

## Youth – Actor of Social Change

Theoretical reflections on young people's agency  
in comparative perspective.

**Interim discussion paper for the UP2YOUTH project**

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## 1. Introduction

This discussion paper aims at systematising the analysis of the UP2YOUTH project with regard to young people's agency in social change. The project starts from the basic assumption that in much of existing youth research and youth policy the relationship between young people and social change is characterised by a more structural perspective. Young people appear as victims who are forced by structural constraints into reactions which are not in line with the standard biographical expectations of societal actors and institutionalised normatives (e.g. postponing family building, refraining from political participation, or dropping out from education). The result are normalising or re-standardising policies which neglect the potentials and competencies inherent to young people's choices and strategies by which they try to cope with biographical uncertainty and to shape their lives in a meaningful way. Policies informed by knowledge which reduces young people to either conforming with or deviating from existing institutional structures will necessarily fail in identifying innovative processes of social integration which start from young people's actions. While policies often are directed to adapting individuals to existing (institutionalised) structures, they ignore the potentials of young people in 'doing' social integration on the basis of daily routines and practices. At the same time, young people while coping with structural demands are "doing difference" in terms of gender and ethnicity themselves. This often neglected ambivalence of agency is the starting point of UP2YOUTH. The relationship between structure and agency is analysed with regard to three sub-topics: young parenthood, civic participation and transitions to work of ethnic minority youth. Each of these themes refers to one of the features of the traditional adult status which in the framework of the Fordist life course coincided – and still does according to the majority of institutional actors – with the status of full social integration. Each of this topics refers to a current debate which reflects social change:

- !" young parenthood refers to family change, to gender and intergenerational relationships and to changes in social security;
- !" civic participation refers to changes in citizenship and democratic representation;
- !" transitions to work of immigrant/ethnic minority youth refers to changes in the relation between culture/ethnicity, education/work and the implications these relations have for social integration based on meritocratic principles.

The central keys to young people's agency in social change in UP2YOUTH are *culture* referring to the different styles and meanings of young peoples actions (compared to dominant normalities) as well as to *learning* with regard to the (new) competencies needed for

‘doing’ – family, citizenship or work. While culture sheds light on the fact that young people are often not regarded as actors because they act differently from adult and/or institutional expectations, learning not only provides skills and knowledge for action but is an active process itself.

In a first step, the project’s procedure consisted in thematic working groups have carried out literature reviews with regard to the countries involved in these groups. On the basis of these synthesis reports have been produced aimed at comparative analysis. The diversity of materials provided from different countries as well as the scarcity of research focussing on the perspective of young people as actors (rather than on their structural conditions for being actors) makes it difficult to apply an inductive approach in developing dimensions of young people’s agency starting from the three synthesis reports. Therefore, this discussion paper starts from a deductive perspective. As we noticed that we repeatedly refer to young people’s agency by referring to labels such as for example ‘structure and agency’ or ‘coping strategies’ we thought it might be useful to reconsider theoretical approaches concerned with action and agency.<sup>1</sup> The second chapter is a recourse to relevant theoretical concepts regarding action and agency within political and scientific discourses which are related to the dimensions of learning and culture as the main keys in the UP2YOUTH project towards young people’s agency in conditions of social change. In the third chapter theoretical dimensions and concepts of agency are related to the three themes young parenthood, youth participation and transitions of ethnic minority youth to work in order to find out to what extent they are fruitful in explaining the key issues emerging from the thematic comparative respective synthesis reports. They may either contribute to answering questions emerging from the reports or to refining the questions. Chapter four turns towards the structural dimension. While the impact of socio-economic factors on young people’s possibilities to act are very well analysed – which is also revealed by the country and synthesis reports – we will focus on the institutional factors. This choice is also motivated by the comparative nature of the UP2YOUTH project and the fact that international comparison means – whether explicitly or implicitly – to address different relationships between the actions of individuals and the structures of (different) nation states. Chapter five, finally develops the question whether a new model of social integration needs to be developed – in terms of social theory as well as of social policy. This approach starts from interpreting young people’s agency as a reflection of social change rather than as to be adapted to existing institutions (which themselves may need re-adaptation

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version has been discussed with the UP2YOUTH colleagues. We want to use the opportunity to thank all for their critical reading and comments.

to changed socio-economic and socio-cultural structures). The aim of this paper is to prepare the ground for exploring new research issues arising from the three themes while linking them to the overall objective of analysing young people's agency in the context of social change. Of course it does not claim to represent a complete or finalised analysis – neither with regard to its reception of action theories nor with their application to the three themes nor with regard to comparing young people's scopes of action across different life course and transition regimes.

