on the basis of their 12th grade school qualifications and abolishing the minimum grade for specific entrance exams. Figure 6.2 above shows the effect of policy changes in 1989 on the demand for places in the public system, and the system's inability to respond to this level of demand. In this way the market for private higher institutions was "artificially" induced, which then led to the apparent "uncontrolled mushrooming of private higher education without regard to its quality or national needs" (TSER/HEINE 1998:14).

Figure 6.3, below, shows how the private system has been declining following its initial growth in the 1990s, affected by the expansion of places in the public system. The overall trend, of a fall in the total number of enrolments in higher education, can be explained by the demographic fall in the number of students aged 18-24.

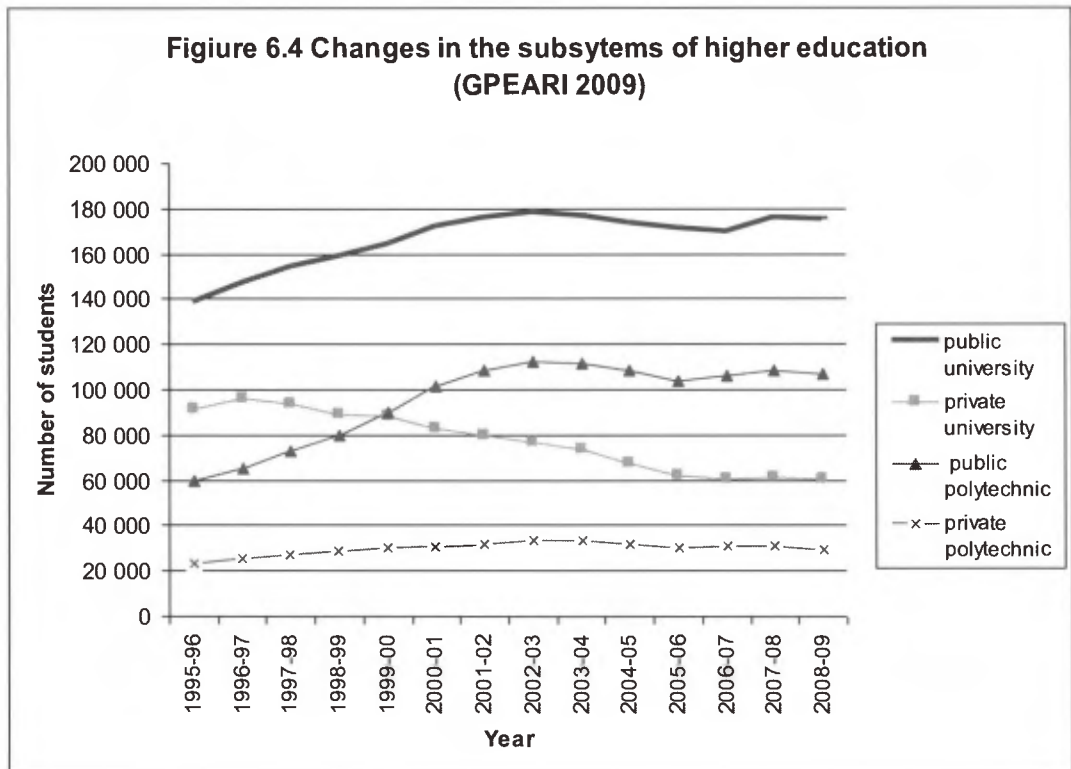
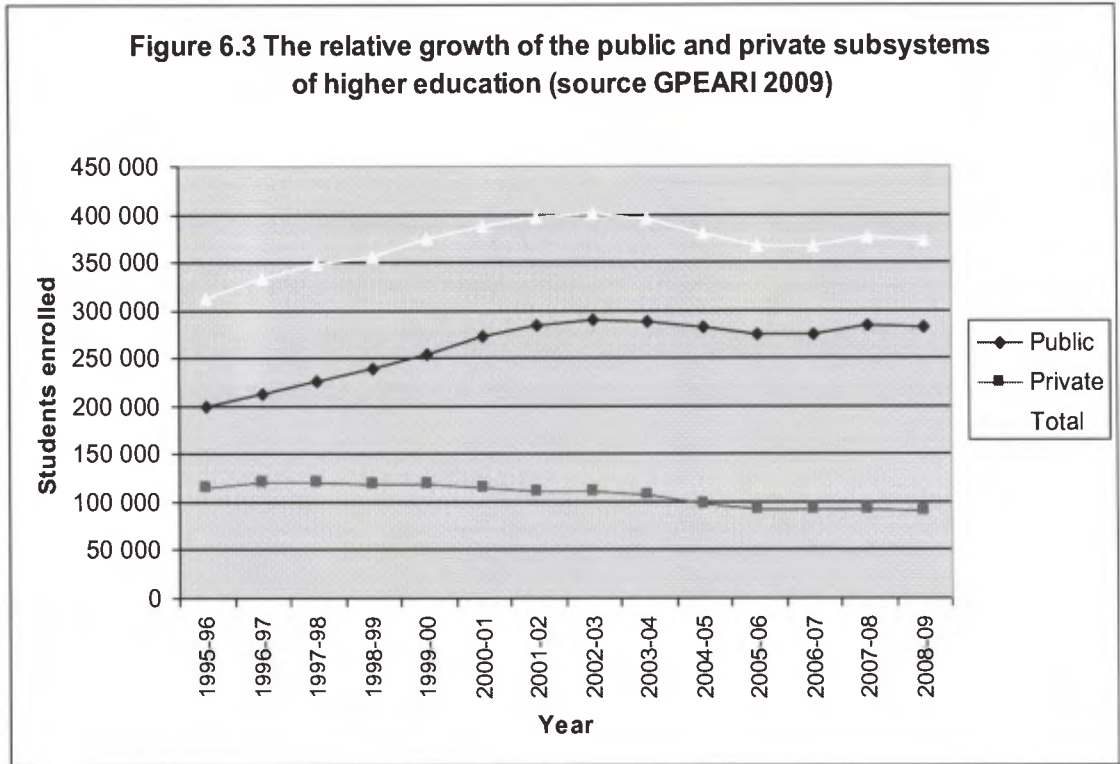


Figure 6.4 shows the change in the relative importance of the four sectors; public and private polytechnic and universities. While private sector polytechnics are relatively stable, private sector universities have declined as both public universities and polytechnics have grown.

There has been resistance to both massification and private higher education. The main areas of contention are labour market opportunities and economic needs; the quality and diversity of degrees and the shortage of qualified teaching staff to meet growing institutional needs. This shortage highlighted the problems of the developing private sector, which were reputed not to have enough qualified, dedicated staff or research facilities to be considered truly universities (in fact, the same problems that faced public universities 30 years ago).

Private universities were not intended to compete with the public universities but to attract students who did not get into the public universities. So, says Seixas (2000:60) "*The competition they promote, then, is between graduates in the Labour market*". Professional organisations, such as the Portuguese Bar Association and the institute of engineers, also feared the devaluation of professions due to the loss of rarity of diplomas implied by the expansion of the system (Seixas 2003:157). Some specifically refuse to admit graduates from private universities except after sitting a separate exam, thereby excluding them from particular types of employment. The unions (for example, the national union of higher education teachers, SNESUP 1997:3) also regard the private sector as a mere entrepreneurial project, unconcerned with quality or educational objectives.

Yet the private sector does compete with the public. Since 1988, there has been a political drive to increase the autonomy of the public sector, funding now being related to the level of student enrolments (TSER/HEINE) plus funding for research from industry. Private institutions are therefore in competition with the public sector through the competition for students, as they gain their funding from student tuition fees. Moreover, there is competition for staff. As there were not enough teachers with higher degrees in Portugal, the phenomenon of moonlighting developed, exacerbated by low salary levels in academia, ending the exclusive institutional dedication encouraged through the Veiga Simão reforms. There is also competition for status and power as graduates from the private and public sector compete for top jobs. This competition, in Bourdieu's terms (1986), is concerned with legitimation in the field, with the ensuing struggle assuring the hierarchical position of the public sector in terms of symbolic capital.

Osketch (2009) analysed models of the private-public partnership through his analysis of similar phenomena in Africa. In Portugal, the size of private education depends on the difference between the types of degrees on offer in the private and public sector, their comparative costs and resources, and how far each sector is able to meet the demand for places. Private sector universities, in general, offer similar types of courses to their public sector counterparts; however, the public system fees (€972 in 2008, according to Law 37/2003) are less than fees in the private sector (an average of €2500 per year). At the same time, both the public and private sectors are hierarchical, with the oldest universities being the most prestigious in each sector. As demand for places expanded through changes in legislation, the public sector was initially unable to cope, so excess demand for places was accommodated by the private sector. As public higher education expanded, demand for private universities fell, resulting in the closure of several institutions.

6.5.1 Quality

Currently there are published quality assessments of both the private and public sectors. However, before these were in place, both the media and academic publications affirmed that the private sector was poor quality, thus reinforcing pre-existing hierarchies (See Arroiteia 1996; Amaral 1996; TSER/HEINE 1998; Coelho Martins 2001; Alves 1995; Magalhaes 1998). For example, a headline in the "Independente" 31-03-2000 claimed that private universities were failing to adhere to legal requirements. However, the text admitted that most universities actually fulfilled most requirements. In another case headlines claimed a private university was a "fraud", (O Público 21-5-1999; 22-5-1999) having apparently collectively discharged 100 lecturers in order to make way for cheaper, less qualified staff. Yet, two years later, under the centre page headline "assessments discover widespread lapses in the teaching body" (Diário de Noticias 11-11-2001), the same private university was classified "as an example to be followed" partly due to the high qualification level of the teaching staff.

There is some consensus that the state has permitted the growth of the private sector without increasing the supporting structures and auditing necessary to develop a homogenous, quality

private sector, leading to a climate of suspicion (Seixas 2003:162). The development of quality assessments has therefore been encouraged by private universities (Seixas 2003:162); as a way of legitimating their own position. The first system of auto-evaluation introduced was principally concerned with bureaucratic issues, facilities and teaching qualifications of the staff. Recent legislation now includes external inspections, which considers the curriculum, resources, qualifications (of staff and students) and student opinions. CNAVES (National Evaluation Council, 2000) reinforced the need for developing competence and skills (including critical thinking) in higher education, which are also part of policy aims (CAE 2003a).

Credentials of students applying to university are also a factor in quality evaluations. In the public system, students generally have higher grades and lower levels of failure earlier in the system than those in the private sector and polytechnics. These same students have greater cultural resources and also value the symbolism of quality of the traditional public sector (CNASES 1997:130). This symbolism, CNASES claims, is confirmed by the structure of demand as higher social groups "*look for higher symbolic capital*" (ibid: 233). Yet it also creates the idea, along with public discourse, of a quality public sector in contrast to the private sector, which is used as a second resort by the majority (except the Catholic university). Teixeira Fernandes' study (2001) also shows that most chose public universities for their prestige as their first or second choice (41.3%) or the Catholic university (64.1%), yet more chose the private and catholic universities for the quality of their teaching (42.6%/ 69.2%), in which the physical conditions are also considered better. This is in contrast to opinions from the state sector that teaching quality in the private sector is inadequate.

6.5.2 Class and democratic access in higher education

Studies suggest that access to higher education is not yet egalitarian. Cabrito (2001) reported that despite the democratic revolution and the expansion of higher education, the proportions of classes are similar to what they were in 1963. The wealthy classes only constitute 22% of the population, yet their children dominate the higher education system, while the lower classes are under-represented (see appendix 6.3). The CNASES study (1997:49), however, shows that its massification has recently made it more democratic. Despite that, families with the highest

cultural and financial capital are still over-represented in all sub-systems, especially in the public sector. There are further distortions according to geographical origins; most qualified families reside in the cities and the less qualified are in rural areas. Public universities lead to more geographical mobility, while private universities are often chosen for their proximity to home.

Teixeira Fernandes (2001) further demonstrated a difference in class structure between public, private and catholic universities. An analysis according to parental occupation and education indicates that the class of small and medium-scale employers, relatively wealthy but uneducated (33.3% having just 4 years of schooling) are over-represented in private universities (public universities have 6.6% and private 21.9% of this class), and the classes of managing directors and scientific and intellectual professions, with high cultural capital (relevant to the fields of science and education), are concentrated in the public and catholic university sectors (see appendices 6.4 and 6.5). Children of unskilled labour are under-represented in private universities, being excluded by a lack of financial resources. In summary, private universities have some concentration of the moneyed but uncultured population, whereas public universities have higher concentrations of the groups with appropriate cultural capital, as well as those groups for whom private universities are financially inaccessible. Neither university sector has populations that are representative of class distribution in Portugal.

6.5.3 Marketization and hybridism

The process of the expansion of higher education was linked to economic development through human capital theory. Carneiro's objectives were ostensibly related to human resource development, for example "*preparing Portuguese managers for the third millennium*", "*having a sound knowledge base in his/her professional field*", with further references to skills in language and communication (TSER/HEINE 1998:14). The reforms were also aimed at reducing state hegemony and traditional corporatism (state organisation) of the public sector universities (Carneiro 1997), thus following a European trend of moving from state control to state supervision and institutional autonomy (TSER/HEINE 1998:20).

However, through the changes in public sector autonomy and the simultaneous development of the private sector, professional academic power has decreased in relation to the market and government (Seixas 2001:234), especially given neo-liberal globalisation. The system of control is a hybrid system where

"Government has substituted traditional forms of regulation with market mechanisms as an instrument of public politics, motivating the competition between institutions in the search for more efficient and more economic solutions" (CNE:2002b:23).

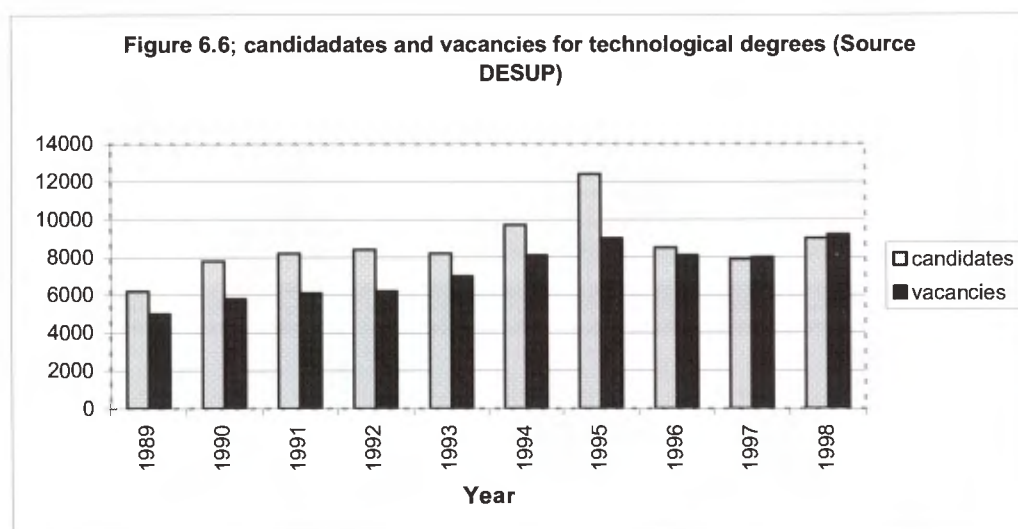
Public sector autonomy from the state means that its income is partially derived from student fees. This limits its freedom, although it has greater liberty than the private sector in the inception and curricula of its courses. The private sector must also apply for recognition for degrees awarded, (TSER/HEINE 1998:24) in an environment of continued mistrust (Seixas 2001:234). On the other hand, the TSER/HEINE claims that politicians' own vested interest in private institutions and the latter's lobbying capacity has facilitated the recognition of some courses.

Market logic is blamed for distortions in the supply of degree courses, that is, there are too many graduates in degrees for which there is not enough demand, and too few in disciplinary areas considered key for Portugal's economic development, such as science and engineering. Private universities have opened degree courses in areas which are cheap to provide, such as humanities and law, and not science and engineering, which require greater investments, and in geographical areas focussed on the major cities, rather than in more outlying regions (TSER/HEINE 1998:120-157). The supply of places is not according to Portugal's stated needs (in science and technology), but according to demand from prospective students. The implication is that the private sector is capitalising on the demands of students in its drive for profit:

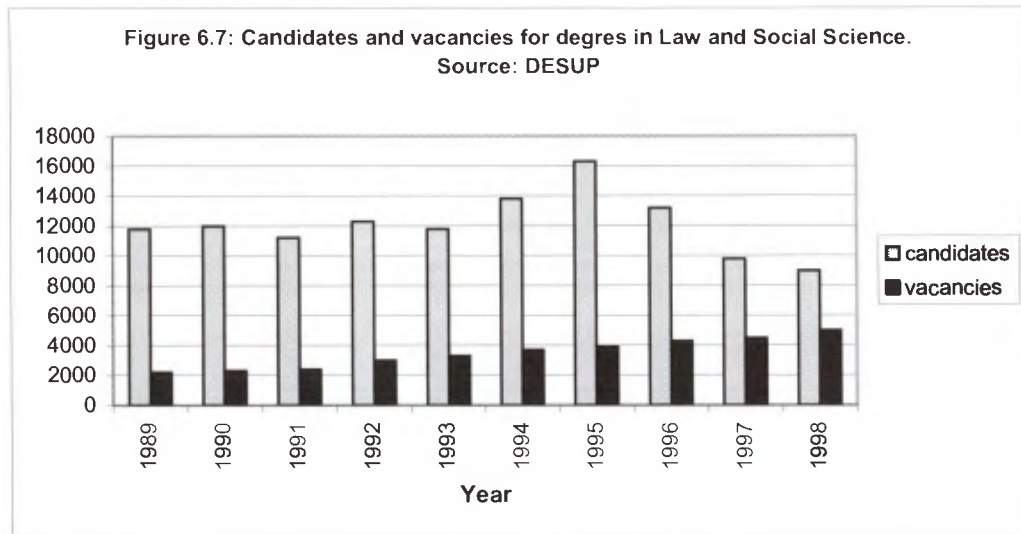
"The need to control the expansion of the private sector is justified by the perverse effects of a market logic which takes the virtue out of the principal of liberty of education". Seixas (2003:151)

However, Carvalho (CNE 2002:209) says that most institutions of private higher education were organised by public university academics without any entrepreneurial experience, so it is likely that their educational experience and aims are also important motivators.

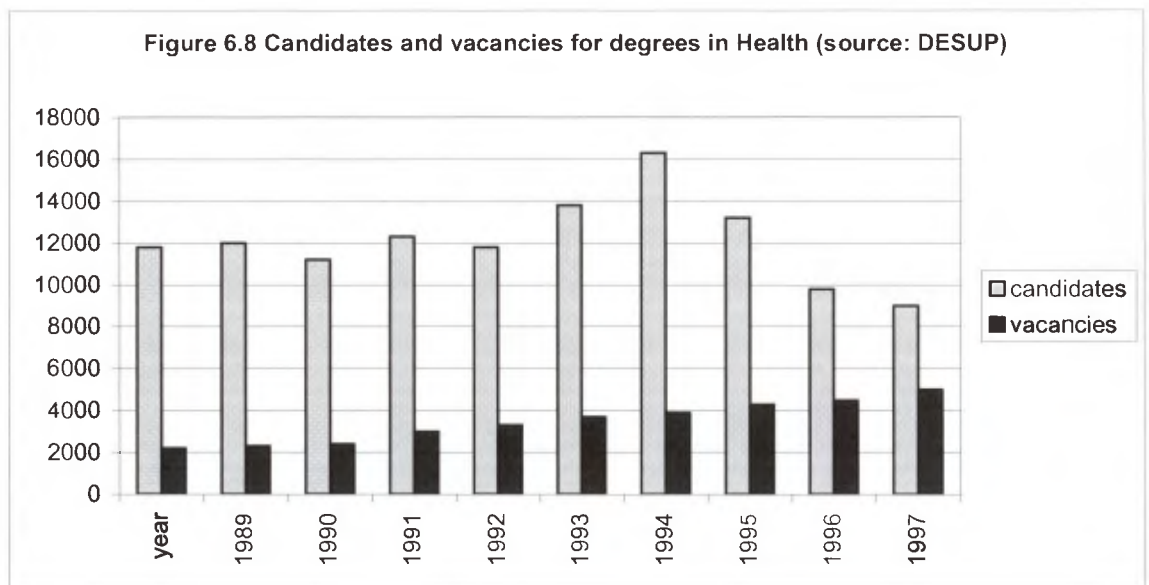
Yet the demand for places exists whether or not the supply of places can meet it. The following series of graphs show the demand and supply for places in the period of expansion of private higher education, in the decade from 1989-1999. Figure 6.6 below shows that the number of candidates for technological degrees in public higher education was met by the supply of places. Given that candidates prefer the high status public system, which is also much cheaper; there was almost no market for private higher education in this area.



On the other hand, figure 6.7 (below) shows that supply of public places in law and social sciences was just a quarter of the demand, precisely the area met by private higher education. Yet the public system has recently expanded its supply of places in this area, thus meeting demand. In other words, given the opportunity to expand, the public sector has reacted to the market in the same way as the private sector, while the private system is contracting as a result (see figure 6.1). Employment prospects have not improved, and the budgets in the public system have been shrinking. In other words, the public sector is now doing what the private of doing before; expanding places without regard for Portugal's needs.



There is one major area for which there continues to be excess demand, which is the area of Health (see figure 6.8 below). It is also an area in which there is greater demand than supply for professionals in the labour market, with a chronic shortage of General Practitioners in particular. However, both the Government and the Portuguese Medical Association have been influential in restricting places on these degrees, and although new (public) courses have just been opened, no private medical degrees have been authorized.



There are other relationships here which first need to be understood in order to focus on this apparent market distortion. One is the mechanism that drives candidates to humanities and social sciences in such large numbers. Law, literature and medicine are traditionally high status

areas, yet the first two have comparatively poor employment prospects. Clearly, if Portugal's survival in the face of global tendencies implies a need for more graduates in science and technology, the mechanisms for how individuals choose their degrees need to be understood.

6.6 CONCLUSIONS

With the rapid massification of higher education in Portugal, graduate employment has worsened (GPEARl 2008), with greater unemployment, underemployment, longer transitions to work, lower pay and less job security (Castro et al. 1997 Kiker et al 1997, Abreu 2001, Alves 2001, Cardoso and Ferreira 2001). This is partly structural, as high skill jobs have not developed at the same rate as higher education, and partly social as graduates tend to wait until they find work they consider appropriate (Reyneri 1999). Once they make the transition, opportunities to shape work tasks are limited Teixeira (2001), as low skilled managers give few opportunities for their members to participate in organisational decisions. This limits the effect that graduates can have and also leads to conflicts between graduate expectations, identity and reality after the transitions to work (Teixeira 2001).

Higher education has expanded through a private and public sector, although private sector universities have declined recently. The private sector has been criticised for opening low quality degree courses in areas that are cheap to provide, such as humanities and law, and not science and engineering, which require greater investments. However, these are the areas most in demand from students, despite a lack of labour market opportunities, leading to a competition for jobs between private and public sector graduates in this area. Nevertheless, the public sector has had the advantage of historical prestige. Moreover, some Professional organisations, fearing the devaluation of professions refuse to admit graduates from private universities without further exams (Seixas 2003:157). More recently, the development of quality evaluations has been encouraged by private universities as a way of legitimating their position (Seixas 2003:162).

The idea that graduates can affect economic and social life implies active participation, critical thinking and action, yet little is known about how far these exist among graduates of higher

education. Moreover, Portuguese higher education may be encyclopaedic rather than critical, but this has not been studied systematically. Research has indicated that higher education is chosen in order to earn more, have higher status and to escape unemployment (Cabrito 2001, Martins 2001, Alves 2001, Estanque and Nunes 2001) rather than to develop the capacity for critical thinking and reflexivity. However, research so far has not considered the inter-relatedness of choices, how they change through a university career, and what students mean by personal fulfilment, or critical thinking. A clearer idea of how individuals make choices and act on their educational opportunities would give policy makers and educators insights into what needs to be done to improve learning environments in higher education and work.

PART TWO: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

7. GAINING INSIGHTS INTO THE MEANINGS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

7.1 Whose meanings count?

In Portugal, higher education has grown to mass proportions (chapter 6), despite the lack of development in the productive system (chapter 6). Initially this was through the private system as the public system was unable to expand quickly enough to meet demand. Estanque and Nunes (2001) argue that higher education in Portugal is used instrumentally as a strategy to escape unemployment, to increase earnings and social status. However, graduate unemployment and underemployment have been increasing (data in chapters 1 and 6), which suggests that if higher education is only valued instrumentally, graduates will be increasingly dissatisfied with it in the transition to work. Opportunities to use skills, knowledge and insight acquired in diverse social and work contexts may be missed, and this may lead to limitations to the economic and social change that the government expects from it.

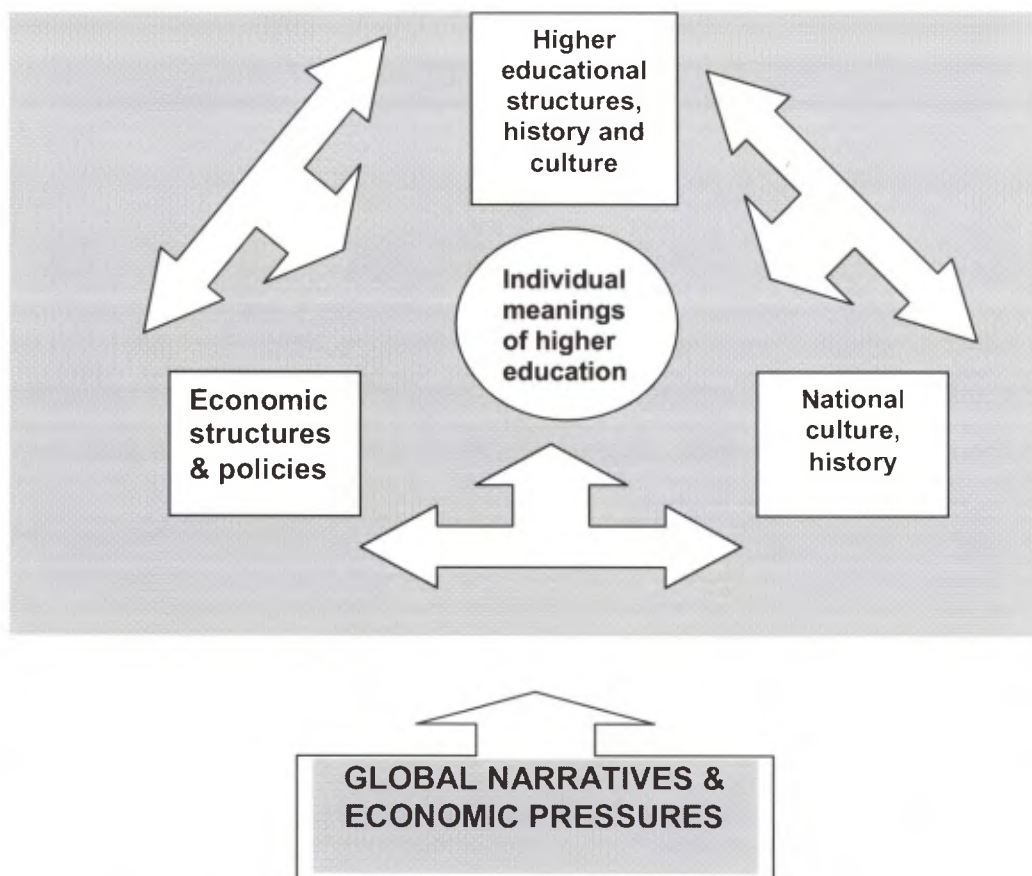


Figure 7.1 Influences on individual meanings of higher education

Figure 7.1 shows how individual meanings of higher education are affected by several interconnecting areas. Economic structures and policies, within the context of historical and political events in Portugal (chapter 5) and influenced by global economics, have affected the development of the productive and educational systems (chapter 6). These systems have created cultural narratives about higher education, which have an effect on the individual meanings attributed to it.

The values and meanings that individuals ascribe to higher education are affected by several factors, including their resources (social, cultural and economic), experience, values, expectations and dispositions to knowledge and learning (Bloomer 1997, Hodkinson et al 2008), which evolve with time and contexts, (chapter 2). Moreover, higher education (chapter 3) is supposed to get students to think critically, develop autonomy and change their relationship with knowledge (Barnett 1990, Scott 1995). However, how students perceive and act on educational opportunities (their studentship) depends on their experience, values, expectations and dispositions to knowledge and learning (Bloomer 1997, Hodkinson et al 2008), evolving with time. These values and dispositions are important, because they affect what and how students learn, the importance they give to their higher education, and their later realization after the transition to work. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that meanings and knowledge socially constructed in higher education remain the same after the transition to work (chapter 4).

7.1.2 Current research in Portugal

Research in Portugal (Estanque & Nunes 2001; Gago 1990, Martins, Arroiteia & Gonçalves 1990; Cabrito 1990; Fundação de Juventude 1990; Martins 1998, 2001; Ministério da Educação 1º inquérito aos diplomados 1999; Teixeira Fernandes 1999 CNASES 1997) emphasises the increasing instrumentalism by students in higher education, which is used as a strategy to escape unemployment and to increase earnings and social status. This, it is argued, leads to a lack of ability to debate, apathy towards reading and memorization for exams. Although critical thinking is emphasised in government policy, and students feel that it is developed, research has neither been concerned with what it actually is, nor how far it is developed. Research into transitions is growing, but it has tended to emphasise employment and relevance of knowledge

to work. Yet it cannot be assumed that the development of capacities and attitudes developed in higher education remain the same in the transition to work.

Quantitative analysis of the subjective meanings of higher education in Portugal has not been designed to address the contextual, embedded nature of knowledge and the meaning of higher education for individuals (chapter 6). Firstly, research has taken place before, during or after the transitions to work, but not longitudinally. Consequently, continuity is assumed, and changes and discontinuities are not taken into account. Secondly, existing research into values and attitudes has frequently tended to involve quantitative methods and fixed choice questionnaires. Although this means that statistically significant numbers of participants can be questioned, it limits the answers that can be given, which are assumed to lie within the parameters of choice given by the researchers. Consequently, certain aspects have not been explored, notably unanticipated meanings of higher education and how choices may relate to a sense of self and social environment.

Some research in Portugal (such as Cabrito 2001) has tended to support the idea that educational choices are made as an investment (a human capital model). This has happened for several reasons. Firstly, researchers' interpretations have generalised answers to specific questions. For example, research has asked whether graduates expect to earn more as a result of having a degree. Most answered affirmatively, but this does not mean that this is the main or only interpretation of a degree, which is what was assumed. Secondly, other research Gaio Alves (2001) has fused the internal, personal value of university education with the external meaning of a degree. For example, the belief that a degree indicates basic skills and knowledge does not mean that degrees were chosen rationally on a cost-benefit basis, ignoring self-realisation, identity, and social world. This research assumes rationality without substantiating these claims. It also fails to consider the importance of an individual's social support and resources, and attitudes to risk-taking, all which have been shown to be key factors in other comparative studies (chapter 4).

Thirdly, rationality is assumed rather than shown. Questions that ask participants to rank reasons for choosing a degree according to their importance assume a strict, continuous hierarchy, without considering how the boundaries between these reasons may be blurred or overlapping. Moreover, questions that ask about the rationality of their choices may have led to a post-choice rationalisation by the participants, even though the process may not have been actually rational. In contrast, research by Hodkinson, 1996; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, indicate that rationality is limited, and career decision-making is socially embedded.

Research has not engaged in evaluating the existence or meaning of a scientific, critical and creative spirit in higher education. Although research has found that most students believe that critical thinking exists, the researchers did not ask what students consider this to be. However, the way in which students frame their expectations and experiences in higher education affects their use and value of it. This includes their perceptions of whether higher education develops critical thinking and truth seeking, and their understanding of what that means. Accordingly, it should be included in research into students' meanings and values of higher education.

In conclusion, it cannot be assumed that there is a single meaning of higher education for all graduates of higher education in Portugal. Meanings and values attributed to higher education are important, because they frame the uses of university knowledge and skills. Moreover, they affect how universities and their graduates can be part of the process of change through critical reflexivity and symbolic reinvention. At the same time, these meanings and values are not fixed, but related to specific contexts (such as work and higher education institutions). They are affected by multiple inter-related factors, including structure (gender, class, culture and the nature of the political economy); and individual aspects (graduates' personal history, social and economic resources, self-concept, and relationships). Moreover, rationality cannot be assumed as lying behind choices, as these may be only partly rational and conscious. These factors must all be taken into consideration in order to gain insights into the meaning of higher education.

7.2 Methodological decisions

There are three broad considerations at the outset of the methodology (Hammersley 1993b: ix, Robson 1993:40, Cohen and Manion 1994:4), which are:

- The intention of the research (who it is intended to inform and why),
- The philosophical assumptions of the research
- The values of the researcher.

7.2.1 Intention of the research

The main research question is as follows:

- **How do graduates' ideas of higher education change before and after the transition to work in Portugal?**

Sub questions include:

- What expectations did the graduates have of higher education?
- What significance do individuals ascribe to their experience of higher education?
- How do graduates construct their sense of transition to work?
- How do individuals construct their identities as private university graduates?

The objective is to gain insight into what individuals expect from higher education, and how this changes with their experience of it and in the transition to work. It aims to understand the influences on their choices, expectations, and studentship while discouraging (as far as possible) rationalizations of their decisions (see methodology, below). The theoretical approach is based on Bloomer and Hodkinson's (1997, 1999, 2000a, b) work on horizons for action, studentship and learning careers, which are based on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, (chapter 2). Figure 7.2 (overleaf) shows a model outlining this theoretical approach. Culture (as the socially transmitted pattern of human behaviour and beliefs) is interconnected with policy, institutions, the economy, and individual beliefs. Individuals are positioned socially and constrained by their cultural, social and economic resources, which affects both how they act on their educational opportunities in higher education and also their expectations, strategies and resources for making the transition to work. However, these may be shaped by their experiences and relationships in higher education. Their transition is also affected by the labour

market (itself affected by the global and national economy) as well as employers' beliefs, expectations and resources.

Policy in Portugal (chapter 6) and theory (chapter 3) also envisage that higher education should develop critical thinking, autonomy and character (Barnett 1990:22, Ainley 1994:184), and that it should be part of the process of development (chapter 4). Studies in Portugal have ascertained that most students believe that it is developed, but not what individuals consider it to be (Teixeira 2001, chapter 6). Once in employment, the graduates reconstruct their identities and knowledge according to a number of factors: cultural and managerial barriers and resources, communities of practice within the workplace, as well as their own expectations, strategies, and resources (chapter 4).

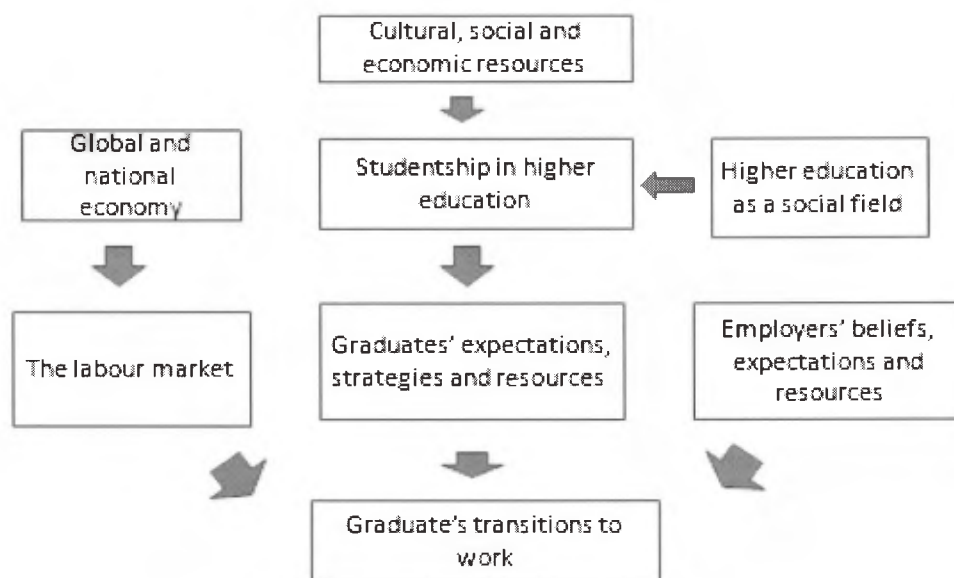


Figure 7.2 Model of theoretical approach

Change arises out of the relationship of structure to agency. Agency encompasses thought, decisions and behaviour, which can be maximised through education by improving rational thought, information, and discussion (chapter 2). This idea is most radically explored by Barnett's (1997a) concept of critical being, in which opportunities can be opened through higher education for widening the concept of critical thinking to critical self-reflection and action. This

would, theoretically, radicalise what Emirbayer and Misch (1998) refer to as reflexivity and symbolic reinvention, not just in thought but in action, thus increasing agency. Although subjectivity always lies within the limits of structure, change can only happen through reflexive agency, which is how “*an individual monitors what is happening and anticipates how she/he can use this for change*” (Scott 1995:176-8). For this reason, the research needs to understand how far this type of agency is engendered in higher education, and what inhibits or encourages its development.

7.2.2 Methodological philosophy

The methodological decisions here are inseparable from underlying assumptions about human nature and knowledge, analysed according to four aspects described by Cohen et al (1994:6).

Ontology: The thesis presupposes that knowledge cannot be separated from the meanings ascribed to it by individuals from within their cultural and historical perspectives, thus it is embedded. This emphasises the role of subjectivity and human consciousness in recreating the social world. However, this does not mean that there is no external reality. Routinised practices and beliefs of the external world are drawn into consciousness in a non-contemplative way through the iterational dimension of agency (Emirbayer and Misch 1998). Thus aspects of the social world, such as class, ethnicity and gender, are effectively external structures. Although these externally defined categories are always subject to individual interpretation, the pervasive and continuous effects of these structures demonstrate an independent reality. Indeed, social research has repeatedly shown that such categories act as effective boundaries to agency and change, thus the social world is not wholly interpretive and subjective. Some limitations come from outside, such as Portugal’s internal wealth and resources, current structures of employment and the legal system, and its economic position on the periphery of Europe

Moreover, consciousness itself has a physical reality that exists prior to the social world, as apparent through recent advances in neuroscience. Consciousness continually shapes dispositions and perceptions of the social world. The social world, in turn, affects the development of extended consciousness and social identity, but not unconscious, proto-self,

present before birth (Damasio 1999:154); or core-consciousness (Damasio 1999:16), that is, a sense of self in the present moment, and the source of emotions (Damasio 1999:219), which is stable across a life time, under strong gene control. Thus the social world and consciousness are interdependent, but do not have a causal relationship in either direction. Biological dispositions, in this way, limit the potential of agency (even though these potentials may be unexplored). Social reality, as perceived, both creates and limits the potential for agency. Thus there is a reality to both consciousness and external world that cannot be ignored, although individuals' perceptions and constructions of their world are vital to what they believe and how they act within it.

What this means for the research methodology is that external conditions can be, to some extent, measured; categories such as social class, gender, institution policy statements, economic development and employment structures can be described by an outside observer. However, individual perceptions affect responses to these structures, so a key aspect of the research involves understanding these perceptions, a process that is problematic, as discussed below. Moreover, as thoughts and beliefs are related to context, and may change, they cannot be assumed to continue from one context to the next. This implies the need for longitudinal rather than cross-sectional analysis.

Causality and voluntarism in human nature: Neither external structures nor neurobiology are wholly deterministic, so genetic patterns, social class and gender do not determine behaviour. These may produce resources, propensities, opportunities and perceptions, resulting in certain tendencies. Theories emphasising deterministic structures allow little scope for choices, reflectivity and understanding, and fail to explain differences in cultures, class and families (chapter 4). Evidence of individuals who break out of conventional patterns suggests that there is a scope for agency that is not limited in a simple way by existing social conditions. Yet the case for mere voluntarism and purely rational action must also be rejected. Hodgkinson and Sparkes' (1993) concept of "horizons for action" demonstrates this principle well, that is, perceived opportunity structures, limited by external opportunities. Individual perceptions are shaped by habitus, so opportunities may be understood to be irrelevant, inappropriate or

unattainable despite any reality that may exist. Thus individuals neither choose their destiny nor are determined by the world around them.

The question for research, accordingly, is to understand how active reflection on choices, such as the decision whether to go to university, differs for individuals. There may be differences in the perception and pro-activeness in relation to the structure of opportunities. Research methods cannot assume, in advance, where these individual differences may lie, how much rational thought is involved, which factors are important in arriving at these choices, how far the actions of a reflective agent overcomes initial perceptions of choice, or acts to change perceived obstacles. According to Wilson (2004), all stories we tell about ourselves are rationalizations, and in the context of interviews, these may be constructed narrative versions of the social world that are familiar cultural stories, and do not represent truth (Miller and Glassner 1997:125). Yet Miller and Glassner say that while this means that interviews cannot be the source of authentic data, they can still be the source of insight.

Epistemology: The idea that knowledge and beliefs about higher education are embedded in individuals means that these are not observable. Behaviour can be observed, but this may not indicate whether individuals feel alienated from practice or fully engaged, unfulfilled or fulfilled, frustrated or contented. Moreover, observation gives us no access to the internal mechanism by which knowledge and meanings are reconstructed across contexts, relating university to work and social practice. Neuroscience emphasises the importance of emotions in thinking, understanding and decision-making, which take priority over language, meaning that people are neither dissolved into discursive structures nor rational, autonomous receivers and transmitters of knowledge. In other words, there are manifestations of a physical reality which impact on the socially perceived world.

This has implications for both researcher and researched, for, as knowledge is embedded in individuals and in contexts, this implies the absence of positive facts that can be observed as external to the problem to be studied. Moreover, the researcher's own subjectivity is implicated; her knowledge is embedded within her own understanding, values and specific contexts, and

consequently she cannot be regarded as a neutral observer in a positivistic way; the researcher's values are thus implied.

7.2.3 Research values

Hammersley (1993a) points out that "*the rationale for a focus can never be solely factual*", and that values are implicit or hidden within it. Eisener (1992:51) explains that perceptions of the world are framework dependent, influenced by points of view, focus, language, framework, thus making the researcher's subjectivity an integral part of the research. These must be identified in order to bring objectivity into the process (Seale 1999; Eisener 1992)

The need to consider values is equally important for qualitative or quantitative research. Robson (1993:58) suggests that all sciences are interpretative, and human values cannot be ignored, as observations are infused with assumptions. However, acknowledging that all research has limitations is not enough to qualify the research as relevant, or useful. Phillips (1989) argues that objectivity comes from a process of evaluation and criticism, rather than the pretence of objective truth (see sections on validity, researcher subjectivity, relevance and ethics). Moreover, research can still be rigorous if we acknowledge our prejudgements, values and subjectivity, which need to be critically assessed in relation to the research framework. Thus the declaration of research values and positions enables readers to make their own evaluations (Fairclough 1988). This is built into the analysis; the research is not construed as a positivistic attempt to reach the truth, but one in which meanings are brought into the research context by both the researcher and the participants.

As a teacher in private higher education, my initial concern was regarding students' engagement with their university knowledge and experience, and perceived cultural differences between Portugal and the UK. The students' stories in Portugal seemed to indicate that they were using education as a way of gaining encyclopaedic knowledge for future professional application. They did not appear to see higher education as a place where they could learn to think critically, where they could gain freedom to think, or develop personally, and seemed frustrated by attitudes to private higher education.

This research aimed to find out systematically how students constructed their expectations of higher education, and whether it changed in their subsequent work contexts. An underlying value of this research was to give the students / graduates in this university an opportunity to express their opinions. In order not to restrict the participants' options and to give importance to their points of view, I aimed to use semi-structured interviews, rather than structured interviews or questionnaires. This is a value in itself, but also related to participant motivation: what they say matters and they are given power as experts in the topic of interest.

7.2.4 Choices in the method of research

The aim of the research was to develop an understanding of how the idea of higher education is perceived by graduates before and after the transition to work. The aim was to explore rather than test a particular hypothesis, which meant that the research design had to remain open to unexpected data from the participants. The major decisions are outlined below.

- **Longitudinal research** was chosen in order to study changes and adaptations over time, across the transition to work, an aspect not considered by research in Portugal. It cannot be assumed that knowledge, and values remain constant from one context to another. Indeed, it is pertinent to discover how far the effect of the university context influences graduates in their subsequent environments after the transition to work.
- **Qualitative data** in the form of semi-structured interviews was considered to be more appropriate, despite being less generalisable and replicable than quantitative data, for the following reasons:
 - (i) A tentative semi structured form, consisting of a list of topic areas and open ended questions, can allow feelings and views to emerge, explore unexpected data and negotiate meanings (Silverman 1999, Robson 1993, Cohen and Manion 1994). The intention here is to get at graduates' views of themselves, and their values and attitudes towards education across the transition process. The view of oneself is considered to be a social construct, largely "*constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives*"

(Giddens 1991:244), which is not static or self determined, as socially structured fields (such as the institutions) through which individuals pass are significant for reflexivity and turning points, and personal change. Thus assumptions need to be avoided, and the research methods need to be open to unanticipated issues. However, topics need to be limited to those most pertinent to trajectories through university.

