

Introduction: Moving to Nowhere Land? (Un)Certainties in transitions to work for the young generation

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Work has multiple important implications for individuals, social life and societies. „Work enables people to earn a livelihood and be economically secure. It is critical for equitable economic growth, poverty reduction and gender equality. It also allows people to fully participate in society while affording them a sense of dignity and worth.” (‘Human development report’, 2015, p. 1) This special issue takes as its starting point the observation that there is an increase in *transitions* not only between workplaces but also between the status of being employed and being unemployed. In a nutshell, transitions to work are imagined in the viewer's mind, have a social nature as they are being constantly negotiated and are shaped by opportunities and resources in a given historical context. In order to be able to explain an individual transition to work, we have to look beyond the individual level to include the social, the structural and the historical level. Historically, today's situation can be seen as marked by three major developments.

First of all, since the 1970s, growth rates in the early industrialized countries have been falling steadily and unemployment has become chronic. On the one hand tax cuts, deregulation and privatization stabilized profits. On the other hand, pensions and social benefits were reduced. The global economic crises of 2007 has resulted in the individual and social compulsion to functional integration into the labor market, which also goes hand in hand with the enforcement or the threat of social exclusion (Graeber, 2011).

Secondly, capitalism has emancipated itself from its territory: (which has been) the nation-state. In times of digital capitalism (Böhnisch & Schröder, 2017), billions of free-floating money are pushing for ever higher interest rates, thus forcing the working societies of the world to move to those regions, where jobs are (still) available. The barriers to inequality no longer lie between poor and rich countries, but between the zones where capital is invested and the social wasteland that surrounds them. And farther out there lies the desert land, the nowhere land: the plundered southern regions, the economically uninteresting areas, the slums of the mega-metropolises, where the army of misery grows.

Thirdly, the productivity explosion from decade to decade has led to a „growth trap” (Wisman, 2013). It would not have been possible without the exploitation of fossil forests, which grew in millions of years of geological history, and whose burning is now driving the world's ecosystems into a climate catastrophe (Klein, 2015). In the year 2015 and onwards we had a first taste of what to expect as millions of people from the miserable regions of the world set off. People follow the promises of globalization and the media images of a globalized consumer culture; they flee from the climate damage, from the wars caused by the oil craving of the Western world and from the social consequences of the unequal trade. People arriving with hopes to find employment to make a better leaving or looking for a job that is a prerequisite for getting a right to stay.

Against the backdrop of these developments the special issue will offer insights from empirical studies that look at the group of marginalized young people. In the **first part** the contested role of *career guidance* we be analysed in the discourse of European institutions (Schröder, Karl, Muche and Truschkat in this issue), as a ‚traveling idea‘ arriving as program for schools in the Maghreb Region (Khalil in this issue) as well as a rationality of social work actors in the processing of transitions in the life course in general and transitions to work in particular (Schröder in this issue). The **second part** focuses on the perspectives of young people. The empirical studies explore insecurities and unpredictabilities for young people moving within the European Union for job related reasons (Skrobanek, Ardic and Pavlova), analyses narratives of young adults on experiencing mobility in non-linear transitions to work (Benasso, Castellani, Cossetta, Dittrich and Walther in this issue) and provide reflections upon the work with unaccompanied minor refugee in Germany and their chances to reach a „recognised“ position in society (Ploegger in this issue). The **third part** addresses occupational aspirations and pathways into work of so-called care leavers (Göbel, Hansmeyer, Lunz and Peters in this issue) and discusses the chances for youth from precarious socio-demographic circumstances in cross-border mobility in the Greater Region of Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France (Zöller in this issue).

Based on these empirical studies, the special issue aims at reflecting new (un)certainties in career and training pathways in the perspective of young (mobile) people as well as in the perspective of the policy discourse and of social work organizations that promise to help regulating modern life courses, such as career guidance services. As being employed (or at least being employable) is seen as a key indicator for integration and social inclusion, the following questions are being addressed by the contributions of this special issue and considered as relevant for future research: How is the situation diagnosed within the EU-discourse? Which solutions are derived from this? What role do social work organization play in this? How do individuals perceive the demand to make their own career plans? How is the relationship between individual, organization and policy (re-)defined against this backdrop?

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