It may be necessary to clarify in advance that we are fully aware that focussing on an agency perspective runs the risk of neglecting late modern (neo-liberal) ideologies relying on discourses of individual subjectivity and agency and thereby legitimising the shift from collective (especially state) responsibility towards the self-responsibility of individuals – be it with regard to life plans and biographical decisions or to compensation with social risks. Having Foucault's analysis' on power, subjectivity and governmentality in mind (Foucault 1976; 1994; cf. Rose 1999), our guiding assumption is that neither structural limitations nor impacts of societal discourses are valid reasons not to analyse how young people take choices within given constraints and in interaction with cultural norms (cf. Elder, 1994).

## **2. Conceptualising agency in the context of social change**

Based on an understanding of societies as relationships of structure and agency this section deals with understanding the role of young people's agency in social change.

### **2.1 Social change**

Talking about social change is a precarious endeavour because social sciences have produced a wealth of thought and theories about it and producing a short overview without leaving out important developments is nearly impossible. Therefore we concentrate on the strands of analysis that evolved around the changes in the life course which are most pertinent to the changing nature of youth in our point of view.

On a phenomenological level, we can distinguish five different diagnostic angles. Starting from Bauman's conception of post-modernism which stands for the end of grand ideas and the rise of individualism. His work centers around the developments of the post-war period with its rise of mass production, the building of the welfare state and dominant technological optimism inter alia breaking down. Beck has taken this aspects of change further and added the dilemma of political steering and state interventions that consists of a break with technological optimism and introduces a view on the manageability of change as throwing

light into the unintended consequences all attempts of managing change have to face. Another aspect of social change is the disembedding (Giddens 1991) from social patterns that in former times gave (not only) young people's lives orientation through norms and values. Lash and Urry have theorised this as de-traditionalisation (1994). A third vein of theorising social change starts from the meso-level and emphasizes the growing role of networks as a link between individual and society (Castells 1996) demanding a whole new set of competencies in young people's socialisation. The rise of the network society often is seen as a complementary process to what Robertson and others have coined as "glocalisation" bringing together insights into the weakening role of the nation state and the growing importance of the local level by what has been described under the vast umbrella of globalisation processes. One strand of debate bringing production conditions into play is the debate around the changes of Fordist industry model to Post-Fordism (Brown & Lauder, 1999), which involves the move from serial mass production to different patterns of surplus creation.

Explaining the dynamics, the factors and reasons behind these phenomena is still a bit more tricky. First of all, three levels of change need to be distinguished: the macro level comprising social structures and culture, the meso-level of institutions and a micro level of individuals. In broad brushes, we can distinguish between modernisation, (post-)marxist and differentiation theories. The main differences between these approaches are the way they conceive of the interrelation between the different levels of change. Accordingly and again in very broad brushes, they also differ in the way they link typical change media like structures, culture or technology to these levels. But none of contemporary reasonings about social change sticks to a mono-causal explanation that puts one of these in the forefront and declares all other factors as dependent.

The perception of the way change happens has changed from linear and teleological assumptions to non-linear ones where no single force determines the direction or dynamics of change. Modernisation refers to a historical process marked by secularisation, democratisation and capitalisation of society but also to social differentiation and individualisation. We conceive social change as a multi-faceted, non-linear modernisation process that has its drivers in the conflictual appropriations of technical, economic and ecological developments by societies. Late or post-modernity is characterised by a reflexive modernisation of social structures resulting from emerging risks and side-effects such as the de-standardisation of life courses and transitions and new dynamics of social exclusion. In the following, we therefore start from the general perspective of changing life courses before we present transitions to

work, the transition to parenthood and civic participation as exemplary social arenas where social change interrelates with young people's agency. We also assume that individualisation as a concept is over-simplistic to cover the complex relationship between autonomy and new bindings in young people's relationships. Research for a long time has conceptualised of youth as being more or less determined by these changes. Individual agency in youth research often is taken into account if it comes to risk behaviour and deviance. And accounts of exclusion, unemployment and other issues young people have to deal with, often conceptualise their role as victims of structural contradictions. In the following sections, we want to take stock of how agency of young people can be differentiated and see which understanding of modernisation processes we can develop that does neither take structures as something young people have to take for granted nor ignore the fact that processes of social change pose new challenges to individuals. By looking into different approaches to conceptualising young people's agency we hope to be able to formulate some first traces how policies could be conceptualised that makes new types of agency more probable.