- (ii) Semi structured interviews avoid imposing a framework on participants, so researcher's perspectives do not have so much power. This was considered important not only in order to explore new perspectives, but also because of the different cultural frameworks of researcher and researched (the interviewer was English, and the participants were Portuguese). Yet communication is never transparent; participants' replies also depend on their understanding of questions, and it is also the researcher who limits time, questions, and areas of relevance. Consequently, the method of collecting data affects the type of data collected (Breakwell 1995:309). In the case of this research, the data relating more to feelings was in line with the importance ascribed to emotions in constructions of the self and knowledge.
- (iii) The exploration of the importance and feelings ascribed to choices may limit post-event rationalisations about meanings choices.
- (iv) Spontaneity, flexibility and sensitivity to the respondent are not only part of the method to gain information, but also to gain trust and build inter-subjectivity in the interview context. These are also important in drawing on participants' emotional self (Cohen 1994:288, Rogers 1961:365-378, 39-56) and require the context of non-directive, interviews. Research suggests that unstructured or semi-structured interview formats generate more trust and authentic insight into beliefs and feelings than questionnaires and structured interviews (Seale 1998:204).
- (v) Trust and authentic insight may increase according to the relationship participants have with the interviewer. Although research suggests that self-disclosure is greater when both parts believe they are similar (Breakwell 1995:239), differences between researcher and participants can also be used to positive advantage. In the case of these interviews, where the interviewer was English and the interviewees were Portuguese, neither can assume that they have the same references, so language and

events can be discussed for their meaning. Rogers (1961) argues that the necessary qualities of maturity (congruence, empathy and respect) also apply to research, helping to build inter-subjective depth. In this research, the interviewer is considerably different with regard to culture, language, age, social role and gender (in some cases).

- (vi) The research-participant power binomial is redressed, the participant gaining freedom and voice (Seale 1998:205). This is both a research value and part of participant motivation.
- (vii) The idea that identity lies in behaviour, not words (Silverman 1997, Lave and Wenger 1991), depends on the form of identity we are talking about. In this research, it was important to understand the engagement, reconstruction and realisation of the individual self across the transition, which is gained from insight into individual thoughts.
- (viii) Observations were not considered relevant because they do not reveal preceding or subsequent events, participants' feelings and motivations.

7.3 Research design and data collection

The principal data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, one before and one after the transition to work. Further elements were also included as follows:

- Backgrounds of participants were gathered through pre-interview questionnaires, so that details of gender, geographical origin, schooling, parental education and occupation could be gathered; these were compared with existing quantitative studies (from Teixeira Fernandes 2001, Barreto 2000, and the National Statistics data base, INE)
- A further layer was added by the contextual description of the institution involved, its described aims and objectives, and an interview with the head of the institution concerned.
- Finally, perceptions of employment opportunities were compared with national graduate employment statistics and satisfaction surveys, the institutions' own employment record (which existed only in a limited form).

A single institution was chosen in order to focus on differences between degree subjects within the institution across the transition period. The institution chosen, which for reasons of confidentiality is not divulged here, was a new (not Catholic) private university, in a major city in

the north of Portugal. My own familiarity with the institution, in which I teach, facilitated access to students who were about to make the transition to work, and in-depth contextual knowledge. The university will hereafter be referred to as UDC for “Universidade de Cidade” i.e City University (not its real name).

7.3.1 The choice of the participants

Time was a major factor in limiting the number of participants, who were chosen from 3 degrees plus a fourth for the pilot study. The aim was to interview 15-20 participants twice, plus 2-3 in the pilot study, generating 35-46 interviews. In practice, there were 25 first interviews, and 18 second interviews following the transition to work (see figure 7.3 overleaf), including the pilot study (see also summary of participants and their family backgrounds in appendix 7.8). The degree areas chosen represented a range of practical subjects (civil engineering and administrative sciences), and areas that may have attracted students for their own personal development and understanding of the world (anthropology, and psychology, in the pilot study).

<i>Number of students:</i> <i>Degree Course</i>	Pre-transition			Post-transition		
	<i>males</i>	<i>females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>males</i>	<i>females</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Psychology</i>	1	2	3	0	2	2
<i>Civil Engineering</i>	5	3	8	5	2	7
<i>Administrative Sciences</i>	1	5	6	1	4	5
<i>Anthropology</i>	3	5	8	1	3	4
TOTAL interviews	10	15	25	7	11	18

Figure 7.3 The total number of interviews in the study

The difference between genders shown in these examples is not representative of the proportion of males to females studying each degree throughout the university. For example, the gender ratios in civil engineering were not 5:3 as in this reference, but 15:1. Gender differences are important, but a representative sample would have meant too few of the opposite gender.

7.3.3 What is a transition?

There is no clear period following graduation in which individuals can be said to make the transition to work in Portugal. It is common practice for students to undertake a work placement in their last year of study, an essential component in the UDC. Indeed, the list of students about

to make the transition to work used in this study was generated from the UDC office responsible for these placements. After the placement of 3-6 months, the students return to the university to complete their dissertations, and unfinished disciplines. However, if the students are offered a permanent job while on placement, they usually accept it, working full-time while finishing their dissertations and uncompleted subjects, (this often happens in civil engineering). In this case, they must be considered to have made the transition to work, although they are not yet graduates. In other cases they return to the university to finish their degree then continue with further study, particularly if they perceive the labour market to be difficult. Thus the transitions were sometimes extended by several years.

All students chosen for the study expected to make the transition to work in the year after the interview, although some had had their placement and others not. All students with permanent jobs were excluded, whether part time or full time, on the basis that there would be no comparable data of before and after the transition. Mature students were also excluded, as they would have had work experience already.

The complicated transition period was responsible for extending the timescale of the research to over two years between the first and second interviews. The first interviews took place between May 1999 and January 2000, and the second interviews took place between July 2000 and July 2001. Participants who had not been working for 6 months or were not in a full time employment search by July 2001 were excluded from the second interviews, (although no participants were unemployed). Other individuals had delayed their transition to work because of unfinished or continuing studies, or personal reasons. A few were impossible to trace, or had moved away.

7.3.4 Problems of entry and access

Formal permission ("*entry*", Ball 1993) to interview students and discuss the UDC was given verbally by the Dean, who also gave an extended interview as part of the research process. The Dean did not prohibit the use of the university's name; this was a research decision to protect the confidentiality of those involved. Permission was also given to involve the services of the

university placement office, which was responsible for generating lists of students undertaking work placements.

Access to the students was facilitated through my own contacts. The participants were told that the study was about their transition through university and into work, concerned with their individual values and meanings of their university education, while at university and after they had entered the labour market. Both issues of confidentiality and time commitment were discussed. Research involved a short questionnaire, interviews of up to an hour, before and after their transition to work, and on-going phone discussions and feedback through summaries of the transcripts of the interviews. Some candidates declined, being unable to commit to future interviews within the timescale or because they were still studying and not intending to start work. The aims of the study, issues of confidentiality and participant involvement were also included in a covering letter (appendix 7.1) given to the participants with the pre-interview questionnaire (appendix 7.2) prior to the first interview. They gave their authorization for using quotations and information at the interview. I also said that the research process was open to their opinions or questions, and that they would be welcome to read the final result.

7.3.5 Interview arrangements and further contacts

Factors that can influence outcomes include time of the day, year, place of interview, and rapport. Both interviews were held in an office at the University, at a mutually convenient time and date. First interviews were generally during the day, but second interviews were mostly in the evening after work, participants frequently travelling some distance, indicating their continuing commitment to the research.

Contact was not limited to the interviews; after the interviews, they were given a summary of the interview, as I understood it, with an invitation to comment on and change anything they regarded as not representing their intentions. Between interviews and feedback from the summaries, I phoned them to check their progress in finishing their degree and searching for work, logging each phone call on a summary sheet for each participant. I also sent Christmas cards, as a way of maintaining continued contact and interest.

7.3.6 The pilot study

Before the pilot study, the questionnaires and interviews were tested out with two colleagues who helped considerably in discussions of what I really wanted from each question, and the best way of putting this in Portuguese. Some questions were relatively closed, did not stimulate a response, meanings were ambiguous, and there were too many questions. After improving the basic design, two pilot interviews were carried out (pre and post transition) with psychology students in order to see if they functioned well, if there were further modifications necessary, and to practice a semi-scheduled approach. As no major changes were made as a result of these pilot studies, they were included in the analysis. (Robson 1998) suggests that valid data can be generated from the pilot studies.

7.3.7 Questionnaires and interview schedules

The questionnaires were written in order to generate data about the individual's family, educational and work background, with additional questions to start them thinking about their reasons for going to university, personal influences, choice of institution and degree, and future intentions. The interviews were semi structured, as summarised in figure 7.4 below, and were concerned with developing an understanding of how the idea of higher education is socially constructed by graduates before and after the transition to work, starting with the construction of choices of their degree and institution, continuing with how they perceived university life, their path to employment, and finally how the meaning of higher education changed in the transition to work

<u>1st interview (before starting work)</u>	<u>2nd interview (after starting work)</u>
The route to university	The route to work
Adaptation to university life	Adaptation to working life
Relationships	Relationships
Personal change	Personal change
The main benefits of higher education	The main benefits of higher education

Figure 7.4 The interview schedule

The interview with the Dean was developed from the university's own publicly stated objectives. The objective in the interview (full transcript in appendix 7.4) was to get the Dean's opinion on how the university tried to achieve its objectives, how far it succeeded and the difficulties encountered. Moreover, the UDC's objectives are very close to the stated aims of the Ministry of Education, leading to further points of comparison.

7.3.8 Practical problems

The major problem encountered in the research process was maintaining contact with the participants along the period of study, predicting which participants would make the transition to work, and maintaining a balance between genders in the study. In future research, this could be avoided by expanding the choice of subject areas to those with less bias towards males or females, expanding the time scale available, and choosing exclusively participants who had completed their placement and were in the process of writing their dissertation while in full-time education (which might result in different participant profiles).

Other practical problems encountered were finding time to meet; the unpredictable unavailability of an office; acoustic problems in new offices resulting in poorer quality tape recordings; telephones ringing mid-interview and other interruptions; participants who forgot the time and day of the meeting, or who were unavoidably delayed, or who forgot to complete their pre-interview questionnaire; tape recorders which suddenly fail, tapes which end mid-interview.

Problems included the ability to handle semi-structured format without losing track of the main focus or forgetting a question, re-formatting questions spontaneously to fit with the flow of the participant's discourse without changing the question; getting taciturn participants to speak, garrulous participants to focus on the issues of interest within a limited time-scale, and suspicious participants to open up. My experience in several areas helped me, including previous research, participation in university support groups, and training as an oral examiner.

7.3.9 Limitations of the research

The main limitations of the research are the following:

- Small group size (not statistically significant).
- The limited number of degrees involved (four.)
- The specificity of geographical area (North Portugal) and the private institution studied; neither of these can be claimed to be typical.
- There is no comparison with other institutions of higher education, private or public, polytechnic or university, or with other areas of the country.
- The specificity of the time of the study; attitudes and beliefs about higher education and university are changing constantly. The 1990s were a particularly tumultuous period, with the rapid expansion of all higher education systems; access to new publics, and by the beginning of the new millennium, significant graduate unemployment had arisen alongside a general economic decline in Portugal.
- Perspectives of others affecting and affected by values were not formally considered (e.g. teachers, employers), although informally they helped to shape my impressions through dialogue.

However, despite these specificities

- Different settings may have similarities (other private institutions, across Portugal, in public institutions)
- This research can be compared to quantitative research carried out in Portugal (for example, Estanque and Nunes, 2001) in order to triangulate the findings.
- Further triangulation can be made through the use of the interview with the Dean.
- The objective of this qualitative research is to explore meanings, understandings and processes, rather than to substantiate truth claims. Interviews in this research were designed to generate detail that would have been inaccessible in any other way, in order to generate insights and understandings of values and processes of decision-making and making the transition.
- Systematic elements increase validity, such as having the same interviewer, the same place and similar time of day for all interviews, and a topic sheet of question areas to be covered.

7.4 Summaries, transcripts and translation

The research was carried out in Portuguese, all interviews being done by a fluent non-native speaker. This had implications for the intersubjectivity of interviewer and interviewee (see analysis below), and also as for the sense being made of the questions and the way they were asked. Although the interviews are not analysed in a positivistic sense, it was necessary to make sure that the participants were understood as they intended in the interview. The pre-pilot tests were helpful in this regard, but nevertheless not all communication was smooth. Some participants would understand a question in one way, and others would request clarification. Sometimes they would answer the question they thought I had asked, which was not what I intended. I would allow the participants to answer in one way, and then try to re-phrase the question. The fact that some participants seemed to misunderstand some questions was not treated as polluted data, but analysed as part of the way in which participants tried to anticipate meanings within the context of the interview, and how they saw the interviewer.

7.4.1 Transcripts

The interviews were tape recorded, I wrote field notes after the interview, and transcribed the recordings. An example of a transcript (in English) of a first and second interview is included in appendix 7.5. The transcriptions were an important part of the research process, not only to encode interviews in written form prior to analysis, but because the process of repeated listening revealed information about how the interviews were organised and jointly constructed. Details such as pauses, laughs, overlaps, intakes of breathe, sighs, intonation, confused talk and misunderstandings were all features that became apparent. Other non-verbal features, such as smiles or raised eyebrows, could not be systematically written down at the time of the interview, but not all this information was lost. The field journal was used for notes on pre and post interview discussions, and notable non-verbal communication. For example, in the interview with a Civil Engineering student who had started work:

Interviewer: Was your university knowledge important at work?

A.S.: (.) yes, yes of course.... (Field Notes: A.S. looks at me quizzically, raising his eyebrows, but does not stop speaking. After the interview he discusses the question.)

The participant doubly frames the situation according to his perception of me as a teacher he knows (the raised eyebrow) and as an interviewer (he carries on talking for the tape recorder). It is a clear example of the joint construction of the interview context as separate from other contexts for talk, but also suggests the construction of university in which the application of university knowledge at work is natural. It is also indicative of the problematic nature of what the interviewee says; he saw me both as teacher and researcher, so affects the nature of the interview.

7.4.2 Summaries

Although the interviews are a "*version of the world produced in discourse*" (Silverman 2001:179), and were analysed accordingly, I wanted to ensure that the participants and I had some agreement about what was said in the interviews; that my interpretation of their meanings coincided with theirs. Moreover, I wanted their continuing collaboration in the production of meaning, in order to increase my understanding. This was particularly important given the culture/language gap, and the fact that the data needed to be translated into English. To these ends, summaries of each interview were produced in Portuguese from the transcripts, concerning the main decisions, values, turning points and influences in their lives (appendix 7.6). The participants were invited to correct the transcripts for any detail they felt did not truly represent what they had said in the interview. All transcripts were returned after reading, and any corrections used as further data. Only two had significant comments on them; one felt that one remark was not what she had meant at the time, and a second corrected my Portuguese grammar mistakes.

7.4.3 Translations

Translation-related decisions have a direct impact on the quality and validity of the research report (Birbili 2004), and are discussed in more detail below. Moreover, translations of interviews may change how someone is perceived (Temple 2006). Problems included: occasions where there is no lexical equivalence between languages (conceptual equivalence should be used); occasions where there is no conceptual equivalence (which is unsolvable); difficulty in translating grammatical forms; quoting participants' words in another language using

a literal translation (which may not make sense) or a free translation (which are partly creative and may cause information to be lost).

I did all the translations, as researcher/ interviewer, so the process of reconstruction of meanings was consistent. As a native English speaker with 21 years experience of living and working in Portugal within Portuguese communities rather than British ex-patriot, I have proficient experience with the language and culture. Here are the significant translation decisions:

1. In order to maintain as much of the original character and meaning of the participants' discourse itself, the translation is literal whenever this preserves the sense in English, even though this may sometimes seem foreign. This was possible as there are similarities with some of the syntax and lexis of Romance and Germanic languages. Yet sometimes, literal translations would fail to communicate, in which case conceptual equivalence was applied.
2. Sometimes translations are literal, but an interpretation in brackets is left. For example. "*I needed a course (degree) in order to build something (start a company), or to continue what my father had started (the business)*".
3. Highly contextual words and phrases cannot be translated directly, and so are subject to interpretation. For example the Portuguese word "pois" has no independent meaning and takes its meaning purely from the context of the sentence or the context of the conversation. It can mean various things such as "I see", "yes", "no", "of course". For words and expressions such as these, translation is according to my interpretation of the context.
4. In Portuguese it is not always necessary to use a pronoun, the subject being derived from the verb conjugation and the context. However, in some cases, the first and third person conjugation is the same. Moreover, there is the habit of using the general impersonal pronoun "one", as in "one must always do this". This can lead to some lack of clarity. In translation I opted for "one", when an idea was generally applicable.
5. There are words that are commonly used in Portuguese about cultural practices without a direct equivalent in English. Sometimes a phrase will give the general idea, but in other cases there are deeper cultural meanings. For example "cunha", translates as "pulling strings", but also implies the existence of favours owed or kinship ties. In some cases I have

left the Portuguese word in inverted commas by the translation. Some ideas have also been explained in greater depth in the analysis chapters.

6. Titles and the use of a polite third person address to those in relative positions of authority are very important in Portuguese, and reveal social relationships. Third person address has been maintained, and titles have been maintained in Portuguese, in inverted commas.
7. Incoherent and disjointed text is translated into equally incoherent English.
8. Transcriptions and summaries were read while being translated into a word processor, using voice recognition software (Via Voice). The texts were subsequently checked for errors created by the software, and original annotations, pauses, overlaps added in.

7.5. Analysis

7.5.1 Meanings

The interviews were not considered as a reflection of reality because:

1. What people say may not coincide with what they do (Seale 1998:204)
2. There is not one single true account of a social situation, but a variety of accounts, adjusted according to perceptions of the interviewer and the context. (Silverman 2001)
3. The interviewing process fractures the stories being told (Miller and Glassner 1997:101), as the interview belongs to a different context from the events, and may not show deeper conceptualisations of the subject's experiences
4. People's accounts are not symbolic of the world they describe, but draw on "*familiar narrative constructs*" (Miller and Glassner 1997), shaped by cultural understandings.

The interview itself is therefore a construction, in which both participants draw on a number of resources to create the discourse (Silverman 1997; Seale 1998). The radical interactionist's position is that the interview is a creation in context through which no knowledge of the outside world can be analysed. This is rejected on the grounds that:

1. It is ethically reprehensible to conduct interviews in which the participants are given status as experts in the topic, only to discount their meanings as a construction, and to reduce the interview to an analysis of conversation skills.

2. Realities exist, regardless of interviews, although people may not want to disclose themselves totally. Recognising this permits us to gain greater understanding of their lives (Miller and Glassner 1997:102).
3. Cultural narratives are shared by the participants in a culture, and interviews can permit the communication of perspectives and beliefs, as the language of which it is made simultaneously *"shapes meanings, but also permits intersubjectivity"* (Miller and Glassner 1997:103-4)

Accordingly, interview data are both a topic and a resource (Seale 1998: 210-216), although the way that the discourse is constructed must be considered. Discourse can be analysed according in the following ways:

1. Linguistic repertoires: *"resources people draw on to construct accounts"*, (Seale 1998:209) according to the type of (moral) person the individuals are representing themselves as, and the resources they are drawing on, such as scientific or moral repertoires. (Silverman 1997:179-184).
2. The stake or personal motives that participants ascribe to themselves and others. (Silverman 1997:179-184)
3. The scripts (or normal ways of talking about events) used by participants to call upon the *normality* of the events they are describing. (Silverman 1997:179-184). According to Foucault, social practices are made to appear normal (Seale 1998:246), so deconstructing this apparent normality is a key to understanding them. This was particularly evident in the participants discourse about the decision to go to university, but not in the decision for their choice of degree or university, for example. Equally of interest are questions about aspects that were not regarded as normal. These generated contradictions, or avoidance, suggesting that these were outside the normal narrative patterns that participants drew on. In other words where is the text silent? What do participants omit to say?
4. The interpretative context and the power relations implied (Seale 1997:250). As Baker (1997:131) says *"questions are a central part of the data and cannot be viewed as neutral invitations to speak – rather, they shape how and as a member of which*

categories the respondent should speak". Thus membership category devices (how members organise their social world through categories, linked to particular actions or characteristics).are a further key element. This may change along an interview, as the participant describes themselves as a student/ engineer/ daughter. Their categorization of me is also important. There were differences between us in age, power, nationality, and sometimes gender, but we also had areas in which we are members of the same category: as part of the UDC. Participants frequently invoked my ethnicity to explain aspects of Portuguese culture, drawing comparisons with what they believed to be British culture.

5. Data needs to be analysed not only according to that which support the argument, but also contradictions, inconsistencies, variations. For example, for many, the choice of going to university was described as normal, but there were exceptions, which need to be described.
6. Similarities between texts, even if they are not described as normal, give an indication of a limited range of cultural discourse that is drawn on.
7. The interview as a reflexive context: the interview can be a time in which new narratives are invented to describe events which participants claim they had never thought about before, thus their identity is changing *in situ*.
8. Comparisons can be drawn between participants according to gender, degree courses, pre-and post transition interviews.

7.5.2 Coding

Translated transcripts were transferred into RTF and into NVivo qualitative analysis software and data were coded by key words and themes (Richards 2000, Bazeley and Richards 2000), The way that the data were coded grew and developed as my understanding of the data grew. To begin with, I looked for particular aspects coming from my initial research questions, and the interview questions, such as the how and when the decision to go to university arose. This appeared to arise out of participants' accounts as distinct from the decision to go to university, so a new category had to be invented for this. In Nvivo, coding can be done as unconnected items or connected items (trees). I chose to see my coding structures as relating to larger

themes, so that I could organise the emerging picture. So, under the general category of the choice and meanings of higher education, I included sub branches about early ideas of university, and within this further coded those who mentioned that going to university was normal. The final node listing is in Appendix 7.7.

Further trees and branches could be added as the ideas emerged from the data; if an aspect did not fit into a previous category, or if previously coded data could be included in further categories. Consequently, some data were included in several areas. Coding the data was not fixed; as I read and re-read the data; I could change the coding, add new coding from existing categories, or invent new categories. The software was as flexible as I was, given my own knowledge and values as a researcher. The data could also be organised according to attributes ascribed to it; data from the pre-interview questionnaires was added here plus other information (first interview, second interview, degree studied), so data sets could be organised according to any of these attributes (for example, parental education levels) or overlapping categories.

It was important to make sure that data did not just reproduce anecdotes, and that unexpected and contradictory data were accounted for. Although this was not a statistically significant sample, tables were drawn up from the coded information in NVivo and transferred to Excel, so that comparisons could be made of responses. This meant that impressions could be eliminated in favour of a more systematic analysis, for example, how many had regrets about their choice of university or degree after the transition to work compared with prior to the transition. Thus values and beliefs in different degrees could be compared with each other, within each area, and between interviews. This could be represented as a percentage, or verbal quantifier.

Further rigour and systematic treatment of the data could be added through the search facilities of the software, which permit the researcher to look for particular phrases or words, through the whole data set or within particular categories. Thus, despite the tables drawn up above, and the care with which the coding was carried out, analysis could be deepened through a word search and an analysis of the context of discourse in which it occurred. For example, the search for the

word “work” in the 1st interview sets revealed that actually all the participants had assumed the connection of university and labour market at some point in their interview, but this word did not always appear when discussion about how the decision to go to university arose.

7.6 Quality Issues

7.6.1 External validity

External validity refers to the generalisability of the concepts and conclusions to other situations (Schofield 1989:109), and how useful the conclusions are for predicting or interpreting other phenomena (Breakwell 1995:9). Lyotard (in Seale 1999:13) suggests that generalising across contexts is an act of despotism, and Foucault claims that the world is just a “*babble of competing voices, none of which ought to lay claim to privileged status*”. Indeed, part of the justification of this methodology is precisely this; that individuals have their own stories to tell, in their own ways, and only a method which permits them to do so without forcing limited answers or rationalisations can truly facilitate polyvocality. However, this research is quite specific to the particular participants in the UDT, in the north of Portugal, at the turn of the century. The database is not statistically significant, being qualitative and relatively small scale, making it much less easy to generalise (Silverman 2001:248). Comparisons through simultaneous quantitative sampling were excluded because of limited resources.

The question is whether the analysis has any relevance to other graduates within the same institution but different degree courses, or to other universities within Portugal, or even those beyond. The common sense answer would be that the greater the differences between subjects, the less likely that results can be generalised across contexts. The institution has its own particular features and context, so some aspects are not generalisable. On the other hand, an easy way of treating the data is to not claim any generalisability for it at all, but leave it up to readers in other contexts to recognise similarities and draw their own conclusions.

Peräkylä (1997:214-6) suggests two ways in which results can be generalised. The first relates to the possibility that practices could be similar across different research settings. The second refers to the comparison with research that is carried out in different settings, from which

conclusions of generalisability can be built up. This may be partial; for example, British studies have considered the nature of learning careers and career choices (chapters 2 and 4) that partly overlaps with the considerations in this study. If comparisons can be drawn between the two different settings, then this increases the possibility of generalising that aspect over a wider area. Silverman (2001: 250) also suggests that theoretical sampling can be carried out, that is; selecting groups for study on the basis of the relevance to the research questions. This is a possibility in the future.

7.6.2 Internal validity

For Denzin (1994), validity and reliability belong to a discredited moment (being positivistic). Alternatives include internal validity, referring to consistency within the research, or reliability of measurement (Robson 1993:63); a lack of contradiction within the research (Breakwell 1995:9). Attitudes of both the interviewer and the interviewee can threaten this (willingness and ability to give information, openness, tiredness, time of day, place and year). Difficulties can be overcome, according to Breakwell, through systematic questions. However, this is problematic in a research design such as this one, in which questions are deliberately not systematic, but arise from within the interaction. The systematic elements include using the same person for all interviews, using a topic sheet of question areas to be covered, the same place and similar time of day for interviews. Indeed, Seale (1998:150) considers that the validity is increased if questions do not constrain answers.

Other elements which threaten internal validity, according to Robson (1993:70) include environmental changes not directly related to the enquiry (there were changes in the labour market and attitudes to the UDC, but these were considered part of the study); the study affects the participants, who may start thinking about aspects (they did, but this was included in analysis); atypical respondents change the results (while no-one was considered typical, they were all at a similar stage in their university career, of a similar age, and had not worked full-time), selective drop-outs (the most significant aspect was the high drop out rate among anthropologists, partly as labour market conditions meant they prolonged their studies. The surviving participants gave a clear indication of this too). Other aspects of validity (Seale 1998:

150-6, 259) relate to the consistency of the analysis, and how far unexpected data and negative cases are explored (see analysis). Finally, there is validity in the coherence and consistency of how well data supports conclusions, which will be discussed in the final section.

7.7 Ethical Issues

Ethics refer to the protection, welfare and rights of the participants (Hammond 1995). The researcher's right to know is balanced over the right to privacy, overt or covert penalties for taking part (or not) in the study; dignity and self-determination, confidentiality, giving full information to those taking part, and gaining the right to report the work (Robson 1993:29).

Most of these issues have been discussed earlier in this chapter. However, two issues are worth discussing. First, as a teacher within the UDC, I was concerned that the participants should not feel pressured to take part in the study, and this was made clear in my initial recruitment drive. The fact that some participants felt free to refuse, without having to justify their reasons (forcing a justification may have been felt as a pressure), indicates that this was successful. Indeed, the participants seemed to value the opportunity to speak about these issues, and some expressed disappointment when they did not progress to the second part of the study. Second, I emphasised confidentiality, but one participant would have welcomed the inclusion of his name. For the sake of the preservation of the anonymity of his colleagues, I have not included any real names.

7.8 Summary and Conclusions

The objective of the study was to understand the nature of the perceptions about higher education in the transition to work. This is compared to the assumptions within higher education policies, and the policies of a private university in the north of Portugal. The research involved background contextual studies about the labour market, the economy and higher education; about the institution. Interviews were carried out with the Dean of the University and with participants from four degree courses before and after the transition to work, having first given them a pre-interview questionnaire.

These interviews were transcribed, summarised and given back to the participants for feedback, then the transcripts were translated, and transferred to electronic format before being analysed. The analysis was carried out with the point of view that the interviews were a context specific social construction, and could not be analysed in a positivistic sense, but only by taking into consideration the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee and the nature of the social narratives that were drawn upon by both. In this way, the nature of the social construction could be analysed according to the choices, values, social participation, relationships and perceptions expressed.

**PART THREE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF
GRADUATES' VIEWS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

8. THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHOICES

A list of pseudonyms and the backgrounds of each of the participants is in appendix 7.8.

8.1 The decision to come to university

This study starts with an analysis of the way that individuals make the decision to come to university and choose their degree, as their values and expectations may affect their engagement in education. In Portugal, the majority of young people aspire to higher education for protection against unemployment (Alves 2001); to earn more (Cabrito 2001), and to gain social mobility/ higher status (Cabrito 2001; Alves 2001 Martins 2001). This has led some researchers to suggest that a degree is rationally chosen on the basis of the cost of education and benefit of the working position (Gaio Alves, 2001), thus supporting Human Capital Theory, which has driven government policy (Pacheco 2001, 2009 Stoer, Stoleroff and Correia 1990). However, although the participants in this study made implicit and explicit connections to future employment, there is little evidence that this choice was made on a technically rational basis, that is, by considering both their aptitudes and the labour market.

The qualitative research methods in this study were designed to understand individual trajectories through higher education by allowing feelings and views to emerge, exploring unexpected data and negotiate meanings, and avoiding assumptions by the researcher. The pre-interview questionnaires were to gain background information and start participants thinking about their route through university. It included the question "Why did you choose to go to university?" In reply to these questionnaires, two-thirds specifically mentioned that the reason to go to university was to improve job prospects, while a quarter merely replied, "to get a degree". However, in answer to why they chose their particular degree, only two mentioned considerations of the labour market as important, while two-thirds cited personal interest as the principal reasons behind their choice.

The interviews were able to develop responses further. Analysis of the interviews suggested that university study was not only connected to utilitarian prospects, but to a sense of self, childhood hopes and dreams. For half of the participants, going to university was something that they said they had desired since they were young. Some were unable to specify an exact time, others suggested they had “dreamt” of university since 7th or 8th grade (age 12-14), and the rest only started to consider continuing their studies towards the end of high school. The majority of the participants (three-quarters) mentioned wanting to continue studying because of a “love” of school, and described positive relationships with their teachers and learning. All but one of the participants described positive learning experiences. The words used in their responses suggest that feelings were important in their decisions (but this does not preclude rationality). Other factors included parental encouragement (all but one respondent mentioned this) and wanting an enjoyable profession later on (three-quarters of the participants), and two-thirds of the participants also considered that graduates have an advantage in the labour market.

8.1.1 Rationality

As discussed in chapter 2, choices may be rational or irrational, conscious or unconscious. Technically rational choices involve the conscious examination of knowledge, thus connecting actions and outcomes to intentions, pragmatically rational choices are tacit, embodied and emotional, based on partial information from trusted individuals (Hodkinson 2008), whereas irrational choices do not involve reason or understanding. Choices can also be made subconsciously (Damasio 1994, 1999, 2003; Wilson 2004), which can be rational in the sense that optimal decisions can be made on the basis of a subconscious value system. Choices can also be influenced by cultural narratives (cultural perspectives on how things should be). These guide perceptions as well as legitimising events according to common expectations, thus shaping intentional states (Bruner 1990). Individuals accept these as being true, even though cultural narratives can be myths.

The fact that the interviews reveal that choices are related to feelings, dreams and hopes does not mean that decisions were not rational, but that choices were not wholly conscious or technically rational. Going to university was not always regarded as a choice, as alternatives

were not always considered, and as it was considered normal to go. Nevertheless it was a route that they concurred with. For example, in the questionnaire, in response to the question “why did you decide to go to university?” psychology student Mariana wrote:

“I didn't choose it; ever since I started to study, probably because of my parents' influence, I only intended to stop when I had obtained a university degree”

In the interview, in response to the question “when did you first start thinking about going to university” she said this:

“I always wanted to [go], since I was young, I don't know whether it was because of the influence of my parents.... I never questioned the idea of stopping my studies... I chose to go to university because it was already implicit that I would go”

Evans (2009:10) says, “*the process of entering higher education is often one of staying on the escalator (getting off would require planning)*”. Similarly, the respondents here suggest that going to higher education has become a common route for the majority. Two thirds of the participants said that they had “always” wanted to go, implying that the route was normal, and accepted, such as Mariana, above, for whom the university route was “*implicit*”. This implies that it is not a technically rational choice, but one that she accepts when she says “*I always wanted to.*” Moreover, going to university was described as “normal” in just over one fifth of the first interviews. This implies that going to university is not, in itself, regarded as a choice for these individuals. A typical example is Sofia (psychology):

“I never really thought about not studying, because for me it was a normal route that I was going to follow.”

Yet in her pre-questionnaire answer she wrote that the reason why she chose to go to university was:

“To make the transition to work easier, which is very competitive. I also liked studying, and to feel more cultured”

This appears to be rational, connecting studying, employment, feeling “cultured”, and meanwhile continuing to study, which she enjoyed, but this is apparently contradicted by her interview, which implies that it was not a choice at all, but a normal part of social behaviour. Yet she does manage to connect these disparate aspects of her narrative:

"[My parents] always encouraged me to study... but I also liked studying and so wanted to continue, and I started to understand that anyone who doesn't study can't go very far... I know very well that today there are lots of people who have studied and who are also unemployed... But probably they have a lot more chance of having a better life and getting a better job."

Sofia consciously sees that going to university is enjoyable but also normalised (a non-choice), a necessity in order to succeed in her professional life ("*anyone who doesn't study can't go very far*"). This is framed in terms of future employment and the labour market in general, to have greater chances of employment.

This is a second recurrent theme within the first interviews, but the connection between the two is not always straightforward, for example, in the interview with Mariana (psychology).

"I never thought about the future... As I had to take a degree and I didn't want to stop studying I thought that if I had to study a few more years at university I should do something that I liked."

"I had to take a degree" implies necessity, but she also makes decisions on the basis of emotions ("*I should do something that I liked*"). Yet despite having chosen a degree for reasons not connected to the future, by the end of the interview she claimed that the most important aspect of a degree was to provide job opportunities:

Interviewer: "What do you value most about the university?"

Mariana: "I hope that in doing this degree, I will manage to get a job in this area."

Interviewer: "Although you didn't choose the degree because of employment, now you are hoping it will be help to get into the labour market? Is it that?"

Mariana: "Yes. I hope that this degree will open doors for me."

Mariana says that future employment was the most important part of going to university, even though she had not considered the labour market. It was as if this was implicit; either she didn't think about the future because it seemed unnecessary (better jobs as a result of a degree were taken for granted), or else she hadn't considered this when she accepted the normality of going to university.

Two thirds of the participants mentioned overtly that future employment was one of their primary considerations, but like Mariana, one third of the participants did not express this directly. Yet further analysis reveals that it is implied in their interviews even when not directly mentioned as a reason for going to university. For example, Paulo (anthropology) did not mention employment prospects as the reason to go to university, and felt greater obligation from his parents to go, as well as feeling it to be a normal, expected route. He thought about university from 10th grade, when “*everybody thought about it*”, but did not know what he wanted to study, and was obliged by his parents to continue studying. He chose Anthropology because he liked humanities at school. Nevertheless, when asked about the future, the connection is implicit, though vague:

Paulo: “I don't usually think much in terms of objectives... perhaps in the placement I can understand what I want a bit more...but what lots of people tell me is that it's difficult to get a job in anthropology. It's not a very practical degree.”

Interviewer: “are you hoping to get a job in the area of anthropology?”

Paulo: “yes, or related with this at least.”

Paulo's makes the connection between his degree and (weak) employment prospects, as if this was one of the objectives of a degree, but not the only one. In the second interview, when asked about the main benefits of coming to university, he says:

“The breadth of knowledge...I think university opens mental perspectives.”

All of the participants made a connection between their choice of degree and employment prospects, as if this is the main “cultural narrative”. For example, Sandra (administration) says:

“My father has the idea, and he's not in the least bit wrong in this, that in order to have a better future one has to have a degree.”

The connection of university to work is assumed by all of the participants (see appendix 8.1). For some this was the only benefit, and for others it was assumed as a main objective, although not the only one. The connection seemed obvious to them, so was sometimes implicit rather than explicit in their interview, such as in the case of Paulo, leading the interviewer to ask the question directly. This assumption affected how they engaged in higher education, discussed in the next chapter.

Like Sandra, most of the participants were encouraged to go to university by their parents on the basis of future job prospects. One third of the participants mentioned that their parents' encouragement was partly based on their own experiences and difficulties in the past. For example, Carlos (civil engineering) said:

"My mother wanted her children to have something with more qualifications. She only studied until the 4th grade, and perhaps because she had felt some difficulties in her life, it's natural that she wanted her children to have something more".

Alternatively, the students themselves understood this difficulty, and wanted to escape it, such as Ricardo (civil engineering):

"[My parents] always wanted the best that they could give me, and they didn't have the opportunity to have... I wanted a little bit more than my parents had; a better life economically and socially"

Ricardo connects the idea of higher education to "opportunities", which we can understand as career prospects, better pay, and also social advantages. Higher education was restricted to an elite until the late 1980s, and was connected to social status (Stoer 1986:53), and the participants in this study seemed acutely aware of this.

8.2 Social mobility and higher status

Despite claims by studies that students choose higher education for status, the participants in this study reject this as one of their driving objectives. In Portugal, people with a university degree are given the honorary title of "doctor". (People who gain a doctorate are "professor doutor"). In general the participants reject the idea of wanting this status, or of it having any meaning in the time of massification. As Clara (anthropology) says:

"I don't think it [a degree] makes a difference nowadays, but it used to. I don't think it does nowadays because there are so many people with degrees."

This changing status leads to a dichotomy between participants' failure to value the status itself and their desires to please parents who do. For example, Camila says:

"There is that desire to have somebody in the family with a university degree... I suppose that deep down it was really because of family pleasure that I came to

university. Because people are still very connected with traditions, or social status, I think that type of thing is very small-minded and shouldn't exist".

Many participants reject outright the idea of an elite title; Marcia (civil engineering) says:

"If I could be an Engineer without any type of title, I would do so because it doesn't add to my happiness"

There is even the idea that titles given to graduates can inhibit good communication, For example, Sofia (Psychology) says

"I don't think it should be like that, a distance between people. I think it should be the opposite, especially in the profession that I am going to have."

For some, it is as if they do not want to admit the importance of status in the interview. For example, Isolina (civil engineering) says:

Interviewer: "and the social status of being an engineer?"

Isolina: "no, no [pause] although I do like it a bit."

Interviewer: "and your father?"

Isolina: "that too, it's obvious, isn't it, that he also likes it."

Her hesitation and long pauses in admitting liking her social status as a graduate is counterbalanced by her use of "obvious" regarding her father's satisfaction. This implies the acknowledgement of different ideas: on the one hand it is normal and acceptable for her father's generation to esteem graduates' social status, and perhaps not so much for the younger generation; it is not something they always want to admit to, and sometimes actively dislike.

However, Joel (civil engineering) claims that status comes from performance and knowledge rather than qualifications

"Status is for me, is really knowledge. Somebody who has knowledge is more at ease because they have that knowledge".

This is a point of view also expressed by Rita (anthropology)

“Social status is important in one aspect, because it's important for the dignity of the degree... Anywhere I go to work I want everybody to know what anthropology is, and what it is for. I don't want to work in an office of a town-hall and have people working with me who give me the title of “Senhora Doutora Antropologa”

Others claim that academic titles are useful in maintaining one's position in the hierarchy, creating the illusion of knowledge while gaining experience to put university knowledge into practice. As Ricardo, civil engineering, says:

“At work it's very important to know who's above and who's below. An Engineer can't be treated just the same as a normal worker. It's very important to establish status and this depends on people knowing how to impose themselves. This because if you go to work and to show that you don't understand things very much, I think later on you can be called everything but “engineer”, somebody who doesn't understand anything.”

Sandra (administration) is a little more confused, as if she both desires the status and rejects it simultaneously, or does not want to admit it: “

“In social terms, whether we want it or not, having a university degree is a step up in life and it's immediately a different class from those who don't have one, even though they...I don't see myself as different to the others, I think I'm the same”.

Almost all the participants recognise the existence of social hierarchies created by degree titles. However, there is a big difference between wanting knowledge to be accepted, like Rita and Joel, which means that graduates can bring new knowledge into working environments, and wanting power and social status conferred by having a degree, implying the lack of negotiability of different domains of knowledge. There is an ambiguity among the participants in this study; the majority deny choosing university for the status it confers, or wanting this status, but they recognise its existence in others. All the participants know someone who capitalises on the social power of a degree. For example, Sofia (Psychology) says:

“Many people feel that when they finish their degree, they're completely changed. They think that ‘they have a king in their belly’ as we usually say.”

The expression “they have a king in their belly” means they feel important. However, the participants mostly denied wanting this status themselves. For example, Camila says:

“I’m one of so many thousands in Portugal, just one more graduate. It’s completely absurd to call somebody ‘Senhora Doutora’ after doing a degree”

This in itself is perhaps an indication of the declining power of a degree; the moral stance presented in the interviews means they must reject it or justify it.

After starting work, some participants changed their attitudes, suggesting it is both important and useful to have an academic title. António (civil engineering) had resisted the idea, yet later he said it could not be ignored, as it gave him advantages when carrying out his job:

“People think that they should call me ‘Senhor Engineer’ and it would complicate things if I didn’t permit them to. They would start to think that I wasn’t good enough to do the job. When I go to the town hall, I have to go on Mondays unless I tell them I’m an engineer, in which case they will attend me at any time... I never have to wait in a company reception area”.

Other graduates noticed a similar effect, even in non-work related events, although none of them admit to using this advantage. Ricardo (civil engineering) recounts:

“I suppose on a social level I’ve noticed that my degree has a lot of interest, but in my point of view I’m against that. I don’t think that just because I’m an engineer I should be better attended in a clinic than somebody who didn’t have the luck of having a degree. I also condemn, for example, that thing that I’ve noticed that a person starts speaking to me arrogantly but when they know that I’m an engineer they completely change their way of speaking to me, as if I’m a totally different person”.

On the other hand, participants noted differences between their own values and those of their parents’ generation, indicating a shift in social values. For example, Clara (Administration) says:

“I don’t think [social status] makes a difference nowadays, but it used to for my parents, because they’re a different generation, the generation in which the most important people had their studies, they were ‘doctors’, but not nowadays.”

However, the idea of being a graduate still appears to have social power, despite the increasing number of graduates, possibly because of both its historical status and the relatively high number of people with a limited education (see chapter 5). However, none of the graduates here admitted to liking this social status, even if they thought it was useful. This could be because of the constraints of the interview situation, or the ambiguity of liking social status and being seen to like it.

8.3 Non-normalised routes

Research suggests that 77% of youths aspire to a university education (Alves 2001), even among those whose parents had little or no education themselves, suggesting that it is becoming normalised. However, not all the participants in this study regarded going to university as a normal route, and had to overcome difficulties in order to go. For example, in the case of Ana (administration), key (male) figures in her life are represented as obstacles. When asked about when she first considered going to university, she said:

“Since I started going to high-school, around about the 7th or 8th grade, I was quite sure that I wanted to do a degree. This was even more so because I'd worked, I'd finished 6th grade and then my father didn't let me continue studying and he took me out of school. I really wanted to... I had to leave because my father wouldn't let me continue studying. He wanted me to work in agriculture. I hated agriculture, I felt very frustrated. It took me two years to convince him to let me start studying again and from the 7th grade I was always a very good student and I was sure that I wanted to go to university and do a degree.”

After overcoming her father's resistance, Ana had to face her future husband's objections before she went to university:

“He's very jealous and he thought I was going to lose myself in university, that I was going to stop liking him, and he didn't want it. But I fought, and I thought if he really liked me he would continue at my side. So I enrolled at the University, even though he didn't support me at the time.”

The identity Ana presents of herself in the interview is of someone who lacked support from her family but fought for the right to study:

“I fought very much alone because I didn't have anybody to support me... What I wanted was another type of life. I was always a fighter, and a dreamer. Where I come from, very few people went university, everybody was either working in factories or as domestic help. I knew I didn't want that for me. I didn't want that. I wanted something more, I wanted to go further.”

Yet she appears to contradict herself as she also says, at different points in her interview:

“My mother would have liked it, as she always wanted me to have a university degree. My godmother supported me a lot, the greatest dream she had was that I should finish my degree. She... helped me a lot during my degree...”