## *2.2 Theoretical dimensions of agency*

The aim of this section is to clarify the understanding of agency subsumed in the perspective on youth as actor of social change. On a basic level, agency is understood as the capacity of an individual to act, related at one level to free will, while action refers to a single activity influenced or resulting from agentic processes.<sup>2</sup> According to Giddens (1984) agency is characterised by the *durée* which connects single actions throughout everyday life. In the following, some key dimensions of agency will be reflected which emerge from existing psychological and sociological concepts of agency. The range of concepts referred to is selective: Weber's theory of action, rational choice theories, social interactionism, ethnomethodology, theory of communicative action, theory of creative action, relational pragmatism, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Giddens' theory of structuration, Bauman's concept of sociality, psychological concepts of coping and motivation and finally recent conceptualisations of identity and biographical agency. No reference is made to theories that conceptualise human action one-dimensionally as response to external stimuli – whether these are early behaviourist psychological or purely structuralist sociological theories. This means that concepts are taken into consideration which imply an interplay between social structure and individual agency in explaining both processes of social integration but also individual decision making. The chapter is structured by key dimensions of agency which emerge from

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<sup>2</sup> We owe this basic linguistic distinction to Andy Biggart.

the theories discussed: meaning, intentionality, processuality, learning, culture, sociality, and structuration.

### *What actions are taken? The meaning of agency*

What actions do young people undertake and what goals do they strive for? What decisions do they take? Where do their goals come from and how are they generated? What reasons (and reasoning), assessment, preferences and priorities are reflected by young people's actions and how can these be analysed and understood?

It was Max Weber who introduced an understanding of action as human behaviour distinguished by subjective *meaning*, that is the rational assessment by which actors select and direct their actions. Meaning in his concept primarily results from individual 'purposes' or from collective values. Implicitly, he suggests that the relation between collective values and individual purposes is that the former contribute to the formation (and legitimation) of the latter. Weber's focus on rationality and purpose therefore characterises his concept of action as primarily goal-oriented or "teleological" (Weber 1972; cf. Habermas, 1991; Joas, 1992).

This is the ground on which theories of rational choice have been developed – especially by economists. According to these theories individuals are self-interested agents who choose their actions according to a set of preferences against which potential consequences of actions are assessed and costs and benefits are weighed against each other. Meaning is conceptualised in terms of maximising benefits. This can take rather crude forms such as the simple Homo oeconomicus while more differentiated ones such as RREEMM (Restricted Resourceful Expecting Evaluating Maximising Man) including also non-rational subjective and normative dimensions (Esser 1996). The behaviour of young people is often addressed by means of rational choice theory, especially if understanding behaviour which diverts from mainstream social norms. Educational or labour market disadvantage may be explained by a lack of or the wrong kind of investment in human capital; postponed parenthood is interpreted in terms of individual cost-benefit-calculations under conditions of higher – material and immaterial – costs of living; participation and non-participation are analysed with regard to the benefits young people expect – in comparison to other activities such as consumption (cf. Miles, 2000). Criticism against ascribing agency to rational choice refers first to the tendency of conceptualising meaning and purpose as one-dimensional and linear, second to neglecting the bounding effects of social structure (in terms of restricted resources) and third to the question how meaning is being generated and reproduced through action (Emirbayer & Mische 1999; Archer 2000).



While both Weber and rational choice theorists assume that actions can be ascribed to pre-existing goals and purposes, symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists are concerned with the making of meaning for and through agency. Both approaches start from the assumption that individuals – and individual agency – are embedded in and constantly interact with social contexts through which meaning is generated and reproduced. Symbolic interactionists assume that all human action is based on subjective meaning, second, that meaning evolves from social interaction and is, third, modified by a process of subjective interpretation. Mead's socialisation theory reflects this by the distinction between Me, Self and I and between role-taking and role-making (Mead 1959).

The focus therefore lies on the formative process of action and the dialectics between action and (re)production of meaning (cf. Blumer 1969). This is even more accentuated within the ethnomethodological approach with its focus on shared meaning and the fact that actions are result from collective meaning in which actors and situations of action are embedded (Garfinkel, 1967; cf. Giddens, 1984).

Symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology have inspired attempts of liberating critical theory from Adorno's diagnosis that in tendency modern societal conditions restrict human agency to the behaviour of amphibians. Habermas' theory of communicative action which refers explicitly to Mead distinguishes between meaning which is (re)produced by means of intersubjective negotiation in the social life world and functional behaviour resulting from and mediated by differentiated systems. Thereby he also distinguishes between the rationality of life-world communication and functional appraisal of purpose (Habermas 1981). While he observes an increasing colonisation of subjective agency, he argues that systemic integration continues to depend on the communicative production of subjective meaning. This can be exemplified with regard to the UP2YOUTH topics: in order to participate they need to develop interests in – individual and collective – activities in the public space; in order to develop their human capital they need to develop motivation for engaging in education and training. Probably the most obvious discrepancy exists within the topic of young parenthood: in order to meet the fertility demands of social security systems young people need to fall in love and develop the desire of building a family together. In this regard, there is a close connection between Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman's interpretation of the individual in liquid modernity: the active construction of meaning requires opportunities of intersubjective exchange in the public (recognition with Honneth, 1992) in order to become subjective meaning which only is meaningful if also socially recognised (Bauman 2000).

At first sight, psychological concepts of agency appear to interpret meaning quite differently: psychological theories of motivation locate the goal or meaning of action in subjective motives which originally have been primarily seen as drives or needs (e.g. Maslow, 1970). However, in the meantime there are various approaches – as for example authors concerned with the generation of subjective interest (Vigotskij, 1962; Krapp, 2002) – who refer to interest as subject-world-relationships which emerge and stabilise (and change) over a person's life span. And the concept of intrinsic motivation explicitly refers to activities which are done for themselves – for the experience of flow (or simply of 'fun') (Bandura, 1979; Csikszentmihaly, 1997).

The concept of coping originally was restricted to actions under conditions of stress. Meaning – or the goal of coping – in these cases was reduced to re-establish agency in terms of regaining control over the own life situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Zeidner & Endler, 1996). As Böhnisch argues, under conditions of individualisation and late modern uncertainty this applies more and more to all human action, that means: every action has at least as a side effect the aim to confirm individual agency (Böhnisch, 1997). The extension of the concept of coping to everyday life and biography in general would not make sense if this would not imply dimensions such as coherence, individuality and self-reflexivity (Antonovsky, 1987; Böhnisch, 1997; Keupp et al., 1999). While this may be still interpreted as reacting to threatened agency, coping needs to be interpreted in terms of shaping the own life in a subjectively meaningful way rather than only solving problematic situations (Stauber, 2004). In Joas' terms this means that – apart from solving problems and fulfilling purposes – agency includes an aspect of creativity, that is of having an impact on the environment and giving visibility to internal processes of meaning-making. One example is the different relevances that for example work has for persons apart from the formally set purposes of production and making a living (Joas, 1992). Referring to Joas' and Dewey's pragmatic thinking, Emirbayer and Mische (1999) conceptualise the dialectic process of meaning making over time: rooted in and emerging from past experiences and interactions as well as existing structures, longing for anticipated, imagined and desired future effects, and embedded in present evaluation of demands and possible action. From here it is close to concepts of identity and biography according to which modern identity work (or biographic work as identity work over time) implies the constant reflection of the relation between I and Me (in Meads terms). Especially, under late modern conditions meaning becomes more and more fragmented and contextualised so that meaning-making is an increasingly contradictory and complex process characterised by biographical dilemmas. In fact, while the life course may be seen as the

structural stimulus for biographical appropriation, it does not also guarantee and provide for subjective meaning – the sense of life (Keupp et al., 1999; Mørch, 1999; Alheit & Dausien 2000). Thereby meaning extends beyond individually set purposes but includes the structurally bound processes of meaning-making as well as the reassuring of subjective identity and biography. This has been shown by a variety of studies on young people's practices, life styles, decisions and strategies (e.g. Miles, 2000; Pais, 2003; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005; Henderson et al., 2006; Walther et al., 2006; Walther, 2007).