I had teachers who would say “keep going on, you have this chance, you have the capacity to do a degree, you must keep going because you can't do anything in their world of work without a degree”. The father of one of my friends, after my mother died, also helped me a lot. He also helped me to go to university”

So although Ana presents herself in the interview as facing obstacles, she also had encouragement, so appeared to be caught between conflicting narratives. She acts as if overcoming this conflict was a choice, but according to her description, the alternatives (agriculture, domestic work or factories) are not acceptable options for her. Moreover, university is presented as accessible; she has been encouraged by a number of significant others and told that she is capable of taking the university route. Clearly she regards this as appealing, not just for employment, but identity and fulfilment:

“I really like to learn new things, to read, to be always learning something new... I think It would be terrible if I had to give up every day and do something I didn't like, for me to get up in the morning I have to feel good about myself, in my work, knowing that I'm going to meet people who I like working with, knowing that I can help people, and for me that's very important...”

As such, her choice of university seems more an option to maximise opportunities, and minimise risk, rather than connected to a carefully planned outcome.

Nevertheless, her route to university is quite linear; it was something she had regarded as desirable from a young age, and did not deviate from that desire. Other routes are more roundabout, involving turning points structured by internal and external events. Silvia (administration) describes her decision as one marked by changes in direction:

“I didn't want to come to university. I was at school and I was doing a professional secretarial course until the 12th grade and then a secretarial placement... I got to the 12th year and I started to see that the course really didn't give me any advantage... I saw classmates of mine who had left before who ... had finished their course and didn't have very many professional opportunities.

The course was good and I always thought that it was good, but companies really wanted people who had a university degree and other qualifications. So I started to think seriously about going to university “

When she says “the course was good”, she is probably implying that it was useful in terms of developing the skills, and interesting to her. However, it was not sufficient to avoid the risks of unemployment. As in Ana's case, university was a way of minimising the risks of an uncertain labour market, but the decision to study a particular degree was taken separately.

8.4 Choice of degree

For some the choice to go to university was inseparable from the decision to study a particular subject area, for others it was a separate decision. The majority of this small sample had already decided to go to university when they chose to study a particular degree. Only two participants had decided on a particular area, meaning that university was an inevitable route for them to achieve their objectives. Both of these chose civil engineering, which they connected to their personal interests and identities from a relatively young age. For example, António says:

“Since I was little, as my father was connected with construction, I thought I would like to be a civil engineer, ever since I was in secondary school, even before, I loved the

idea, ever since I remember the only thing I wanted to study was to be was a Civil Engineer.”

In António's case, it meant that he would be able to continue his father's construction business:

“My father must be pleased because he was always excited about the idea of me becoming an engineer... it's mainly because it follows on with what they'd been doing all these years. If I wasn't an engineer and then when my uncle and my father retire there would be nobody to carry on the family business. They are the sort of people who don't want to hand their services to others. And they're on the site day and night and they deal with everything on the site. So they'll be very happy to hand some of the business over to somebody in the family, somebody who will follow on their work.”

Thus his choice reinforces Portuguese family values, and maintenance of economic capital in the family. Yet António denies the importance of social status at several points during the interview, instead he suggests that a foreman is equally important to a construction site:

“From the experience that I have, I think that a good foreman is also important, because in our degree we don't learn as much as they learn in their whole lifetime... because we tell them what's going to work and they can tell us straightaway that it won't, because there is no good engineer without a good foreman.”

António did not explain why he wanted to be an engineer rather than a foreman: his narrative is in terms of morality (family values) and emotionality (his childhood dreams). However:

“A foreman knows how to build something, how to do something practical and an engineer knows how to calculate and knows enough about how to put things into practice. An engineer has the background, but a foreman doesn't, although he knows a lot more about how to put things into practice than an engineer, but doesn't know anything about how to calculate it... everybody knows who the engineer on site is. Everybody respects that but the engineer also has to respect other people, and get along with them. So there's no point in arriving on site with the suits and a tie and wanting to impose your point of view.”

In other words, an engineer has more control and power through theoretical knowledge and social position, although this needs to be negotiated. Moreover, the choice of degree enhances this power, which is one reason why he moved from the technical college in Coimbra:

"I didn't like it because it was technical... Technicians can't join the Engineering Order, and they don't have a university degree."

Technicians have fewer powers on and off a construction site than licensed engineers, and they cannot sign building projects. António's decision thus maximises his power, although he is circumspect about what this means in terms of status (see chapter 10).

The vast majority (90%) of the participants in this study chose their degree after having made a general decision to come to university. These decisions were made in a variety of ways, according to what seemed possible, enjoyable, connected with their sense of self, and encouragement from significant others. Personal identity and enjoyment were central for the majority, as in the case of Sofia (psychology):

"Perhaps from the 10th grade was the time that I decided that I really wanted to study psychology. I was studying psychology in the 10th grade at the time and I really enjoyed it, my teacher was spectacular and I had several conversations with him about what he did and that really fascinated me."

For others, the decision came later, but was also deeply connected with their sense of self, as for Rita (anthropology)

"I failed to get into psychology in the state university by 0.1 point and I was extremely disillusioned ...I did it a psycho-technical test and the result showed that I was 99.9 per cent suitable for social sciences..."

"When I saw Anthropology I had no doubt, I am going to do anthropology and I'm going to make Anthropology my life. Because I know it's a social science, it's a science about mankind in his various domains"

On the other hand, others were looking for what seemed possible, for example, Camila (anthropology), who had failed to get in to study what interested her most (history of art, kindergarten teaching, or theology):

"I put everything [university brochures] on top of the table and I saw what subjects they had on each degree course, and what I felt capable of doing, because I know what my limitations are. I thought anthropology would be a course where I could begin. It had languages, but also it had subjects connected with arts, things that made me study. It seemed like I could do it, whereas the other courses had things like mathematics and statistics and things like that which I kept away from because I don't understand mathematics."

Camila was not interested in anthropology for itself, and admitted that at first she did not really know what it was. Her decision was to do something possible, which meant avoiding maths and statistics.

Personal relationships also figure strongly in the decisions; they are rarely made in isolation, and there is frequently direct or indirect influence of significant others. The majority (90%) of participants were influenced by other significant individuals either directly or indirectly through role models, or both, teachers being significant for two thirds. There were cases where there were also significant negative influences but all participants had the support and encouragement of at least a few people, at the same time as perceiving it as an individual choice.

Marcia (civil engineering) explains how her interest in civil engineering arose, as the interest stimulated in engineering by her 10th grade maths teacher was matched by the sense it made for her as a person, having grown up in an environment in which many family members were involved in activities related to civil engineering, such as plumbing and carpentry. Her family tried not to influence her directly, but she understood what they really wanted. Here she shows how she freely chose to do what her family wanted her to do, after her teacher had suggested a possibility that seemed both possible and desirable:

"I started thinking about it because the teacher who taught me mathematics was a civil engineer. He started to speak about his degree, and the goods things that come from it, and what it was about, and I started getting interested in it. I had already been introduced to the world of civil construction through my family in one way or another. ..."

but my father didn't influence me very much, but I blame my father more for me having come to study this degree, although he was always careful not to touch the subject, so that nobody could say that he influenced me. "

Interviewer: "but did you know what he wanted?"

"Yes, but we never spoke about the subject. He knew I wanted to take this degree, but he didn't want to influence me because of what people could say if I couldn't manage it. So he never said anything at all. It was only when I got in that he admitted that he had wanted me to do this."

For the great majority, the labour market for their particular degree was not part of their calculations. Ricardo (engineering) was exceptional among the participants for considering simultaneously his identity, capacities and the labour market. First he rejected studying computer science just one week before applying to university:

"My parents gave me a computer and I thought that was fascinating and I liked it a lot. One day I was thinking, I was sitting at the computer and doing some work, which was a little bit boring ... and I suddenly realised that that wasn't what I wanted for my life. I really need open spaces. Not a fixed base, where I would spend all day at a desk, stuck in a chair in front of a monitor, in the same place. I wanted something which would give me more liberty, more mobility. I wanted to have some freedom where I could do different types of things. I didn't want to have a monotonous life."

Finally, he arrived at the decision to study civil engineering, considering that it would lead to good employment opportunities:

"This friend of my father had done electronic engineering, but not worked in the field. He said that this wouldn't be such a good option. He said that perhaps the best option would be Civil Engineering or Chemical Engineering, which would have a better future. I'm talking in terms of employment, because that was also one of my worries; to find a degree course that had good professional opportunities. So I thought about what I could do best, and whether a degree would give me some possibility to give me what I wanted at the end of the day... A good job, better paid. At the time we were talking about Civil Engineering. I was looking around the house and I thought that would be interesting. I

thought it I would like to exercise that profession. Straightaway I thought, sites, sites changed constantly. One builds a house and after it's built you go somewhere else. I'll have a lot of mobility. I won't be restricted to one space and perhaps I can travel from one place in the other, and that attracted me a lot."

Ricardo arrived at an apparently rational decision about what he would like to do considering what he wanted to do, achieve and how he wanted to live his life, considering possibilities in employment and university. However, despite his reflexivity about the sort of person he considered himself to be, his decision was based on the contingency of the conversation with his father's friend, acceptance of this single point of view of the labour market. His decision is rational; he connects desired outcomes with behaviour, but it is also emotional, based on his feelings about himself and the idea of construction which he suddenly felt while at a building site. The idea that there were also good labour market opportunities was something that he accepted on the basis of information from contacts he regarded as trustworthy. However, he did not check what information he was given, thus rationality could be said to be limited; the coincidence of possibilities and emotional interest were of overriding concern.

8.5 Conclusion:

There is little evidence from these interviews that the decision to go on to higher education is a technically rational decision. For the majority, it was assumed to be a normal route, so did not involve planning or a point at which they examined their options and made a choice. Many began to anticipate this long before they needed to make a decision about it, and it was connected with feelings about school and learning, as well as the idea of having a career that would be interesting and fulfilling. Significant people in their lives were influential in their route to university and choice of degree, especially parents, family, teachers and friends, and what they said helped to create the idea that a degree was important for their future working lives. From what they said, it seems that their routes to university were influenced both by the prevalent cultural narratives about higher education, as well as feelings about their continuing education and learning which they gradually became aware of. Going to university is regarded not only as normal, but necessary, but this is more in the general terms of minimising risks and maximising

opportunities than making rational and calculated decisions as assumed by Human Capital Theory.

However, the ideas the participants and parents had about the role of higher education were strongly connected to the idea of future work, which all of the participants had. They believed that they would have advantages in the labour market, better career opportunities and pay, and they expected to work in an area directly connected with their degree. A second idea that was widely recognised was that having a degree is associated with social status and privileges, a better position in the social hierarchy. However, many of the participants rejected this idea as being out of date and irrelevant for times of mass higher education.

The idea of a specific degree, however, is a compromise between the need to be prepared for the labour market, and self-identity; the idea of what is possible, acceptable and desirable for each person, rather than the market. It is not just the process of studying that is assumed to be connected, but one's life long career; one studies anthropology in order to become an anthropologist. Although higher education in general was connected with maximising labour market opportunities, a degree connected the individual with their social identity, with what they believe is possible and interesting for them to do (horizons for action). This was a choice based on social relationships and feelings about the type of person they felt themselves to be. Only a few participants considered the labour market in any way, and when they did, it was on the basis of information from trusted individuals.

The ideas and feelings that the participants had about their choice of degree and the role of higher education were important in shaping how they acted on their educational opportunities. However, they were unable to anticipate in many cases what the degree would involve, and how this would evolve with time, as the following chapters will show.

9. TRAJECTORIES OF PARTICIPATION IN UNIVERSITY AND WORK

In the previous chapter, it was shown that students come to university as if it were a normal continuation of their studies, but one that would prepare them for the world of work. However, their choice of degree was mostly not made on consideration of the labour market, but according to what they enjoyed and felt capable of doing. Nevertheless, this chapter will show how they framed their study expectations according to expectations of future utility as well as perceptions of the evaluation framework. Students also have sub-agenda related to their specific degree choices and the importance these have for their lives. However, their expectations are not the only factors which shape their learning at university; relationships with teaching staff and participation in the classroom affect both how they act on their learning opportunities and their future expectations for work. On the other hand, these classroom relationships cannot be seen in isolation, but are part of previous experiences of education, bound up with a sense of themselves as students.

9.1 life stories in education

9.1.1 Camila's story

The effect of life histories in education on participation and perceptions can be dramatically evidenced through the stories of two anthropology students, Camila and Rita. Both of them cite early educational experiences as influential in their later lives, but in completely different ways. While Rita attributes her later love of anthropology to her early experiences in primary school, Camila's dislike of school altogether, and sense of incapacity and frustration also arose from these early experiences.

"I never liked going to school very much... I was badly prepared for school, so when I got to middle school I failed... They didn't give me the basics in primary school. But also because nowadays I can say that that teacher hit me a lot... She hit me with a ruler and the cane and she hit my face twice, and cut it deeply. She had an engagement ring on and slapped me across the face with her hands and tore my face twice. That's not a good way for gaining affection for school... My mother went there twice but straight

away, the teachers, we're very small next to them, they can create the picture they want, and say that the blame was all ours."

Camila was immediately clear about her dislike of school; however, she appeared to delay saying how she had been abused at school, as if it was something hard to admit. She says "nowadays I can say", implying that previously she had not been able to. She takes a moral stance through presenting herself as a powerless victim of a physically abusive system, with defective pedagogy, in which her educational relationships could not be resolved even with her mother's intervention. These dual criticisms appear to have great continuity along her education, in a variety of contexts, through school, a private language institute and university:

"In 5th grade... I was really weak, I had so many difficulties in Portuguese, I studied languages and I don't think I started in the best way. I studied English and I don't think there was a teacher who could develop interest for a foreign language in us. I started failing straightaway. ... Deep down I think we start learning Portuguese badly and we get to university and it makes the same mistakes and in English it was the same thing... I didn't learn the basics and I ended up going to [a private language institute]. I was only there a year, because my difficulties continued. The teacher only spoke English and when we failed to understand, 'Please don't interrupt'."

She only mentions one positive teaching relationship from school, in history of art. This positive relationship coincided with a positive belief in her capacity and enjoyment in that subject.

Interviewer: "What did you like about the history of art? "

"I like the subject, the themes they talked about in those three years. I got to know the teacher... he was somebody who really felt what he was teaching. He was somebody who was very interested in art too. And he passed his soul to the classes and he did everything for us to be able to succeed."

At university, despite mentioning some positive relationships, her emphasis is on the teachers who continued to make her feel inferior:

"There were teachers on the degree who stimulated the students to defend anthropology, because apart from being a relationship between students and teacher,

there was a teacher-student relationship... inside and outside the classroom, and with some study visits one gets a bit closer to some teachers... but it's all very hierarchical, very traditional, at this university, but in general in Portugal

Although of the motto of this university is to innovate, at the level of certain innovations, they don't exist at all, because a lot of teachers, although they give lessons here, they also teach in other places, and they're the same everywhere they go. So they make sure that they maintained the same attitude. Some, even those from this university, hierarchically they maintain themselves separately and always do ... the student has to know that he is very small next to the teacher."

Camila's language here reflects that used when talking about her primary school teacher, of her as a student being "small" in relation to the teacher. Moreover, her idea of the relationships in university is that they reflect the social structure of Portuguese society in general. These attitudes to teachers had continuity in her educational history. However, her later pedagogical relationships at work were more positive:

"I worked with two technicians in the laboratory and with a colleague in metals. Those were the three people with whom I worked directly and with whom I still maintain a very agreeable relationship ... they have the sensitivity to understand who has the ability for [restoration] and who doesn't.... "

Interviewer: "and you had the ability?"

"I think so. Modesty apart, the piece that they gave me, the principal piece of my placement, was without doubt an important piece."

As in her experience with the history of art, her good relationships at work seem to relate to her own positive self-regard in that concept, and of her belief in her own capacity and skill to do the work. It was as if the new relationships at work freed her from the constraints and frustrations in learning that she had felt for most of her educational career. Where participation seems possible through positive relationships and perceptions of the accessibility of learning opportunities, her assessment is positive; however, her sense of powerlessness to overcome difficulties is an overwhelming part of her life history.

9.1.2 Rita's story

The drama of Camila's story contrasts starkly with that of Rita, whose strength of relationships with teachers at all levels of her education is paralleled with her growing sense of agency. Throughout her education, she describes her relationships with many teachers as personal and educational although specific teachers stand out. In the following excerpt she reconstructs her biography so that her current love of anthropology is attributed to her primary school teacher.

"My primary-school teacher... I think my enthusiasm really came from him ... he taught us for four years and I think it was he who developed my enthusiasm for these things in anthropology. Now I understand... Now I can make an interpretation of this but at the time I didn't understand, but I thought it was very good; for example we had study visits. He took us to old cities and villages and showed us what rural life was like. Anything was an excuse for him to teach us traditional music. And that was how I learnt my times table, singing... Even today I miss him terribly, because he influenced me so much... In the secondary school I had two or three teachers who I still telephone, we still talk. Here at this university there's a whole series of them."

Rita reconstructs her past knowledge and relationships to give continuity to her present, and makes sense of her past knowledge through her current perspectives. The striking similarities between Rita and Camila's stories are the way that belief in their capacities is interwoven with the personal relationships from their earliest school experiences. While Camila mostly emphasises her anger and powerlessness, Rita stresses her growing personal development and sense of agency arising out of these relationships. She gives several examples of how this happened at university, including the following:

"In each year there was at least one teacher who influenced me more... at the level of discourse, of thinking... And the fact that they affected our way of thinking, and this will reflect in those little things that we do on a daily basis. We look about us in a completely different way... Professor Pedro, who's my supervisor at this moment... chose me to participate in the excavations. I think that there he demonstrated that he had a trust in me and he knew that I could do it... he also motivated me constantly to do good work and to do a good dissertation... which could be published. So he really pushes me a lot."

He's a person like that, for him a project has to be very good, sufficient is just not good enough, it has to be good ... For me to have a grade of 10 or 11 in a subject is enough and he showed me that was wrong. If I have the possibility to get 15 or 16, why shouldn't I it make more effort to have it? That's how he encouraged me and showed me that I was capable."

Her personal development arises from her sense that she is trusted, from her understanding of the professor's encouragement and belief in her capacity, and from the acceptance of his demands that she could and should aspire to do more. In Rita's history, these empowering relationships had already proved both accessible and valuable, and were integrated into her experience. Interestingly, she does not have any sense of the hierarchy of relationships mentioned by Camila, despite having previously expected to find this at university:

"I thought there would be a much colder relationship with the teachers here, that there would be that distance, wouldn't there? We're so used to seeing colleagues at university saying that at university you can't have a close relationship with the teacher. The teacher is there, and you're on the other side at a distance. But I didn't feel that here. "

Her growing sense of agency is integrally connected to her ability to develop positive relationships, in a virtuous circle leading to further career opportunities. In the second interview she says:

"I got a telephone call from [an organisation] asking me if I wanted to work with them in a monastery, which is where I am at the moment. I said yes, but I was curious about how they had obtained my telephone number, because I hadn't sent my CV anywhere ...a friend of mine who was working with me in Viana gave my name to IPPAR in conversation with the director, who was the one responsible for the excavation and who had said that they needed an anthropologist to be in the excavation ...and they didn't know anyone who was available, so [my friend] gave them my name ... "

After each interview, and in later telephone conversations, her career continued to develop through further contacts, although she did not limit herself to passively accepting offers of

employment, but created them for herself. This started with her placement, with the encouragement of her supervisor:

“I went to Professor Pedro and asked him what to do. And he said Rita, you're capable of doing this by yourself and getting your own placement and doing your own work, so why not ask? You don't need anybody else to get this placement for you... And that's how it was. I did my placement in the town hall where I live after speaking to the mayor and proposing what work I should do.”

9.2 Social class

Despite the dramatically different way in which Camila and Rita see the same degree, their educational relationships and their career prospects, life history is not the only factor. Personality, developed in social context, and resources also count. In Rita's case, her family's comparatively high cultural capital in the field of education (see appendix 7.8) is a further resource both in framing her expectations and her developing relationships including her early school experiences. This is not a cause of the trajectory, but a facilitating factor. For example, Rita describes how her university experience is not limited to studying, results and credentials, but is re-embedded through family discussions:

“Quite often at home we discuss these things [cultural patterns] because we always talk a lot at mealtimes, and quite often we prolong our lunch hour to talk about some current event ...and I try to give an anthropologist's perspective

Rita's educated middle-class environment appears to make it possible to embed her learning outside work and exams. Embedding learning in family discussions around the table would be difficult for some of the participants in this study, who admit the limitations of their parents in understanding what they are doing. In this study, it appears as one of a number of resources that individuals, with particular dispositions and experiences, can draw upon. Indeed, other participants without the advantage of background also form strong positive relationships in learning and work. For example, Joel (civil engineering), despite coming from a background poor in both cultural and economic resources, felt particularly confident in his pedagogical relationships:

"I got on particularly well with all the teachers. I don't think that I'm a different person to the others but they probably like me. They speak to me without any type of problem as if they were speaking to one of their colleagues. Perhaps it's my way of being... We speak about any type of subject without any problem at all... I always feel completely at ease to speak with teachers... inside and outside the classroom"

As with Rita, this social confidence continues after his transition to work. He found work as a site director through the contacts of one of his university lecturers, and said that he learnt through his personal contacts (an engineer and the site foreman), getting on well with everyone he met on site and in the town hall. He regards this ability as a personal characteristic that helps him prevail over difficulties in adaptation:

"I'm an easy person to talk to and that's how I overcame all the problems"

In this study, the majority of participants came from backgrounds with relatively few cultural resources, although they differed widely in financial resources. Yet what was salient in this small-scale qualitative study was that despite initial individual social positioning, it was a constellation of factors, including individual choice, action and personal characteristics such as Joel's, which were significant in constructing meanings, values and progression.

9.3 Gender

Gender also affected individual trajectories, which became apparent in the search for work, especially in fields such as banking and engineering perceived to be men's work. Marcia (civil engineering) explains how social norms for women's roles shape employment opportunities, and her own resistance to them.

"In a choice between a man and choosing a woman, they would always prefer a man. They say that a lot. But nobody takes it badly. If they had open minds they would know that there are women who aren't tied to what others want them to do. I've got no problem in getting home very late and leaving home very early. But I know there are female colleagues of mine from university who have problems if they get home late because their parents get angry or they have a husband and children to take care of, and so [the companies] don't want things like that happening."

*Interviewer: "aren't these things problems for men too?**

"No, normally they are not, they don't mind getting home late even if they're married."

According to Marcia, it is women's perceived domestic duties as well as parental control of a daughter's activities that restricts women's opportunities. She believes that it is not female incapability in gendered activities such as civil engineering, particularly on site, that limits opportunities, but the conflicts of time which affects a women's ability to dedicate herself to her job. This corresponds to comments from other participants, but it was particularly salient in civil engineering where all graduates mention extremely long hours. However, Marcia does not allow herself to be restricted in this way, despite pressures from her aging parents to take a greater role in supporting them.

Isolina, also in civil engineering, sees things differently. She maintains that work on a site, where she had her placement, is not appropriate for a woman. She invokes both constraints upon time and the dirtiness of the site as a reason for avoiding it:

"I have just been on a site in my work placement and I had to admit that it's a bit difficult for a woman... I think on a site it would be really difficult to leave at the end of the day. I would have to twist their arms to be able to leave. It can't be like that. For a woman it's more difficult, and then when children come, even more... Going there every now and again is fine. But going there every day and working there, it's dirty..."

It is not as if the outside world is restricting Isolina, but her own ideas of femininity and a woman's role. Her idea of parenthood is also linked to traditional ideas of what it means to be a mother, which she regards as natural and inevitable:

"When a couple have a child, who is it who takes more care of the children? It's obvious that it's a woman. Although it might not be so much like that nowadays, people say is both of them, but it's different. A mother is always a mother, isn't she?"

She appeals to popular discourses of changing relationships, and refutes them. *"It's obvious"* and *"A mother is always a mother"* infers that biology and child rearing arrangements are intertwined, and appeals to the morally superior position of women who accept this role.

Yet Isolina's view of her the outside world goes much further than her own desired role as a woman. She eventually goes to work with her father and brother in the family firm, but avoids disagreeing with them because of how she believes women are seen:

"Sometimes problems arise, but often I don't say anything because I am afraid of being criticised... because, well, women aren't very well accepted, not very well seen. in this business it's a bit like that. We wouldn't want to admit it but it's true... There are some things that I say but there are others that I don't because I am afraid of saying the wrong thing."

Her fear of making mistakes and the lack of desire to assert her point of view with her brother and father have similarities to the section on critical discourse in the classroom (see below). A paternalistic model is apparent here; the fear of making mistakes, the lack of encouragement of critical dialogue, and the unspoken, subordination to those seen to be in control, through beliefs in roles and values. This is the only example where this pattern had a gendered variant, although the lack of support for learning in the work place and limited opportunities for participation were common themes.

9.4 The effect of teaching practices on learning

Although positive learning experiences coincided with a good self-image, other factors were also significant. Students also tried to assess what subjects would be important in their future working lives. As indicated in the previous chapter, a minority of students, in all subject areas, came to believe that university helped their intellectual and social development, but how they engaged in each subject made a difference. For example Silvia (Administration) says:

"We study to learn something, but not just to do the exam. I think it's good for us, and our intellectual and social culture. We're studying and we get know things which happened in the past and which are part of society nowadays and very important... Quite often we study a bit for the exams, and this happens sometimes principally if the subject is something we don't like, and then I think we study a bit to pass exams and we don't mind if it's important for our life or not."

All participants said that teachers affected how and what they learnt, overcoming previous notions of the usefulness and the inherent interest of the subject itself. Sandra (Administration) said that in a subject that they perceived to be uninteresting the teacher transformed their perceptions:

"In school administration, we have to study the forms of leadership, the characteristics, legislations, law. It was a subject which from the outset we thought would be a little bit boring, with lots of legislation and so on, but it wasn't, it was interesting."

Ricardo (civil engineering, 1st interview) explained how his participation changed dramatically with two similar subjects given by different lecturers.

"The lecturers have a lot of importance. There are some who could actually create disinterest in the class and they couldn't motivate the students. That can get very boring, and then after a while people start missing classes. A subject I had in the second year and another one in the 4th year were related to certain techniques and were given by different lecturers although they were only slightly different... In one of them I managed to get very high grades and the other one only an average grade. Well obviously it wasn't just them, I recognise that I studied in one more than the other but it was also because of the teacher. He didn't motivate us, and there wasn't very much interest on my part either. But the other teacher answered all my questions and was always available to explain things, and this increased interest on my part."

Classes considered "boring" might be poorly attended even if the subject is considered inherently interesting or useful. Clara (Administration) gives an example:

"Sometimes something is interesting, but the teacher doesn't know how to motivate us, and gives classes in a very boring way... for example, I had introduction to law [at my previous university] and I had it again here and I liked the subject, only that what I learnt was there and not here, because the teacher was very monotonous when he gave the class. When that happens, we get to the middle of a lesson and there is nobody in the room because everybody has left... the teacher has a lot of influence, because the

subject might not be very interesting but if that teacher knows how to teach and motivate us then things can become interesting.”

Many of the participants mentioned the need for the lecturer to motivate them and make the subject interesting, despite knowing that a subject maybe important for their future. The onus, thus expressed, is outside themselves, and they are thus partly dependent upon their teacher's skills. Several participants distinguished between a “good” and a “bad” teacher, which they defined in terms of class participation, consistency and clarity of explanation. António (civil engineering) gives his perspective;

“A great teacher is one who knows how to teach, and is not worried about completing the programme, but with getting the student to understand, from the very first day till the last. That's what I consider a good teacher. “

A good teacher, according to this model, is someone who focuses on students' understandings. The teacher is the one who has the information, and the students need to learn and understand that specific area of knowledge, without questioning its truth. Teaching is based on giving information and instructions, and can be authoritarian. Expressions used by students reflect this; teaching is “giving the material” (“dar a materia”), (subject matter), as if on a fixed menu of knowledge. Participation, thus understood, is related to motivation to go to classes, to study and understand, asking questions for clarification. Few participants go further in their definition of a good teacher, except Rita, who sees a teacher's knowledge as capable of transforming her own:

“A teacher is a master with a message to transmit to us ...their own different ways of thinking makes me alter mine”

Nevertheless, the transformation is unidirectional; teachers may transform students, but the reverse process, or mutual teaching and learning, is never mentioned. Yet some of the teachers in this university were apparently concerned and helpful beyond classroom boundaries, although this was still within the motivation-understanding model. Sandra (Administration) explains:

"I really had spectacular teachers who lent us supporting texts, they came loaded down into the classrooms, they always worried about us, and gave us their telephone number in case we had questions at the time of the exams, and I think that was great, especially for student motivation. There were others who weren't like that... They got to university, they gave the lesson, they came to the end and they went away and there wasn't any contact like that."

Interviewees all said that they were free, with most teachers, to ask questions when necessary.

Sandra continues:

"Almost all teachers generally gave total liberty for the students to speak and ask questions about what they didn't understand and it didn't matter if it was the first, the second or the third time."

Bad teachers were the reverse, according to Sandra; they didn't have a personal relationship with the students and were not concerned with processes of understanding, learning and motivation, didn't give opportunities to ask questions. In Paulo's view (anthropology) this meant:

"The bad teachers influenced me, for the worse, they made me disinterested"

The teachers, in other words, were responsible for the students' learning; students did not appear to take responsibility for this themselves, using the teachers and classroom activity as a resource in their own intellectual search. Relationships, thus considered, are paternalistic, with control and power on one side, even if this is benevolent and helpful. Acquiring knowledge is the process of moving from one point in the paternal equation to the other.

Yet according to one participant, students are often not always willing participants in class.

Sandra relates the following:

"Sometimes some teachers must feel frustrated because they ask the students to participate, don't they, and the students don't. ... we had a teacher this year... and the way that she gave the lessons was a little bit different to what we were used to because she tried to get students to participate in classes. But there was no way of getting us to participate because there's always somebody who doesn't feel very comfortable"

because we're afraid of making a mistake, but she tried every way possible to get us to participate and she ended up managing it. You can see this from the grades that the students got; the students who came to classes had very good grades."

Sandra's story suggests that students needed to be persuaded to take part in class activities that did not follow the traditional model. She said there were those who "didn't feel comfortable" at first, because they were not used to this type of activity, while also suggesting this lack of involvement by students is commonplace. Her view that this teacher was a good one is reflected by her comment that those who participated in classes gained good grades. Getting the grade is the outcome; interest in the class is the process.

9.5 Critical learning

The idea that higher education is connected with preparation for future employment is not only assumed by individuals, but is also part of government aims. Through this, higher education is connected to social and economic development through human capital theory, cultural creativity and scientific thinking (see appendix 9.1). At the UDC, the Dean envisages that the stimulation of cultural creativity, the development of critical thought and scientific spirit should be developed both in classes and the dissertation at the end of all degrees:

"The objective of the dissertation is that the student should undertake an initiation in scientific methods, in the spirit of curiosity and critical thought. The object is that we have some control of the quality of the output, because if we didn't, we would run the risk that the students would leave only with the experience of copying, and having completed the various disciplines in a very parasitic manner. With the dissertation, we can ensure that they are autonomous and deserve to have their degree, which is the license to learn by themselves"

However, the students did not seem to accept or understand that the dissertation was part of their intellectual development. Like many participants in this study, Camila (Anthropology) had difficulty completing her dissertation, and regarded it as unconnected to work, so devalued it. She does not seem to share the Dean's vision of the dissertation as developing the spirit of

curiosity and scientific thought. Indeed, the idea that she has about the dissertation is the very antithesis of the Dean's, that is, to avoid parasitic reproduction of the ideas of others.

"Although I have lot of ideas for my dissertation, I'll look up ideas that other people have already written. I have to base everything on this theoretical support ... I have to get the ideas from different sources, and that's not mine at all, it's nothing new, these are things which already exist ... so it's just rubbish, it's 50 pages of rubbish and then they will give me a grade for it and then they will give me a degree."

It seemed that she did not regard the dissertation as a creative or intellectual project. One possibility for this is the lack of preparation that they were given for it. Candida (anthropology) claims:

"There are many students who get to the 4th year who don't know how to prepare their dissertation. That's terrible, but I think they don't apply themselves very much. The university makes us do the dissertation but it doesn't prepare the students. It didn't give us the pre-preparation that it could."

Even when individuals had completed their dissertation successfully and found some intrinsic value in it, they seem to agree with the general perspective that it was not really relevant for their future, as in the case of Joel (civil engineering):

"I don't know whether it's worth it, I mean that it's worth it; I learnt a lot of things with the dissertation. I think it was worth it for this reason, but I think perhaps it should have been done another way... I think we should have some work that isn't so time consuming as a dissertation. For example in the state university they do engineering projects. We study projects here at this university, and I also did a project here."

In his somewhat contradictory discourse, Joel appears to value what he learnt, yet suggests a common idea among the civil engineering graduates that the dissertation should be replaced by a more practical approach, such as an engineering project, which is what is undertaken in the rival public university. The idea that the dissertation is not appropriate for engineering degrees, and that a project would be enough, is common to all the participants, and was probably

discussed between them. It is as if Joel is faithful to the groups' critical viewpoint despite having found some learning value in his own work. The students frequently mentioned resentment for the amount of work it gives them, preventing them finishing their degree quickly, and the lack of support they felt in undertaking it. None of the participants described their dissertations in terms of critical thinking or originality, so rather than an opportunity for creative agency it is regarded as an imposition.

Being critical involves skills and dispositions (chapter 3) and means being evaluative, it implies a process of deepening understanding of whatever is under consideration, assessing truth claims, and coming to autonomous conclusions about them. This implies an active process of enquiry, involving multiple resources, not only those presented by the teacher. A further distinction is that critical thinking, according to Barnett (1997:16-18) is an individual process, whereas critical thought is collective, social and in order to happen it requires social ratification.

This study considered two aspects; firstly, how participants' value criticality at university and work, and secondly, the perception of how it is valued and encouraged by those in power. Yet discussion about it suggested a lack of common understanding about its meaning. This does not mean that critical thinking does not take place, but implies a lack of coherence in language used to describe critical processes. However, descriptions of participation, learning processes, objectives in learning and participants' understanding of the nature of knowledge and truth gives some idea of how the participants valued critical thinking, and the encouragement and opportunity that they had for this, as shown below.

Participants indicated that their goal was towards understanding. This in itself implies a degree of critical thinking; one cannot truly understand without some degree of verification. However, when students claim that they wish to understand, it is not clear what exactly they mean by this. Moreover, students' motivations included learning so that they could become good professionals, but this utilitarianism neither precludes nor guarantees critical thought. Criticality, as Barnett has pointed out, has many domains, including practical and disciplinary domains.

Indeed, curiosity in specific areas of study drove the interest of some participants, such as Ana (Administration)

Interviewer: "Why do you want to keep learning?"

"It's in order to deepen my knowledge, and update myself, because I feel that in the world, things are changing very rapidly, technologies arise and I feel frustrated when I see something new that I don't know how to work with.... I know that a lot of things are changing, evolving, new theories developing, and I don't want to be out of date, because I think a major transformation in Administration is coming... I want to be a part of all this so I can help in the organisation of Administration."

Ana's drive for information, to be up to date, is part of her desire to be an active part of the world, to effect change, as well as her empowerment in civic life. Her drive for understanding thus appeared to cross boundaries, relating to her inner understanding, the world around her, and the practicalities of her existence.

Not all candidates have this drive; learning can be disassociated from self-identity, and connected to a future unknown world of work, rather than a drive for truth and understanding. Accordingly, deepening knowledge is related to external rewards, such as improved grades and social recognition, which for Isolina (civil engineering) shows that she's really got to the bottom of a subject:

"When one dedicates oneself to a discipline, I notice that the grades go up... I really want to show, I really wanted to be seen to do well."

Mariana, psychology, was driven partly by a fear of failure, in her own eyes and to those who were important to her.

"At first I came to all [lessons] because I was afraid ... I thought that perhaps if I didn't come to the lessons afterwards I wouldn't understand things so well so I came to all the lessons to keep up with what was going on so it would be easier to study... I didn't want to let down my parents and I wanted to show results so I always studied."

She says her drive was to understand, but she gave up trying to use it to enhance her own understanding of the world and other people after the first couple of years of study:

"In the first and second years I started using [psychology] to try and understand things around me and try to explain certain things. I was probably trying to apply my knowledge in practice for myself. From the third and 4th years I didn't think it made so much sense to do that, I don't do it any more. "

When her degree ended, and she found a job in a non-psychology related area, her curiosity in her chosen subject of study seemed to end with it. In her second interview, she appeared to be disinterested in furthering her knowledge:

Interviewer: "Do you read your psychology books now?"

"No, because the books I had in psychology are all technical books, and I think that if I'm not reading with some specific objective I won't be able to remember the information."

Her specific objectives in psychology, it seemed, were related to performative tasks such as university assessments, and possibly in a future professional role as a psychologist. When she did not achieve the latter, her interest was suspended. As such, her interest was not to deepen her knowledge of the limits and possibilities of the subject itself, nor to enhance her understanding of the world. Understanding was thus pragmatic and deeply context bound.

In other cases, practical application, understanding and self-identity seemed inseparable, such as Marcia (civil engineering):

"I try to see what's most important in what I'm studying... For example, there are certain teachers who... tell us that some things are essential and that some things are necessary to apply in practice, and that's what I try to pick up on."

In Marcia's case, her desire to keep learning was constant (in all interviews) and designed to fill the perceived gaps in her learning. The drive to learn and deepen her knowledge was constant, and the criterion for learning was usefulness. Like many of the students, she said she wished to understand; her understanding may or may not have involved elements of evaluation or confirmation of the truth of the theories. Certainly, after her transition to work, she was concerned with practical elements of what worked or did not work well, and how far her existing

knowledge allowed her to have a practical role. Moreover, when the interviewer asked her about her critical assessment of subjects in the classroom, she interpreted this as how useful the knowledge would be:

Interviewer: "Were there opportunities to develop a critique of the subjects taught?"

Marcia: "Yes, when it happens, it happened like this. When there are certain subjects that interest me, and they really interest me I tried to put the problem to the lecturer. When it's those disciplines that are not very connected to Civil Engineering, I don't give very much importance to what's happening so I end up not developing a critique."

Interviewer: "And how do the professors respond to these critiques?"

Marcia: "They try to understand and they try to change things. There are people who try to change things and yet it ends up the same."

Interviewer: "You're talking about critique of the programme content?"

Marcia: "Exactly."

Interviewer: "Did you ever have doubt about the truth of the theories, or whether they could be seen another way?"

Marcia: "Yes that has happened. To err is human and that has happened to me at various times. There have been subjects that they taught us when at the end of the lesson the lecturer admits that it was all wrong. And then criticisms start, and nobody knows what they're doing. "

The interviewer's question regarding a critique of the subject matter was interpreted as a discussion of a criticism of what subjects were presented, and how. This was not apparent at first, and only became so as the discussion progressed. Realising the misunderstanding, the interviewer turns to a discussion of truth claims. This was also interpreted as a discussion of criticism of the way the classes were given and what mistakes made, rather than the nature of knowledge itself. Several interviewees responded this way, in all the degrees represented here. It was as if the idea of critical thinking itself was not a very common one; perhaps if the words "evaluation of truth claims" or "assessment of theories" had been used, it might possibly have generated a different response. Yet there were students who understood the question as intended:

Interviewer: "Is it important to develop a critique of the subject matter?"

Ricardo: "It develops the state of things. I think a critical spirit develops new positions in new subjects... For example if a colleague turns round to me and says something shouldn't be like that or should be another way, this will make me think about his point of view and perhaps another situation where it might not be true. If we start discussing we might get to an optimal conclusion, even better than my mind or his. When a critique is well developed, it is not destructive, it's not criticism in the bad sense which doesn't take anybody anywhere ... Being open and knowing how to listen and thinking whether it can be true or not. If somebody is in the classroom with this spirit it makes things more interesting and contributes to development."

Ricardo mentions several aspects which could be regarded as indicative of critical thought; deepening understanding, the evaluation of truth claims, the recognition of alternative positions, the curiosity to find out more, the social opportunity for discussions, and the development of knowledge itself. He was not the only interviewee who arrived at this conclusion; about a quarter of all participants gave similar answers.

The second reason why it appeared that there is comparatively little understanding about critical thinking and assessment of truth claims was that while there was some degree of consensus about the opportunity for discussion in the classroom, with some teachers, truth and knowledge ultimately resided with the teacher. Ana (Administration) says:

"There were things I didn't agree with. There were teachers with whom we had the opportunity even in the exams to give a personal opinion and to develop a critique. Of course it had to be well founded. There were also cases of teachers where we knew that if we didn't defend the opinion of the teacher then it would be worse for us. Well I rebelled a bit there because I didn't agree, but I didn't want to lose out, so I defended the teacher's opinion."

Even if students' points of views were encouraged or tolerated in the classroom, there was a general idea that this had limited applicability in the assessment processes. This had its own individual variations, arising out of individual trajectories, such as Camila's:

"We have to answer questions like little lambs and not question in any way at all. "

Even Rita accepted that there were only limited opportunities for individual perspectives:

"There are certain teachers who accept our own interpretation in the evaluation, and others who don't accept it."

Moreover; even in classroom discussions, there was no necessity to join in. Thus critical thinking did not become collective critical thought. Mariana (psychology) says:

"When discussions started to develop I only thought "I agree with this, I don't agree with that", but I never spoke... Everybody else was debating things and as they were speaking I was building my point of view. I didn't need to say anything because in that type of discussion they rarely got to a conclusion so people went away with their own [point of view]. It was only important for me and it wasn't important that the others knew because I knew what I thought."

Mariana did not need to defend any particular perspective, it was not necessary to join in the discussions, and it was not part of the evaluation process, thus her own critical thinking did not need to be defended to see how well she analysed and supported her own point of view. There was confusion between giving one's point of view, and developing a logical or evidence based critique. Critical thinking, although inwardly reflective, might not be critical at all. Indeed, Mariana goes on to say:

"If on the one hand they say we should have an opinion, on the other hand they say that nobody invents anything nowadays, don't they, everything has been invented, and we only have to agree or disagree."

Thus in the knowledge society, with accelerating change spinning almost out of the bounds of comprehension, Mariana has come to understand that knowledge is unchanging; that her contribution to it is impossible, and her private, undefended opinion is important only to her. University, thus construed, could hardly be conceived of as contributing to knowledge at all. Yet there were also individuals who seem to be searching for truth. António claims that:

"At university we learnt to think in another way about a problem, perhaps we think the little bit before we act. Doing a degree teaches us something about this and it's not just what we learn on the course or what the degree allows us to learn in life."

In his second interview he discusses different ways in which he contributes to his father's company, and comes to the following conclusion:

“A lot of theory doesn't work in practice but this practice will lead us into a new theory. There is always a theory behind it, but for every theory that we say is going to work and perhaps will not in practice there is another theory that will. There's always theoretical support.”

António had the opportunity to develop his critical thought in conjunction with his father, through the family business. Yet for many of the participants, this was not even a remote possibility. The opportunities in university to discuss points of view, give opinions, and develop one's own projects, are open and encouraging compared to the work environments faced by some of the participants. A further factor to note was that neither academic discipline nor social class seemed to be important in developing critical thinking skills in university. There were individuals who appeared to value critical thinking in each of the degrees included in this study, and individuals with comparatively little cultural capital relevant for the field of higher education (such as Ana and Ricardo), as well as those with more (such as Rita).

The Dean believes that it is traditional Portuguese university culture that makes the development of critical thinking difficult:

“Unfortunately, the institution is contaminated by the environment of the country in which it is not very common to stimulate culture, critical thought and scientific research. Inasmuch as the institution is seen as a post-secondary school, there is a risk that it is not possible to initiate the student in the spirit of critical thought and research. I think that our greatest problem is that the Portuguese university lecturers haven't yet understood this new mission of the university, because they just reproduce the models of the university from which they have come, in which there is a very sedentary spirit.”

9.6 Conclusion:

This section on trajectories of participation is concerned with how individual processes and experiences of learning intersect with the learning opportunities created by the university, and

relate to later learning relationships. These trajectories are marked by extremes, but this is not just an accident of the variations in the interviewees, but perhaps a characteristic of Portuguese society. It is a society described as paternalistic, yet the authority implied in paternalism, even when transferred to a teacher or employer, can mean protection and encouragement as well as control. Certainly both extremes are manifest here, nurturing on the one hand and controlling and disempowering on the other.

These extremes of paternalistic relationships were also manifest in the relatively passive way that learning is organised round the classroom. Curiosity and understanding appear to depend on the coincidence of individual trajectories and nurturing teaching relationships. Despite the students' own agendas, a benevolent teacher was seen to encourage learning through dialogue, in order to help the students arrive at 'correct' understandings of pre-determined areas of knowledge. The reward was higher grades, and in some cases, applicable knowledge for the work place (the "real world"). Less benevolent teachers were considered aloof, disinterested, controlling and authoritarian, permitting neither discussion nor questions. Yet more innovative attempts at involving students in other forms of participation were also mistrusted. The concern was more to "get things right" than to explore, to master particular areas of knowledge rather than test their limits and verify their truth claims.

Yet students were critical; of curriculum content and its validity and applicability to working life; to curriculum delivery, and how it is made accessible, interesting and motivating; and of administrative and organisational procedures. Criticality towards knowledge itself, of its dimensions, feasibility, and generalisability was rare. University as a place where one 'learns to think' did not appear to be a common discourse, and even where it was recognised to some extent, the general opinion seemed to be that it was almost irrelevant in matters of assessment. Given this scenario, it is not surprising that many students rejected the dissertation as irrelevant. The role of university seemed limited to imparting given knowledge, rather than developing acting, reflexive agents.

10. PRIVATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATES: IDENTITIES AND PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT

10.1 Introduction

State universities are both cheaper and perceived as more prestigious than their private counterparts, (except the Catholic University). The decision to go to a private university is taken, in many cases, after failing to be accepted by the state system. As chapter 8 indicated, the choice of degree is related to self-identity. For this reason, some students choose to transfer from the state system to a private university in order to take up a place on a degree with which they feel affinity, despite the social stigma associated with the private system. Once at university, the students in this study mostly accept this identity, while noting the discrepancy between what is said about the institution and their experiences within it. However, the transition to work brings with it new challenges; faced with the challenges of the labour market and applying their knowledge in the practical world, many then re-examine the idea of university, their degree courses and particularly the idea of private higher education.

10.2 Paths to the private system

In this study, a fifth of the participants had attended state universities before starting at the UDC, 25% had attended other private universities, giving them experience of alternative organisations. A further 10% had been accepted by the state system but chosen not to accept and 20% had not applied to the state system. This was not only because of the choice of degree, but also because of other factors including the university's proximity to home. For example, Carlos explains how he left a chemistry degree at a distant state university to take up civil engineering at the UDC:

"I wasn't interested in that degree, it wasn't what I wanted and it was so far away. It took me 5 hours to get home. Everything together made it hard for me to adapt."

But in many cases, it was failure to be accepted by the state system in the degree of their choice that led the participants, often reluctantly, to take up a place in a private institution. Isolina (civil engineering) explains her resistance, and subsequent adaptation to the university:

“People say that if you go to a private university it's made easier to pass. They say that all the subjects and the teaching are made easier. Probably it's not true, but that's what people think outside... I always meant to apply to the state university again, once I got here and got used to it, I didn't really feel like going somewhere else and making new friends, so I stayed here.”

Isolina's acceptance of her new identity as a private university student was apparently passive, accommodating, and the result of successful socialization rather than a choice, or recognition of any positive quality of the university or the degree she was studying. Her doubts about coming to the university were based on popular ideas about the inadequacies of the private system, for example, that assessment is facilitated, and that the subject matter is not up to standard. Several interviewees mentioned this, although regarded it as a misperception by the outside world. Ricardo (civil engineering) elucidates:

“People have this idea that private universities facilitate things, that you pay for your degree and you can get your degree more easily. I tell everybody who asks me that I didn't ever have that possibility; a lot of work is needed to pass... I think perhaps that here they demand even a little bit more, or perhaps I was more responsible. I knew that my parents were paying for me, so I had a great feeling of responsibility to finish my degree in the shortest time possible. So I made more effort and I know my parents had more difficulties. Here at this university nothing is made easier for anybody.”

Participants often mentioned that they believed that the class sizes were much larger in the state system, without a system of support for the students' learning. As André (civil engineering) says:

“I have the idea from conversations that they have enormous classrooms, with a lot of students and teachers speak with a microphone. It's not like here; there are few of us.”

Moreover, the equipment and installations were perceived to be better in the UDC. Ana (Administration) affirmed:

“I think that in relation to the state university it was much more advanced. I had friends in state universities who had a lot of problems; installations, equipment and everything

like that. I didn't here, there was nothing that we lacked, we had great installations, and great equipment."

Those who came from other universities, especially the state sector, particularly valued the relationship between lecturers and students within the UDC. Márcia (civil engineering) expresses this clearly:

"The lecturers at this university are much more accessible, there's a much greater difference between students and teachers in the public universities, where there is not the slightest possibility of asking questions and speaking to the lecturers. But not here, it's very different, and I also liked the way that the classes were given, very carefully, with much more attention to the students... this was much better."

For Marcia and many of the students in this study, access to teaching staff and small class sizes were perceived to be the major advantages of this private university.

10.3 Hazing

If the social distance between teaching staff and students is reduced at the UDC, so is the strength and hierarchy of the hazing in the students' initiation ceremonies (which continue along the year). Candida describes her initiation at her previous university:

"It was hard. Walking with our knees tied together, they threw eggs at us, and at night they made us walk by a wall and threw cold water and flour on us... They did a lot of things to us; they closed us in rooms and smoked so it was horrible. Then made us sit with our heads down... I started feeling bad, I started coughing and coughing and I couldn't stop and so I left. But there are some people who were frightened and they ended up being really traumatised. They couldn't even study because they felt so traumatised. Instead of helping us to get used to the academic environment these people terrorised us even more on."

The common elements appear to be control, humiliation and fear, especially of being excluded from more enjoyable activities along the year. There are also advantages, such as facilitating socialisation, as Carlos expresses:

"You get to meet your colleagues. Probably it would take a lot longer to make new friends if it weren't for the Fresher's week, because people are obliged to socialise."

The UDC deliberately set out to have different type of initiation ceremonies, in the name of democracy, as the Dean explains:

"We are now in a less stratified society in which certain types of behaviour cannot be tolerated. There is an effective democratisation of university life, which is not compatible with the arrogance of the elder to the younger students. Fresher's week should be a way of integrating new colleagues when they arrive at university, and victimization is a pathological component that I do not accept, so I have always tried to ensure that the initiation of new colleagues should be within acceptable limits, and I do not permit that the elder students mistreat the younger. Instead they should integrate and initiate them with a spirit of respect, friendship and solidarity, and not repression and victimization."

Indeed, none of the participants who experienced Fresher's week at the UDC mentioned the fear and trauma experienced by Candida. There was some idea that it was entertaining. For example, Rita (anthropology):

"It was really fun and I liked it a lot... I participated in everything."

Yet although violence and humiliation involving egg throwing and dowsing were excluded, for others, elements of fear and control still existed. Sofia (psychology) explains what she had to do and why she felt this was necessary:

"They painted me and made me do very silly, strange things, rolling on the ground. I didn't want to avoid it altogether because otherwise I couldn't participate in any of the other academic activities and I would be completely excluded."

A common element of the process, in both the UDC and other universities, is that the new students have to call the older students "Doctor", as a clear reminder of the process of hierarchization of which university is a part. Moreover, Isolina's description suggests that

domination by older students, through which freshers gain acceptability, is a major part of the process:

“They say ‘I want a cigarette, give me a cigarette’ and things like that or they say ‘go and fetch this or that for me’, and people are obliged to. I don’t think it should be like that. I think we’re all equal... Later we were all made to go to a gymnasium and dance and sing.”

The subordination involved in this hazing runs parallel to any paternalism and passivity in the classroom. In subsequent years students have the opportunity to “get revenge” and repeat the process with younger students, although none of the participants in this study admitted taking part in this. Despite the existence in the UDC of older students who can “save” unwilling students, there is a lack of viable alternatives to enable students to participate in enjoyable social activities.

10.4 Changing identities: the transition to work

If, before the transition to work, students rejected what was said about private universities as unfounded, after starting work, some were more vulnerable to external criticisms. This was particularly true if the labour market opportunities for their degree were limited, and appeared more so if they lacked confidence. It also depended on (perceived) access to the labour market, which all participants said was facilitated through pulling strings, known in Portugal as “cunhas”.

10.4.1 “Meter a cunha”: pulling strings

The idea of “cunhas” is to use contacts and influence to get the desired help, and it often includes an exchange of favours or power relationships. It means that credentials are secondary to the power relationship, as explained by Candida (anthropology):

“There is still the mentality of authority, pulling strings and knowledge.... People are very old fashioned and don’t have an idea of qualifications and qualified service, it’s all through pulling strings.”

Candida claims that those in power decide who has access to employment and on what terms thus limiting access according to credentials. According to her, this is a long-established

tradition, although Mario (Administration) claims that it is recent. Possibly these are both true; previously the number of highly qualified people was low in comparison to the number of places available; unemployment among graduates was unknown until the independence and subsequent influx of returnees from the colonies.

Some of the participants wanted to look for work without asking for favours. This apparently implied greater personal merit and kudos, while the idea of using personal contacts, if they had them, was only a stand by, as Clara claims:

“If I had contacts I don't know if I would want them, because if one day I have a better position than I have now it's because I managed it by my own merit... sometimes people make a lot of effort and their merit is not recognised, but it should be us who fight. If we manage it, people will know that it is with our efforts, really proving our capacities.”

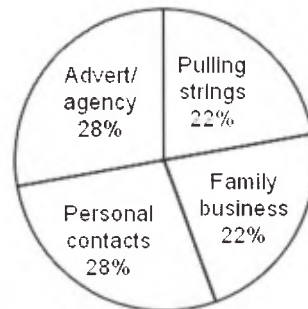
Clara takes a moral position against the use of pulling strings, although she does not have connections herself. Her moral position, then, is one that coincides with the reality of her situation. The other participants have a tacit disapproval of the need to use these contacts, while simultaneously stressing the importance of using them. Mario (Administration), having explained that he was going to send out his CV to apply for advertised jobs, also stressed the indispensability of pulling strings.

“I think here in Portugal [knowing people] is the most important thing. Nowadays people aren't paid for the value that they have, but for the contacts, for pulling strings as we usually say. It is one of those things that I can't say that I won't do. There are people who can sometimes manage it on their own, but there are only a few of them. For most people it's because they know someone, or because somebody gave them a chance.”

Mario stresses the importance of contacts, claiming that few can manage without it, although his moral position is apparent through the use of “unfortunately”. Moreover, he regards this as normal in Portugal. Indeed, in the second interview it transpired that he found work through his father's business contacts.

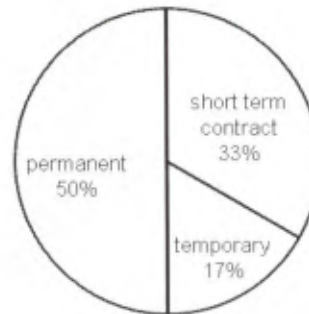
In this study, a third found employment through contacts who knew their capacity to work, corresponding to the idea of networking (see table 10.1 below); that is, contacts developed in previous employment, placements and university. Nearly a quarter of the participants went into their family business, nearly a quarter got a job through pulling strings, and the rest found employment through adverts or private employment agencies. Moreover, those who found employment through personal contacts were more likely to be satisfied with their work than those who depended on adverts and agencies. This may not be representative of the population as a whole, but they show how social capital affects pathways to employment.

Figure 10.1: Paths to employment



Although all the participants in this study had found employment, half of these were precarious positions (see figure 10.2 below). Contracts were either temporary or were short-term contracts. In two cases, the graduates had been working longer than stipulated by law on this basis, but the employer refused to legalise the position with a permanent contract. Jobs in family businesses were regarded as secure, as were most jobs found through personal favours.

Figure 10.2: Precarity of employment



10.4.2 First shocks

As graduates tried to find work through the “market”, public beliefs about private higher education began to have some impact, although more so where labour market opportunities and individual confidence were insufficient. Accordingly, it was not a major problem for those with degrees in civil engineering; and all these participants reported that the fact that their degree was from a private university was an element of surprise but not an obstacle in itself, as Marcia: (civil engineering) reports:

“There are lots of people who don't know the university, many start by asking what subjects we studied, and when we tell them all the disciplines that we have done, they are surprised because it's so similar to the state university. When they ask who our lecturers are, people say that some of the names are very well known.”

However, Marcia noted the fact that UDC graduates were not automatically admitted to the Order of Engineers without taking a specific admittance exam, unlike their public university counterparts. This meant that they were unable to sign licenses, and thus were excluded from some employment opportunities.

Two thirds of the participants in this study noted negative attitudes towards private university graduates in general, often specifically towards UDC graduates. Some of these resisted this on

the basis that outsiders did not know what they were talking about, and that comments bore no reality to their experience within the university. But for a few, confidence in their choice of degree and university was shaken. The following two excerpts were both from Administration graduates; the first is Ana:

“So many things are said about this university and the course, mainly the press and even by people from other universities who, when we say that we are at this university, only have a very negative idea because they've never heard of this degree. This is disheartening... I think the university is not what people say it is... despite being private, it's a good university. I think it's a preconceived idea that people have.”

Ana perceives her experience to be positive, and has gained from university what she expected of it so these goals appeared to be realized. In her case (see previous chapters), she wanted more than qualifications; and had overcome several obstacles to go to university, perhaps giving her the confidence to resist these negative discourses.

On the other hand, Clara, who admitted being rather timid, appeared unable to defend her graduate identity against the onslaught from the media and individuals:

“I haven't found anybody, to date, who has said anything good about this university. There've been many times when I don't even dare to say where I've studied or taken my degree because of the image of this university. It could be a bit unfortunate to have spoken to people who don't like this university and run it down... it's very upsetting at the beginning of every academic year to open the newspaper and only see bad things about this university. It's our image that has also been damaged. “

Interviewer: “Who runs this university down, people within it or from outside?”

Clara: “It's both, because if someone runs it down, it's because somebody who studies here has been saying things about it.”

Interviewer: “Do you agree with the things that people say about it?”

Clara: “I don't say that the university doesn't have positive aspects... I liked it, the teaching, about that I've got no complaints to make at all.”

Clara refers to media articles criticizing private universities and the UDC in particular without trying to ascertain their legitimacy; she also comes to the conclusion (without any evidence) that complaints must have come from students themselves, although her own experience was positive. In other words, a lack of critical assessment leaves her vulnerable to outside influence, unmitigated by personal contacts and opportunities for her personal realization. This, compounded with the lack of opportunities at work (her job involved answering the phone and photocopying) led her to the conclusion that her university experience wasn't worthwhile.

Interviewer: "Are you happy with your choice of degree?"

Clara: "No I am not. I recognise that when I applied for higher education I didn't have very much information about it and it was all done quickly. On one hand I wanted to go to university, that's true, but I also feel, although they didn't say anything, that it was for my parents not to be disappointed, because my parents really loved the idea of me having a university degree. Now I look at my parents and they look at me and wonder why they spent all that money."

Clara's lack of resources has made her choices and valuing of university problematic. First, she found it difficult to choose a degree, having no support in understanding what they were about and what they could mean for her life. Second, she found her identity challenged as a private university graduate. Third, her job was precarious, unsatisfying, and one which seemed to bear no relationship to her degree.

10.5 Satisfaction after transition

Prior to the transition to work, the participants reported feeling satisfied with their choice of degree and university, despite some originally having been disappointed at not getting into the public system. Sometimes they regretted their choices for other reasons. For example, Carlos (civil engineering)

"If I could go back, if I was 16 now, I would get my grades high enough to get into veterinary college. Now it's difficult ... I really like animals."

Carlos attributes missing his "vocation" to a lack of earlier maturity, but regards his choice as a pragmatic one, which enables him to live close to his family and gives him practical

opportunities with his father's firm. However, he remains satisfied with his degree choice as a "versatile" option.

However, the satisfaction of some other graduates is affected by the transition to work. A third of the graduates, in all degree areas researched, came to regard their choice of degree as a mistake. One way in which the transition to work catalysed this understanding was if the relationship between work and university wasn't what they had expected. Sandra (Administration) explains:

"I'm not completely happy with my degree or the university... because what I'm doing now is in an area that I identify with more, but [my degree] has nothing to do with it. I thought that it would have more, but that's because of my own ignorance... I had some expectations about the course but in the end I've come to see that it's not really what I wanted and it's not what I thought."

In this case, the expectation that university should prepare students for work very specifically features in her dialogue. An important feature for her was the idea given in information about the degree that directly linked it to particular professional outlets. Her non-acceptance with the outcome is to do with her expected trajectory, and self-identity.

In other cases, it was the discovery of some aspect of themselves which led to the belief that they could have chosen a different degree, although this "discovery" in every case here coincided with dissatisfaction with employment opportunities and limited opportunities to use university knowledge. For example, Mariana (psychology) discovered a deepening interest in Portuguese literature during her months of searching for employment.

The dissatisfaction with the degree did not always coincide with dissatisfaction with the university. The latter was related to a range of issues, which can be classified into external and internal relationships. Internal relationships include the belief that the curriculum should have included certain practical subjects and excluded unnecessary subjects. They also largely rejected the relevance of the dissertation because it did not develop practical knowledge.

Criticisms of external relationships included its public image, a lack of knowledge by outside bodies of the degrees, and the lack of recognition of the university by professional orders. Yet the way that graduates overcame this appeared to have some continuity with their prior trajectory. For example, Isolina (civil engineering), who identifies other areas of her life in which she lacks confidence, tries to avoid saying where she studied.

“I’m not ashamed of having come here but I feel that if I had gone to the state university then I would feel more confident.”

On the other hand, while recognising external attitudes, Rita (anthropology) believes in the qualities of the university, which she describes as “very innovative”, and continues her proactive attitude so evident across both interviews (see chapter 10). She says

“I’m not going to hide where I studied. There’s no way that I will do this because I really liked this university. I think that my degree is very good and I think I have every chance of having a good job as much as anybody who’s taken a degree in a public university”.

10.6 Conclusions

The paths through private university to work are marked by the negotiation of hierarchies. Initially, private university is regarded as an inferior choice; state universities have a longer standing status, and it is assumed that this status translates into teaching quality. However, once at university, students accept their new identity more enthusiastically, despite continuing awareness of the public image of the private system. They come to believe, in many cases, that they actually have advantages in terms of class size, the accessibility of teaching staff, and facilities. However, the transition to work involves a reassessment of these beliefs; in some cases, graduates resist their public image as unfair and based on ignorance, but others accept the weight of public opinion, and seem unable to resist public discourse. This seems to be especially true for those who admit a lack of confidence, and whose post transition options appear limited.

Opportunities for work are also subject to a hierarchy of resources; those with family connections or family businesses have advantages over those who do not, although gaining employment through the system of favours is regarded as morally and meritocratically inferior

by all participants, even by those who regard them as vital. In many cases, those who gain work through these advantages have greater possibilities to use their knowledge, and have supported learning, although none of the participants here have a specific graduate training scheme. Their self-image as graduates has an effect on their life outside their work environment, even while they protest the unfairness of this treatment by the public. Trajectories of participation appear to be continuous factors in the negotiation of these hierarchies; participants' capacities to resist outside pressure as graduates from a private university is stronger in students who say they are confident, and have strong social support. They are weakest in those who lack confidence, and who are unable to evaluate critically the attitudes to the private subsystem of higher education.

The initiation ceremonies during the first year of university life appear to reflect and reinforce these hierarchies, but do not cause it. The UDC's own ceremonies appear to lack some of the more violent characteristics of other universities, but nevertheless, the patterns of control, humiliation and fear of social exclusion are persistent factors, which have resonance in some aspects of working life.

11. THE CHANGING MEANINGS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE TRANSITION TO WORK

11.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the transition to work, and on the change in meanings that individuals give to their higher education experiences. Expectations of the transition also vary with the values ascribed by individuals to higher education (Garcia-Aracil et al 2007), but dispositions to knowledge and learning are not static, they change over time (Bloomer 1977), especially as knowledge, meanings and identities are constructed contextually and affected by communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). Social capital is important in this contextual construction, affecting how individuals gain skills and knowledge, and how they adapt to change (Field 2003a).

In this study, the participants had particular expectations of higher education, but their engagement with learning was also dependent on the types of pedagogical relationships that they encountered while at university, which sometimes broadened their horizons beyond what they had expected. Yet the importance and interest of all knowledge gained at university was reassessed in the transition to work. Their ideas about the main benefits of studying at university appeared not to change much, but any importance that they had given to their broadened horizons, the relevance of their knowledge and the placement, were all reassessed in their transition to work as they reconstructed their knowledge, identities and life course.

The nature of the methodology used meant that questions were open, allowing the participants to tell their own stories. Direct questions were not asked, such as whether they had gained specific skills or broadened their horizons, to avoid any tacit acquiescence. The result was that the participants in this study showed a range of values about the importance of higher education, although there were some that were almost universal. The differences between participants were not necessarily because they held different views, but that the views they expressed in the context of the interview were more important to them, which is a feature of the

methodology. Their change of focus in the pre and post transition interviews did not necessarily mean that they had changed their mind, but that it was no longer as important. For example most of the interviewees expressed their enjoyment of university and studying particular subjects in the first interview, but almost nobody mentioned this in the post transition interview, as if the fact that they had enjoyed it was now irrelevant to them.

11.2 The main benefits of higher education

The changes in perspectives is summarised in figure 11.1, below:

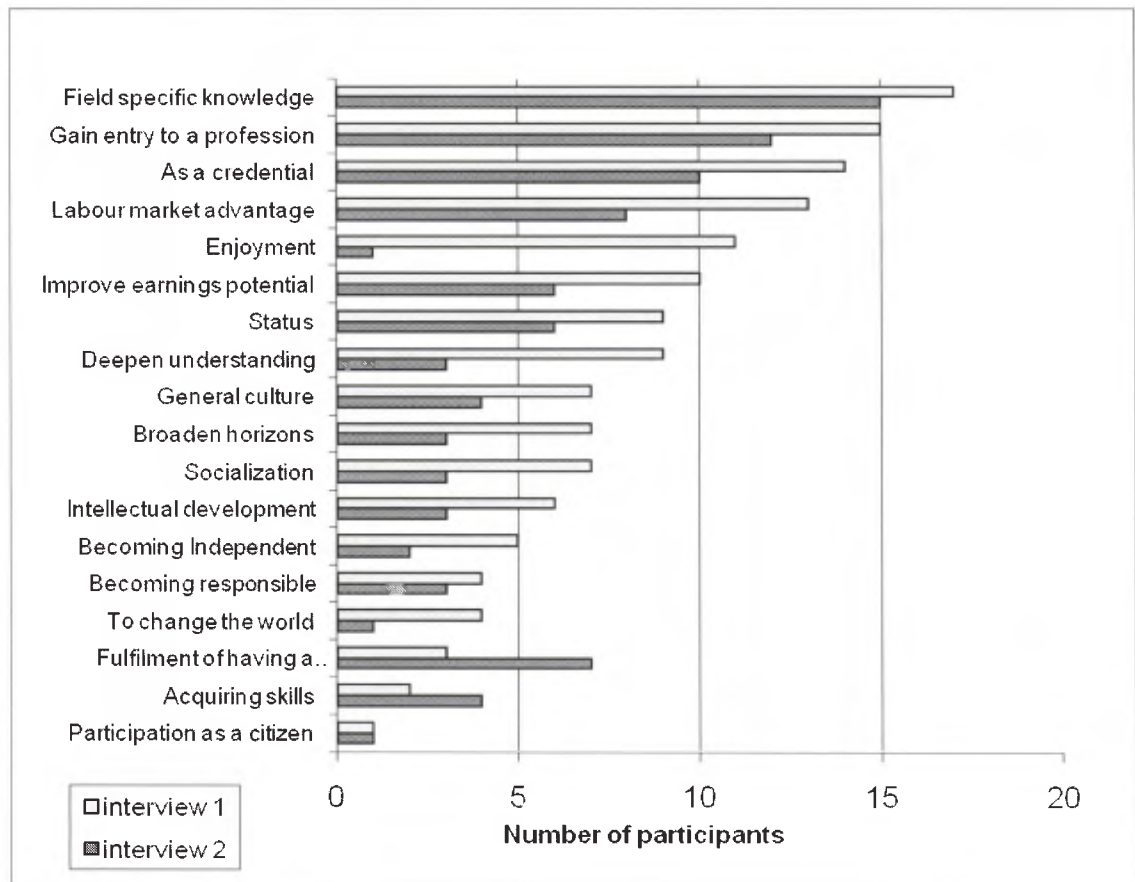


Figure 11.1: The perceived benefits of higher education, summary of results

The four most frequently mentioned benefits of higher education, both in the first and second interviews, were to gain specific knowledge, gain access to a profession, to gain a credential and to have an advantage in the labour market. In the first interview, at least two of these were mentioned by 100% of the participants in this study, and nearly two thirds of the participants mentioned all of these as benefits. As discussed in chapters 8 and 9, individuals strongly associate university and future employment. This preparation is expected to be in terms of

specific knowledge and credentials in order to qualify them for work within a specific profession, or related professions. Some of them mentioned this directly, such as António (civil engineering):

“Ever since I was in secondary school, even before, I loved the idea, ever since I remember the only thing I wanted to study was to be was a Civil Engineer.”

It seems that for António, the idea of higher education is unambivalent, and connects higher education to a specific profession through specific knowledge and credentials.

In other cases, this was assumed rather than explicit. In Camila's first interview, she expressed a desire to work in the field of Anthropology and to use her newly acquired knowledge, but the reservations she expresses about being able to apply her knowledge in practice seem to assume that a degree should have prepared her to work as an anthropologist:

Interviewer: “What you want in the future?”

Camila: “At this moment I don't feel capable of doing anything. I think what I have learnt in four years has evaporated Above all, I would like to do something connected to anthropology”

It's only in her second interview, however, that the strength of this assumption becomes apparent:

“At the moment all the doors are closed. The future is very, very black... I like the degree, I think it is interesting but at the same time I'm beginning to think it's completely without interest at all. it's not good for anything ...it doesn't give us any type of future.”

At this point Camila was employed in a museum, although her contract was not permanent, but she could not see any relevance of her degree, skills or knowledge in what she was doing:

“At this moment I don't feel capable of seeing any benefits at all of having done this course.....: what I'm doing hasn't got anything to do with my degree.”

Many participants were specific about the advantages a degree gives in the labour market:

Carlos: “Whoever has a degree has the advantage in relation to somebody who hasn't got one.... Whoever has more qualifications has more chance of getting that job.”

Their success and failure to gain the sort of employment that they wanted in their second interviews reflects not only the general advantage of a degree, but the specific nature of their knowledge. For example, Sofia (Psychology), who has found work in a school as a psychologist, says the main benefits of coming to university are:

“Firstly the qualification, which I think is very important and probably makes it easier in terms of employment. It is a better qualification to get work in an area of knowledge which I chose and really like.”

Mario (Administration) recognised the applicability of some knowledge from his degree, but thinks he was not able to anticipate what would be most useful:

“In my degree I had computer science and this helped me a lot It was extremely important as well to speak languages... statistics, law... marketing also helped a little bit... it was a pity that I didn't make more effort at the time and I think that I should have paid more attention to certain subjects which I need nowadays. That happens a bit with everybody, when they are studying they don't know really what they going to need it for in the future.”

The four benefits of higher education (specific knowledge, credentials, labour market advantage and access to a specific profession) were still the most frequently mentioned in the second interviews, but less so, as the participants have to face the frustrations of finding how their degrees relate to the world of work after their transition. Not surprisingly, those who made a successful transition to an area of work where they found their knowledge to be useful continued to emphasise the labour market benefits of their credential as well as the value of their knowledge, although they also mentioned gaps in their knowledge, and found that some subjects were not as useful as they thought. This is discussed below.

11.3 Personal development and broadened horizons

Personal development was not mentioned as one of the benefits of higher education by the majority of participants, either before or after the transition to work. When the interviewer asked the question, nearly all said that they had changed in some way, the most common being

becoming less shy, more independent, and generally more mature but many of them considered this a natural process, or a result of living away from home, and not related with learning and studying at university. An example was André, from Civil Engineering:

“One does feel different, that's natural. I'm more mature and grown-up now and an adult. When I was living at home I was more protected by my parents but here I'm all by myself.”

In his second interview he says almost the same thing:

“Well I suppose people go on, years pass by and we all changed a bit. I think that's natural but is not because of the degree. I think that change happens all the time.”

Others from the same degree seem to change quite a lot. In the first interview, António says nearly the same as André:

“I've changed but I think it's because of age and not because of the course. I've changed because I had to change. I had to grow up.”

Yet in response to the same question in the second interview, António attributes change to the process of learning in university itself, not about specific knowledge gained in the process:

“At university we learnt to think in another way about problems, perhaps we think a bit before we act. Doing a degree teaches us something about this and it's not just what we learn on the course or what the degree allows us to learn in life, it's different. We've had subjects ... which get us thinking a little bit, which don't have anything to do with the Civil Engineering but help us to face problems and take an attitude to them.”

His perspective is an unusual one, which was only mentioned by one other participant. It's not clear why he has changed his point of view. There are several possible explanations; he may have thought about it between interviews, or it may reflect his changing relationship with those he works with, in which he has to assert his authority in some way. As he has comparatively little experience relative to those he works with (including his father, a builder, and his uncle), his university degree became the source of his authority:

“The experience that a foreman has, that my father and my uncle have from the site, this is what they learn for themselves... What I've learnt from university was completely different and is a complement to what they know. But what they know is how to put

things into practice and they don't know the theory and that's where they always ask me for the final decision... because I know something about the theory and we've learnt to see things in another way."

Some of the perceived changes were to do with socialization at university, leading to ways of dressing and behaving in public, confidence, and the ability to take part in social conversations.

A typical example is Ricardo (civil engineering), who says:

"Nowadays I read magazines which are not related to my degree and I never thought that one day I would read things like that. I read them because there are colleagues of mine who discuss subjects that I don't know about and I don't have the capacity to discuss with them. So by other means I find out about these subjects in order to have knowledge to talk to them properly. It's something which has got nothing to do with a degree in itself... "

Moreover, he is critical of those who resist change:

"There are people with potential for development, who don't develop but seemed more like children, even their way of dressing, of being, of relating in a group is not correct for somebody who is studying in higher education."

In other words he is suggesting that there is a correct way of being a student, a superior form which includes not only the ability to discuss, but forms of socialisation and dress. In other words, socialisation in higher education develops cultivated individuals, who are distinct from non-graduates. It is also connected to current ideas about graduates' places in social hierarchies, which graduates come to understand more, according to their lived experiences, after their transition to work (see previous chapter).

Nearly half of the participants mentioned some type of intellectual development either in the first or second interview. For example Carlos (Civil Engineering) says:

"I think mathematics obliges people to develop their rationale and their capacity for mental calculations which I think other subjects don't have."

Others mention more general intellectual benefits, such as Silvia (Administration):

"We study to learn something but it's not just to do the exam. I think it is good for us and for our intellectual and social culture."

Frequently mentioned in the first interview, but notably absent in the second was the idea that university could broaden their horizons. For example, Carlos says it has broadened his horizons, but by this he is referring to personal maturation, however, he then says this process could have an effect on wider society:

"I think it has broadened my horizons... I'm more independent and can do things for myself...I'm not so timid as I use to be... I think now the increase in [people at] university is going to reflect on society, improve it."

However, his idea about university and its effects on society is not a common perspective among the participants, although it coincides with the government's own espoused aspirations for it. Only a few participants thought that they could or should try to affect the world around them through their knowledge and actions. An example is Ana, (Administration)

"I think a major transformation in Public Administration is coming ... I want to be a part of all this... I think I have always had the idea... that I'm a sort of person who wants to change something in the world, [which I can do] within Administration."

All the participants from the Anthropology degree, without exception, expressed change in their perspectives of the world and understanding of people about them, for example Rita says:

"I have changed the way I think, the way I see other people and the simple fact of valuing little things in culture and also there's something which the degree teaches us which is how we should see other people and their culture."

In her post transition interview she was even more enthusiastic about the effect that anthropology had on her person:

"This course has transformed me, because I started here with a certain way of thinking and now I see things in a completely different way."

Rita takes the idea of broadened horizons further than any of the other participants. In both interviews, she explained how she had been deeply transformed by both anthropology and the experience of university. Yet fellow anthropology student Camila had a very different perspective after her transition to work. In her first interview she was optimistic about the effect she felt that anthropology had had on her;

"I've learnt so much, it has broadened my horizons and my mind... Even if I don't work in the future in anything connected to anthropology, this degree has helped me intellectually."

Yet post-transition Camila regrets her choice and appears to ascribe to it little of the value that she had previously given it:

"At this moment I don't see any benefits at all of having done this degree. Being an anthropologist doesn't mean anything to anybody."

At the point of this second interview, Camila had a temporary job in restoration in a museum, which she says has nothing to do with anthropology. The principal reason for her change appears to be the non-confirmation of her identity as a graduate, her perception that the market for anthropologists, as she sees it, is very limited, and that no-one knows what an anthropologist is or what role they can have. Yet it contradicts her earlier affirmation that even if she failed to work in the area of anthropology, she wouldn't regret the insight and vision that the degree had given her.

Rita regarded it as her mission to legitimate the idea of anthropology herself:

"I think it's up to me and my colleagues who are leaving now and going into the world of work to change things... this anthropology degree is not very well known and not everybody knows what anthropology is. We can't just sit back waiting for the university to promote our course."

This is a pro-active attitude, but the differences between Camila and Rita cannot be merely ascribed to success in the labour market, rather to emotional perceptions along their learning careers (see chapter 9). Moreover, the value of higher education that goes beyond credentials and the application of technical knowledge in the workplace may have the effect of increasing

realization and broadening graduate identity. For example, despite frustrations at work, Ana (administration) values many aspects of her education.

“I think the benefits are immense...in our day-to-day lives, in our jobs, in our relationship with other people, in the education of our children, in [dealing with] public services.”

11.4 Skills

There were also notable omissions in what the students said were benefits of higher education, compared with other transition studies (such as the CHEERS study, in Teichler 2007). Almost none of the participants mentioned any type of generic skill that they had gained at university, reflecting an absence of discourse about skills in Portugal at the time of the interviews. Most of the spontaneous mentions of skills were related to specific disciplines such as foreign languages or computer studies. Another candidate, Candida Alves (Anthropology) in her second interview, at which time she was working in a bank, mentioned that she had developed communication skills at university,

“I have adapted perfectly well there. My role as an anthropologist helps me to have good communication.”

In some ways, this is a continuation of her first interview, in which she said that her interest in anthropology was partly because of her interest in communication:

“I always very much liked having contact with people, human contact, to help them and I try to understand people.”

Only one other graduate, Sandra (Administration), said in her second interview that she had gained generic skills while at university:

“Even in the way that we express ourselves, we express ourselves much more easily.”

More often mentioned than generic skills, such as communication, were the disciplines supposed to develop specific competence, such as foreign languages and European studies. In general, their ideas about these disciplines did not seem to change much across the transition to work, although in some cases their ideas changed during the degree. Ricardo (civil engineering) said in his 1st interview:

"I said to myself I'm on an Engineering course. But communication grammar isn't so worthless after all. Actually having these subjects really adds extra value to the course because nowadays it's necessary to write reports ... I didn't interiorise it, this knowledge; I suppose I didn't value it very much... [but]... when I was developing my dissertation I got my notes from communication grammar out and used them."

The subject which was most widely rejected by the students as unnecessary was European studies. For example, even Rita (anthropology), who can find nothing bad to say about any other aspect of her university experience, said this:

"I didn't like European Studies. I think it was completely unnecessary."

For many it was rejected either because they couldn't see the use of it, or because they thought they could learn it by themselves. This seems to reflect an idea that the course was about information rather than insight and critical engagement. António (civil engineering) claims in his first interview:

"We are obliged to understand something that we already knew from television or reading the newspaper."

Although this attitude was widespread, it wasn't unanimous. Marcia, a participant who typically valued practical aspects of her civil engineering degree and rejected those which didn't appear directly connected, was one of a few who approved of European studies. However, once again, she frames it as "general culture" rather than critical engagement:

"There are a lot of people in my class who don't agree with it, they think it's a waste of time and it has nothing to do with our degree. We end up realising that we don't know very much about what's going on around us, we're a little bit isolated from the world. I think it's good to know certain things. I don't think general culture does any harm to anybody."

Computer technology and languages were popular, and regarded as transferable skills. André (civil engineering) in his first interview says:

“English always has some use. At the moment it is very important because of the internet and that type of thing so it has its use.”

By his second interview, he still hasn't actually used English but continued to claim that it could be useful, one day:

“I'm sure English has its uses, something that people need to learn and you never know we might need to work abroad and English is necessary.”

For those who did find applications for English, their skill was only a starting point for what they had to do. The Administration degree had eight semesters of English, and included considerable business English and letter writing, yet Ana said she needed help when she started work:

“Everything I learned on this course was useful. English was extremely important. In the letters in English, my colleague helped a lot because she had a degree in English.”

This is a reinforcement of the idea that skills, such as language, are context dependent, but not wholly context bound. They enable individuals to start to make sense of new environments, but further learning is always necessary for each context.

Of course the participants were aware that they were being interviewed by an Englishwoman who, in many cases, had also been their teacher. There was a sense of fun at times when they mentioned English, especially if they wanted to criticise its inclusion in the curriculum.

Carlos: “Yes. There are so many subjects here which don't have anything to do with Civil Engineering ... certain subjects should have been optional.”

Interviewer: “For example?”

Carlos: “English!” (Laughs)

Interviewer: “English!” (Laughs at the same time)

Carlos: “I know very well and I agree this is necessary. Nowadays English is the most widely spoken language... But I think it's a subject which I would never really need.”

11.5 Reassessing the relevance of knowledge

The usefulness of subjects could not always be anticipated. Marcia (civil engineering, first interview) says:

“Psycho-sociology is only theory, and nobody uses any more.”

Yet after starting work, she reassesses this:

“We didn’t value Psycho-sociology at all, but we have to deal with people who are really a bit difficult, so it helps to understand why people are like they are.” (Second interview)

Before coming to university, the dominant idea was to get a qualification or preparation for work, and this idea frames the importance that they give to university study. They are constantly trying to assess which subjects are important or relevant to the world of work, a world that they do not yet know. Their studying is geared towards anticipating what will be useful, and trying to understand the subject matter in relation to its later practical application. Marcia (civil engineering, first interview) says:

“My objectives [are to] try to see what’s most important in what I’m studying, for practical applications.”

Yet at the same time, the practical experiences they have are in the context of university, not work, with the result that in her second interview Marcia says:

“It wasn’t so much that system of calculating things like we learn at university, but more about being with people and knowing what we want and what they want. People spoke about things that totally different way which I wasn’t expecting.”

Even practical aspects were different from university experience:

“When we are university ... we thought all we had to do was look at the costing and do what was there and nothing more. In the end we get to the site and it’s nothing like that. What’s on paper doesn’t necessarily correspond with what was there on the site.”

11.6 Theory and practice

Specific knowledge, it seems, is context dependent, and gives only the initial idea of how to begin in subsequent contexts. Indeed, in the first interviews, few of the participants said they felt prepared for work, while anticipating some differences of application of knowledge. The majority said similar things to Ana (Administration):

"I think at university we get a sort of knowledge. I feel that it's only once we start working, in the world of work will I really be able to put my knowledge into practice, and I'll find a lot of difficulties."

Almost all the participants made a distinction between theory and practice, where practice belonged to the real world. Theory is not just abstracted principals, but almost everything they learn in the classroom, to the point that some students devalue it, for example, Sandra (Administration, first interview):

"Our degree course is very theoretical, we hardly have any practical subjects, and that's why it's a bit of a farce... we only had to study to pass the exam."

She doesn't change this perspective after her transition:

"[My degree] has a lot of theoretical subjects but it doesn't include any practical aspects."

This is an idea mirrored by many of the participants, yet it is this theory which can distinguish them from other people when they start working. André (civil engineering, second interview):

"There are some things that are fundamental and that people on site don't have. A foreman doesn't know certain types of things."

Joel (civil engineering, second interview) says:

"Although we have a lot of theories, in practice it can be very difficult, almost impossible, to apply them."

Nevertheless, the majority are looking for ways in which their knowledge can be useful, perhaps as a way of confirming their identities as graduates. Joel also says:

"At university I learnt a lot of things... there's a technical part and this adapts according to the processes."

This is similar to most of the participants in this study, who regarded part of their knowledge as practical, part highly abstract, requiring application, and partly knowing the process of learning, of how to ask questions and build up practical knowledge on site. They also regard their university degree as incomplete, not only in the sense that it lacks a practical component, but

also because there are so many aspects which couldn't be covered, and several intended to undertake further study, whether short courses or masters degrees.

Theoretical knowledge from university was sometimes only valued for its role in gaining a credential, and not as informing their actions. For example, Isolina (civil engineering) says:

"We criticise theories because why would I want to know what this guy or that guy did. But we have to have a little culture. I suppose it is all part of it. I don't think it will help very much with my knowledge. I think practical experience is the best thing - what we do in our day-to-day work, rather than two or three more years in school. But I think it's a professional qualification which will help."

Perhaps that is why she admitted cheating in some of her exams:

"I was caught copying twice. I had some help with me in the exams and twice I got caught, one is always trying to do a little bit of copying. Because they say why should you study so much when you can copy?"

It's an attitude she normalises:

"Most people do this. It is obvious that I copy, if I can copy why wouldn't I? If I don't know a question and the teacher's not looking, I can copy; obviously I'm going to copy."

Although at the same time she said her objective with learning was to know it and remember it forever. She doesn't try to resolve the contradiction between knowing and copying. Indeed, she devalues the knowledge gained at university, which for her is a mere credential compared to the practical knowledge of work. In her first interview, she says:

"When we finish university we don't know very much... But I think it's a professional qualification which will help."

Yet she does value it a little more after her transition to work, although in a vague way

"When we leave university, I can't say that we know very much, but with time we pick things up and, because obviously we learn something, because if I hadn't been here I wouldn't know some details, some technical terms..."

“A person who finishes university, who has a degree, has some value. Whether you want it or not, you always learn something and you have to know something, because you can't study for five years and not learn to do anything.”

It appears that she has started recognising the importance of some of her university knowledge, although her emphasis is still on knowing how to do something, rather than knowing how to learn and understanding the limits of this knowledge.

11.7 The placement

The majority of students expected higher education to prepare them for work, so the placement was highly valued by all participants. Their placements were viewed enthusiastically as giving them real work experience, André (civil engineering) says:

“On the placement we really have contact with the world of work. It's out there on the site or in an office. And I'm going to see how it really is, get more experience.”

Ricardo, who has just finished his placement, reinforces this idea:

“Principally what I felt on my placement is that despite having some knowledge, in the end we don't know anything. Whatever we learn here, when we get there we can't show this knowledge, when we get there really it isn't real.”

He seems to consider that university-bound knowledge is not true knowledge, or has limited application in the workplace. In other words, the applications they expect to make are limited by the context of where they had gained previous knowledge.

However, the placement can also reinforce the value of university study. Sandra (Administration) expresses this idea. Her criterion for the importance of university knowledge was that it can be applied in the workplace, as if it cannot be applied, it is worthless.

“I said to my colleagues, why are we studying this if one day this is not going to be good for anything? So the placement was good to see that what we had studied was not in vain.”

However, many of them found that they were not as well supported in their learning as they had expected. Marcia (civil engineering) expresses this:

"We were left on our own quite a bit, rather abandoned. If we wanted to find out something we had to do it for ourselves. But we started understanding how things worked."

Yet post transition, although they value their placement experience, they found that it had not prepared them for all the situations and contexts in which they found themselves. Moreover, there is frequently lack of support for continued learning. Ricardo, in his second interview, expresses this idea:

Interviewer: "Did your placement prepare you for this?"

Ricardo: "No. It was a little bit different and it was a bit hard for me at first. My boss didn't like the fact that I wasn't prepared, and he wasn't prepared to have a new graduate and perhaps that's why problems arose."

It seems, from Ricardo's description, as if the completion of a degree and placement leads people to expect that graduates are fully prepared for work, with specific technical knowledge, and are not prepared to give further support to their learning. As a result, the process of reconstructing their knowledge and identities in the context of work is a haphazard affair, contingent on the availability of someone willing and able to support them.

11.8 Reconstructing knowledge

Prior to their transition, few students felt their university knowledge prepared them for work. They felt their knowledge was too theoretical, and that they did not know how to apply it. Post transition, some of them valued this theoretical knowledge more, as an aspect which differentiated them from other workers, and looked for ways in which it was meaningful in their work environments. However, none of the graduates in this study were inducted into formal graduate training programmes, so the way that they learnt the job depended on the availability and predisposition of available people. One graduate, Mario (Administration), had a general training programme about the production processes used in the company, but not for putting his university knowledge into practice. Nearly three quarters said they felt supported in some aspects of their learning, although this was neither organised nor consistent. The support often

came from supportive colleagues rather than superiors, and sometimes from friends outside work. Yet when they were not supported, resultant difficulties were perceived as reflecting negatively on their university preparation.

Most participants drew on a variety of sources in order to be able to get by at work, including work colleagues, university note books, senior managers and sometimes university friends who they can call on after work to learn practical aspects. Within this general pattern, in which the majority felt support (through colleagues) in some aspect of their work, there were some who had more backing than others. The following is an example of a civil engineer who felt supported in his learning process and valued his university knowledge, although he had previously regarded this as theoretical, saying *An engineer who just finishes the degree isn't really an engineer yet*. In this second interview, he says in what way he values the theory, which works as background knowledge to practical elements of his daily life.