In sum, the analysis of individual action can not simply start from preset goals (such as family orientations, political values and attitudes towards participation, work orientations) but has to include the analysis of how subjective meaning emerges from experiences of own actions.

### *Why do individuals act? Intentionality of agency*

The discussion of meaning referring to the direction of purposeful agency is closely related with the dimension of intentionality, that is the question for the source and origin of human agency. What makes young people act? Do they act because of external demands (and do they act in specific ways due to external constraints) or do they act because they want to act? Do they have a subjective wish to become parents or do they follow family norms? Do they postpone parenthood due to structural constraints of uncertain transitions or due to individual life plans? Do they participate because contributing to the community is part of their subjective identities or because this is the only legitimate way to advocate own goals? Do they refrain from participation due to bad experiences (of limited scope for participation) or due to preferences for other forms of collective action? Do young people relate to transitions to work in an instrumental or a self-related way? Does de-motivation (and failure) in education or training reflect unequal chances or can it also be understood as a conscious choice? Where can intentionality be located?

As already mentioned in the introductory phrases, some approaches conceive of human action as determined by either internal (drives and needs) or external (structural) forces, others ascribe individuals an intrinsic will to act. However, while apart from early behaviourist approaches there are no concepts of agency that would completely deny individual intentionality, some others are either not interested in the question or focus on the structural limitations of intentionality.

According to motivation psychology, intentionality is rooted in motives such as needs or interests (e.g. Maslow, 1970). Giddens discerns between motives and reflexive regulation. Motivation means the potential of agency, the underlying, partly unconscious programme,

whereas intentionality corresponds with the self-reflexive regulation of behaviour in concrete situations (Giddens,1984). He refers to symbolic interactionist and ethnomethodological concepts according to which persons meet “a flow of situations in which they have to act (...) on the basis of what they note, how they assess and interpret what they note, and what kind of projected lines of action they map out” (Blumer 1969, p. 16). Identification of situations as requiring action as well as selecting practices as appropriate in these situations does not necessarily refer to subjective motivation but primarily results from the collective meaning and practice a person shares with his or her community and which are reproduced through culture and socialisation. Symbolic interactionists highlight the subjective interpretation of shared meaning and situations of action. A person has “... to construct and guide his action instead of merely releasing it in response to factors playing on him or operating through him. He may do a miserable job in constructing his action, but he has to construct it.” (Blumer 1969, p. 15). Ethnomethodologists give more importance to the fact that human beings are socialised into routines and enter situations which are structured by and allow only for a certain range of cultural practice without risking to be excluded (or exclude oneself) from a “community of practice” (Wenger 1999; cf. Garfinkel, 1967). Also if individuals either misunderstand or refuse implicit demands (or opportunities) they indirectly refer to them in their actions; or they re-work and thereby change them (Leccardi, 2005b).

This is even more accentuated in the case of Bourdieu according to whom a social field does not only predetermine (or exclude) what can be perceived, interpreted, thought and wanted in a given situation but explicitly includes the resources (capital) which are at disposal for the actor to realise certain intentional aims. He actually speaks of “intentionless intentions” (Bourdieu, 1977).

Theorists of rational action and rational choice on the contrary start from a completely independent actor whose intention is reflected by the purposes he or she follows. These are interpreted as ‘profit’ which can always be maximised. While in some concepts this reads as a quasi-anthropological constant such ‘profit’ may be also translated in terms of agency and control – whereby links to symbolic interactionism are made – as well as of identity (Esser 1999). In these cases however, the proprium of rational choice theory, the calculation of direction and intensity of individual agency, tends to be blurred.

From a pragmatic point of view (and very much in line with Giddens), Joas develops a non-teleological view of intentionality. He argues first that the restriction to purposeful, rational agency implies that neither routine nor intrinsic action are subsumed under agency. Instead he follows Dewey (parallel to the psychological distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic

motivation) in differentiating between self-chosen and externally induced goals of action. Second, this reduction means to separate action from cognition inasmuch as the appraisal of meaningful purpose and rational means precedes action and thereby excludes reflexivity. Third, it separates action from the body as the place or centre of action. In sum, he conceptualises intentionality as the self-reflexive regulation of continuing behaviour (Joas, 1992; cf. Emirbayer/Mische 1999). Means and goals are in a reciprocal relationship (availability of means may raise awareness of meaningful goals). A key concept for him is the ‘situation’ which stands in a ‘quasi-dialogue’ with the physical process of action. He quotes Böhler: “Without even vague goal dispositions which are given *ante actu* in the form of needs, interests or norms, no event will appear to us as a situation but will remain meaningless and mute.” (Böhler 1985 272)

As mentioned already, the pragmatic approach builds (and actually has been) a bridge towards psychological concepts of motivation. Motivation theory starts from internal motives and needs as the driving powers of human action distinguishing as well between internal and external goals. As a second perspective however these are combined with the individuals expectation to fulfil them by own action, that is by reflexive assessment and ascription. Here, social factors can be taken into account, yet without removing the origin of action from the individual personality. This applies also to approaches of critical psychology (Holzkamp 1993; Osterkamp-Holzkamp, 1978). Recent developments towards a ‘psychology of volition’ even rediscovered the category of ‘will’ (s.g. Heckhausen/Heckhausen 2006).

The concept of coping on the one hand might be seen as a forced reaction to external, stressful causes as much as emerging from a deeply rooted need (or will) to stay in control over the own life situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Böhnisch, 1997). In fact, under conditions of de-standardised life courses individuals needs and efforts not only to cope with but to negotiate the shaping of their lives in a meaningful way becomes both more visible and necessary. The diversity and multitude of young people constantly performing and revising life styles stand for the increased complexity and contradictions in (re-)presenting their selves in a way which is both self-expressive and ‘cool’; whether these are forms of family formation and parenting, participation or education and work (Heinz, 2002; Marshall et al., 2003; Stauber, 2004; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005; Henderson et al., 2006).

### *How do actions evolve? Temporality, routine, reflexivity and creativity*

Until now we have been concerned with the questions where individual agency is rooted and where it is directed. The following paragraph is concerned with the question how it evolves –

how it is linked to and embedded in a person's development over time. Do young people act out of routine or in a self-reflexive way? How can they act at all under contexts of late modern uncertainty in which routines developed in the past do no longer match present demands while future perspectives are blurred?

The temporal structure of agency has been elaborated most profoundly by Emirbayer and Mische (1999) who – starting from Dewey's work – operationalise agency in a temporal and relational perspective. Agency is the “temporally constructed engagement by which actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations.” (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, p. 970). As key temporal dimensions of agency they distinguish:

- *Iteration*: the effects of the past in forming stable habits such as routine (Garfinkel, Giddens) and incorporated structure (Bourdieu). Key elements are selective attention, typification and recognition of types, categorical location, maneuver among repertoires and the maintenance of expectations; here they identify close links with life course research (cf. Kohli 1985; Marshall et al. 2001);
- *Projectivity*: future orientation in the sense of the imagination of scenarios. Key elements are anticipatory identification (motivation theory; e.g. Bandura 1997; identity and life plans, Giddens 1991; Keupp et al. 1999), narrative construction, symbolic recomposition, hypothetical resolution, and experimental enactment (Dewey, Joas, 1996); a relation to empirical research lies in a persons' time perspectives (see Leccardi 2005a);
- *Practical evaluation*: the necessity to make judgements and take decisions within present situations which are perceived as requiring action. Key elements are problematization, characterization, deliberation, decision and execution (see coping, Zeidner & Endler, 1996; Böhnisch, 1997).

Intentionality and subjective meaning as well as incorporated habitus are thus related and identified at different stages of the process of action. While the past tends to determine agency by existing structures and made experiences, the necessity to project agency towards a meaningful future and to act in – often unclear – present situations both qualify and counterbalance past influences and open opportunities for individual interpretation and action. Similar, symbolic interactionism stresses the fact that a person has to cope with the situations in which sHe is called to act – and has to construct his or her action (see Blumer 1969).