To do this, they resorted to a number of strategies, drawing on the knowledge of work colleagues and managers where possible. However, as graduates, they are neither regarded as full participants nor at the periphery of their work “communities of practice”, but are expected to have some knowledge. Accordingly, they do not always get the support they need, so resort to using university books and notes, trying to remember what teachers have said, and getting help from knowledgeable friends outside work. Ricardo, civil engineering (second interview):

“There are lots of things that I go back and look up... I remember things my lecturers told me, especially about certain attitudes and advice and understanding the best way to get round certain situations. The production director ... says how we should proceed. I can apply an awful lot. There are lots of things that I go back and look up or, there are lots of things that I remember that my lecturers told me about, especially about attitudes and advice and understanding the best way to get round certain situations. I carry my notes from university around because sometimes there are some questions which arise and I can just go through these. [The production director] always gives his opinion about how we should proceed in certain situations and how we shouldn't. I don't feel a lack of

support; I have the support which I think is necessary. I think in a situation like this there's a way of learning, because we just have to get by in certain situations."

Ricardo says he can apply a lot of university knowledge directly. Although he doesn't classify this knowledge, it is possible that some of the more reified theories are less context-dependent. This is also an idea given by other civil engineers; certain calculations are not context sensitive, other theory serves as background knowledge, and even differentiates them from the experienced workers around them. Yet for other practical, less reified aspects, such as attitudes, Ricardo recalls particular words and reflects on their relevance in his daily work. He is also careful to manage his relationships, and not give the impression of dependence on his superiors. At the same time, he is careful not to lose face with regard to those with more experience but lower down in the hierarchy than him. Talking about how he manages his relationship with site foremen, he says:

"I might know things in technical terms and theoretical terms but I don't know as much as the foreman about how to do things in practice... There's the hierarchical scale and we're above the foreman but if we can't manage our relationship well, we get to the point where we notice that the foreman is ordering us about. "

Ricardo regards himself as unlucky in having this particular foreman, who he considers unhelpful. Indeed other civil engineers were able to have more positive learning relationships with their foreman. However, the idea of managing one's image persisted. Joel explains how he avoided asking too many questions, despite his curiosity:

"At university I had a lecturer who was always saying that be an engineer you need to ask a lot of questions, but if you ask a lot of questions as an engineer they say what type of engineer is this? So I took advantage of my lessons to ask everything I needed there. Now I'm careful not to ask too many questions, not to be too obvious. If necessary I go to look things up in a book. I'm not going to bother the technical director all the time."

The civil engineers, in general, managed to find support for their learning at work from a variety of sources, although they also had to get by on their own. However, other graduates did not feel so supported in their learning. Ana (Administration) described how her induction into the Administration section of a town hall was fraught with problems; disorganisation, rigid hierarchies, back stabbing, but also a great lack of support for their learning. Below she describes how in the absence of support from her superior, she learnt how to survive at work:

“When we do a degree there's a lot of theory and we don't have very much practice. If [my boss] had been more understanding I think she could have helped me lot and could have taught me a lot, but she didn't and we had to do things without having any practice before. I had to learn it at my expense and make a lot of mistakes, so I asked for help from this colleague who didn't have anything to do with the town-hall and who had a degree in Administration and I also used my books and notes from my degree.”

Nevertheless, she was able to use practical aspects of her degree with help from her colleagues:

“What I had to do mainly was to work with the computer. It was what I knew most about. I had the support of my colleague and she gave me a lot of support when I needed to write official letters, sometimes it was confusing.”

But when she was unable to get by on her own, it was taken as negative reflection on her as a graduate:

“[My superior] told me to develop a plan of activities for the next year for the projects and I said that I needed some help because it was something new for me and I'd never done it before and she said try to get by on your own. I tried finding out and it didn't go very well at first but of course the idea that she gave to the councillor was that I didn't have the capacity to do it, that it seemed as if I didn't even have a degree and I didn't know how to do anything.”

Ana was clearly frustrated in trying to survive in a world of work without consistent support for her learning process and reconstruction of her university knowledge. However, her superiors at

work seemed to expect her to have a set of knowledge and skills beyond her practical experience which she could unproblematically transfer from the university context. On the other hand, even as her knowledge increased, there was a lack of opportunity to participate at the level of contributing new ideas and developing the organisation. She says:

“How can I change something, if they won't accept my ideas? I couldn't speak directly with the mayor as the hierarchy has to be respected.”

Many graduates reported similar hierarchies which both failed to support them and failed to accept their active participation. Moreover, at times, the environments described included public verbal, even physical humiliation, reminiscent of the initiation ceremonies at university, as Clara (Administration) says about her employers:

“If they ask you anything you can't even argue with them but they actually kick some employees and call them donkeys.”

Yet not all the graduates experienced insurmountable hierarchies which inhibited their contribution to the development of their work environment. Those who felt a positive agency at work included those who found themselves in strong positions in their work hierarchy, (especially those in family businesses), or in small teams in new businesses.

11.9 Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on the changes in the meaning graduates give to their experience and knowledge gained in higher education as they make the transition to work. There are both continuities and changes in their perspective as they reassess themselves and their learning in new contexts. They seem to expect that university should prepare them for work and that a degree should give them an advantage in the labour market, yet even before their transition, they do not feel well prepared for the practical aspects of working life. Even their placement, which they had valued highly as giving them insights into the world of work, seems inadequate as a preparation for the diverse demands on them post transition.

Despite their best attempts to predict what will be useful in working life, graduates' lack of experience and ability to anticipate the contexts in which they will work means that they

reassess what aspects are useful or not. They do not change in their belief that university should prepare them for work, as if it was training that they required rather than an education to teach them to think about the limits of knowledge. After their transition to work, although they have come to realise that university education has given them a theoretical rather than practical base of knowledge, they have only begun to realise what relevance these theories have for their lives. Moreover, according to graduates' experiences stated here, employers also expect that university should prepare them for work, and they frequently fail to give graduates the training support to enable them to function effectively in work environments. In some cases, any critical thinking or desire to add to their work environments or develop innovations at work seem to be limited by rigid hierarchies and restricted opportunities to act.

As graduates, they try to reconstruct their knowledge, looking for allies in their learning processes who will help them with their daily work tasks, while managing their identities as graduates and managing the power relations around them. To reconstruct knowledge they use their social capital, which includes colleagues at work, managers and superiors, where possible, friends outside work. They also use their memories of what their teacher have said, as well as drawing on the theoretical and experiential memories, and also relevant class notes and books.

However, there are limits to how far they can reconstruct their knowledge and identities, and these limits seem to be both internal and external. The way that they have acted on their learning opportunities seems to have arisen from particular sets of perceptions about why they went to university ("horizons for action" Hodkinson 1998, 2007), which was to get a qualification and specific knowledge which would give them a labour market advantage and allow them to function in a working environment. Any understanding that university has also broadened their horizons or contributed to their intellectual development is only maintained in situations in which they feel that it has fulfilled its primary function. There seems to be only a very limited understanding that university has a role beyond this; generic skills, learning how to think, personal development and intellectual freedom do not seem to be a strong part of their discourse. The problem is that their perspectives on higher education leave them very little

flexibility if their expectations are not met in the labour force, and that they, their parents, and their employers wonder what their education was for.

PART FOUR: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

12. THE MEANING OF HIGHER EDUCATION AS UNDERSTOOD BY GRADUATES IN PORTUGAL

12.1: Introduction

This longitudinal research focussed on a group of students from four different degree courses in a private university in Portugal, before and after their transition to work. The aim was to understand, through semi-structured interviews, how graduates' meanings of higher education change before and after the transition to work in Portugal, in terms of their expectations of higher education, the meanings they ascribed to their experiences, and their identities as private university graduates.

12.2 Expectations of higher education, and the effect on choices

The research in this thesis showed that there were differences in how individuals made the decision to go to higher education (often assumed as a normal route, and a continuation of their education, which they enjoyed), which degree course they chose (on the basis of their perceived interests and capacities) and what they expected from it.

Most students expected their degree to give them an advantage in the labour market and improve earnings potential and status (chapters 8 and 10). In addition, they expected their degree to act as a credential that would give access to specific professions, and to use knowledge gained at university for these future professions. This was important in framing their expectations of university and how they acted on learning opportunities, although other factors such as educational history, relationships and pedagogy were also important (chapter 9). Graduates' values were also important after the transition to work when they assessed the continuing relevance and usefulness of knowledge gained at university, and their satisfaction with their own trajectory (chapters 10 and 11). This has resonance with research carried out in Portugal (chapter 6), which claimed that students are instrumentally orientated to higher education as a strategy to improve earnings, status and employment opportunities (Cabrito 2001, Alves 2001, Gaio Alves 2001, Martins 2001, Estanque and Nunes 2001). However, most

of the Portuguese studies were quantitative rather than qualitative, and none seems to have considered how values may change in the transition to work.

As my research was carried out through in-depth interviews before and after the transition to work, changes across contexts could be compared, and continuity was not assumed. The interviews were semi-structured, so the opportunity existed for participants to express ideas unanticipated by the interviewer. Care was also taken to ask questions that minimized rationalizations, and open questions were used to encourage the expression of feelings, and storytelling of their “personal myth” (McAdams 1993). This does not mean that rationalizations were avoided, but they were less imposed by the structure of the research, leaving interviewees freer to express themselves. Consequently, there were several differences between my research and other research carried out in Portugal.

12.2.1 Unanticipated answers

Quantitative questionnaires were used frequently in the existing Portuguese research, but these restrict the range of possible answers, thus excluding alternative answers. In contrast, my research produced a number of unanticipated answers throughout the interviews. For example, in exploring how the participants decided to come to university, at least half of them said that they had wanted to since they were young, university representing a hope or dream, related to their sense of fulfilment in completing a degree, and continuity of their education rather than a decision related with money, status and career. This contrasts with the model used by Estanque and Nunes (2001:309), who asked students to rank a list of reasons (such as having a vocation, gaining access to a profession for personal fulfilment, in order to contribute to the development of society) for choosing their degree. This assumes a form of post-decision rationality that may not reflect the way that decisions were actually made.

Cabrito (2001) found that most graduates expected to earn more as a result of a degree, and concluded that this is a reason for going on to higher education. However, this is not necessarily so. In my research, for the majority of participants, higher education was regarded as a natural development following success and enjoyment at school. They chose degrees they thought they

would enjoy rather than those that would give them labour market success, which many of them did not consider until later. The graduates in my study did indeed expect to earn more and to gain an advantage in the labour market, but this was not the only rationale behind their decision-making process.

Moreover, the interviews revealed that the choice of a degree was not made at the same time as the choice to go to university (chapter 8). There was diversity in how these decisions were made, and in what order. Some needed to decide at which university to study a particular degree that they were interested in. Others wanted to work in a particular profession, so their decisions were about which particular degree would make this possible. For example, António (civil engineering) wanted to work in engineering in his father's construction company, but later felt that becoming a civil engineer would give him practical advantages that being an engineering technician would not, so he changed from a public polytechnic to a private university. For others, the general decision to go on to higher education was made first, following which they chose the degree that appeared most possible and desirable, given their grade point average, subjects studied at secondary school, and curricular content. Another group changed their mind, institution and degree, sometimes more than once, before finding a degree they felt happy with. Most considered their skills and interests, sometimes in a negative way (avoiding degrees that had disciplines they regarded as difficult). Initially, few considered the labour market.

12.2.2 Internal and external value of a degree

The individuals in this study did not make choices according to the future value of their degree in the labour market, but using a variety of criteria, including what they thought they would enjoy and be capable of doing. This contrasts with some research in Portugal; Gaio Alves (2001) found that graduates believed that degrees denote basic skills and knowledge. However, she associated graduates' ideas of how a degree is seen externally with their personal meanings and values of higher education, and concluded that degrees were chosen rationally on a cost-benefit basis. The graduates in my study principally did expect their degree to give them specific knowledge and a labour market advantage. However, the majority also expected to enjoy their

studies and to deepen understanding (see figure 11.1 in chapter 11). The importance of this is that students are not only learning for the end result, as suggested by Gaio Alves, but for their “own being and knowing” (Barnett 2007: 162). Furthermore, although the belief in the value of their higher education was important for how they acted on their learning opportunities (chapter 9) and how they assessed the success of their transition (chapter 11), we cannot conclude from this that their choices of degree were made on a rational cost-benefit basis. Few students considered the labour market for their degree, and none mentioned the cost of higher education in relation to their earnings potential, and few considered alternative routes to employment.

12.2.3 The assumption of rationality

Much contemporary Portuguese research into transitions has assumed that individual decisions are rational and consistent. For example, questions that ask individuals to rank reasons for choosing their degree (Estanque and Nunes 2001), and to give reasons for their choices, mean that participants may rationalise events in a way that may have little relationship to their actual process of decision-making. Indeed, my research found that the process of decision-making was not always conscious or technically rational, although it was not irrational.

Conscious rationality means that choices are intentionally and judiciously connected to outcomes, even if these are based on beliefs and feelings. Becker and Lewis (1992) claim that rational decisions include anticipation of the future, and are consistent over time. However, decisions can also be rational without being conscious, according to Damasio’s (1994) theory of somatic marker mechanisms, and Wilson’s (2004) theory of the adaptive unconscious (chapter 2). Somatic markers (in the ventromedial frontal region, through connections with the amygdala and hypothalamus) form the neurological basis of a personal value system, so that pragmatically rational decisions can be made on a subconscious emotional basis according to experiences in social contexts. This means that decisions and knowledge are deeply dispositional. Thagard and Barnes (1996: 428-9) describe this as follows:

“Somatic markers serve as an automatic device to speed one to select biologically advantageous options. Those options that are left unmarked are omitted in the decision-

making process... Put simply, actions and plans which best satisfy existing goals are the best options”

In this way, there are some parallels between Damasio's theory and Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which is “*Durable, transposable dispositions, of how to act; social reality through practical social relations*”, (Bourdieu 1986:68).

My research found that choices arose in a different number of ways; for the majority, the costs and the benefits were not weighed up in a conscious and systematic form. Individuals made choices that were rational according to their values and understandings, but at the same time, they were not always very conscious of these decisions or their consequences. For the majority of participants in this study, going on to higher education had become a normalised and accepted continuation of schooling, as also shown by Alves (2001). This is similar to research in the UK, as Evans (2009:10) says, “*the process of entering higher education is often one of staying on the escalator (getting off would require planning)*”. In my study, three quarters of the participants reported enjoying school and learning, and regarded higher education as a natural continuation of their studies.

Moreover, all but one participant described positive experiences at school. For them, higher education was not a choice at all as they did not consider alternatives. Even though most participants were the first generation to go to higher education, they assumed that this was now the normal thing to do, and their choices were more focussed on what to study, and where, rather than whether to study at all. Individuals who regarded continuing their education as “normal” believed they were making a choice while admitting that it was implicit that they would go. Their rationality was limited to accepting the paths that their parents and social group had mapped out for them. Further evidence that it was not a conscious choice for this group of students was that half of them were not aware of the time when they began thinking about higher education, and said they had “always” wanted to go since they were young.

This corresponds to what Hodkinson (1996:127) calls “horizons for action”. That is, the real structural opportunities as perceived through the habitus; external opportunities are understood

through individual perceptions of what exists, and what is possible. Individual horizons for action were affected by perceived possibilities, that is, what subjects they believe they were good at, or at least, could cope with. Other people were also significant in these choices, either directly (making suggestions, getting information, discussing options), indirectly as role models, or through tacit preferences to which the students acquiesced.

The fact that the decision to study particular degrees was made in different ways to the general decision to study in higher education appears to have been missed by previous researchers. Yet this seems to be further evidence that degree choices were not made on a cost benefit basis, but rather, according to individual self-identity, dispositions and resources. These were not necessarily irrational, but the participants were not always completely aware of how they came to believe that higher education would be good for their future.

For a few participants in this study, going on to higher education was a real choice, as they had to think about the consequences of going and the alternatives. Like the majority of the participants, their parents had 4 four years of education (see appendix 7.8). They had not intended to go to higher education, or thought it was possible (therefore not a normalised route), but faced situations which made them reflect. These turning points, according to Bloomer and Hodgkinson (1997, 1999), are normal moments of decision-making, but were rare in this study. In these few cases, all participants were supported and encouraged by significant others who gave them information about the labour market and higher education. Only one was strongly discouraged by significant others. However, facing opposition to her decision meant that she felt more determined, valued the outcome more, and this made it more of a conscious decision, rather than a passive acceptance of a normalised route. On the other hand, the two participants who were not very keen to go on to higher education were more conscious of their compliance with the point of view of others who claimed that it would be good for their future career.

Other people were highly significant in the decisions of all participants. A third of them said their parents' influence was important, transmitting the idea that this opportunity would enable the students to escape the difficulties they had experienced in their own lives by giving them a

valuable credential for the labour market. Teachers, extended family members and other people who were significant in the lives of the participants also supported this idea, giving students the idea that it was both possible and desirable. Individuals accepted the idea that higher education was a natural progression through the education system, and good for their future, apparently without considering specific consequences, such as the labour market for a particular degree.

12.2.5. Cultural narratives

Expectations about higher education were generated using a cultural narrative about what higher education means, but one whose truth was taken for granted rather than assessed in any systematic way. They concurred with the ideas of their parents and other people who were important in their lives that higher education would be good for their future. The evidence for this seems to be in the way that some individuals made decisions without considering the labour market, yet at the end of their degrees, they expected that their credentials would give them labour market opportunities.

Bourdieu regarded language and discourse as part of social reproduction rather than an instrument of reflection, and claimed that it reflects power structures in society, (Jenkins 1992, Sierra 2000) whereas social constructivists regard the roots of thinking as coming from language (Vygotsky 1978, Donaldson 1978, Bruner 1990). Bruner claims that cultural narratives have an important role in constructing meaning. However, in the situation discussed above, the meaning about higher education seems to have been constructed by students' parents and others, and students accept this somewhat passively, which suggests that these cultural narratives are, as Bourdieu suggests, reproducing social beliefs. Only when a particular narrative did not correspond to individuals' experience of reality, such as when their degrees did not lead them to the type of employment they had expected, did they question the validity of the narrative.

12.2.6. Maximum opportunities, minimum risk?

Beck (1992) sees individuals as at the planning centre of their own lives, making choices to maximize opportunities and minimize risk. In this research, some participants wanted to

maximize their opportunities by improving labour market prospects and avoiding boring or dead-end jobs. For example, Ana (chapter 8) says:

“Where I come from, very few people went to university, everybody was either working in factories or as domestic help. I knew I didn't want that for me.”

However there are differences between economic and personal risk. In some cases individuals appeared to minimise the risk to their self-identity by not trying other options; trying alternatives to maximise their opportunities would leave them exposed and vulnerable. This was also evident in choices of degrees; some students were afraid of being unable to cope with certain subject matter, so avoided it, such as Camila:

“It seemed like I could do [anthropology], whereas the other courses had things like mathematics and statistics and things like that which I kept away from...”

Some individuals may not maximise opportunities and minimise risk simultaneously, but do one or the other. Some low risk options are degrees that they believe they are capable of, but which may not maximize their opportunities. Other individuals, especially those who felt socially or financially supported, took greater risks by transferring from the public system to the private system to take a degree that they regarded as giving them a better future, such as António, when he moved from the public polytechnic sector to a private university (chapter 8):

“Technicians can't join the Engineering Order, and they don't have a university degree.”

12.3 The experience of higher education

Chapter nine was concerned with the exploration of students' experiences of higher education. On the one hand, it showed some convergence in the perceptions of teaching practices and learning, critical thinking and pedagogical relationships. On the other hand, it showed individual differences in similar social structures, such as gender and class, as well as the differences in perceptions of the same degree course, taken in the same institution, at the same time. These differences seemed to arise because of individual educational history, leading to diverse ways of acting upon and perceiving educational opportunities, that is, their “horizons for action”, (actions perceived as both possible and desirable) differed (Bloomer 1997 and Hodkinson 2004). The interviews revealed how the participants acquired dispositions to education through experience as their initial class, gender and geographical positions evolved.

12.3.1 Evolving social positions on the route to higher education

The cases of Rita and Camila show how they developed very different tacit dispositions in their paths to higher education. They took the same university course, at the same time and institution, but their tacit dispositions meant that it was understood in very different ways. Despite both experiencing state education prior to university, having the same gender living in a similar geographical area, they had differences in cultural capital. Rita's parents had greater cultural capital than Camila in terms of educational achievements and profession (see appendix 7.8). There is no direct evidence that this affected their early education, but there were differences later in their families' framing of higher education. The meaning Rita gave to her anthropology degree was affected by her family's interest, such as the way that she was able to discuss anthropological interpretations of the world during family mealtimes. Camila made no mention of doing the same thing with her parents. Although Camila's parents supported the idea of her studying at a university, she understood it to mean they liked the associated social status (in common with many of the participants in this study).

Rita and Camila came to university with very different dispositions to learning, pedagogical relationships, and beliefs in their capacity. From the way that each told her story, there was continuity from the very beginning of their educational experience. Camila's horizons for action were affected by her experience of violence at the hands of a teacher, and her mother's inability to intervene. Despite her parents' economic capital, giving her access to a private language school, and later a private university, Camila seemed to have had such difficulty acquiring the cultural capital appropriate for school that she felt unprepared for middle and secondary school, and her evolving position led to a history of failure, which she attributed to the incapacity of teachers to transform her situation. By then, she had acquired a strong negative disposition to teachers and learning in all educational environments, which she brought with her to university. Her language indicates her sense of powerlessness (*"we're small next to the teachers"*) and helplessness with regards to learning, although she did complete her secondary schooling. Only one teacher was capable of transforming her disposition to learning, but he stands out as a unique case in her educational history. Her habitus seems to be one in which she perceives

educational structures in general as steeply hierarchical, in which teachers have power to impose their frameworks for learning without making them accessible, and which does not transform her own ability to learn. Teachers are obstacles rather than resources in acquiring knowledge.

In contrast, Rita's experience was as marked by positive pedagogical relationships with many teachers from primary school onwards, and this continued throughout higher education and in the transition to work. Her evolving social position through school meant that she had not only acquired social capital (the resources that people gain from relationships with others, Field 2003a), but she also had the skills and the disposition to continue building her social networks in a variety of contexts, which give advantages in the labour market (Field 2003b). Indeed, these later helped her find her own work placement as well as a number of temporary and permanent jobs after graduation. Of the participants in this study, she was the only anthropology graduate to find work as an anthropologist, and it seemed to be attributable to her agency and risk taking in searching for work, which are greater when individuals are socially supported (Behrens & Evans 2002).

Rita's cultural capital may have helped her to build social capital through her relationships. Brown and Hesketh (2004) suggest that those from non elite backgrounds lack the social education enabling them to compete in situations when the ability to sell oneself matters. On the other hand, Joel, whose parents had less cultural capital than Camila, seemed to be as able as Rita to construct positive social relationships in school, university and work. Despite his parents' lack of cultural capital in the field of education, through his evolving positions he seems to have acquired tacit dispositions that enabled him to acquire social, cultural and eventually economic capital. He claimed to get on well with fellow students, teachers and later work colleagues and associates. His belief in his social skills is evident through his acquisition of work through personal contacts, and the positive relationship he forms with the site foreman. Joel had the same starting position (parents with four years of education, and a self-employed father), in terms of cultural and social capital, as most of the other civil engineers interviewed here, so his academic and social success cannot be attributed to a broad structural category such as class.

The apparent absence of negative experiences and positive school relationships may have helped him evolve through subsequent contexts, but it seems that he may also have personal characteristics which allowed him to maximise the structural opportunities given to him.

Gender is another social structure important in shaping beliefs and perspectives (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 2005, Bloomer and Hodkinson 2000), with domestic considerations being important for women when making career choices (Hodkinson 1997). However, in my research gender is not deterministic. Márcia and Isolina (chapter nine) had very different perspectives on the role of women in civil engineering. Apparently from identical social and cultural backgrounds (see appendix 7.8), on the same civil engineering course at the same time, both with families with small businesses in the field of building construction, they had different perspectives on whether work on site is suitable and acceptable for a woman. They were both aware of what the cultural values were regarding this type of work, but their perceptions of these values differed. Isolina considered work on site to be intrinsically dirty and unfeminine, and that the long hours would be incompatible with her future role as a mother. Moreover, she felt that her knowledge and opinions were less acceptable than a man's, drawing on her experience of her brothers' and father's attitudes. Thus her habitus led her to accept her gendered role, and limit the way she felt able to act on her knowledge at work, that is, her "horizons for action" (Hodkinson 1996:127).

In contrast, although Márcia recognised that employers prefer men in civil engineering, and that women's perceptions of domestic duties and those of their parents limit their opportunities, she did not feel limited by them. She dealt with gendered attitudes from employers and pressures from her aging parents to support them domestically, in order to maximise her opportunities to work on site. Her experience may be significant; her father and her uncles had tacitly supported her decision to become a civil engineer, before openly approving of her decision after it had been made. Implicitly, it would seem that Márcia's family did not hold traditional stereotypes of gender roles, and this may have been significant in her later attitude, thus broadening her horizons for action.

Camila's, Rita's and Joel's stories seem to show that structures such as class, gender, academic disciplines and institution do not have a deterministic effect on individual behaviour and beliefs. There are choices individuals can make, but the perception of possible choices is limited according to the lived experience and resources of each individual. Camila's experience affected her choices; she avoided degrees she considered beyond her capabilities, and limited her pedagogical relationships, as she considered lecturers dominant and unapproachable. It also affected the meaning she gave to university; after her transition to work, she failed to see any benefit for her life of having studied anthropology. Pedagogical relationships were a key factor in shaping her beliefs about herself, her studentship, and her later frustration with the university system that seems to have failed her.

In each of these four cases, I have claimed that the attitudes, beliefs and habits shown are the result of habitus, that is, their dispositions of how to act. The problem is, as Reay (2009:438) has pointed out, is that "*there is... a danger in habitus becoming whatever the data reveal*". By definition, practices are generated by habitus, which is the structure embodied in individuals. So practices give evidence of the structures of the habitus that generate them (Nash 1999:178). The methodological problem for the researcher is to analyse social practices to disclose habitus that is not just a concept but also a method for simultaneously analysing individual experiences and objective structures (Reay 2009:439). Despite claims by critics such as Jenkins (1992), LiPuma (1993) and Lizardo (2004) that habitus is deterministic, Bourdieu (1977) claims that particular practices arise as individuals, with particular dispositions and resources, cross fields of power. This gives choice to individuals, as long as they perceive them (as Márcia and Rita do, and Isolina and Camila fail to do.) Moreover, Nash (1999) claims that, as practices arise from habitus, then if some people succeed while the majority of a class group does not, this means that there must be more than one identifiable habitus within a class. Similarly, if Márcia perceives that it is acceptable for her to put her career before domestic duties, it is because the idea was already available to her (she is not the first female engineer to act in this way).

However, habitus does not explain individuals and pioneers who have attitudes and beliefs that are completely out of the ordinary. This is particularly important for higher education, in which

the creation of knowledge and questioning of existing rules is a key aspect. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) are critical of concepts of agency such as those that Bourdieu proposes, which focus purely on routinised practices. They are also critical of phenomenological or rational choice theories that neglect structural contexts and the flow of time. Instead, they claim, habit, imagination and judgement are interwoven through the dimensions of time to both recreate and transform structures. Thus, new ideas do not arise from a spontaneous realisation that something is possible, but in social contexts with individuals whose action is neither free from social structure nor totally determined by it. Instead, agency is grounded in the

"Temporarily constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments, the temporal relational context of action, which, through the interplay of habit, in imagination and judgement, both reproduces and transforms the structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations". (Emirbayer and Misch (1998:970).

Higher education has the potential to be a key element of this interplay, as it can change the relationship of students to knowledge. Yet, if that is to be possible, students and their teachers must first perceive this to be the case.

12.3.3 Higher education, whose meanings?

Higher education has an increasingly pivotal role in modern life (Barnett 1990:85). It is supposed to get students to think critically, develop autonomy and character and change their relationship with knowledge, leading to intellectual emancipation. Through knowledge and innovation, it is expected to improve economic competitiveness (Becker and Lewis 1992), and have a key role in social change through institutionalised reflexivity (Scott 1995). Moreover, as the nature of work and society change, graduates' roles, jobs and identities are less predictable, so higher education also needs to prepare them for a volatile social and economic future.

This is set out, to some extent, in the Portuguese Framework Law of the Education System (Law 48/86) (Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo), which is still in force. It defines the political goals to be achieved by higher education. Article 11.3 states:

“University education is designed to ensure a sound scientific and cultural background and to provide technical education, thus equipping students for carrying out professional and cultural activities and for furthering the development of comprehension, innovation and critical analysis” (translation cited in Magalhaes 2001: 289)

Despite this, there is no inevitability about how individual students, as consumers of higher education, perceive it. In my research, despite the fact that they came to higher education expecting to deepen understanding, the main value that shaped their studentship was to gain knowledge that would help in future employment (see Figure 11.1, chapter 11). Students generally looked for knowledge that fitted into their perceptions of what they expected higher education to be; that is, a period of training for later professional application (chapter 9). This led them to regard certain subjects as irrelevant, although they were not able to accurately predict what they would need in the future.

The differences between the students was not what subject they studied, but the sense it made in terms of their personal values, trajectories through education and their anticipated future. For example, while Márcia (civil engineering) said that she tried to see what was important for later working life, Isolina (civil engineering) said the main benefit of university was to gain a credential, claiming that university-based learning, especially theory, would not help much at work. Getting a good grade, rather than gaining insight, was a sign to her that she had studied sufficiently. Mariana (psychology) was also concerned with getting good enough grades so that she would not let her family down, but felt that psychology was not something she could use to analyse her own life, and was not interested in reading about psychology when she did not need it for work. In contrast, Sofia (psychology) considered that understanding, rather than grades, were the objective, so studied with this objective even if she found a discipline tedious. However, some subjects, such as mathematical methods, she regarded as not useful for deepening her understanding of psychology, so she studied these just to pass.

Students with an initially ambiguous or broader idea of what they wanted from higher education were more open to learning opportunities in the classroom. For example, Silvia (Administration) considered that learning was good for her intellectual and social culture, and approached

disciplines on this basis. Similarly both Rita and Paulo, despite their very different approaches to studying and integration in university life, considered that anthropology should do more than prepare them for work, and should change and deepen their understanding.

Yet no matter how important they considered the subject to be, or how inherently interesting, pedagogical relationships were capable of transforming how they engaged with a subject. This is vital for considering areas of potential change. All the students mentioned how a lecturer could transform their interest and engagement in a subject no matter whether they thought it would be useful or interesting. Thus lessons in a subject considered useful for working life may be poorly attended if the students considered the teaching boring, and vice versa. In general, their perception of a good lecturer was one who knew how to explain well, getting students to understand, and motivate students, giving them opportunities to ask questions to deepen their understanding. On the other hand, this means that the onus for motivation was placed on the lecturers rather than the students' internal drive. Moreover, teaching was considered a one way process, the benevolent paternalism of master and apprentice.

According to the students' descriptions (chapter 9) it was the lecturers who decided what counted as knowledge or not. This was particularly the case in terms of critical thinking, which did not seem to be a very common concept; only a few of the participants understood what it meant. For example, Ricardo (civil engineering) mentions several aspects which could be regarded as indicative of critical thought; deepening understanding, the evaluation of truth claims, the recognition of alternative positions, the curiosity to find out more, the social opportunity for discussions, and the development of knowledge itself. The majority of the participants did not seem to understand what critical thinking consisted of, and confused "giving their opinion" with critical thinking.

Yet even where the concept of critical thinking was understood, and valued, the students believed that there were limited opportunities for its application. As Camila says:

"We have to answer questions like little lambs and not question in any way at all."

In other words, the lecturers were responsible for transmitting relevant and applicable knowledge, and the students could not bring their own knowledge to bear on the process. Therefore teaching is didactic, instructive, with a tendency towards the authoritarian. This is symbolic violence, that is, a field of power in which the university teachers are able to legitimate what counts as knowledge (Bourdieu 1990:209). Moreover, it meant that individual students could not gain full membership of the community of academic practice (Lea 2005) as their critical voices were marginalised and tacitly discouraged.

One area in which the students had an opportunity to innovate and have a critical voice was through their dissertation. The objective of institutional policy was that this would develop their critical understanding and creativity. However students regarded it as an imposition, seeing it as impractical and irrelevant to work, and delaying the completion of their degree. Moreover, students did not always have a clear idea of how to carry it out, and it was not seen as an opportunity for creativity or critical thinking, but as a project to reproduce ideas developed by others. In other words, learning cannot be prescribed either by policy or the curriculum, as students select what they believe to be appropriate, drawing on their social understanding to make sense of the new contexts in which they find themselves.

This does not mean that reflexivity, critical thinking, and agency did not exist. First, some degree of critical thinking may have been developed through students' discussions outside the classroom. The need to defend a point of view and challenge accepted truths amongst peers could also develop critical thinking (chapter 9). Secondly, teachers' attempts at developing critical reflexivity may have been misunderstood and resisted given the students' orientations to developing practical knowledge for future work.

There may also be cultural effects; in Portugal, according to Hofstede (1996) there is a greater power distance between those in authority and those who are led, less individualism, and a greater tendency to avoid uncertainty. In contrast, the development of critical thinking, action and even being implies greater uncertainty (risks are involved in speaking out and taking a novel stance), and requires that Habermas' (1990:86) ideal speech situation exists to some

extent, in which all assertions can be questioned, and all participants have the right to take part in a discourse. In the case of this study, the participants had different perceptions of how far they were encouraged to participate in discussions and to challenge ideas. Most participants reported that they discussed ideas in the classroom, but not all felt the need or encouragement to take part. This participation is important for the development of reflexivity, which is how “*an individual monitors what is happening and anticipates how she/he can use this for change*” (Scott 1995:176-8). It is through reflexivity that higher education is said to be part of social and economic change, as new perspectives form the basis of future action, an active process out of which new social forms are constructed Scott (1995:116, 162).

Outside the classroom, the clearest evidence of power distance was through the students’ practice of hazing. These practices mirror attitudes within academia and beyond it, through the use of hierarchical titles, the subordination and control of younger students by the elder, and even violence. However, in this study, the Dean of the private institution placed limitations on the students although this did not totally eliminate the element of humiliation. While some regarded the pranks as fun, and a good way to socialise, for others, the lack of alternative ways of integrating socially and their fear of social exclusion meant that they felt helpless. While these ceremonies are not the cause of practices within the classroom or workplace, they are to some extent a way of legitimating and continuing the attitudes that they mimic. Clara, (chapter 11) gave an example of a parallel situation, in the workplace when she said the following about her employers:

“If they ask you anything you can’t even argue with them but they actually kick some employees and call them donkeys.”

Teixeira (2001) reports parallels in Portuguese companies, claiming that the majority function on an overly hierarchical logic in which there is little margin for liberty for their members to develop their tasks in a personal form and to participate in organisational decisions, leading to conflicts with graduate expectations after transitions to work. In my study, about half of the graduates encountered problems with hierarchies. Moreover, despite the lack of reported value of critical thinking at university, some of the participants’ tried to introduce new knowledge to their work

place, and continued to renew their own understanding of the usefulness and validity of their knowledge. This suggests that university may have developed their cognitive tools to be able to think critically, even if they did not recognise it as such. University may have powerful effects even if students themselves do not notice these.

12.4 Private higher education

Private universities were developed in order to cater for students who do not get into public universities, but the types of course that they offer are broadly similar. There is a hierarchy of prestige across both sectors, the oldest universities being more respected. Discussions about the quality of the private sector have spilled out from academia into the public domain, and may affect employment opportunities. This competition for status and power is about legitimation in the field, in Bourdieu's terms (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), and has the effect of maintaining social order. More recently, quality assessments have been welcomed by the private sector as they serve to legitimate their own position. (Seixas 2003:162). However, although these are published, the public do not seem to be aware of them.

Consequently, the graduates from this study faced challenges to their identity in the transition to work. There was a dichotomy between their experience of this private university and the external image that it had. They believed that they had benefited from better installations and equipment, smaller classes, more accessible lecturers, and less severe hazing rituals. They did not believe that their degree was easier than their public sector colleagues. Some of them had transferred from the public sector or other private sector institutions, and favourably compared their experience at their new university. However, in making the transition to work, all of them faced the criticisms and negative attitudes towards their university. How graduates overcame these attitudes varied. Those who felt confident in their academic ability, social networks, and employment opportunities were able to overcome these attitudes more easily. Others seem to lack both the personal confidence and critical analysis necessary to understand the differences between their experience and what was said about the university.

The group of participants in this study was small, and cannot be said to be typical. Yet in sociological terms they mirrored the class divide between the public and private sector, thus increasing the validity of this study. The class of small and medium-scale employers, relatively wealthy but uneducated, are over-represented in private universities (Teixeira Fernandes 2001). Similarly, the parents of the participants in this study had comparatively low levels of education, but more than half had their own small business (see appendix 7.8).

This affected their transitions to work, with nearly a quarter going into family businesses, and another quarter being able to gain work through the personal contacts of their parents, who could pull strings for their children. This is a common aspect of social capital in Portugal, and all the participants were aware of the advantages these contacts could bring, although they continued to value meritocracy as a way of consolidating the value of their credentials. Just over a quarter of the graduates found work as a result of their own bridging or linking social capital (Field 2003a: 46), that is, distant contacts formed through the university and work experience and contacts outside their communities who could help them find employment. The remaining individuals found work through adverts and agencies, but this work was more likely to be precarious, less connected to their degrees, and less enjoyable.

12.5 The changing meanings of higher education in the transition to work

As the previous sections showed, students had different personal values, trajectories and expectations of higher education, which affected how they acted on educational opportunities (their studentship). This could be affected by pedagogical relationships, despite their overall beliefs about what their objectives for studying were. However, in the transition to work, it was their overall idea of higher education that led them to feel whether they were satisfied or not with their experience and knowledge.

The participants' main objective of higher education was to gain credentials and knowledge for specific professions. They studied civil engineering to become civil engineers, psychology to become psychologists, and so on. In Portugal, this is taken for granted, and is a common phenomenon in southern Europe, in which recruitment is carried out according to field of study,

(Allen and Veldon 2007). Moreover, in Portugal, individuals are more likely to stay with their parents, thus avoiding the need to accept non-graduate jobs (Reyneri 1999). Yet all the participants who completed this study had gained employment, although half of these were precarious, and only half were directly related to their degree. Those who found work in which they could use the knowledge gained in university reported greater satisfaction than those who could not see the applicability of their knowledge. Those in graduate jobs continued to value their degree as a credential, compared to those who found work in non-graduate jobs. However, UK transition studies (Elias et al 1995) have found that many graduates do not see a close connection between study and employment, although this changed with time; graduates were more likely to be in graduate positions after four years (Teichler 2008). This is something my research was unable to follow up on.

What was significant from my study was that generic skills, personal and intellectual development and broadened horizons were very infrequently mentioned. Personal development was regarded as a natural maturational process unrelated to university study; intellectual development was related to specific areas, such as mathematics, and competences were associated with core disciplines such as languages, rather than general communication, interpersonal or numerical skills. Although the idea of teaching for skills may limit a curriculum and fail to deepen knowledge (Barnett 1994), the awareness that skills can be acquired while studying may help individuals see the value of their degree later on if they do not find work in fields specifically related to their degree. This is increasingly important as current graduates are facing worsening labour market conditions (GPEARl 2008). Likewise, the idea that higher education can broaden horizons and deepen understanding, while valued at university, was hardly mentioned after the transition to work. Yet this has the potential to lead to greater ontological realization. In the few cases where it was valued before and after the transition, the graduates involved seemed to have greater satisfaction with their degree, relating it not only to situations of work but to their life in general.

Although graduates' horizons for action meant that they learnt what they perceived as relevant for later working life, the usefulness of subjects in the world of work could not always be

anticipated. Disciplines that appeared to be merely theoretical, and not obviously related to their anticipated profession were sometimes more useful than they expected, and disciplines that appeared to be practical had to be reconstructed in the reality of the work situation. In general, students devalued university knowledge, regarding it as a theory of how things should work, with little bearing on reality, rather than the history of ideas tested according to scientific principles. However, after the transition to work, some of the graduates realised that this scientific understanding not only gave them insight into the world of work that non-graduates did not have, but it also distinguished them from their fellow workers, giving them status through knowledge. They seemed to realise that their knowledge shaped their way of thinking about the world in a way that they had not anticipated before the transition to work.

The participants gave high value to the placement in preparing them for work and reinforcing the value of university, although they had some difficulty recontextualising their knowledge. This was exacerbated by the lack of support for their learning in their work environments, and by the nature of the tasks that were given to them. This meant that they were not as well prepared for employment as they had expected.

Once in employment, graduates had to make sense of their knowledge in their new contexts, which they discovered they could not apply directly. Although their learning at university had been related with their values and expectations, this did not correspond to the knowledge they needed in situations of work. In other words, their knowledge was fragmented, and needed to be reconstructed. By the fragmentation of knowledge, I mean that knowledge gained in another context only gains meaning in new contexts when it is recognised as useful, and reconstructed and supplemented with additional knowledge relevant for the context. Thus individuals may need further training.

However, many graduates felt unprepared for the tasks they were assigned and were poorly supported by their employers. In a “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991), newcomers typically do simple, low-risk but necessary tasks. Yet these graduates were neither treated as newcomers nor full participants, and they were expected to have skills and

knowledge beyond their practical experience (chapter 11). As they needed to protect their identities as graduates in order to maintain their position in the hierarchy compared to other workers, they drew on a number of strategies in order to be able to complete these tasks and reconstruct their knowledge in the work context. These involved using university books and notes (reified knowledge), trying to remember what teachers had said, asking accessible colleagues for help, and asking friends outside work for help. Thus social capital and social skills were important in this process, as was membership of multiple communities of practice (such as university, professional orders, work, friends and family).

A final problem that graduates faced concerned the hierarchical nature of the firms that they worked for. This is a common problem for graduates in Portugal (Teixeira 2001), and for about half the participants in my research. These hierarchies mean that there is little opportunity for graduates to develop their tasks in a personal form and to participate in organisational decisions. This led to frustration on the part of some of the graduates, especially those who had developed some capacities for innovation and critical analysis, but who were unable to overcome the hierarchical structures to make changes. As knowledge-led growth happens in part through legitimating new knowledge, opportunities to shape tasks, and innovation (chapter 4), this implies a major impediment to development of both the economy and the graduate labour market.

12.6 Conclusions:

Two assumptions about higher education have driven government policy in Portugal; firstly, that higher education affects individuals' relationship to knowledge and their capacity to think critically, and secondly, that this could affect their relationship to the knowledge economy and the learning society. However, as Magalhaes (2001a) has already claimed, this is a modernizing discourse that has been imported into Portuguese higher education policy without consideration of economic and institutional reality. Moreover, there are differences in cultural attitudes and practices in higher education across Europe (Schomburg and Teichler 2006), which suggest that there is no single idea of higher education, but that its meaning is situated and socially constructed. This thesis has been concerned with a microanalysis of this construction.

Part of this construction arises from expectations of higher education. In this study, it was assumed by participants to be a natural continuation of school, which would enable them to become professionals in a particular area. These were not wholly conscious decisions but made on the basis of semiconscious emotions and cultural expectations. Moreover, there was very little consideration of the labour market, yet later on they assumed that their degrees would enable them to work as professionals in the area of their degree. This contrasts with the assumptions of British graduates who assume that higher education has taught them to think critically, whether it has or not, but whose identities as graduates can be confirmed if they perceive that they have opportunities in the work place to use these skills (Holmes 2001).

The participants in this study, in contrast, looked for knowledge that they envisaged using in their anticipated future, which they expected to be directly related to their degree. This is partly a reflection of different graduate recruitment processes in northern and southern Europe, reflecting employers' culturally situated beliefs about the nature of higher education. The differences between the students was not what subject they studied, but the sense it made in terms of their personal values, trajectories through education and their anticipated future.

Participants in this study misconstrued the idea of critical thinking, which was understood to mean a criticism of procedures, calculations, or giving one's opinion, rather than assessing truth claims. It seemed that it was almost absent from their expectations about higher education, despite being part of government and institutional aims. Moreover, participants who understood and valued critical thinking claimed that this element was never included in assessment; instead the students understood that they had uncritically to repeat the assertions of their lecturer. This is symbolic violence, in which academics are able to legitimate what counts as knowledge (Bourdieu 1990), and means that students were not regarded as legitimate participants in the academic community (Lea 2005).

The consequence of this was the underdevelopment of critical thinking; some were unable to assert their critical voice at times when they needed it in the transition to work. Firstly, as private

university graduates, they were subject to negative attitudes about private higher education in general and their institution in particular. Only a few were able to question the legitimacy of such attitudes. Further consequences were in terms of valuing their knowledge and skills in employment; it was sometimes difficult for graduates to assess the validity of their university experience, especially as some found work in areas not related to their degree. Moreover, few employers gave opportunities for critical thought or innovation, which means that the perceptions of employers and graduates within cultural and economic contexts help to shape and limit actions.

Some lecturers were able to overcome students' preconceptions about the usefulness of certain disciplines by building strong pedagogical relationships with the students, and stimulating classroom environments. Fellow students were also able to stimulate interest in disciplines and critical thinking through discussions outside the classroom. This suggests that, as individuals cross social fields, such as that of higher education, it is the combination of the context, values and the insight and capacities of significant others that bring about changes in studentship.

Once in employment, graduates discovered that they could not directly apply their knowledge, but needed to reconstruct it and add to it, using their cultural, reified and social resources. This was affected by two factors. First, they were neither "legitimate peripheral participants" (Lave and Wenger 1991) nor full members of the communities of practice in work contexts. Instead they were members of multiple communities whose resources they needed to draw on in order to maintain their graduate identities. Secondly, although learning for these graduates was influenced by their ontology and the context, their knowledge was highly fragmented in the sense that it was gained in another context, and only gained meaning when it was recognised as useful, reconstructed and supplemented with additional knowledge relevant for the context.

The participants seemed to have a cultural narrative about higher education which affected their perceptions of how to act on their educational opportunities. Yet this does not mean that they failed to develop skills. Higher education may have powerful effects in developing cognitive abilities and critical thinking skills, among others, even if students themselves do not notice

these. However, the fact that graduates and their employers do not always realise the effect of higher education means that graduates' skills and potential may be undervalued. Moreover, as individual studentship is shaped by perceptions of what knowledge and skills will be valuable in work settings, opportunities are missed for learning for their "own being and knowing", (Barnett 2007: 162), that is, for ontological realisation. However, in the cases where graduates believed that higher education could broaden horizons and deepen understanding, they seemed to have greater satisfaction with their degree, relating it not only to situations of work but to their life in general. It is the individual's own search for self-realisation, for their place and understanding, which drives them through successive contexts. How these selves can be realized depends also on how much strength can be added to individual trajectories, in university and beyond, in order to have agency in unpredictable, accelerating change.

13. REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

The previous chapters have discussed how Portuguese students' beliefs about the purpose of higher education are influenced by several factors, including individual trajectories through education, social networks, resources and significant individuals in their lives. As these factors change, so do their ideas of higher education. Individuals often continue their studies in higher education because it seems natural to do so, and because of their enjoyment of school. They choose their degrees on the basis of what seems possible and desirable for them. However, higher education is not regarded primarily as a place for personal development, gaining generic skills and critical engagement. Instead, students generally have a narrow view of higher education, mainly focussing on how it affects their role in the labour market. This affects how they act on their educational opportunities and the criteria by which they measure the validity of higher education itself after their transition to work. Moreover, labour market limitations lead to a situation in which graduates who do not find work in areas directly related to their degree devalue their education. This chapter discusses the implications of these findings for institutions, policy and theory. It is also concerned with the validity and generalisability of the research to other areas of Portuguese higher education outside the narrow scope of this sample in a private higher institution in the north of the country.

13.1 Limitations of the research

The first limitation of this research is related with external validity, due to the small sample size from one private institution, in one region. This calls into question the generalisability of this research to other populations from other types of institutions. There are several reasons for this. First, the sample size is not statistically significant, so cannot be said to be a representative sample. Second, four degrees were compared, but this does not mean that graduates from other degrees would have similar experiences. Third, this research discusses the particularity of experience of graduates from private as opposed to state universities. Fourth, the university at the centre of this study has its own identity as distinct from other private institutions. Finally, there are regional cultural differences between the North and South of the country.

The main objective of qualitative research is not to be generalisable but to explore meanings, understandings and processes, rather than to substantiate truth claims. Each interview in this research generated much detail that would have been inaccessible in any other way. Through this method, it uncovered processes of meaning making and unexpected insights that addressed my research questions in a way that quantitative data could not. Moreover, these few interviews generated a large quantity of data. It is attention to the details in this data that generated the insights discussed previously, but even so, the analysis could not include everything. Further interviews would not have increased understanding so would be redundant.

Nevertheless, the findings in this research could be generalisable to some extent. Peräkylä (1997) says this can be done if there is a possibility that practices could be similar across different research settings. In this case, the results are more generalisable the more similar the population setting, such as other private universities in the same region. Secondly, I have cited quantitative research by several investigators in Portugal that show similarity in some of the main themes, but differ in the detail that only qualitative research could reveal. This is a form of triangulation that gives credibility (rather than generalisability) to my research. For example, the instrumental orientation of students is well documented in research in Portugal (for example, Estanque and Nunes 2001), but not the effect of pedagogical relationships, the semi conscious process of decision-making, and the role of cultural narratives. Other aspects of this triangulation include the use of theory (such as Bourdieu's habitus) and research carried out in different settings, such as Bloomer and Hodkinson's research into studentship and learning careers in the UK, which has parallels in my research.

A further form of triangulation was within the data generation itself; the interview with the dean suggested that he understood some of the cultural obstacles facing students in higher education, such as the lack of opportunity for critical thinking, which he believed was part of Portuguese general culture and also because of the lack of perception of its importance among teaching staff (see appendix 7.5, and chapter 9). In terms of the interviews with the students/ graduates, in order to avoid some of the problems of interpretation, especially given the

differences in language, I wrote a summary of each interview, highlighting what I thought to be the main aspects, and asked each participant to ratify them.

Credibility also relates to internal validity of the data. This refers to consistency within the research, or reliability of measurement (Robson 1993:63). The problem with qualitative research based on interviews such as these is that consistency can be threatened by the relationship between interviewer, interviewee and setting (which includes time of day, place and mood). This is not wholly controllable, yet may significantly affect what is said, and how. However, there were systematic elements, including using the same interviewer, the same place and similar time of day for all interviews, and a topic sheet of question areas to be covered. These questions were designed to be flexible and not constrain answers in the way that quantitative or structured interviews would, which increased the possibility of open dialogue. These are factors that increase validity (Seale 1998).

Nevertheless, in practice it was difficult to stick to a topic sheet in these semi-structured interviews, which were different because of the variation in answers that respondents gave. As unanticipated answers were followed up with further questions to gain depth in the answer, inevitably interviews were not equal. Moreover, the personalities of the interviewees affected the interviews significantly. Some respondents were garrulous in their answers, and an open dialogue meant they were likely to digress from the main topic, while one was taciturn, resulting in very different interviews.

As the methodology chapter discussed, the process of interviews is inherently problematic; individuals are in a specific context, describing elements of situations from which they are separated by time and space. There is no reason to believe that these particular interviewees either had full awareness of their situation or that they were willing and able to describe the whole of their truth to the researcher. Indeed, the analysis chapters assume that this does not, and could not always happen, and this had a direct bearing on the analysis. Furthermore, these interviews could also be open to permanent revision, with alternative interpretations available to those given here. This is made more problematic by the translation to English.

The participants' own motivation was related to being able to give their own opinions on a subject that was important for them. Any analysis or editing inevitably re-appropriates the participants' expression for the purposes of the research, which reframes what has been said. As a researcher, I have tried to be sensitive to these voices, while trying to place them in the context of a larger picture. Inevitably I will have failed in some places.

The effect of the study on the participants can also affect internal validity (Robson 1993:70). For example, asking questions about critical thinking means that participants may consider this idea. Indeed, a couple of participants mentioned this in the second but not the first interview. However, there was a twelve to eighteen-month gap between interviews, and it is also possible that they had considered critical thinking for other reasons.

Robson also claims that atypical respondents change the results; yet no one was obviously atypical, as mature and working students were eliminated, so participants had similar ages and were at similar stages in their career. All participants who completed both parts of the research had made the transition to the labour market, so were employed; however, this may have been unrepresentative. One factor with some significance was the high drop out rate among anthropology graduates in this study; labour market conditions meant some prolonged their studies rather than making the transition to work, some lost contact and one went abroad.

Some shortcomings of this research include: firstly, the lack of alternative key witnesses, (employers, teachers, politicians) who may give further insights into what inhibits or encourages participation in the classroom and work. Secondly, the sample chosen may not have been representative of the population. Thirdly, there is no guarantee that the participants revealed all the factors that might have been relevant about their choices and values. Indeed there is some evidence that where they felt an answer to be socially unacceptable (such as the issue of social status), they presented their point of view in a way which they believed would be more acceptable.

13.2 Research values:

As discussed in chapter 7, there are values hidden in all research that must be identified in order to bring objectivity into the process (Seale 1999; Eisener 1992; Robson 1993). The declaration of research values and positions enables readers to make their own evaluations (Fairclough 1988). Stanley and Wise (1993) claim that the researcher's self cannot be left behind when doing research.

I was influenced in the choice research theme by the experience of working in higher education during a period of rapid expansion. At the time, growing graduate unemployment and the division between the public and private sectors of higher education were debated in both the press and academic journals in Portugal. As an English woman living in Portugal, differences between my own and the host culture were salient to me, especially the apparent assumption that a particular degree course should lead to a specific professional outcome. It seemed to me incongruous that students should have such expectations of higher education in a largely low-skill labour market. I was not only influenced by my own British background, but particularly by the writings of Bourdieu, Bloomer, and later Lave and Wenger, which gave me the impetus to look at the socio-cultural attitudes and perceptions of students.

There is the danger that the strange and the different are noticed by foreign observers and that the similarities and apparently banal aspects are overlooked. I realised that I had to be open to elements that I had not anticipated, yet seemed important to the participants; I had to be open to surprises in the data, to follow up on aspects that they considered significant, and to question what they seemed to take for granted. Elements that I had not initially considered that seemed significant to the participants included the hazing ceremonies and the importance of pulling strings to get work. After participants mentioned this, I followed up on what it meant, and included it in subsequent interviews. Aspects they considered obvious included their expectations for the future use of their degrees, and their objectives when they studied (how did they decide what was important or relevant?)

I chose to focus this study on the transition period to contrast the participants' values while in higher education, and their reflections on the value of their knowledge after gaining a stable position in the labour market. Two points in time gave an idea of changing values across the

transition to work; a longer study would have shown the evolution in time, (through university, from school, after several years in work).

I realised that the participants had a particular relationship with me, and that I was framed in a number of ways; as their former English teacher, as a foreigner, as an older woman, and as a researcher. The interviews they had with me were unique, and would not have been the same with any other researcher. They explained parts of their culture as if I did not know it; they reacted differently while being recorded and when chatting before and after the interview, they had a comfortable familiarity with me while maintaining a respectful cultural distance, (using the third person form of address, for example). Yet they admitted things to me that may not have told me in another context (such as cheating, and the importance of clothes and status).

The research created a great deal of data, and I also had to make value judgements in deciding which elements to analyse, and which to leave out. These decisions were made while looking at the data and at the elements that seemed most important given the initial research questions (focussing on changing values in the transition to work), the context (in which there continues to be debate about the role of private institutions) and most surprising, such as the very different perspectives of higher education and gender roles by students studying the same degree in the same year. What I excluded, including attitudes to citizenship, perceptions of educational structures, attitudes to life long learning, and attitudes to the curricula, could have filled several more chapters.

13.3 Implications for institutions

The previous chapter indicated that teachers could have both a positive and negative effect on the students' engagement with a discipline, and that this engagement affected the development of critical analysis. The students believed that opportunities for critical analysis in assessed work were limited, and that in order to succeed they needed to defend the point of view of their lecturers. This may be because of cultural factors, as the dean claims in his interview (chapter 9). In Portugal, there is greater power distance between those in authority and those who are led, and a greater tendency to avoid uncertainty (Hofstede 1996). However, research in China (Kember 2000) has shown that it is teaching styles rather than cultural traditions that affect engagement.

This, then, should be the first point of intervention by the institution. There are four possible areas for change. First, through training courses for teachers that emphasise the need for stimulating critical analysis, as well as methods and techniques of doing so. Second, through critical thinking courses for students, such as that implemented by the Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia of Universidade Nova de Lisboa, for software engineering students, which was the first such course implemented in Portugal (Pereira and Krippahl, 2007). Critical thinking in itself may be limited, and graduates' participation in the learning society may indeed be increased with other aspects of critical being (Barnett 1997), but it is essential as a starting point for critical self reflection, self realisation and making sense of knowledge in successive contexts. Third, critical analysis could form an obligatory part of the assessment process, and methods for doing this could be outlined in disciplinary programmes. Fourth, students could develop their own critical project in the form of a magazine for which they are entirely responsible.

The Bologna process may also affect critical participation. This had not been implemented at the time of this research, when assessment was carried out primarily through tests and exams. The Bologna process envisages greater development of skills such as critical thinking, and also involves greater participation by students, for whom assessment involves autonomous literature research and class presentations, in which there is scope for developing critical analysis. However, students in this study resented dissertations because they did not value the development of critical insight and creativity. They were also at the end of their degrees, so dissertations delayed the process of graduation and getting a job. Students need preparation for the skills required in undertaking the dissertation, and support from supervisors, who could also help them reflect on the skills that they are developing in the process. They could be encouraged to start work on their dissertation earlier, to avoid resentment at the end of their degrees. Support for writing and researching the dissertation could be given from the third year, so that it could be finished before the transition to work.

The participants also expressed their frustration at having to study disciplines that they regarded as unrelated to their degrees. Under the Bologna process, more options are available than at the time of this study. However, the participants in this study were unable to predict accurately what disciplines would be useful in the future, so although increasing options may create

greater satisfaction, this may mean that students make choices on the basis of a discipline's perceived utility for work, rather than to deepen insight and understanding.

Further opportunities for valuing an existing curriculum could be created if students reflect on skills that they are learning. Without putting skills at the centre of the curriculum, which may limit disciplinary knowledge, objectivity and truth (Barnett 1994), individuals can be encouraged to recognise that information is not the centre of the curriculum. Participants believed they were acquiring knowledge that could later be applied in the workplace, without realising that their learning was shaped by personal beliefs and context. Later they found that they were not able to transfer knowledge as they had expected, so some devalued their experience of higher education. However, if they had believed they were learning generic skills, they may have had more opportunities for revaluing and constructing these in work contexts, especially when working in areas not obviously connected to their degree. The movement towards skills has already started in Portugal; its widespread recognition by employers may also help to redefine what a graduate can do.

13.4 Implications for policy makers

Higher education in Portugal has levels of massification similar to those of the UK, but with the idea that higher education develops specialists in specific areas. This is unsustainable, as the level of development in Portugal means that the demand does not exist for so many specialists. Currently the idea that degrees lead to particular careers allows for very little flexibility, and limits the understanding of a degree by both employers and students. These meanings have developed in a historical context (chapter 5), and are maintained by employers, students and their social networks. Nevertheless, if there was a new public discourse about higher education focussing less on specific professional development, this might help students and employers to reframe the meaning and value of higher education.

Another, related problem is how graduates make the transition to work. First, it is probably difficult in practice to avoid the nepotism in private businesses. There may be social advantages for firms in using social connections in hiring staff; who may be thereby more loyal and leave less frequently (Field 2003). However, this method of recruitment means that candidates with less social capital are at a disadvantage, and firms may not be choosing the best person for the

job. One possibility is that higher education institutions can increase graduates' social contacts through job fairs, which currently do not exist in Portugal, and through further short placements in a number of different firms.

Second, graduates have reported their difficulties in making their transition to the workplace, as their learning and adaptation is often unsupported. Employers are avoiding employing graduates because of their lack of experience (GPEARl 2008), but where companies do employ graduates, they are expected to get by. This is an area for government intervention together with higher education institutions. If employers had more support with their system of education and training, they might be able to develop training schemes that would permit more harmonious transitions, the use of a broader spectrum of graduate degrees, as well as continuous graduate development.

Private institutions have traditionally opened degrees in areas that are cheap to provide, but these degrees are also those with the greatest demand (chapter 6). The problem is that there is too much demand for degree courses that lead to fewer labour market opportunities, and insufficient demand for some high tech/ science degrees that the government see as key for the development of the economy. There are two factors which may influence students' degree choices; knowledge of the degree courses and labour market, and the type of experiences that will help individuals to understand that the high tech/ science choices are both possible and desirable.

Quality assessments are important for legitimating the position of private higher education institutions, and also for their graduates. These graduates typically have a lack of cultural capital in access to higher education compared to graduates in the public sector (chapter 6), and face further discrimination in the transition to work. The wider dissemination of the results of quality assessments may help redress this imbalance. However, if quality assessments paid greater attention to the existence of critical thinking and creativity, this would serve to stimulate the development of these aspects. The systematic sampling of a small number of student assessments and projects by quality assessment evaluators, or cross-marking of a sample across institutions, may lead to greater confidence in each institution's capacity to assess its

own students, and may give the broader public greater confidence in the quality of the private sector.

The system of hazing in higher education is regarded as fun by some, and a humiliating ordeal by others, who have few alternatives in their integration in university life. The excesses of this process, including deaths, regularly make newspaper headlines in Portugal. Furthermore, systematic humiliation reinforces attitudes of hierarchical domination and is in opposition to a spirit of integration and critical reflexivity. Lessons can be learnt from the private institution in this study, which places limits on hazing. The government claims that massification of higher education is part of democratisation (chapter six), but there can be no democracy in structures that encourage the arrogance of older to younger, of qualified to unqualified, and of the powerful to the powerless.

13.5 The implications for theory

This study has shown how individual trajectories through higher education are interwoven with concepts of self-identity, socially embedded beliefs and structural opportunities to give a revisable, changeable meaning to higher education. In other words, it is a cultural construction. Accordingly, the massification of higher education in Portugal will not necessarily be part of modernization in the same way as it is in other countries. This supports Scott's argument (1995:177) that massification is neither a cause nor an effect of other modernisations, but operates inside social change.

Barnett's (1997) active, reflective concept of "critical being" implies greater participation by agents who are not merely orientated to entrepreneurial projects, but to radical social and global change. It implies horizontal relationships and the capacity for individual reflexivity. It may help higher education in Portugal to escape the narrow instrumentalism that is taking over its identity (Magalhaes 2001). However, everyone involved in higher education has a habitus, leading to limits to horizons for action. In the case of Portugal, the history of higher education, its traditions, employment patterns, as well as more general attitudes and beliefs, affect the meanings and values ascribed to it. These cultural patterns might not easily be open to change. Simple solutions such as the introduction of critical thinking courses may not be enough.

Yet there is great heterogeneity in many sectors in Portugal that leads to “a certain instability of social practice” and an apparent “capacity of adaptation to things” (Sousa Santos 1997:60). This adds diversity to the field of higher education, which means that as individuals with their own socially conditioned trajectories and habitus cross it, new opportunities become apparent. This is partially evident in the differences between individuals in this research, which are as significant as their similarity on certain issues (such as gender or status). It is also evident in the way exceptional teachers help students to overcome their pre-existing expectations.

For Giddens (1991) the self is “reflexively understood by an individual in terms of his or her biography”. However, emotions were an important aspect of these selves, affecting choices and social participation. It affected how they chose their degrees, how they engaged in lessons, how they filtered what aspects of their knowledge were important, and how they engaged socially. It is important to note that this would also have been important in the development of critical thinking, action and self-reflection. The participants recognised that they developed personally (although they attributed this to natural maturation), changing their values with experience, and gaining greater insights with time. Some seemed able to face adversity with more confidence; their capacities and beliefs did not disappear with the change of context. In other cases, the self-belief they felt they had gained at university seemed to vanish. Individuals’ social support (from friends and teachers) changed as they made the transition from university to work, and so did their belief in their capacities, and their identities as graduates. Some were able to cross social fields without deflecting from their goals or confidence; all of the participants who showed confidence and pro-activity in university and work were able to draw on social capital for support.

Social capital was also important in the reconstruction of knowledge in the work place, as graduates tried to see the relevance of what they had learnt in university, and drew on their social contacts inside and outside the work context in order to help them make sense of the new situation. What they had learnt in university was within their habitus at the time, and had shaped their perceptions of what was important or relevant to learn. Their learning, in both higher education and work, was related to their social participation, so was situated and embodied, and not centred only on their cognition. However, the students believed they were acquiring

knowledge at university, rather than participating in it, (probably because of the way lectures were organised). In other words, they were learning continually, through their modified dispositions, in each subsequent context (Hodkinson 2008). Hodkinson is critical of cognitive approaches, such as that of Haskell (2001) that view learning as something that can be transferred. He says:

“There is no learning to transfer. There are people who have learned, who learn as they move and learn after they have moved”. (Hodkinson 2008: 43)

However, this is insufficient to explain what graduates in the study did do when they start work, when they found that their embedded knowledge was insufficient for their current situation. The graduates' learning was carried out in a number of contexts; in lectures, at home, on placement, with colleagues and it did not entirely make sense in their work context. They had a new learning task, which was to participate in their working communities, with its particular objectives and constraints, but to do so they needed to reconstruct the knowledge they brought to the situation. They drew on reified sources, such as books and lecturer notes, on their own memories of what different lecturers had said, or past practical experience that they recognised to be similar; they asked for help from colleagues and managers within work and experts from outside too. Their reconstruction was a new process of learning, it was socially embedded, and they were not always successful in the process. In other words, their knowledge was embedded, but in the process of transition, it proved to be highly fragmented, in that it needed to be recognised as useful in subsequent contexts, reconstructed and supplemented with additional knowledge relevant for the context.

This reconstruction was further compounded by the fact that the graduates were neither legitimate peripheral participants nor full members of the communities of practice in work contexts. Instead they were members of multiple communities whose resources they needed to draw on in the reconstruction of their knowledge. Legitimate peripheral participants (Lave and Wenger 1991) are assumed to move from newcomer status to full participants through their gradual inclusion in the work tasks of the community of practice. Learning takes place according to shared goals of the community, and the process is one in which the newcomer accomplishes progressively more difficult tasks. In the transition to work of these graduates, they were expected to carry out tasks for which they were not prepared, and for which they did not always

have support from within the community. They drew on multiple resources to protect their graduate identities because a failure to do so meant that their identities as legitimate graduate participants would be compromised. Although the shared tasks arose from the community, these tasks could only be achieved through simultaneous membership of other communities. Learning and being were therefore fractured across these different communities.

Finally, this aspect of the research provides a point of reflection on the practices within the communities themselves. Communities of practice have a tendency to be conservative (Kimble 2008), emphasising the way things have always been done. Membership of multiple communities has the possibility of changing practices as knowledge comes from outside. In this study the only evidence for the way existing practices could be changed was where graduates started working in their family companies, as change also implies power, but it is an area that could be further researched in the future.

13.6 Future research

There are many areas of research that arise directly from this thesis. Some of the key tasks for further research are as follows;

- To expand this research to more students in more universities, in order to compare different types and styles of institution.
- Research could concentrate on particular disciplinary fields to find out what particular difficulties exist in transitions in each area.
- Research could also compare universities across Europe; the comparative experiences for students in Erasmus programmes may be an interesting starting point.
- Research design could change to a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology. This could show both structural and individual elements, as well as compare institutions.
- Research could also identify what inhibits or encourages certain forms of participation in educational contexts. For example, why do some students avoid taking part in discussions?
- The reconstruction of knowledge in the transition to work; this needs further research on a larger scale to see whether the factors discussed here prevail in a variety of settings

- Can graduates change a community of practice? This would need a long-term study of different types of community. Graduates shape their work tasks and become agents of innovation within the organisation of work (Teichler 1999:308, Harvey et al 1996, De Weert 2007), but is this through their generic skills or because of the new knowledge they bring from other communities?

13.7 Conclusions

This thesis has been concerned with the nature of graduates' embedded meanings as they make the transition from university to work in Portugal, on the basis that learning cannot be separated from the meanings ascribed to it by individuals. This study concurred with Bloomer's (1997) research in that individual paths through education and into work are affected by social networks, resources and significant individuals but added that there are no deterministic effects of social class, gender or field of study. The meanings given to higher education arise out of cultural narratives, relationships, and self-identity, shaping perceptions about the purpose and interest of knowledge.

Educational policy in Portugal has stated that higher education is expected to be part of social and educational change. Critical thinking is assumed to be an integral part of this. However, higher education is not separate from the broader political economy of which it is a part; from its cultural history, or from the socially constructed meanings ascribed to it. Indeed, the participants in this study did not see higher education as a place for personal development, gaining generic skills and critical engagement. Instead, their view of higher education was narrow, focussing on how it affected their labour market opportunities. This affected how they acted on their educational opportunities and the criteria by which they measured the validity of higher education after their transition to work. Moreover, labour market limitations meant that graduates who did not find work in areas directly related to their degree devalued their education.

A key finding of this research relates to the reconstruction of knowledge in work contexts, and relates to the concept of "learning careers" (the development of a student's dispositions to knowledge and learning over time, Bloomer 1997). Learning is assumed to become part of a person who learns, so Hodkinson (2008) claims there is no learning transfer. However, this is

insufficient to explain what graduates in the study did when they started work, when they found that their embedded knowledge was insufficient for their current situation. Their new learning task required them to reconstruct the knowledge drawing a variety of cultural and social resources. In other words, their knowledge was embedded, but in the process of transition, it proved to be highly fragmented, in that it needed to be recognised as useful in subsequent contexts, reconstructed and supplemented with additional knowledge relevant for the context. Graduates were also affected by the skills and knowledge that employers expected from them, but were not always supported in their learning process. Therefore a key finding of this research is to contest an aspect of learning careers; learning does not just belong to people who have learnt, as Hodkinson (2008) suggests, or to the context, but is reconstructed and added to using the socio-cultural resources available to the individual. This has significance internationally for research into transitions from higher education to work.

Higher education cannot lead to change on its own; all educational and productive sectors affect higher education, and vice versa. If students' and employers' perspectives of higher education can be broadened, labour market opportunities increased, and support for individual transitions to work improved, this would be beneficial for both graduates' self-realization and how mass higher education can affect the knowledge economy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1.1 Labour force and unemployed population, (continued overleaf)

	Active population in numbers							
	Higher education				General population			
	all age groups	TOTAL 15-29	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL all ages	all age groups	TOTAL 15-29	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL all ages
	M & F		MALE	FEMALE	M & F		MALE	FEMALE
1985	147.829	28.845	87.950	59.879	4.544.735	1.483.172	2.655.928	1.888.807
1986	163.575	34.299	97.796	65.779	4.500.846	1.484.561	2.639.660	1.861.186
1987	158.781	29.631	94.912	63.869	4.531.936	1.461.972	2.631.431	1.900.505
1988	174.637	33.958	103.323	71.314	4.570.098	1.460.835	2.626.625	1.943.473
1989	193.454	38.664	110.311	83.143	4.632.752	1.452.976	2.656.399	1.976.353
1990	201.442	37.169	114.136	87.306	4.708.928	1.431.857	2.677.565	2.031.363
1991	226.163	41.509	123.521	102.642	4.813.074	1.402.831	2.700.292	2.112.782
1992	341.820	69.977	180.501	161.319	4.736.685	1.405.002	2.639.352	2.097.333
1993	353.321	66.128	186.477	166.844	4.714.716	1.312.392	2.605.821	2.108.895
1994	372.808	68.712	190.245	182.563	4.772.074	1.277.238	2.628.145	2.143.929
1995	385.708	75.164	193.029	192.679	4.752.688	1.210.816	2.612.557	2.140.131
1996	388.136	93.163	193.065	195.071	4.786.387	1.216.808	2.623.999	2.162.388
1997	388.109	98.356	190.330	197.779	4.851.949	1.215.350	2.652.801	2.199.148
1998	448.393	127.285	186.082	262.311	5.095.675	1.390.702	2.804.991	2.290.683
1999	475.478	136.781	203.202	272.276	5.136.124	1.373.065	2.818.086	2.318.038
2000	487.593	140.209	206.567	281.025	5.226.384	1.370.617	2.854.489	2.371.894
2001	516.343	159.610	209.722	306.621	5.325.237	1.386.387	2.901.288	2.423.949
2002	533.144	175.689	204.448	328.696	5.407.807	1.388.746	2.937.790	2.470.017
2003	617.617	184.297	244.643	372.974	5.460.265	1.351.368	2.947.941	
2004	714.196	204.735	287.273	426.923	5.487.813	1.328.065	2.957.040	2.530.773
2005	733.094	204.735	296.677	436.416	5.544.851	1.328.065	2.963.547	2.581.304

Unemployed population, in numbers

	Higher education				General population			
	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL 15-29	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL 15-29	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL all ages
	M & F		MALE	FEMALE	M & F		MALE	FEMALE
1985	3.454	2.975	1.307	2.147	389.026	250.204	168.224	220.802
1986	4.507	3.715	1.430	3.077	385.545	246.647	172.611	212.934
1987	3.037	2.358	1.779	1.258	322.617	203.831	141.117	181.500
1988	3.054	2.323	1.332	1.722	259.971	159.017	104.177	155.794
1989	2.720	2.130	1.104	1.616	231.252	142.092	90.186	141.066
1990	3.011	1.967	953	2.058	218.933	124.362	84.904	134.029
1991	3.123	2.233	1.007	2.116	197.068	109.074	73.480	123.588
1992	4.808	3.487	2.005	2.803	194.068	110.134	90.651	103.417
1993	8.056	4.446	3.941	4.115	257.358	134.385	119.881	137.477
1994	10.504	5.659	4.639	5.865	323.733	156.202	155.682	168.051
1995	14.049	8.408	6.833	7.216	338.363	159.732	165.759	172.604
1996	17.054	11.967	6.942	10.112	343.945	162.398	166.977	176.968
1997	13.324	10.723	5.087	8.237	324.106	145.458	158.535	165.571
1998	15.322	10.590	4.918	10.404	251.904	116.326	110.580	141.324
1999	17.821	11.283	6.474	11.347	225.796	95.828	108.869	116.927
2000	15.272	9.915	5.000	10.272	205.502	88.207	89.327	116.175
2001	17.768	11.889	4.881	12.887	213.543	96.984	91.566	121.977
2002	26.034	17.026	6.516	19.518	270.523	125.591	121.382	149.141
2003	36.972	24.528	12.071	24.901	342.309	149.733	160.874	181.435
2004	37.857	26.119	13.510	24.347	365.029	151.779	172.872	192.156
2005	46.217	28.024	16.652	29.565	422.272	170.512	198.150	224.122

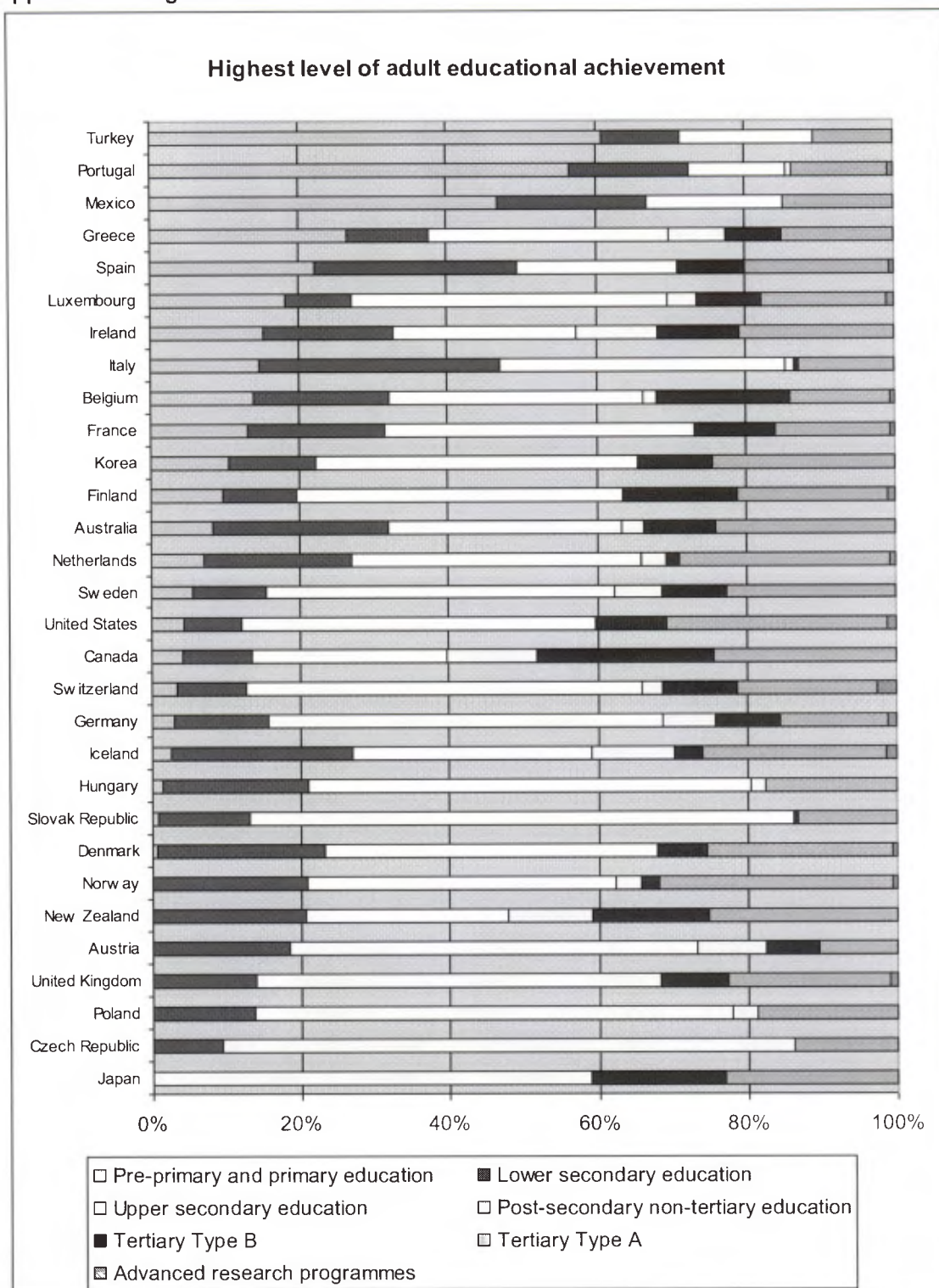
SOURCE: PERMANENT YOUTH OBSERVATORY (OBSERVATÓRIO PERMANENTE DE JUVENTUDE); DATABASE 2009

Appendix 1.2 Unemployment (as a percentage of labour force)

	Graduates of Higher Education				TOTAL Population			
	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL 15-29	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL 15-29	TOTAL all ages	TOTAL all ages
	M & F	MALE	FEMALE	M & F	MALE	FEMALE		
1985	2,3	10,3	1,5	3,6	8,6	16,9	6,3	11,7
1986	2,8	10,8	1,5	4,7	8,6	16,6	6,5	11,4
1987	1,9	8,0	1,9	2,0	7,1	13,9	5,4	9,6
1988	1,7	6,8	1,3	2,4	5,7	10,9	4,0	8,0
1989	1,4	5,5	1,0	1,9	5,0	9,8	3,4	7,1
1990	1,5	5,3	0,8	2,4	4,6	8,7	3,2	6,6
1991	1,4	5,4	0,8	2,1	4,1	7,8	2,7	5,8
1992	1,4	5,0	1,1	1,7	4,1	7,8	3,4	4,9
1993	2,3	6,7	2,1	2,5	5,5	10,2	4,6	6,5
1994	2,8	8,2	2,4	3,2	6,8	12,2	5,9	7,8
1995	3,6	11,2	3,5	3,7	7,1	13,2	6,3	8,1
1996	4,4	12,8	3,6	5,2	7,2	13,3	6,4	8,2
1997	3,4	10,9	2,7	4,2	6,7	12,0	6,0	7,5
1998	3,4	8,3	2,6	4,0	4,9	8,4	3,9	6,2
1999	3,7	8,2	3,2	4,2	4,4	7,0	3,9	5,0
2000	3,1	7,1	2,4	3,7	3,9	6,4	3,1	4,9
2001	3,4	7,4	2,3	4,2	4,0	7,0	3,2	5,0
2002	4,9	9,7	3,2	5,9	5,0	9,0	4,1	6,0
2003	6,0	13,3	4,9	6,7	6,3	11,1	5,5	7,2
2004	5,3	12,8	4,7	5,7	6,7	11,4	5,8	7,6
2005	6,3	13,7	5,6	6,8	7,6	12,8	6,7	8,7

SOURCE: Calculated from the database of the PERMANENT YOUTH OBSERVATORY (OBSERVATÓRIO PERMANENTE DE JUVENTUDE); 2009

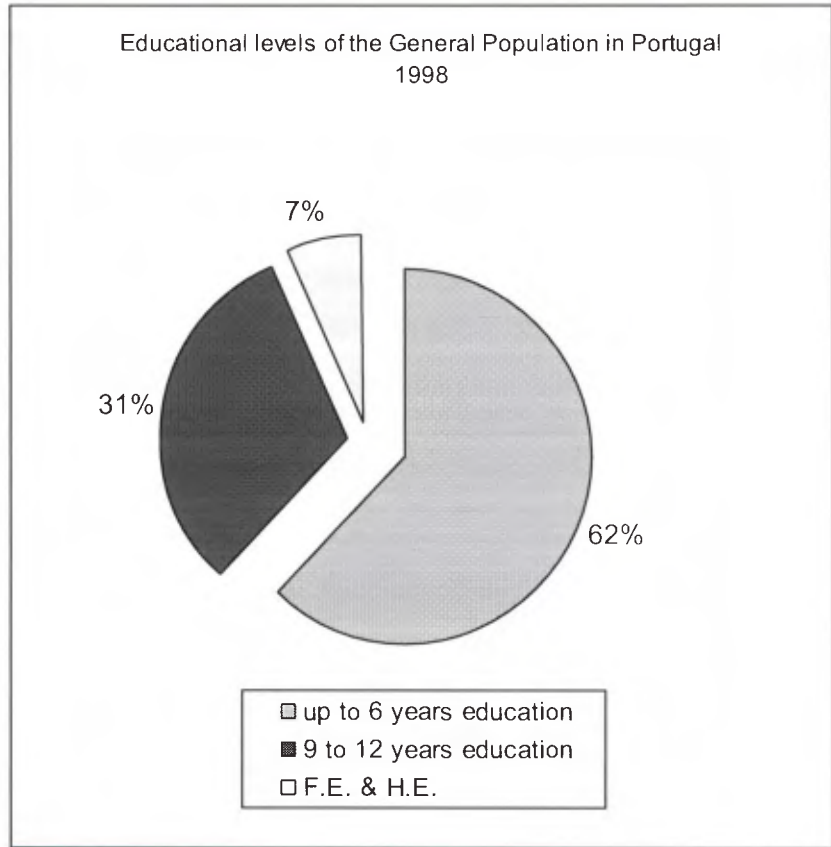
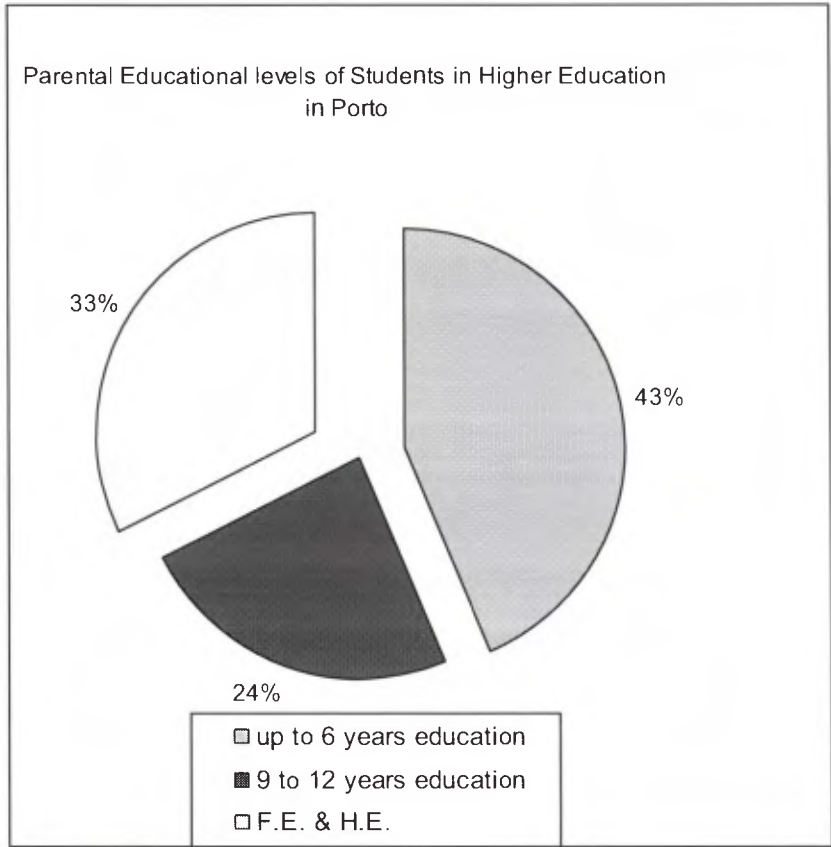
Appendix 5.1 Highest levels of adult educational achievement

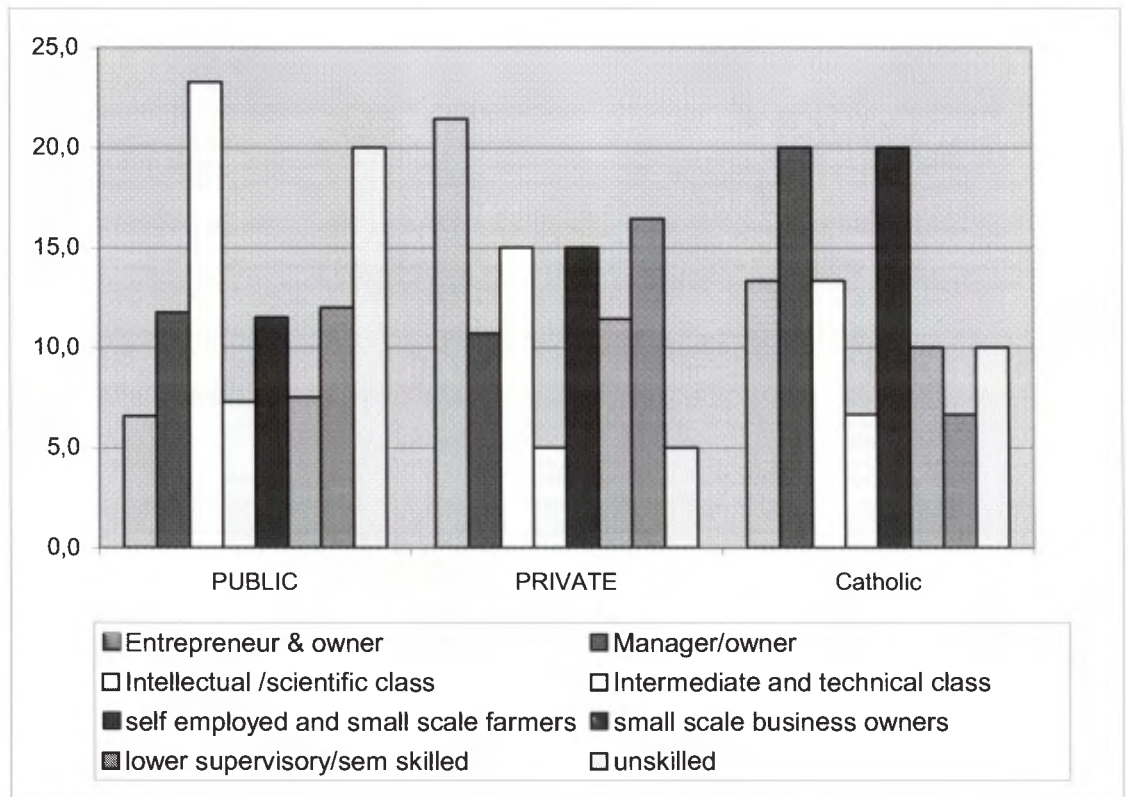


From OCDE indicators 2009: education at a glance, Indicator A1 To what level have adults studied? 2009-11-16

http://www.oecd.org/document/24/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_43586328_1_1_1_3745_5,00.html

Appendix 6.1 Parental educational levels





Data sources: A comparison of educational levels from a survey of Higher Education students in Porto, by Teixeira 2001

Appendix 7.1a Covering letter, Portuguese

Teresa Pole-Baker Gouveia:

email: tfgouveia@udc.pt

cacife: 234

Caro Participante,

Obrigado por ter aceite participar neste estudo, que faz parte de um projecto de investigação do meu doutoramento em Educação na University of Surrey, Inglaterra.

O estudo, é sobre o que cada estudante percebe da sua experiência educacional Universitária na transição para o mercado de trabalho e, pretende dar voz e expressão aos pontos de vista do estudante que normalmente não são considerados nas discussões sobre o valor do educação Universitária. Os seus pontos de vista são importantes no processo de mudança na educação universitária.

A investigação compreende duas entrevistas, uma antes de acabar o seu curso e a outra um ano depois da primeira. As entrevistas dar-lhe-ão oportunidade de expressar todos os pontos de vista que você tenha sobre qualquer aspecto da educação universitária. Mesmo assim, não hesite contactar-me para qualquer esclarecimento sobre a natureza deste projecto e dos seus resultados.

Para facilitar todo o processo de entrevista, gostaria que você preenchesse o formulário da forma mais completa possível e que me entregue em mão ou o deposite no cacife número 234 (sala das professores), fechado no envelope fornecido.

Penso ser importante dizer-lhe, que toda a informação e pontos de vista por si expressos durante a investigação são confidenciais e, você não será indentificável em qualquer publicação que resulte deste estudo.

Desde já grata pela sua colaboração

Teresa Frances Pole-Baker Gouveia

Appendix 7.1b Covering letter, English translation

Teresa Pole-Baker Gouveia:
email: tfgouveia@udc.pt
locker: 234

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study, which forms part of the research for my doctorate in Education at the University of Surrey.

The study is about individual students educational values and personal experience of University education in the transition to work, and is intended to give students a voice to express points of view normally not considered in discussions of the value of University education. Your views are important not only for theory, but also for the process of change in Higher Education.

The research is comprised of two interviews, one before, and one some time after the transition to work. The interviews will be fairly open in order to give you the opportunity to express any points of view that you have about any aspect of your University education. Nevertheless, please feel free to contact me if you would like any more information about the nature of this research and its results.

In order to facilitate the interview process, I would be grateful if you would fill-in the attached form about your general background as completely as possible on your own, and then return it to me in person, or in my locker N°234 (in the teacher's room), sealed in the envelope provided.

I feel that it is important to emphasise that the information and points of view that you give at any point during this research will be completely confidential, and you will not be identifiable in any publication arising from this research.

Thank you for your collaboration

Regards

Teresa Frances Pole-Baker Gouveia

Appendix 7.2: Written questionnaire in Portuguese

I N F O R M A Ç Ã O B A S E

Este estudo, trata da sua experiência individual com a educação universitária na transição para o mundo do trabalho. Gostaria que preenchesse sozinho e de forma completa o formulário. Posto isso, que mo entregasse em mão ou o depositasse no cacifo número 234 (na sala das professores), fechado no envelope fornecido. Esta informação pretende facilitar as entrevista, das quais a primeira seria em breve, conforme a sua disponibilidade.

Muito obrigado pela sua colaboração

Teresa Gouveia

(letra MAÍSCULA)

1. Nome completo:.....
2. Data do nascimento: :.....
3. lugar do nascimento: :.....
4. Morada permanente (para contacto) :.....
.....
.....
5. Numero do telefone (para contacto):.....
6. Onde vivia em criança, por quanto tempo e com quem (pais, avós, tios, etc.)?

<u>Local</u>	<u>Número de anos residente</u>	<u>Encarregado de educação</u>

7. Que nível de formação atingiram os seus pais, e qual é a profissão deles? Se você foi criado em parte ou completamente por outra(s) pessoa(s), por favor adicione também esses elementos e respectiva informação.

Primeiro nome	Anos de escolaridade de	Nível de ensino depois de acabar a escola: Curso técnico, médio, superior	Profissão actual	Profissão Anterior
Mãe:				
Pai:				
Outro(s) tutor(es):				

12 Historia da sua educação:

Quais foram as escolas frequentadas (nome), e as habilitações conseguidas:

Please name the schools you have attended and the educational qualification achieved:

<u>Data</u>	<u>Escola</u>	<u>Habilitação Conseguidass</u>

13. Qual é seu curso?

.....

14. Porque escolheu frequentar a Universidade?

.....

15. Porque escolheu esta Universidade?

.....

16. Porque é que escolheu este curso?

.....

17. Havia outro curso no início que preferisse em vez deste? Porquê?

.....

18. Existe qualquer membro da sua família que estudou numa área semelhante à sua? Quem e o que estudou?

.....

19. Algum membro da sua família influenciou a sua opção de curso? Quem foi, e como é que o influenciou?

.....

20. No fim deste curso, pretende trabalhar ou continuar a estudar?

.....

21. Está a pensar nalgum tipo de emprego ou carreira? Quais?

.....

Appendix 7.3 WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE (English translation)

This study is about individual students educational values and personal experience of University education in the transition to work. I would be grateful if you would complete the following information about your general background as completely as possible, on your own, and then return it to me in person, or in my locker N°234 (in the teacher's room), sealed in the envelope provided. This information is intended to facilitate the interviews, the first of which will take place in the near future, according to your availability.

Thank you for your collaboration

Teresa Gouveia

(please PRINT)

1. Your full name:.....

2. Date of birth: :.....

3. Place of birth: :.....

4. Contact Address :.....

.....

.....

5. Contact Telephone Number: :.....

6. Where did you live as a child, and for how long, and with whom (parents, grandparents, uncle, etc.)?

<u>Town</u>	<u>Number of years resident</u>	<u>Guardian</u>

7. What level of education did your parents attain, and what is their occupation? If you were brought up partially or completely by someone other than your parents or grandparents, please add their details

First Name	Years of school	Level of further Education: Technical/ Medium /Higher	Current Occupation	Previous Occupation
Mother:				
Father:				
Other guardian:				

12. Educational History:

Please name the schools you have attended and the educational qualification achieved:

<u>Date</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>Educational Qualification</u>

13. What subject do you study?

.....

.....

.....

14. Why did you choose to go to university?

.....

.....

.....

15. Why did you choose this University?

.....

.....

.....

16. Why did you choose this particular subject of study?

.....

.....

.....

17. Was there another subject that you would have preferred instead of this? Why?

.....

.....

.....

18. Is there any member of your family who has studied in a similar area to you? Who, and what did they study?

.....

.....

.....

19. Is there any member of your family who affected your choice of University degree? If so, who, and how did they affect you?

.....

.....

.....

20. At the end of your degree, do you intend to work or study?

.....

.....

.....

21. Do you have any particular employment or career destination in mind?

.....

.....

.....

Appendix 7.4 Interview with the Dean of the UDC

1. One of the primary objectives expressed by the UDC is to educate for active (working) life. In your opinion, how does the UDC implement this concept?

Dean: All courses include a placement as part of the evaluation, in order to have some experience of working life and practical application of their knowledge obtained at University. University has to be attentive to the signals from the labour market, but the university has another mission, which is to prepare people cognitively for a professional activity in a way that they are autonomous with free will and action. This is why we include the placement, so that they can have contact with the external reality. We try to transmit this idea to our students that the university is looking for a way to differentiate its educational product, and it's important to take from university some useful active knowledge that they can apply in a practical reality.

Our concern is not to be exclusively a classic, erudite, classic university, but to have a dialogue with the professions without this meaning just training professionals. We wish to train young people with enough capacities and scientific skills (competences) that permit them autonomy in the labour market in a certain activity. However, most importantly, we train citizens who can show that they have the tools to adapt to the labour market

2. Interviewer: How do you evaluate the results obtained?

Dean: For this end we have created a placement office with business relationships. At first it had some difficulties getting a good response from the labour market, because a two-way relationship was necessary, and it was difficult because the fabric of Portuguese business societies at first saw these placements as an additional burden. However, now the results are extremely positive, and now we have no difficulty whatsoever in finding placements for our students, which sometimes leads to recruitment. Quite the contrary, we now have a deficit of supply for the demands made on the placements office. Moreover, the employability of our students is extremely high, close to 100% in certain courses. So the evaluation is made through the response of the labour market. Evaluations are made without any type of risk to the companies concerned, but allow them to evaluate the students in terms of their behaviour, personality, capacity to work as part of a team (group) and their creativity

3. Another primary objective expressed by the UDC is to educate for civil life, (for citizenship). In your opinion, how this been developed and has it had success?

Dean: In my point of view this is the most important principle of the university, as new technology makes knowledge available to practically everybody, so the role of university is to train citizens. University should develop the students autonomy, which is limited when they start their courses, and educated them for life, society, and to exercise their rights as citizens, although this is more difficult than developing them for their working life. The university's project is that lecturers, students and other functionaries should all have an autonomous spirit and free thought, to intervene in social processes. There's nothing worse than young people with university education being passive in social processes, so our objective here is that they develop here the mental tools that let them be critical, and make well-founded changes in social life. For this we need a new university culture in which the students understand this is an adult school, not a post-secondary school, in which the development of adult behaviour, intellectual honesty and sociability based on the principals of solidarity, mutual respect and loyalty. This depends on the part played by the teaching staff as well as the students. The fundamental problem is that this presupposes the change in university culture as much more than a place of learning than of teaching.

What we have to do to develop this is that university students understand that the final objective is that they become active and autonomous in their learning, unlike their previous experience of schooling in which they have been limited to reproducing what has been taught. At university, memorisation is essential, but not for reproduction but creativity, so that they can leave university with clear thoughts, critical opinions and autonomous judgement, and civically important in social processes, in order to transform reality. But more important that changing the world is to change the transformed world. This means that the university project should give the students security to learn how to learn, but not in the sense of traditional universities in which students had to reproduced knowledge handed down to them, but where knowledge is systematised through the mutual collaboration between teacher and student, in the sense that they both learn.

4. Interviewer: For this end are the core courses (for all degrees), such as languages, grammar, European studies, part of this training for civic life?

Dean: Yes, fundamentally because these develop transferable skills, in addition to the scientific knowledge that is indispensable for the exercise of certain professions, which allow the graduates mobility between jobs, as well as to take part in civic life, to communicate in ones' own and another language, have competences in new technology, and understand what it means to be part of Europe, so that they can face globalisation in which the labour market works with the advantage of the polyvalence that they get from these skills.

5. Interviewer: Are the limitations that the institution put on the "praxe" (freshers' week) part of this process?

Dean: Yes, we are now in another type of less stratified society in which certain types of behaviour can not be tolerated. There is an effective democratisation of university life, which is not compatible with the arrogance of the elder to the younger students. Freshers' week should be a way of integrating new colleagues when they arrive at university, and victimization is a pathological component that I do not accept, so I have always tried to ensure that the initiation of new colleagues should be within acceptable limits, and I do not permit that the elder students mistreat the younger. Instead they should integrate and initiate them with a spirit of respect, friendship and solidarity, and not repression and victimization.

6. Interviewer: A third objective is to stimulate cultural creativity and the development of critical thought and scientific spirit. In your opinion, how has the institution done this and how does it verify the results in this field?

Dean: Unfortunately, the institution is contaminated by the environment of the country in which it is not very common to stimulate culture, critical thought and scientific research. Inasmuch as the institution is seen as a post-secondary school, there is a risk that it is not possible to initiate the student in the spirit of critical thought and research. In order to convince students that being a university student is a great social responsibility, it is necessary to obtain a degree of distinction and differentiation. However, as this is not possible directly. We have been obliged to enforce a degree of participation in the lessons (lectures), at the same time a trying to convince

the teaching staff that methods nowadays should be directed to self-directed learning, much more than being attentive to the lecturer's knowledge. This was our intention when we introduced a degree of obligatory attendance, and a final dissertation for all courses. The objective of the dissertation is that the student undertakes an initiation in scientific methods, in the spirit of curiosity and their own critical thought. The object is that we have some control of the quality of the output, because if we didn't, we would run the risk that the students would leave only with the experience of copying, and completed the various disciplines in a very parasitic manner. With the dissertation, we can ensure that they are autonomous and deserve to have their degree, which is with the license to learn by themselves. We are the only university which is trying to row against the tide of this "post secondary school" mentality, which is difficult because our own students are contaminated by those who go to other institutions, and see the dissertation as one more moment of sacrifice to make their lives more difficult, whereas the truth is that it is only to make them aware that those who receive their degree have really received a license to learn by themselves. This is like a driving school, as someone who is not prepared to drive a car can kill people. The responsibility of the graduate is very great, and we can't let them leave here illiterate (in this sense), which devalues the university at the same time. There are always reactions when we introduce restrictive measures, but after a while people adapt and the measures end up being absorbed, and with time, I expect that we will be able to achieve the desired end, that is, that our students will develop an amount of creative and curious spirit.

The participation of the teaching staff is obviously fundamental, especially as now we are heading for the integration with the Bologna agreement, in which our universities will be part of the European system. Then Universities will have to have criteria which I consider fundamental, and should always have had, that is a period of learning directed by the teaching staff, a period managed by the student, and evaluation which is managed by both. This evaluation is important as the lecturers are able to accompany the intellectual development of their students, which can only be analysed through the students own work. I believe that in the future we will be able to ensure that the students start their courses have the obligation to construct their portfolio and dossier which will accompany them throughout the course, in which they will register their own emotive process, curiosity, problems to be discussed, leading to a habit that we still haven't

managed to attain, but is fundamental, which is that they attain a true declaration of autonomy of scientific thought and critical spirit.

7. Interviewer: There are, then, limitations due to the perception of the students, but are there also limitations because of the teaching staff?

Dean: most of all because of the staff. I think that our greatest problem is the Portuguese university lecturers haven't yet understood this new mission of the university, because they just reproduce the models of the university from they have come, in which there is a very sedentary spirit. They see themselves principally as functionaries rather than professionals, which prejudices the development of critical spirit and the preparation for civic and working life. They think that they must religiously fulfil their duty, which is to give a class with the subject matter they consider important, and pretend that the outside world doesn't exist, whereas they should never forget that there is an outside world, with people and problems. There should be more spirit of initiative, more autonomy in the sense that their role is to see university a factory of citizens and not a place where they distribute knowledge as if it were a supermarket of knowledge.

8. Interviewer: Are these three objectives subject to external quality evaluation?

Yes, but the problem is that the national commission for the evaluation of higher education is not very concerned with these three components. Universities are evaluated from a bureaucratic perspective, fulfilling administrative requirements rather than for the project and its development. The university is evaluated with the external world as a result of its efforts and has an acceptance now that it didn't have 6 or seven years ago, and there is a greater demand for exchange programme places on the Socrates and Erasmus programmes than there used to be. But what happens is that the innovation that we have always sought here, to do things in a different, better way, is very restricted as a result of the bureaucracy.

9. Interviewer: For example?

Dean: For example, on the level of analyse of processes. The ministry of education takes an excessive amount of time to analyse new projects, at least three years before an new course is approved, which could not happen in a normal country. Nowadays, knowledge is dynamic, and

so 3 years now is like three decades 20 years ago. On the other hand there is no mutual trust between institutions and the ministry; therefore we have no relationship of accountability. The ministry is only concerned with whether we fail in some bureaucratic aspect, and the evaluation is not as unpolluted, as pure as it should be. An institution can have many blocks from a pedagogical or scientific point of view, but less in terms of the fulfilment of administrative requirements, and so are more highly valued by external evaluations, and they forget that the essence of a university is not in terms of administration but pedagogical and scientific development. It's difficult in a country like Portugal which has a centralist tradition, with a suffocating bureaucracy, to develop an innovative project.

10. Interviewer: In this sense, also in the sense of the development of critical thought, have they also imposed restrictions in terms of the number of hours of each course?

Dean: Exactly. We're touching on the essential aspect. What the ministry of education should do is define minimum criteria, or minimum programmes. What should be respected in all training and institutions is the liberty of being in control of their own course plans and curriculum. There are too many subjects in each degree curriculum, and too many hours spent in lessons, but these are the legal requirements. The big question is that we will have to change this as we adopt the Bologna declaration. The courses will be organised according to European credit transfer systems, according to the three dimensions of teaching learning and evaluation. The teaching aspect will mean that the professor will not have to teach 60 hours on a subject area, but could teach 10 or 15 hours and leave the students to research and learn the others by themselves, developing the students' self-directed learning, and deepening their knowledge in the libraries. However, this is not yet possible in Portugal because of traditions and the verticalization in our curriculum. We need to develop more transferability, and make the curriculum more horizontal, and permit combinations that students consider more useful, such as in the Anglo-Saxonic systems or "major" and "minor" subject areas, so that engineering could be studied together with literature, for example. As it is, Portugal is becoming more backward in these times of knowledge without frontiers. All knowledge is complex and multiple. Mono-science doesn't exist and the difficulty that we have is that bureaucratically we do not have

autonomy, but always subject to the guardianship of the ministry of education, which is slow and old fashioned.

11. Interviewer: As a private institution, do you feel there are more or fewer restrictions compared with public institutions in the implementation of these concepts?

Dean: There are more. Because as private institutions we do not have the autonomy of that public universities have, as we have to ask the ministry of education for authorization and do not have any degree of autonomy, apart from certain post-graduate courses and specialisations. This arises from the inexistence of trust. If there is no culture of trust, there cannot be a culture of accountability. We can only have autonomy through the fulfilment of bureaucratic norms applied to the sector.

12. Interviewer: How do you evaluate the importance of democratic participation in the UDC by the teaching staff and the students?

Dean: One of the reasons why we altered the internal structure of the university, from departments into faculties, is to stimulate a greater participation on the part of our teaching staff to the process and project of the university, and try to convince them that they are not mere functionaries but active agents in the project, indispensable in its development. The division was done so that each faculty would possess a degree of autonomy in their pedagogical organisation, and in their scientific and administrative organisation, so that they can also be critical, creative, and not functionaries merely concerned with fulfilling their timetables, teaching their lessons, writing tests and correcting their exams, but understand the university project is also theirs. Their participation can add to the projects quality, credibility and value, which must inevitably pass through the teaching staff. What makes a good university is not the students but the teaching staff, because if we have bad teachers, we have bad students.

13. Interviewer: And is the democratic participation of the students also important?

Dean: Exactly, because if the teachers aren't used to participating democratically in the project, they will transmit this idea to the students too. The students of the university don't have such a

democratic participation as they should have because they are convinced that the problems are all resolved, that they don't have problems, and don't need to fight for anything, and only need to worry about themselves. It is exactly in this the problems of the students resides, they feel absolutely protected, and the lecturers and administration can resolve all their problems, so they don't grow up, don't develop their characters. But this participation is dependent of the lecturers' participation as well. When we organise activities such as conferences, the participation of lecturers is extremely limited, and the students notice this, and don't understand why they should take part if the teaching staff doesn't. At the moment the students are passive, and criticises for the sake of it, but don't take one step to change the situation.

14. Interviewer: In your opinion, what are the cultural values of this institution, and how do you envisage their development?

Dean: In terms of values, we are going through a particularly difficult phases at the moment, because Portuguese society has become one of unruly, compulsive consumerism, so people think that the most important thing is not their values, or other beings, but what they own. There is a substitution of being for having, which is prejudicial because people are only in the culture of possession and not for the culture of sustainability, so when they first come across difficulties in their lives, it is catastrophic as they are not prepared. So another of the important missions of the university is to prepare people for difficulty, to supply them with the mechanisms and defences necessary to face difficulties, but we have a long way to go to convince people that being is more important than having. It is "being" that will give the students autonomy, and a degree of liberty, if students have a system of values of which they are perfectly aware and will defend (assume), of solidarity, loyalty, mutual respect. University should give them the defences so that they permanently have a superior spirit, are civically developed, and should know perfectly well that for the world depends on their values to improve. It is this message that the lecturers should transmit to their students, which is educative.

15. Interviewer: Is it difficult to convince the teaching staff of this?

Dean: Very difficulty because they also come from the culture of possession, and are the victims of this culture, in a country with immense structural difficulties as Portugal has, although

it is a country of excessive consumerism, and in which there is the idea that there is no difficulty for others whatsoever. I believe that the university should stimulate the students to debate with the lecturers to think about this reality, because the most important resource of this country are the people, as we don't have any other resources but the people. If the universities don't fulfil their role and develop the people who are the pillars of the society, society will become more and more decadent. So we should inculcate the values of respect for others, loyalty, solidarity, and the idea the human beings are different from animals.

16. Interviewer: Do you believe you have developed any of these values here?

Dean: Yes, despite everything, the UDC has been moving in a positive direction and it is deepening all the time. Until now, the social sense that we have developed, for example in the area of health, we feel that the students feel enriched by the possibility that they can serve, and show solidarity with others, for example with the poor children in the schools in Paranhos, the dental clinics open to people with financial difficulties. On the part of the students there is the possibility of growth of their personalities and the possibility to have contact with other realities, rather than avoiding it completely.

APPENDIX 7.5 Sample interview transcript, translated into English**Ana Pinto, public administration, first interview**

Interviewer: when did you first want to go to university?

Ana: since I started going to high school, around about the 7th or 8th grade, then I was quite sure that I wanted to do a degree. This was even more so because I'd worked, I'd done the 6th grade and then my father didn't let me carry on studying and he took me out of school. I really wanted to.

Interviewer: he took you out after the 6th grade?

Ana: I did the 6th grade, and I had to leave because my father wouldn't let me continue studying.

Interviewer: why?

Ana: he wanted me to work in agriculture. I hated agriculture, I felt very frustrated. It took me two years to convince him to let me start studying again and from the 7th grades I was always a very good student and I was sure that I wanted to go to university and do a degree.

Interviewer: but why university and not a technical course or something?

Ana: there was that option too in my school. But personally technical courses didn't interest me so much. I studied in the area of sciences and then that I changed to the area of letters and I also liked medicine very much. So, I started studying physics and chemistry but I was a disaster and the grades have to be very high. Something else that I also liked was administration and that's when I decided to change this area. There was a technical professional course as an option, but I wanted a university degree, I knew I didn't want to work at the end of the 12th grade and I didn't think it be any good for me to take a technical qualification. I preferred something which would then get me into higher education straightaway.

Interviewer: so you didn't want go to polytechnic for example?

Ana: no I wasn't very interested in going to polytechnic.

Interviewer: why not?

Ana: I don't know. My dream was university.

Interviewer: but did you have anybody who influenced you in this option for university?

Ana: No.

Interviewer: no?

Ana: on the contrary, I mean my mother would have liked it, as she always wanted me to have a university degree. After I started studying, my father would only support me if he saw that I had good grades, so I never got behind and then he supported me. But then my mother died, it was in that year that I applied for university and I couldn't apply for the public universities because I couldn't do the specific exams because it was on the day that she died, so I couldn't do that exam, and so I couldn't apply for university as I had wanted to, the state university, where I wouldn't pay so much. It's always more expensive to go to a private university, it's always more expensive.

Interviewer: of course.

Ana: and at that time I was already dating and I was thinking about getting married but it was my husband who didn't want me to come to university.

Interviewer: didn't he?

Ana: he's very jealous and he thought I was going to lose myself in university, that I was going to stop liking him, and he didn't want it. But I fought, I went over everything and I thought if he really liked me he would continue at my side. So I enrolled at the University, even though he didn't support me at the time, but I enrolled at the University and went on with it.

Interviewer: but after that did he support you?

Ana: now he feels very proud that I'm nearly finishing this degree.

Interviewer: he feels proud now?

Ana: yes, now he does.

Interviewer: after all these years?

Ana: yes. I fought very much alone because I didn't have anybody to support me. My godparents, my godmother supported me a lot, that greatest dream she had was that I should finish my degree. She supported me a lot and helped me a lot during my degree.

Interviewer: how did you get this idea of going to university (pause), did you know anybody in your home town, did you admire somebody, where to this idea come from?

Ana: where I come from, very few people went university, everybody was either working in factories or as domestic help. I knew I didn't want that for me. I didn't want that. I wanted something more, I wanted to go further.

Interviewer: yes.

Ana: so this at idea of going to university came from there. I wanted to go further, I really like studying. I really wanted to keep learning, and find out something more. I always had that idea in me.

Interviewer: but what was it that you wanted from university?

Ana: what did I expect from university?

Interviewer: yes.

Ana: when I came to university I expected to do a degree, I wasn't forced to come, I came because I wanted to and I was really very determined.

Interviewer: but what did you want, was in this knowledge to know about the world, to be something more, what did you want?

Ana: I wanted both of those things, one of those was knowledge. I really like to learn new things, to read, to be always learning something new. University was a way that I could be learning something new and something that I liked it because I had got into the degree course that I liked. On the other hand because I wanted to go further I didn't want to be a factory worker or a cleaner because that wasn't what I wanted for myself, so that was the second reason which took me to university.

Interviewer: so it was very frustrating working in agriculture as you told me.

Ana: yes. I wanted something more, much more than that.

Interviewer: but do you feel that the women around you were frustrated with what they did?

Ana: colleagues of mine worked in factories, a lot of them work there because they wanted to, others were there because their parents couldn't afford to send them to university and these really felt frustrated too, it made them feel inferior because they had been studying and they couldn't carry on with it, and many of them really felt frustrated.

Interviewer: but what you wanted was another type of life?

Ana: yes.

Interviewer: what did you want?

Ana: yes what I wanted was another type of life. I was always a fighter, and a dreamer. So I thought that I wanted something more, and I wanted to attain an objective and I really wanted to go further.

Interviewer: were there teachers who encouraged you study?

Ana: yes, I was always a good student and the teachers used to say "you are going to university aren't you?" And I would say "I think so." I had teachers who would say "keep going on, you have this chance, you have the capacity to do degree, you must keep going because you can't do anything in there world of work without a degree". The father of one of my friends, after my mother died, also helped me a lot. He also help me to go to university, because I was at that impasse, where my boyfriend said that he was going to finish with me if I went university and on the other hand my friends' father said "no you should go, don't stop going to university you'll be sorry if you do". I really thank him today for that, because he also influenced me it a lot in order to go on to University, he gave me strength.

Interviewer: but was it because of Sandra that you came to this same degree?

Ana: yes, we were very good friends. We came to do the same degree. But even if Sandra hadn't got into university or if she had chosen another degree, I would have done this one because I liked it.

Interviewer: when you got here to the university, what were your first impressions then?

Ana: here in the university?

Interviewer: yes.

Ana: I had some preconceived ideas about university because of her friend of mine was here. She didn't say anything bad about it. I came here because I'd be closer home and because I could go by car everyday I wouldn't need to rent a room. I think that's something my boyfriend really wouldn't accept. He didn't want me to go far away, he wanted me close. (Laughs) so when I came here it was a good option to come to this university and I'd heard good things about it, I'd also heard bad things about it, but I'd also heard good things so I went. Well I got here and for the first year I didn't have a bad impression of the University, I liked it and I think that in relation to the state university so it was much more advanced. I'd friends in state universities who had a lot of problems, in terms installations, equipment and everything like that. I didn't here, there was nothing that we lacked, we had great installations, and great equipment. I paid, I knew that we'd paid but it would all be worth while because of the things we would have. In the second year I was a little bit more disillusioned with the university, but not exactly with the university, the university isn't to blame because there was there a major change in our

course, the Ministry of Education imposed this change in order for our course to be ratified by the state, so there was a lot of change there.

Interviewer: in mathematics?

Ana: and they started introducing Mathematics. I wasn't one of those who suffered more because of that, my colleagues suffered a lot more, because I'd had mathematics until the 11th grade because I was doing natural sciences, so I was more prepared. I didn't really have problems with mathematics at all. What was more annoying is that they would say that we wouldn't need to do certain subjects because they would be excluded from the course and then suddenly in the third year they said that we need to do them after all. I could have done them straightaway. But I don't blame them; it was the role of the Minister of Education to ratify our course, so it was for our good. If our course hadn't been licensed it wouldn't have been any good for the labour market.

Interviewer: so it was important in terms of professional options?

Ana: yes of course. I accepted these changes at the University, I thought they were important and our course got much better after these changes. It was difficult to cope with these changes because we had 11 subjects in a single semester, so that was very difficult to do but we managed to pass. I personally managed to get over all that, and I thought that it was a way of adding value to our course with these changes. We were much better prepared for the world of work in public administration which is what we want to do at the end of our course.

Interviewer: and when you came here in the first week, did you take part in the universities initiation ceremonies, the fresher's week?

Ana: the story was very funny because as I had a problem with my husband, who was my boyfriend at the time, he didn't let me enrol. I didn't enrol in July like everybody did, I only came in September and I enrolled in fresher's week. We came to enrol, and at that time we had to buy a computer, and we came in fresher's week. I remember perfectly, I came in here to enrol I went to get the computer and nobody knew I was a fresher, and nobody did anything to me and this was already the last day of fresher's week that I was enrolling and I had to pay a higher rate for an enrolling after the deadline but I enrolled at the end of fresher's week. So I didn't experience and that week at all. After that I was very enthusiastic about coming to the university. I really

wanted to come here, and I liked being here. I made friends easily with a group and I had no problems at all.

Interviewer: so you were happy that you didn't get caught up in fresher's week?

Ana: I would have liked to have been part of fresher's week. But it was no good because I came on the last day nobody and recognised me as a fresher. I think I went by it, but the experience that my friend had.... (Pause)

Interviewer: was it fun?

Ana: it was fun. I'm also quite playful, and not one of those people who take things badly, I like these things. I didn't participate in fresher's week and I would have liked it. Oh well.

Interviewer: after that you started learning here at university, so how did you study and learn better?

Ana: What's the best form of studying?

Interviewer: yes.

Ana: to be honest with you I'm rather disorganised. But I understand what I'm doing in that disorganisation. In the first year I was more disorganised because it was the year I got married at the end of that year, at the end of the first year. My grades were a little low perhaps because of this, because I was worried about a lot of things, and my mother had any died a short time before, and I was a bit down still. It was a bit hard for me, but I managed to adapt and my way of studying, I didn't study much, I had an exam and I only studied the day before. I didn't study, I didn't have that regular period of studying, Of studying when I came home from classes, or organising my notebooks I came home: no I didn't do any of that. I took notes, I put them together at home and I got to the eve of the exams and started studying.

Interviewer: when you studied did you try to memorise things?

Ana: no. I can't memories things.

Interviewer: no?

Ana: I'm useless at memorising things. I try to understand things first in order to remember something, because I think if I didn't understand I couldn't remember anything I was taught, I wouldn't know what I was saying. My method of studying was always this, it was always. I never studied for a long time before, I studied from my notebook whether it had a lot of material or little, I studied and that the maximum of the week before, I didn't ever start before. In two or

three days before the exam and always on the basis of understanding things, that was enough for the exam and remembered everything. If I'd try to memorise, I knew that nothing would stay. I wouldn't memorise anything.

Interviewer: so what was the value of the classes, was it only to take notes?

Ana: I thought it was very important, I thought that, I was always the type person to come to classes and not to miss them because I think classes are very important.

Interviewer: why?

Ana: because I thought if I didn't take notes then I might not understand something and as I had the teacher right there then I could ask questions straightaway. If I waited until the end of the semester to ask for somebody else's notebook I would be reading things I wouldn't understand, I wouldn't know what they were talking about. I wouldn't have been it within the context of the class. I think it's always very important to participate in class, so I always came. Apart from that sometimes I asked a friend of mine who I thought took good notes to see if I could compare and see if there had been anything that I'd missed or not, because there were teachers who spoke very quickly and I wanted to catch everything. And so I asked one of my friends for her notebook in order to complete my own.

Interviewer: and there was no difficulty about them lending you their notebooks?

Ana: there was a group of friends and we exchanged our notebooks between us. There was another group who are those types who never went to classes and they got to the end of the semester and asked to borrow the notebooks of the people who always came. I'm a very soft person, and too sensitive and I could never refuse anybody. I always lend my notebook to everybody; I had no problems about that. But other friends of mine didn't want to, and they said the others hadn't come to classes and so they wouldn't lend them their notebook. But I lent mind, I never had any problems about that.

Interviewer: so you didn't have that idea of competition?

Ana: no, I'm not, I'm never, I'm not the best in the class, I'm a reasonable student, not best in the class. I fought to have reasonable grades, and even now I am fighting to have an average grade of 16.

Interviewer: you're going to get a 16?

Ana: I think so, if my dissertation goes as well as I'm thinking, I think so. I always fought for that average grade. I've never compared it with the other people. I never looked around to see who was better to me, and that wasn't what motivated me to study more. What motivated me to study more was in order to get grade that I wanted.

Interviewer: what is important of this average grade?

Ana: For a masters or doctorate. I want to do a master's or doctorate, not straightaway after the course, I want to work a few years, I want to think about children too, but after that.

Interviewer: children, now?

Ana: not now. I want to work at least one or two years, after that I'll think about children and when they're a little bit more grown-up and they don't give so much work, I'll think about a masters or doctorate.

Interviewer: for what?

Ana: it's that anxiety about wanting to know more, to not stop learning.

Interviewer: but why is it that you want to keep on learning? Is it in order to deepen your knowledge or broaden your view of the world?

Ana: it's in order to deepen my knowledge, and up date myself, because I feel that the world, things are changing very rapidly, technologies arise and I feel frustrated when I see something new that I don't know how to work with. So I want to learn how to, I want to do a course in computers, I want to know how to work with computers and I know that it's a lot of new things are coming up all the time. Even for my course I know that a lot of things are changing, evolving, new theories developing, and I don't want to be out of date, because I think a major transformation in public administration is coming, in the area of my course, of course we are within the change, but then lot of new things are coming up I want to be a part of all this so I can help in the organisation of public administration.

Interviewer: so it's with the idea then of changing something around you?

Ana: yes, yes.

Interviewer: did you always have that idea, about administration? Or was it something which has been growing?

Ana: I think have always had that idea. There's a time, it seems like I'm a sort of person who wants to change the world, but I can't get to the conclusion by myself, but within administration.

I also like psychology I also dream about taking a psychology course one-day. In the town hall I'm going to work in the area of the social action.

Interviewer: yes

Ana: because that's the area which fascinates me. I like do everything they it I can around people and helping others. So in the town hall I'm in that area, I'm going to be in the area of social action and I think I'm going to feel fulfilled, in the employment centre, helping people in getting employment, housing, arranging housing, all that type of thing, or doing projects in the fight against poverty and participating in these projects. It fascinates me because I know that I'm helping somebody and everything within that sphere fascinates me.

Interviewer: so the world that you want to change, is not a technical world but the world around you?

Ana: yes. I think if I'm a humanist and not a materialist and I know I lose out a bit because of that, because I'm not a materialist. My husband is exactly the opposite and sometimes we have arguments because of that, because I don't mind at all. As long as I can help other people, everything's fine with me. I don't mind if I stay back because of that, all I want to do is help other people, and my husband is completely different. He's more materialist, he thinks more about money, about a future and having money tomorrow, and I don't. If I have enough for the day, that's fine for me. I live each day as it comes and that's what I'm like. And well, everything that I can do to change society for the better is what I want to do.

Interviewer: who was it who has influenced you most?

Ana: my mother, who was an amazing person, she was my best friend, I can really say that. We had very open conversations; I never had any problems with her. My grandmother, the mother of my father, I didn't know personally because when I was born she had already died. But I heard stories about her and they say that she was a real friend of the poor and that my grandfather was a bit bad, he was rather authoritarian and she let the poor people sleep in the bar and so then she would take and soup and bread because that was at the time of the second world war. There were lots of people begging. So she let them sleep there without my grandfather knowing about it and took some bread and soup for them to eat. I think everybody loved my grandmother. She had a huge heart.

Interviewer: and your mother had the same heart?

Ana: there was the mother of my father. My mother's mother, was also an amazing person, she died after my mother. But she was a person who are had lived a long time. She was already 85 years old and she knew perfectly well what was going on about her. She wasn't one of those people like some old people are who seem like they've stopped in time and who can't keep up with the changes. My grandmother always kept up with the changes and she was always a person with a big heart, and my mother too. Whenever she could she would also help others, she never got on badly with anybody, she never had problems with the neighbours, she was always an amazing person.

Interviewer: it was these people that you admired most?

Ana: but my father was the opposite, he was very authoritarian, and I think my mother suffered because of that and we did to too. It was because of him that he made us work those years and we didn't want to.

Interviewer: in the fields?

Ana: yes. My mother suffered because of my father and we did, we manage, my mother and my two brothers and I were at always so closer and we always managed to get over everything because we were so close and we always talked a lot. He was never violent, but he was very authoritarian, and what he said was an order and he didn't accept their ideas of the others. Even he could be sure that he was wrong but he was incapable of admitting that and he said what we had to do.

Interviewer: yes.

Ana: my mother for me was an idol. I consider my mother my idol, I didn't know my grandmother, only heard about her but I consider her an idol too. It's not that I want to imitate them, I'd don't want to be the same, but I do feel in need a great desire to help others. I think, for me, in the world of work, I have to do something which I feel useful to others. If I had to work in something which I feel is very materialistic I think I would feel very frustrated. Materialism, the things that go on to day in companies, everybody wants to go up as high as they can over the tops of other people's heads. That for me is frustrating, I don't want any part of that, I just want be where I can to help others, and not to spoil other people's lives.

Interviewer: what about the relationship with people here in this university, is it very good, very open, how was it?

Ana: I always had a very good relationship with the teachers here at this university and also when I did my placements. I needed the help of some teachers because I was doing some questionnaires and I wasn't very well prepared for that. A law teacher of mine from human-resources made himself available immediately in order to help me to do a questionnaire. A teacher of mine from the first year here also helped me with my dissertation. I think I have a good relationship with all the teachers, and I never had a problem with anybody.

Interviewer: inside or outside the classroom?

Ana: as much within the classroom as outside it.

Interviewer: was there anybody who influenced you more?

Ana: any teacher who influenced me more?

Interviewer: yes.

Ana: there is always at one teacher or other who I admired more, I don't know, perhaps because of the way that they transmit their knowledge. I had one teacher who really affected me, perhaps because she was my teacher for three years, she taught us three different subjects, and I carried on learning and got to know the teacher, and she carried on learning and got to know us and we liked her. At least I did, I was always waiting for her to arrive because I liked that class. I learned things, knowledge, I managed to apply things to for my in my day-to-day life. That was very important for me. It was good to go to class and not have to just listen to theories, theories, which didn't mean anything to me. It was in these very theoretical classes that this teacher managed to show an application our day-to-day lives for us to understand better and we ended up having a closer relationship.

Interviewer: in the classrooms was there the opportunity to develop a critique of the material?

Ana: a lot, especially with this teacher. We had the opportunity to present certain themes in class, things that we liked more and to talk about them. Instead of the teacher giving the class it was us. We prepared the theme and she helped us. As for participation in the classes, in the first and second year I was very shy and I was afraid to take part in classes, but from then onwards I wasn't, I don't know why but I changed. In these presentations, whenever she didn't understand something the teacher would tell us, but if I didn't agree, I would say so, I would intervene in say it was because of this, or because of that. From there onwards I really took part in the classes and didn't sit in the classrooms passively any more, but I was active in the class.

Interviewer: but were there aspects of this material which you might not have agreed with, theory for example?

Ana: yes there were things like that. Things which I didn't agree with, that I was learning. There were teachers with whom we had the opportunity even in the exams to give a personal opinion and to develop a critique. Of course it had to be well founded of course. There were also cases of teachers where we knew that if we didn't defend the opinion of the teacher then it would be worse for us. Well, I rebelled a bit there because I didn't agree, but I didn't want to lose out, so I defended the teachers' opinion.

Interviewer: do you want a bigger space for this critique?

Ana: yes, that's what I want in my masters or doctorate. There I can really defend what I think with a lot of force.

Interviewer: During all this time, do you think you've changed in some way? You told me you were timid and you're not so much any more, but have you changed in any other way?

Ana: yes a lot. During my first year of university I was very shy, and in the second year I still was. In the first year, because I was about to get married at the end of the year, I wasn't so connected to the university. In the second year I started to see how important the average grade was and to apply myself more for the exams, and prepare myself better. I can see this on my qualification certificate; we can see the development of my grades. In the first in my grades were lower, in the second year there higher, and the third year they even higher, and the 4th get higher still, (laughs) because I began to understand how important it was to get a reasonable grade and I dedicated myself much more to studying.

Interviewer: is there another way that you changed, in a more general way?

Ana: I think in general a lot of things changed. My timidity, I became more communicative, even in my group of friends which became larger. I began getting on with people better, with everybody in the class. The first I had some difficulty because of my shyness, I had some difficulty. After that I tried getting on with everybody in class. There are always closer friends, but I always try to get on well with everybody, I never had rival relationships with anybody, I never had anything like that, I'd always try to get on well with everybody. If any problem came up I preferred to us speak directly with the person and resolve the situation face-to-face.

Sometimes I would be quiet and they start talking about me behind my back, that happened and I was very hurt. So I tried never to do that.

Interviewer: do you expect the same type of environment when you start work, how you think it will be?

Ana: I haven't got any experience, only my placement.

Interviewer: where did you do it?

Ana: in Castelo town-hall, I had five months of placement there; we prolonged the placement to do everything that we had proposed, because we had to develop this project in our placement, me, my friend Sandra and some teachers. We spoke at the university about the world of work and the differences and that there would be, and I was very optimistic about it and my placement opened my eyes a little bit. I thought it was not as easy as one might think. What people say is that it's a bit, people go over each other's head and we think that there's somebody there we can trust and after a day that person might betray our trust.

Interviewer: so there's a lot of competition?

Ana: a lot of competition. I think that happens a lot in the competitiveness of the world of work in order for people to get as high as they can and to earn as much as possible and the go over each other's heads, even over their own friendships. This is something I felt in our placements, which is not something which happened directly to me but I saw it going on with other people. I am a bit afraid of the world of work and I think the placement prepared me a little bit more for that and because I learnt that you really can't trust anybody. This doesn't mean to say you can't have good relationships with your colleagues, I think we can do, there are good relationships with colleagues that we have but we have to know what we can say and what we can't. I learnt this. But I know I still have a lot to learn, and I will go on learning.

Interviewer: with practice?

Ana: yes. I think that's important.

Interviewer: did you get this placement through the university or did you have the contacts before?

Ana: no it wasn't through university I already had the contact. It was through my friend Sandra. Her father is part of the town council and it was through him.

Interviewer: so you are both going to work there?

Ana: no, Sandra has different ideas. Her parents have more possibilities and she has different ideas. She doesn't want work in public administration she prefers something else. I would prefer public administration in the area that I told you about.

Interviewer: in the social area?

Ana: yes social action.

Interviewer: you already told me that it's not money or social status which interests you, it's more what you can do?

Ana: it's more what I can do for others, money, for me (pause)

Interviewer: it's more about personal fulfilment?

Ana: yes. Because I think It would be terrible if I had to get up every day and do some thing I didn't like, for me to get up in the morning I have to feel good about myself, in my work, knowing that I'm going to meet people who I like working with, knowing that I can help people, and for me that's very important.

Interviewer: do you feel very well prepared for work?

Ana: I think that, I think at university we get a sort of knowledge, the placement was a great help and showed me a little bit about the world of work. I felt that it's only once we start working, in the world of work will I really be able to put my knowledge into practice, and I'll find a lot of difficulties, I'm aware of that, I'm going to face a lot of difficulties and I think I'm going to start from zero. When I start working, but I will start from zero, I have all the theory that I've got along this course but applying it is very different and knowing how to apply it is very different. I've got a lot to learn from with my work colleagues. For me it's really starting from zero. I'm going there as an empty box and I'm going to learn.

Interviewer: **Ana,** thank you very much.

Ana Pinto, public administration second interview

Interviewer: how did you find your current job in Castelo town hall?

Ana: how did I get it?

Interviewer: yes.

Ana: first because I did my placement there. It wasn't paid, and I think they liked my work and after I finished my degree I had the help of somebody that I knew.

Interviewer: your friend's father?

Ana: yes, it was Sandra's father, and if it hadn't been for him probably wouldn't have been me, it would have been some other person. I think that was an important factor in getting this job, otherwise I couldn't have got it because it's very difficult.

Interviewer: but apart from that what is the importance of your qualifications in getting this job?

Ana: I think they were very important because when we did the placement we let them know a little bit about what our degree course was about, which they didn't know. Our course is designed for public administration but I think that the mayor and the councillors with whom we had more contact didn't really have an idea of this and I think that they got to know it a little bit better and I understood that our course really was designed for public administration and that we can be very useful.

Interviewer: so it was through Sandra's father then their eyes were opened to it?

Ana: yes, and I think so. I think he was the most important.

Interviewer: why?

Ana: because if it hadn't been for him they would never have lived and listened to us, especially to me. Sandra is different. If I hadn't known her father and Sandra probably they would never have listened to us, and probably they would never even get to know what the advantages of my course for public administration were or not.

Interviewer: and so what did you actually do when you started working there? I'm not talking about the placement, but when you started working afterwards.

Interviewer: I started as an administrative assistant and that was the contract that I signed and maintained this function all year. But my job was really not so much as an administrative assistant as my course prepared me for something more than that, and they knew that I knew something more than being administrative assistant. But as they could pay me less as an

administrative assistant and as I didn't actually have my degree finished because I hadn't finished my dissertation, they took the opportunity to pay me less. So I was placed in the Social Action Group and a project came up which had been approved by the council which was the fight against poverty and I was part of that project team. So we started to develop that project and put it into action.

Interviewer: can you tell me more about your day-to-day life on this project?

Ana: the precise tasks I did in more detail?

Interviewer: yes. When did you arrive, who did you speak to during the day?

Ana: I worked with; we had a section in which about five of us worked. My relationship with my colleagues was great, they were impeccable people.

Interviewer: were they graduates'?

Ana: only one, one of my colleagues had a degree in languages, English, she was working there. She had given lessons before that, now she was working there. The other colleagues didn't, they weren't graduates. One was in the process of doing a degree in tourism, but not the others. The relationship with these colleagues as I was saying was great and what I had to do mainly was to work with the computer. It was what I knew most about, and I was there more as part of the administration of the projects. Everything worked with computers; all the tasks developed were in my hands. We had there a lot of contact with the councillor head of that team, who was a teacher called Rachel, I think she was so spectacular person as the chief, but sometimes it didn't work very well. But she created some difficulty in carrying out our tasks.

Interviewer: can you explain more?

Ana: she was a great person and it was very easy to get along with there, except when we were dealing with work. I won't say that she demanded too much, but she left everything in our hands and if everything didn't go as well as it should, she drew our attention to it a bit.

Interviewer: did she get angry?

Ana: yes, she would get very irritated and she told us off in a way that we were very hurt, in front of everybody

Interviewer: was she a graduate?

Ana: she had a qualification to be a primary-school teacher, I don't know if it was a degree. I don't think so, but I don't know very well

Interviewer: no?

Ana: but she was 30 something years old so I think at that time that it wasn't a degree qualification. She was a person who was a little bit insensitive and didn't understand our limitations very well. One day she would be in a very good mood and we could do what we like with her and the next day she would come in and nobody could say anything to her.

Interviewer: do you think it was more to do with her a personality or the expectations she had as the boss?

Ana: I think it had something to do with her temperament because we compared her with her with other chiefs and other councillors and the same thing didn't go on. There was a certain disorganisation in our team because of that. There was a lack of co-ordination of tasks, and between her and us there wasn't very good communication. There were certain times at which the communication wasn't very good. After that the greatest problem at the beginning was, I really got on well with her, but the biggest problem was that somebody else started and I think that spoilt things a bit and things started getting much worse. This person was at the head of that project which I told you about. She was supervising the projects that the counsellor couldn't follow all the time, and so she was given that task. She became responsible for this project and she supervised it, she supervised me and my colleagues who are more connected with the project and I think that really complicated things. She started getting very nasty with us.

Interviewer: was she?

Ana: she was. When she started in this section we were horrified at how she was working which wasn't the best.

Interviewer: but was she more qualified than you, did she have more experience?

Ana: yes. She was a lawyer and think it was only that, it seems to me. She had already worked in other town halls. She had worked in one near by and had left because of some problems with other workers there but she already had some experience in developing this type of project because this was a project in the fight against poverty and so she came to our town hall and she was given the task of developing this project. I had the bad luck of having to work with her.

Interviewer: was there a problem with her temperament too?

Ana: I think it was really just her temperament. She was a very difficult person, as much personally as in her day-to-day work. She was a person who wasn't able to understand

anything. I could say "today I don't feel very well, and I have a headache" just as it way of getting it off my chest, and she was likely to go up to the councillor and tell her this but in a very negative way.

Interviewer: did she?

Ana: and I found out after I'd come home and I was very hurt by that. The fact of knowing that she wouldn't help us at all in anything and the idea that she gave about us to the councillor was very negative and I was even more hurt, when once she taught me to develop a plan for the next year for the projects, the plan of activities and I said that I needed some help because it was something new for me and I'd never done it before, and she said "try to get by on your own", and I'd tried finding out and it didn't go very well at first, but of course the idea that she gave to the councillor was that I had didn't have the capacity to do it. Then she said that it seemed as if I didn't even have a degree because I didn't know how to do anything. After that I had to develop the budget, and I asked help from somebody who knew, and not her of course, and then things went much better, and she said to their councillor that it wasn't me who had done anything at all and that it was her who done everything.

Interviewer: but it wasn't true?

Ana: it wasn't true, no.

Interviewer: so she lied.

Ana: a colleague of mine knew what was going on and defended me to the councillor, otherwise things would be much worse here. It was very difficult and it was like that all year, then I was pregnant and I think my nervous system was affected because my first problems came from there, because my nervous system was completely changed and I got home at night and started crying because I could only imagine what was going be like working with that woman the next day and I felt completely change. Things really changed a lot. That was another factor that I forgot to mention. Well, I got pregnant, but nobody was expecting it, not even me and then I saw that when a woman gets pregnant at work, while you're working you suffer a lot and I can see that it was really true and things changed completely.

Interviewer: in what way?

Ana: in my relationship with the councillor because she was a very accessible person, I think she never really understood it that I wasn't expecting to get pregnant, not even me, because

she once told me that she didn't believe it, she once told me that she thought I'd planned everything, because by bad luck I had signed a contract on 15th September and I found out I was pregnant a month afterwards, I was already pregnant two months but only knew the month afterwards and so she didn't believe it. I think everything went badly for me that year. I've already told lots of people and that that year was the year to forget.

Interviewer: so you really weren't expecting that?

Ana: I didn't think it would be like that. I think it's not like that; things really went badly for me. I don't think all work is like that and that's not at the reality of day-to-day, because like that nobody could work. But it went really badly for me

Interviewer: so was the year of experiences. But in terms of your learning what you did at work, you worked a lot with the computer, how did you learn to do those things?

Ana: well, I had the support of my colleague who had a degree and he gave me a lot of support when I needed to write official letters. Official letters are something that people do a lot as part of administrative work; we have to send them from one entity to another. We worked a lot with it and sometimes it was confusing. The text, and the Portuguese, and some of the letters in English, and my colleague helped a lot because she had a degree in English.

Interviewer: with the language?

Ana: with the language. But then I never had problems with computer because I'd been learning to use it during the whole course and I had used them a lot. With the computer there I only used the word processor there and it was very basic for me, it was very easy for me and I didn't have a problem with that at all. But there were certain things which I had more (pause). When one does a degree there's a lot of theory and we don't have very much practice. There I had the help of this colleague. This person that I'm referring to who I worked with, if she had been more understanding I think she could have helped me a lot and could have taught me a lot, but then she didn't and we had to do things straight away without having any practice before. I had to learn it at my expense and make a lot of mistakes, so I asked for a help from this colleague a lot who didn't have anything to do with the town-hall, and who had a degree in the area, and I also used my books and notes which I had obtained during the course.

Interviewer: but what is the value of this theory during the course?

Ana: I think it was really important. I think it was important and I continue saying that the course is directed at public administration.

Interviewer: yes?

Ana: I think is developed for that. I was working in the area of social action and I think if I'd been working in other areas, there are other areas which would perhaps even more close to my degree. In the area of administration of the town hall more than that area I was working in, but by chance I went there but I think anyway that everything I learned on this course was useful. English was extremely important.

Interviewer: English?

Ana: yes. Very, very important. I think it's always necessary, and computers too.

Interviewer: but English in relation to computers or English in relation to communications and what you had to do?

Ana: communications, it happened that the counsellor who was on the area of social action also had to deal with the tourism and quite often I had to go to the see tourist office because a colleague was absent and I had to go there because I knew had speak English, although Castelo isn't really a tourist town, but there were always some English tourists who would turn up and ask for information and if I didn't know something I would just try get by as best as I could.

Interviewer: so English was one of those things which wasn't theoretical but practical out of the knowledge that you got at university?

Ana: yes.

Interviewer: did other knowledge that you attained have practical application?

Ana: apart from computers which I've already referred to, what was also very useful was accountancy. We had two disciplines of accountancy, public accounting and regional and local finance, which were the other subjects which really helped me a lot in order to develop the Budget. Planning and management was another subject which helped me immensely for what they had to do and they were very connected with that.

Interviewer: so this experience of accounting, when you had to do a practical application did you have to ask for help from someone or could you use your knowledge directly without...?

Ana: it was difficult, and very difficult. As I say, when one starts working, either we find people around us, our superiors, who understand and help us a lot or it's very difficult for anyone to put things into practice without anybody's help. Because we have a lot theory, a lot of theory and our knowledge of accountancy was really very weak. We had accountancy for two semesters but for me these were just notions of accountancy and I think now that I should deepen this knowledge and do a course in that. There are courses, many courses of accountancy, I'm thinking of going into it a bit more. I have an idea of setting up a business of my own and I don't know if what I know is enough, about accountancy, it's not enough.

Interviewer: what was the most difficult thing that you had to do?

Ana: well, the most difficult thing was when they asked me to develop a plan of activities and the budget and told me to get by on my own. I didn't have any basic knowledge, I could have actually had to a lot of knowledge, even practice, but I would have to have help from someone. I was working in a project which was new for me and to develop a plan of activities I needed to have a notion of what other activities they wanted to do, and nobody told me anything about that and I couldn't guess. That was the most difficult thing.

Interviewer: so do you think there was a lack of communication?

Ana: a lot, a lot.

Interviewer: it was a lack of teamwork where you worked?

Ana: yes.

Interviewer: and what is the easiest thing?

Ana: the easiest thing ended up being developing official letters, sending official letters ended up being one of the easiest things for me. After learning it well, after doing one I kept on learning that type of Portuguese and got to know the type structure and from there onwards it was almost like working by rote. It's easy.

Interviewer: it's like a factory?

Ana: it's easy from there on.

Interviewer: but it was it difficult at the beginning?

Ana: at the beginning, I think the first month for was for adaptation, and from there onwards I didn't have any more problems.

Interviewer: but you sometimes you had to go out to the tourist office?

Ana: yes.

Interviewer: did you stay more often in the office without going out much?

Ana: I didn't go out very much in those days and I had to go to the tourist office, I didn't go out much but there was a time at Christmas when another colleague and I, as we were connected with the project of the fight against poverty, we went to the door of the supermarkets to make a collection of foods in order to distribute to the poorest families of the area. It was that type of activity which got me out more, and then we went out as well to give in this food and to take it to different parishes.

Interviewer: did you go personally to give in these things?

Ana: yes. With the mayor everything had a political end, but we also took part in this.

Interviewer: did you like this part?

Ana: no, not much. Because I was in a phase of my pregnancy in which I didn't feel very well, I felt very dizzy and standing up all day in a supermarket was very difficult for me, but nobody understood this. It was one of the things which caused me more problems, because I spoke about this to get it off my chest, if I had stayed quiet and I wouldn't have had problems.

Interviewer: but if you hadn't been pregnant, do you think he would have enjoyed that part, distributing the food to people?

Ana: I would have liked that. Because I would have felt that I was helping people, and it was at Christmas time and I would be giving food to people who probably didn't have very much to eat, so I would have liked it. The part which was most difficult for me was not giving this food, but spending all day standing up in the supermarkets collecting foodstuffs. That was the most difficult thing for me.

Interviewer: do you think it was a good use of your time like that?

Ana: if this time was well used or not? I'm going to be sincere, I think that that activity of collecting food was not very well planned and because of that I wasn't very motivated. Because every year the town hall has a budget in order to buy a certain quantity of food in the supermarkets, and that year the councillor decided that we would also collect more foods in order to give more. I think it was an excellent idea. It was just a pity because other foodstuffs came from a supermarket where they usually buy and they distributed this but the other food that we collected, I found out a few days ago, was all put in a warehouse. Litres and litres of

milk and food which can go off very quickly and would have to be thrown away weren't distributed and then I thought all my work was in vain and I was very disillusioned with that. I was thinking it might be like that, because when they buy food they buy so many kilos of sugar and they give the same to all the families, but when we collect food which people give us in the supermarkets it can't be like that. So we would probably have to give different things to everybody because we couldn't give the same to everyone, and I thought that might cause problems, as the families know each other and they look at what each of them has received and who got more or better food. This can cause problems at a political level and I think that the biggest problem was on a political level. And so they decided that those things would stay there and so they would distribute them later at Easter, but then Easter went by.

Interviewer: and it stayed there.

Ana: it stayed there, and a lot of things went off and they could only use the rice, sugar and those things which last longer and I was very disillusioned with that, because a lot of our work had to be thrown in the rubbish bin.

Interviewer: I know you're making a criticism of the system in which you worked, but you think you could have changed something there?

Ana: if I could have changed something? Well, I have a lot of ideas but in a town-hall the things work a bit like this. We have a chief who we have to obey, only if the chief is somebody who's open to new ideas, the ideas that we have could actually be put into practice. But there it couldn't have worked like that, because the chief, the chief who we worked with wasn't very open to new ideas, and what she had in mind had to be put into practice despite what we thought and whether we said we didn't think it was a good idea and it's not going to work, she would just go ahead anyway. How can I change something, if they won't accept my ideas? I think it's a bit difficult in the civil service because there it is a lot of bureaucracy and everything is stipulated at the outset. I think this is one of the things which stops new ideas from people who are working there. Another problem is if the chief is somebody who's very closed to new ideas, and we can never give ideas, ever.

Interviewer: and you think that all the supervisors are closed to new ideas?

Ana: I don't say that if I went to speak directly with the mayor perhaps things could be different but we have to respect the hierarchy and I could never go directly speak to the mayor and

saying "my boss doesn't accept this idea that I'm telling you". I couldn't do that, as a hierarchy has be respected, we can go directly to our superior, who could accept it on not, but we don't know. It is very difficult

Interviewer: what would happen if you didn't accept this hierarchy?

Ana: I don't think things would be well accepted because personally I have good relationship with the mayor through my friend's father and think and that would go against me because my boss would never accept that I said anything to the mayor that she didn't know at the outset. There was a time when I was accused of something which hadn't even happened and a rumour went round that I managed to get everything that I wanted there through the mayor. She told that, in a very hurt way, when I hadn't even said anything to anybody. This idea came from I don't know who, I don't know where, and this rumour went around. She would never accept very well if I went directly to speak with their mayor for any reason and went over her head.

Interviewer: so this was your boss before the lawyer?

Ana: yes. Because there was a time which I saw that everything is I was doing went through that lawyer who's my superior I came to the conclusion that my boss, the counsellor, didn't know what was going on, everything that I was doing was changed around negatively. There was a time at which I started to do things and speak more directly with the councillor and the other one, the lawyer, started reacting very badly and I believe that she did because from there onwards she cut us off from almost completely and my colleague, she almost never appeared in our section, she stopped telling us what tasks we should do and worked more with the industrial association and perhaps because of this she wasn't so connected with the project and we started working more directly with the councillor. It was very positive but it was enough for something else happened for things to go back what they were before.

Interviewer: do you have the sensation that the hierarchy is a very strong and rigid but not very sincere?

Ana: this is very negative and I had think that's true and I think is very negative.

Interviewer: despite all this, did you feel fulfilled in any way?

Ana: not in the least.

Interviewer: no?

Ana: now I am at home and I have things to do. My husband has a music school and sometimes I give administrative and support, I help. I had the idea that I've learnt a lot of things there, in practice and that's helped me in other things that I have to do in my day-to-day. I have this idea, there are lots of lessons, one after the other which one learns and in each experience, as negative as it is, one always learns from them. As negative as these experiences are, I always learned and keep on learning as I didn't have anybody to supervise me. I learnt a lot.

Interviewer: In the future, you've been telling me that you are thinking of changing some things?

Ana: yes, because my experience there was so terrible that only the idea of going back there scares me a bit.

Interviewer: yes.

Ana: it scares me a bit.

Interviewer: about going back?

Ana: yes. I haven't spoken directly to the mayor yet because it's hasn't been possible yet but only to the intermediary who is Sandra's mother in this case. The idea is that once I have given him my dissertation I can sign the contract as a graduate. I would earn more first because I earned very little, which was a de-motivating factor. Yet here now, I have to finish my dissertation to sign the contract as a graduate, except that that frightens me. It frightens me that I would have to go back there, because probably I would have to work in the same section I don't know, perhaps I wouldn't have to work in the same section but I'll still have doubt contact with those people. I didn't have any problem with my work colleagues and I would feel sorry to have to change Section any because we had a good relationship. But I think with the bosses I think that would be a bit difficult even if I didn't have to work with them, I would have to face them again and that frightens me. That's where I think I'll find an option to do something different. My husband doesn't want me to start my own business.

Interviewer: no?

Ana: I don't know why.

Interviewer: but he never believed you could do your degree?

Ana: I don't know what his idea is, but I had the idea that I'm a fighter so when I speak about setting at my own business probably I'm capable of doing it and taking care of it without any type of problem at all. But he is likely to say No is no. I'll do everything and that's it. Probably setting up my own business is a bit difficult but I'm going to set it up with one of my university colleagues.

Interviewer: with Carmita?

Ana: with her in that respect it's completely different and with she's probably got what I don't have, which is knowing how to say "no" when it's necessary.

Interviewer: that's why?

Ana: I'm softer in that aspect and she's harder and I think it's going to work.

Interviewer: What was the business you were thinking of?

Ana: its franchising because I think it's very difficult set up a business from the beginning and the possibilities of success are much smaller , so we thought about franchising in which there is a greater chance of success, with a concept of computer education for kids products which I think...

Interviewer: "Computers for Children"?

Ana: yes. English is also connected so I think we have a good chance of success. We've been looking at a lot of things and studied this, it's got negative aspects too and things that we have to get round, but I think it's worth it. I think the biggest problem is whether they will accept us or not. I think the area I'm living in is a great area because it doesn't have that yet. But is going be them who are going to decide whether with the right people to develop the business in my town and is a question which worries it bit and we are waiting for their reply.

Interviewer: when you going to find out?

Ana: I have with me as a form so I can fill it in and give them all the information so that they can evaluate our situation and then we have to wait for the reply. The only thing is that we don't have the finance at the moments, but finance is not a problem. We going to resort to the young entrepreneurs' scheme and that is not a negative aspect to get into this business because I have been informed about this and I don't see very many negative aspects and with which they can't help us.

Interviewer: but you are still doing your dissertation at the moment? How much time will it be before you finish?

Ana: I want to finish within two months.

Interviewer: Are you happy with your option if degree?

Ana: I'm happy but I wouldn't like to stop here. I would like to go further and do a master's and possibly a (pause)...

Interviewer: in the area of administration or accountancy?

Ana: in the area of administration, possibly a doctorate, but it depends on a lot of things

Interviewer: what is it going to depend on?

Ana: it's going to depend on my family life, now I have a baby and it's making a lot of things difficult to them, at the moment it's very difficult. Even the dissertation is difficult and I imagine that a masters' would complicate things a lot more. The future is a bit uncertain and if I'm going to search for a business I'd better wait for a few years. I know the first few years are difficult and only after it's started going well I have the idea to expand the business and set up, if it's not her kindergarten, at least a college for three to six-year-olds. If the business expands in this way I think that my knowledge will help and have to be developed all the time so that things work probably and so then I would like to do a masters or doctorate.

Interviewer: but it's a project which is very far off for now?

Ana: yes.

Interviewer: are you happy with your choice of university?

Ana: yes. Despite everything which has happened that during our course, so many negative expects and so many things were said about this university and about the course.

Interviewer: who says this?

Ana: mainly the press and even colleagues from other universities who when we say that we are at this university they only have a very negative idea because they've never heard about this course. This is a disheartening and so I thought "why am I doing a course that nobody's ever heard of any university which people speak badly of" and that's really disheartening. But as we've been going on and it's been getting to the end of the course and I started to see things in another way. Firstly because I started to see that the course was really designed for public administration and only after putting our knowledge into practice and going into public

administration that we could really see what the truth is. Apart from this I think the university is nothing that people really say, it's a good university. Despite being private, it's a good university.

Interviewer: did you hear it bad things about this university or not so much?

Ana: I don't think it's so much like that. I think it's a preconceived idea that people have and it's just as well for us that we read at this university and I think that this negative idea is changing.

Interviewer: apart from work and the ideas do you have do you have time for anything else in your life?

Ana: it's very difficult. I'd like to make time for a lot more. For example reading, I liked reading so much and I would like to make time to do embroidery which I also like, there are so many things that at the end of the day, I'm tired and I can't do it and that's a bit disheartening. All that is left is the weekends and at the weekend my husband works Saturday all day and I also work on Saturday all day on housework to leave everything organised and on Sunday everything goes by so quickly there is no time for anything else.

Interviewer: I can imagine.

Ana: there is no time for anything else.

Interviewer: but you think your degree has any value for your life apart from work?

Ana: I think so.

Interviewer: in what way?

Ana: I think it's very important. First I think it can help me a lot in the education that I can give to my daughter. Whether it's a degree in administration science or any other degree is important. The knowledge which I have acquired during the course is important for the future and for the education of my daughter for the position in relation to society, and for the way that people see us because we have a degree. I don't mean to say that because I have a degree that I am better than other people, it's not that, in that respect people are the same, but it helps, and our society works a bit like that according to our qualifications.

Interviewer: are you treated with more respect, for example?

Ana: unfortunately as well, that means that people suffer because they don't know things because of their own ignorance. Another thing which helps a lot is not things that we learn on the course but the things which are not directly connected with the course of administration but with any degree, which are the things that in our day-to-day life help us to deal with the

bureaucracy which surrounds us. In any public institution there are people who manage it, the people who have to do things, we get to any place and we need papers for everything, and either that is something that we are prepared for all or we have our contacts, or they think that we are just a little bit ignorant and try to ignore us or cheat us and not to help us. That's very true when we go to public services.

Interviewer: is it?

Ana: in public services they don't try to cheat us, they're only there to give a service. But quite often somebody comes along who we feel pity for, somebody who doesn't know it even how to fill in documents and when the administrative services should help they don't and they treat them badly. And that's when I realise that they can't do that to me, if they'd don't treat me properly and know how I can respond, I know how I can complain, but other people don't have the type of knowledge about their rights and it's something very important. So I have gained a type of knowledge about my rights and how I can use them. All this is important and the experience of taking a degree and other people who haven't got one end up being prejudiced by that. I think that's very important.

Interviewer: what are the principal benefits of coming to university?

Ana: I think the benefits are immense but I can't remember all of them. I think in our day-to-day lives the knowledge that one has acquired is always useful. In our job of course, because probably I'll get a job according to the degree that I've got, but so quite often if I can't get that, any degree that I have always helps, in our jobs, in a relationship with other people, in the education of our children, because we probably want to give a good education to our children, as we've had the best then we can help them. I have nephews whom come to me quite often with school problems because their parents only have four years of schooling and don't understand things. I think it's a great advantage that I can help my children in the future at school. At the moment those are the only advantage is that I can think of, but am sure there are lots more.

Interviewer: thank you very much Ana.

APPENDIX 76 INTERVIEW SUMMARY IN PORTUGUESEAna Pinto- resumo

Sempre queria tirar um curso desde que entrou para o 7º ano. O pai tinha tirado Ana da escola depois o 6º ano para trabalhar no campo, o que a fez sentir-se frustrada. Queria evitar este trabalho, o trabalho doméstico ou nas fábricas, que havia a sua volta. Levou 2 anos a convencer o pai a deixá-la voltar a estudar, mas ele mais tarde deu apoio. Outras pessoas que davam apoio a esta ideia, eram a sua mãe, professores, e o pai da sua amiga Sandra. Mais tarde, antes de entrar na Universidade, teve que enfrentar a oposição do namorado que pensava que ela ia deixar de gostar dele. Ele também mudou de ideias depois de ela ter entrado, e sentiu-se orgulhoso. Casaram-se no fim do primeiro ano do curso. Por causa destas dificuldades, ela tem a ideia de si própria, de ser muito sonhadora e muito lutadora.

A escolha da Universidade, em vez de um politécnico, era para ir o mais longe possível, mas a escolha do curso não era o que fez em primeiro lugar, embora que a administração era uma coisa que também gostava. Queria a Universidade pública, mas a mãe faleceu no dia do exame de entrada. Acabou de entrar para o mesmo curso e Universidade que a amiga Sandra, que era perto de casa, e podia vir de carro todos os dias: tinha ouvido bem e mal de UFP, mas ficou contente com o seu curso comparativamente com as colegas nas estatais, que tiveram problemas com as instalações e equipamentos. O único problema que teve com a UFP era por causa das mudanças impostas pelo Ministério da Educação, mas não era difícil adaptar-se a estas mudanças.

Ana não teve a experiência de ser caloiira na primeira semana, porque matriculou-se tarde, mas gostava de ter apanhado aquela semana, sendo uma pessoa brincalhona.

Disse que é desorganizada nos estudos, porque só estudava nas vésperas dos exames, mas que assistiu às aulas todas, tirando apontamentos e comparando com as colegas para ver se faltava alguma pormenor. Entre um grupo de amigas emprestavam os cadernos, mas o grupo não queriam emprestá-los as pessoas que não assistiram às aulas. Mesmo assim, Ana disse que é uma pessoa mole, que não conseguia recusar.

Ana estuda por entender as coisas, e não consegue decorar. As aulas ajudavam, porque as professoras podiam sempre tirar as dúvidas. Disse que não é competitiva, nem a melhor nem pior da turma, mas lutava sempre para ter a média de 16. A importância desde média é ou fazer um mestrado ou doutoramento daqui uns anos, depois de ter filhos (1 ou 2 anos depois de trabalhar). Estudar significa aprofundar o conhecimento e actualizar-se porque as coisas mudam tão rapidamente. É importante para ajudar na organização e mudar coisas a sua volta, embora que acha que sozinha, ela não muda nada.

Ela quer trabalhar na área de acção social, para ajudar as pessoas arranjam emprego, habitação, etc., e em que sentirá realizada. Sente-se humanista e não materialista, e era influenciada pela a sua mãe, a histórias da sua avó paterna, que eram mulheres bondosas que ajudavam os mais pobres. O seu ídolo era a sua mãe, embora que a Ana não quer imitar ou ser igual, mas também gostava de ajudar e ser útil aos outros.

Sempre teve um relacionamento bom com os professores, dentro e fora da sala de aula. Havia uma professora que talvez influenciava mais, com que teve alas durante 3 anos. Gostava a maneira de ensino dela. Com ela, aprendia não só teorias, mas a aplicação. Esta mesma professora encorajava muito participação, e questões, diálogo. Havia outros professores com quem teve a oportunidade no mesmo exame de dar a sua opinião pessoal e fazer a crítica. Mas havia outros que não deixavam, e só queria que defendesse as opiniões deles. Acha que vai ter mais espaço para opiniões próprias num mestrado.

Mudou pessoalmente muito durante o curso. Tornou-se menos tímida, fiz mais amizades, defendia-se melhor, e mudou o seu método de estudo, a aplicar-se mais. Acha que no trabalho vai haver muitas pessoas ambiciosas, que são capazes de passar por cima de tudo, mesmo amizade. Acha que não pode confiar pessoas demais, embora que podia ter boas relações com os colegas. Conseguiu o estágio, e o futuro trabalho, através do pai da amiga Sandra, mas não se sente bem preparada por trabalho, apesar de ter feito o estágio. Só mesmo trabalhando que ela acha que vai por na prática os conhecimentos do curso, e vai ter muito que aprender

2ª Entrevista

Na altura da segunda entrevista a Ana estava em licença de parto, que aproveitava para fazer a sua monografia. Depois de acabar as cadeiras na Universidade, começou a trabalhar na câmara de Paredes, onde tinha feito o estágio. Arranjou este estágio e emprego através do pai da amiga; só era por este contacto que a Câmara podia ter conhecimento do curso de Ciências de administração, porque é muito ligado à administração pública, mas pouco conhecido. Entrou como auxiliar administrativa porque ainda não tinha acabado a licenciatura, razão pelo que a câmara podia pagar menos. Mas as tarefas que desenvolvia eram mais que neste nível, e sentiu que a Câmara aproveitou os seus conhecimentos ao nível de salário mais baixo.

Trabalhava em equipa com 5 pessoas no projecto de "luta contra a pobreza". Dava-se muito bem com a equipa, em que havia uma licenciada em línguas, e outra pessoa em vias de se licenciar. Trabalhava com as tarefas relacionados com administração no computador: A chefe (vereadora) era muita simpática como pessoa, mas como chefe criava-lhes dificuldades. Não explicava as tarefas, mas ficava zangada quando não corriam bem, era insensível às limitações da equipa, e também à maneira como lhes chamava atenção, em frente de toda a gente. Entenderam que havia outros chefes que não se comportavam da mesma maneira.

Tudo piorou quando entrou outra pessoa como chefe do projecto, qualificada como advogada e que já tinha experiência de dirigir projectos semelhantes. Ficaram horrorizados da forma como ela trabalhava, e dirigia a equipa de uma maneira humilhante e insensata. Já tinha vindo embora de outra Câmara por causa de problemas com os funcionários. Era uma pessoa muito difícil tanto como pessoa, e como chefe. Não ajudava em nada, dava-lhes tarefas que não entendiam e disse á vereadora que a equipa não sabia fazer nada, e nem parecia que tinham um curso. Ao mesmo tempo, fingia que ela própria tinha elaborado trabalhos que na realidade eram feitos por Ana, embora o resto da equipa defendesse a Ana quando soube.

Ana engravidou naquele ano, mas ficou muito nervosa por causa desta má relação, facto que complicou a sua gravidez. Por cima, a gravidez foi mal vista pela vereadora, que achava que tinha planeado a gravidez depois de assinar o contrato. Foi um ano de muito azar e

dificuldades por Ana, mas ela não acredita que todo o trabalho na Câmara é assim, senão ninguém podia trabalhar.

Aprendeu a fazer o trabalho de várias maneiras. O trabalho de computador era fácil; o que tinha aprendido na prática na universidade era mais que suficiente pelo trabalho que tinha que fazer: em outros aspectos, por exemplo, escrever ofícios, tinha ajuda de uma colega, mas em outras áreas tinha apenas a teoria, que não ajudava o aspecto prático. Recorria a colegas de outras áreas, e aos apontamentos do curso. A teoria chegava a ser muito importante, embora se tivesse trabalhado em outra área teria sido ainda mais relevante. O mais importante era Inglês, contabilidade, finanças públicas, planeamento e gestão. Mesmo assim, era difícil pôr estes conhecimentos teóricos em prática, e as teorias não chegavam por o que ela tinha que fazer. Por isso está a pensar em tirar um curso de contabilidade, que ajudaria a desempenhar as suas tarefas num emprego, e também numa empresa própria. A coisa mais difícil que ela teve que fazer, foi elaborar um orçamento e plano de actividades em que ela teve que desenrascar-se, mas sentiu que não tinha bases, e precisava da ajuda de alguém, mas havia falta de comunicação, e sentido na equipa.

De vez em quando tinha que sair da Câmara para ir aos postos de turismo, aos supermercados para fazer uma recolha de alimentos, pelo projecto de luta contra a pobreza, e entregar às paróquias. Não gostou muito disso, por causa de se sentir mal na gravidez, facto que ninguém queria entender, embora que gostava de sentir que ela própria estava a ajudar alguém através do projecto. Apesar disso, não se sentiu muito motivada porque a Câmara já tinha, no orçamento, uma quantidade de dinheiro para comprar alimentos para distribuir, e o resultado foi que a comida recolhida não foi toda distribuída, e algumas deterioram-se em armazém e tiveram que ser deitados fora. Então a Ana sentiu que o trabalho foi em vão.

Ela critica a sistema, e tem muitas ideais, mas não se sentiu capaz de mudar qualquer coisa por várias razões. Primeira, é tudo estipulado a partir da burocracia. Segundo, o chefe tem o poder, e quando não está aberto às ideais dos outros, as suas vão para frente, mesmo erradas, e as outras ignoradas. Se Ana falasse com o presidente, sem respeitar a hierarquia, seria mal vista e prejudicada. As hierarquias são muito fortes e rígidas de uma maneira negativa.

Não sentiu minimamente realizada no trabalho, embora aprendesse muita coisa na prática, que a ajudaria a fazer outras coisas, como apoio administrativo, para a escola de música do marido. Aprende-se sempre com as experiências, mesmo quando são negativas.

Desgostou-se tanto do seu trabalho, que não está com muita vontade de voltar para lá, embora tenha esta opção e vá assinar novo contrato como licenciada, para ganhar mais. Está assustada por causa dos chefes, que teria que encarar se voltasse, mesmo se mudasse de secção, embora se desse bem com as colegas. Está a procura de outras opções: quer montar com uma colega da universidade, um negócio próprio, embora o marido não queira. Mas Ana já o enfrentou quando ele não queria que ela tirasse uma licenciatura, e sente-se que ela é capaz de ir para frente, e tem espírito de ser muito lutadora pelas coisas que quer. Estão a pensar em fazer um franchising de “Future Kids”, que dá maiores probabilidades de sucesso. Tem os conhecimentos na área, estiveram a estudar os aspectos positivos e negativos. Ainda não tem financiamento, mas vão recorrer a “Jovem Empresários” e vão aguardar a resposta da companhia de “Future Kids”.

Está contente com a opção de licenciatura, mas quer continuar a estudar, tirar mestrado na área, e possivelmente, um doutoramento. Depende da vida familiar (O bebé já traz mais dificuldades para estudar) e ao negócio que quer montar.

Está contente também com a escolha da Universidade, apesar das mudanças de estrutura ao longo do curso, e tanto que foi dito sobre esta universidade pela imprensa e colegas de outras universidades. Têm uma ideia muito negativa, e nunca tinham ouvido falar do curso, o que é muito desaminador. A universidade não é nada daquilo que diziam, mas agora acha que as ideias negativas estão a mudar.

Gostava de ter tempo livre para ler, fazer ponte de cruz, mas depois de trabalho e tarefas domésticas, não há tempo.

Por além do trabalho, a licenciatura também tem valor para a vida. Qualquer licenciatura ajudaria na educação dos filhos, na posição social, e da maneira como as pessoas olham, para uma pessoa com um curso. Sente-se mais capaz de lidar com toda a burocracia que nos circula, e não ser enganada pelas pessoas, ser bem tratada, e saber os direitos que tem, e

como pode usá-los. Os benefícios de ir a universidade são imensos. Qualquer curso ajudaria no trabalho mesmo quando não se consegue um emprego relacionado, em o relacionamento com o que tirou, e a relacionar-se com outras pessoas. Tem a certeza que há muitos outros benefícios também.

Appendix 7.7 NODE LISTING

- 1 assumed or implied connection to work
- 2 Direct connections to work
- 3 Semi direct connections to work
- 4 (1) /choices & meanings of HE
- 5 (1 1) /choices & meanings of HE/early ideas of university
- 6 (1 1 1) /choices & meanings of HE/early ideas of university/normalisation of study routes
- 7 (1 1 2) /choices & meanings of HE/early ideas of university/non normalised choice
- 8 (1 2) /choices & meanings of HE/choice of degree
- 9 (1 3) /choices & meanings of HE/choice of university
- 10 (1 4) /choices & meanings of HE/expectations of HE
- 11 (1 5) /choices & meanings of HE/adaptation to University
- 12 (1 6) /choices & meanings of HE/objectives of study
- 13 (1 7) /choices & meanings of HE/value of university study
- 14 (1 8) /choices & meanings of HE/perception of educational structures
- 15 (1 9) /choices & meanings of HE/life long learning
- 16 (1 10) /choices & meanings of HE/dissertation
- 17 (1 12) /choices & meanings of HE/value of non-central subjects
- 18 (1 12 1) /choices & meanings of HE/value of non-central subjects/changing values
- 19 (2) /continuities of self
- 20 (2 1) /continuities of self/ways of seeing self
- 21 (2 2) /continuities of self/contradictions
- 22 (2 3) /continuities of self/perceived personal change
- 23 (2 4) /continuities of self/normality
- 24 (2 11) /continuities of self/attitudes to private HE
- 25 (3) /freedom and agency
- 26 (3 1) /freedom and agency/unagency
- 27 (3 2) /freedom and agency/weak agency
- 28 (4) /hierarchies

- 29 (4 1) /hierarchies/the prache
- 30 (4 2) /hierarchies/status
- 31 (4 3) /hierarchies/relating to others
- 32 (5) /relationships
- 33 (5 1) /relationships/Families-embeddedness
- 34 (5 1 1) /relationships/Families-embeddedness/disembedding
- 35 (5 1 2) /relationships/Families-embeddedness/normality
- 36 (5 2) /relationships/teacher relationships
- 37 (5 3) /relationships/friends
- 38 (5 4) /relationships/work colleagues
- 39 (5 5) /relationships/boy-girlfriend
- 40 (5 6) /relationships/other relationships
- 41 (6) /culture and citizenship
- 42 (7) /critique
- 43 (7 1) /critique/critical dispositions
- 44 (7 1 1) /critique/critical dispositions/curiosity
- 45 (7 1 2) /critique/critical dispositions/action
- 46 (7 1 3) /critique/critical dispositions/open mindedness
- 47 (7 1 4) /critique/critical dispositions/judiciousness
- 48 (7 1 5) /critique/critical dispositions/truth seeking
- 49 (7 1 6) /critique/critical dispositions/reasoning confidence
- 50 (7 1 7) /critique/critical dispositions/analytical ability
- 51 (7 2) /critique/critical self reflection
- 52 (7 3) /critique/critical action
- 53 (7 4) /critique/uncritical thought
- 54 (7 5) /critique/criticality and participation
- 55 (7 5 1) /critique/criticality and participation/limitations by teachers
- 56 (8) /Work
- 57 (8 1) /Work/value of work
- 58 (8 2) /Work/ways of searching for work

- 59 (8 2 1) /Work/ways of searching for work/cunhas
- 60 (8 3) /Work/preparation for work
- 61 (8 3 1) /Work/preparation for work/learning the job
- 62 (8 4) /Work/choice of work
- 63 (8 5) /Work/value of HE and work
- 64 (8 5 1) /Work/value of HE and work/theory & practice
- 65 (8 5 2) /Work/value of HE and work/revisability of knowledge
- 66 (8 6) /Work/perceptions of the labour market
- 67 (8 7) /Work/communities at work
- 68 (8 8) /Work/motivation and feelings
- 69 (8 9) /Work/Future dreams
- 70 (8 10) /Work/state structures for employment
- 71 (9) /Min~ risks, max opportunities
- 72 (9 1) /Min~ risks, max opportunities/not min r max op, but cont self
- 73 (9 2) /Min~ risks, max opportunities/min risks min ops
- 74 (10) /Gender
- 75 (11) /Search Results
- 76 (11 1) /Search Results/sacrifice
- 77 (11 2) /Search Results/maths
- 78 (11 3) /Search Results/private
- 79 (11 4) /Search Results/Portugal
- 80 (11 5) /Search Results/Portugal 2
- 81 (11 6) /Search Results/Portugal 3
- 82 (11 7) /Search Results/English
- 83 (11 8) /Search Results/English 2
- 84 (11 9) /Search Results/English 3
- 85 (11 10) /Search Results/here in Portugal
- 86 (11 11) /Search Results/here in Portugal 2
- 87 (11 12) /Search Results/in Portugal
- 88 (11 13) /Search Results/the Portuguese

- 89 (11 14) /Search Results/the Portuguese 2
- 90 (11 15) /Search Results/culture
- 91 (11 16) /Search Results/theory is
- 92 (11 17) /Search Results/placement
- 93 (11 18) /Search Results/placement 2
- 94 (11 19) /Search Results/good teacher
- 95 (11 20) /Search Results/good teacher 2
- 96 (11 21) /Search Results/Bad teacher
- 97 (11 22) /Search Results/degree and work
- 98 (11 23) /Search Results/degree and lb mkt
- 99 (11 24) /Search Results/truth
- 100 (11 25) /Search Results/Satisfied second interview
- 101 (11 26) /Search Results/true
- 102 (11 27) /Search Results/merit
- 103 (12) /Interviewer effect
- 104 (12 1) /Interviewer effect/implicit question taken up
- 105 (12 2) /Interviewer effect/misunderstands
- 106 (12 3) /Interviewer effect/Double questions
- 107 (12 4) /Interviewer effect/doesn't take up question
- 108 (12 5) /Interviewer effect/Portugal stories
- 109 (12 6) /Interviewer effect/refers to interviewer
- 110 (12 7) /Interviewer effect/echo
- 111 (12 8) /Interviewer effect/resists narrative
- 112 (13) /Trauma stories
- 113 (14) /satisfaction
- 114 (14 1) /satisfaction/university satisfaction
- 115 (14 2) /satisfaction/degree satisfaction
- 116 (14 3) /satisfaction/job satisfaction
- 117 (14 4) /satisfaction/job relationship to degree

Appendix 7.8 summary of participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Degree	Parent's education		Parent's profession *	
			Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Mariana Braga	Female	Psychology	FE	6th grade	1.2	3
Sofia Barros	Female	Psychology	FE	9th grade	3	3
André Barbosa	Male	Civil Eng	4th grade	4th grade	7	6
António Taveira	Male	Civil Eng	4th grade	4th grade	4	8
Carlos Coutinho	Male	Civil Eng	4th grade	4th grade	4	8
Isolina Mendes	Female	Civil Eng	4th grade	4th grade	4	8
Joel Torres	Male	Civil Eng	6th grade	4th grade	4	7
Márcia Matos	Female	Civil Eng	4th grade	4th grade	4	8
Ricardo Silva	Male	Civil Eng	4th grade	4th grade	4	7
Camila Castro	Female	Anthropology	9th grade	4th grade	3	8
Cândida Alves	Female	Anthropology	4th grade	12th grade	4	3
Rita Carvalho	Female	Anthropology	12th grade	12th grade	2	8
Paulo Branco	Male	Anthropology	12th grade	9th grade	2	3
Ana Pinto	Female	Administration	4th grade	4th grade	7	8
Clara Rodrigues	Female	Administration	4th grade	4th grade	4	8
Mário Melo	Male	Administration	12th grade	9th grade	4	3
Sandra Carneiro	Female	Administration	FE	12th grade	4	8
Silvia Dias	Female	Administration	4th grade	4th grade	7	8

*Socio-economic classifications according to “the Goldethorpe Schema” (Goldethorpe 1997 and Erikson and Goldethorpe 1992):

- 1.1 Employers in large organisations
- 1.2 Higher professional occupations
2. Lower managerial
3. Intermediate (secretarial etc.)
4. Small employers/self employed
5. Lower supervisory /craft
6. Semi-routine occupations
7. Routine occupations
8. Unemployed/ unclassified, (including housewives)

Appendix 8.1 Participants' expectations of higher education and work

Pseudonym	Degree	Selection of comments about university and work
Mariana Braga	Psychology	I hope that doing this degree course that I will manage to get a job in this area. [The main benefit of university is] in terms of qualification, in getting a job, it is better than not having a degree
Sofia Barros	Psychology	[The main benefits of coming to university] are firstly the qualification that I think is very important and probably makes it easier in terms of employment. As a qualification, it is better to have a qualification and get work in an area of knowledge which I chose and really like I think these are the major benefits
André Barbosa	Civil Eng	A degree...is important in terms of future work.
António Taveira	Civil Eng	Ever since I was in secondary school, even before, I loved the idea, ever since I remember the only thing I wanted to study was to be was a Civil Engineer.
Carlos Coutinho	Civil Eng	Whoever has a degree has an advantage in relation to somebody who hasn't got one... more chance of getting a job
Isolina Mendes	Civil Eng	Interviewer: the benefits of being here at the University are in terms of employment? Isolina: yes Interviewer: Does it have other benefits? Isolina: at the moment doesn't have any others
Joel Torres	Civil Eng	When one has qualifications, a degree, it's easier to live nowadays, getting a good job.
Márcia Matos	Civil Eng	in relation to other people who don't have a degree I'm going to have an advantage [in the labour market]
Ricardo Silva	Civil Eng	This course would give me what I wanted at the end of the day... a good job. Better paid
Camila Castro	Anthropology	I'm going to send my CV then try to get some work... It would be very good if I could get some work in the line of anthropology. Perhaps after my placement I can continue working in a museum
Cândida Alves	Anthropology	I think that I'm going to have... benefits from being this university in relation to the world of work.
Rita Carvalho	Anthropology	Effectively the world of work is very difficult for whoever doesn't have a degree and better for those who do
Paulo Branco	Anthropology	Paulo: People tell me is that it's difficult to get a job in anthropology. It's not a very practical degree. Interviewer: are hoping to get a job in the area of anthropology? Paulo: yes, or related with this at least.
Ana Pinto	Administration	Probably I'll get a job according to the degree that I've got
Clara Rodrigues	Administration	I went for a university degree because of it gives people the capacity to have a specific knowledge a very determined area, because doing things and not knowing how to do them, I don't think that makes much sense. [a degree] is an added value that I have [to find work]
Mário Melo	Administration	I think teaching [at university] is a little bit out of date. I think it should be closer to the world of work.
Sandra Carneiro	Administration	In order to have a better future I have to have a degree
Sílvia Dias	Administration	After we have a degree I can apply for a broader range of jobs.

Appendix 9.1 The aims and objectives of Higher Education in Portugal

Source: DESUP (The Department of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education)

"It is important to increase the national effort in higher education in order to respond to the needs of the country at a crucial phase of its development, satisfying the scales of qualification and motivation which are compatible with the construction of Europe, stimulating high levels of training, recognising and rewarding quality and competitiveness in the sub system of higher education which is leading to progressive internationalisation, and attending, in this way, to the aspirations of the Portuguese population."

(The Guide to higher education - Ministry of Education 1997/8)

The objectives of higher education are:

1. To stimulate cultural creativity and the development of a scientific spirit and reflexive thought.
2. Train graduates in different areas of knowledge, who can be inserted in professional sectors for the participation and development of Portuguese society, and collaborate in their continuous education.
3. Motivate scientific research, with the view to developing science and technology and the creation and diffusion of culture, and, in this way, develop the understanding of mankind and the environment in which he lives.
4. Promote the spread of cultural, scientific and technical knowledge that are part of the heritage of humanity and communicate the knowledge through teaching, publications or other forms of communication.
5. Stir up the permanent desire for cultural perfection and make the corresponding concretisation possible, integrating the knowledge that is going to be acquired in a systemizing intellectual structure of knowledge for each generation.
6. Stimulate knowledge of the problems of the world today, in particular national and regional problems, supplying specialist service to the community and establishing through this a reciprocal relationship.
7. Continue the cultural and professional training of citizens through the promotion of adequate forms of cultural extension.

University teaching is envisaged to assure a solid scientific and cultural preparation and supplying technical training that makes the exercise of professional activities possible and promotes the development of the capacities of conception, innovation and critical analysis.

Polytechnic teaching is seen as supplying a solid training at a higher level, developing the capacity for innovation, and critical analysis, and teaching theoretical and practical scientific knowledge and their applications, with a view to the exercise of professional activities.