Other concepts do less combine past, present and future to the same extent. As regards a dominance of the (determining) past, Bourdieu's concept of habitus conceptualises the past as

incorporated (also in physical terms) and thereby almost as a totalising impact on individual agency. Giddens stresses the aspect of routine as a mechanism to reduce complexity, uncertainty and contingency in mutual human agency across time and space. More than Bourdieu he allows for change and variation, especially where social structures provide interstices and niches (e.g. transitions as “wild zones” of life course regimes (Kelly, 1999) or “hot” areas (Lévi Strauss, 1961) of social integration) (Giddens, 1984). His interest in routine is owed to the ethnomethodologist perspective. Authors such as Garfinkel (1967) and Cicourel (1973) are interested in the question why despite of the contextual nature of the meaning of each verbal statement and behaviour people understand each other well enough to develop shared worlds of meaning and attribution. They reconstruct the *methods* (the routines, the practices) individuals apply in their daily (inter-)action in specific cultural contexts (“*ethno*”), especially in situations in which they face discrepancies between societal expectations and own interpretations and expressions of normality. On the other side, the relation between past, present and future is interpreted the other way round although being as stable and linear. According to Weber and rational choice theorists preferences and meanings have been developed at specific points in the past (although they obviously are not interested in the past) and subjected to cost-benefit-assessments in the present with regard to future outcomes (Esser, 1996). This accounts as well for early concepts of motivation and coping which assumed that motives and the goal of regaining agency were an integral part of human personality. Later developments however have introduced aspects of reflexivity inasmuch as both conceiving of the subjective relevance of motives (needs and interests) as well as expectancies - informed by social and individual ascription (Heckhausen, 1991; Bandura, 1997). Inasmuch as motivation results from an actor’s experiences individual agency may be seen in terms of motivational careers allowing also for motivational change (Walther et al., 2006). This coincides with an understanding of biography as processes of identity work over time (Keupp et al. 1999; Schütze 2003). Biography means reconstructing and balancing the past, imagining, inventing, outlining and planning the future and coping with present demands in a way that past and future are connected through meaning and continuity (Alheit & Dausien, 2000).

Joas argues that only a concept of agency as self-reflexive relation of internal and external aspects is able to explain the creative aspects of agency which constantly question, challenge and transcend existing routines and structures. He draws on Maslow’s distinction of primary creativity (imagination), secondary creativity (innovative production) and integrated creativity (self-reflexive combination between imagination and a critical and responsible attitude

towards production). Self-reflexivity also refers to the fact that intentional action is both motivated and expressed physically requiring the relation between body, rationality and social context (Joas, 1992).

In sum, understanding action as temporal and socially embedded allows to identify the relationship between structural influences as well as intentional aspects. It also allows to overcome the separation between acting and the emergence of the meaning of acting. Further it differentiates various dimensions of agency whereby individuals can be conceived of as intentional and self-reflexive actors without neglecting the relevance of external influence. Before this background, the next sections deal with some key aspects of the structure and agency paradigm: power and resources, contextualisation and structuration.

### *Structure and agency I: power and resources*

It is obvious that conceiving of individuals as intentional actors does not imply complete individual freedom nor can abilities to act (or not), the extent to which one may realise own agency be restricted to individual skills and competencies but needs to be extended towards a wider perspective of resources. This includes access to resources such as money or social contacts. Access to resources for agency may be addressed in terms of power which is a key issue in the debate on the intentionality of individual agency. Normally, social sciences address the issue of power in terms of power differentials whereby certain groups have less possibilities to realise their agency than others. As regards young people, their agency is seen as restricted by older age groups while among youth also general structural categories of social inequality (class, education, gender, ethnicity and region) account for differences and divisions. A more basic understanding of power which is implicit both in Giddens' theory of structuration (1984) and in Foucault's theory of power (1976) refers to power in the first place as the capability to interfere into the external world, to make a difference. In this regard it is a fundamental requirement of any action and subjectivity. The question however is to what extent structural constraints can restrict choice among alternatives so that one can no longer speak of intentional agency. Bourdieu's perspective on incorporated limitations (or possibilities) emerging from social fields comes close to mechanistic concepts according to which external forces directly transform into (limited) agency. However, the question would be if – following his perspective on the reproduction of inequality – different habitus are more or less restricted and pre-determined and/or leave different scope for realising creative and intentional agency (Bourdieu, 1990). In contrast, Giddens assumes a dialectic of domination, that means that all forms of dependency give access to resources of action which may also



influence the relationships of dependency themselves (Giddens, 1984). According to him also action under extreme conditions characterised by lack of choice qualifies as intentional in contrast to intuitive behaviour.

Approaches of rational action have more problems in grasping the limiting impact of social structure as their methodological individualism denies the possibility of relating individual actions to collective structures and thereby allows only for indirect relations between structure and agency. Esser's introduction of the dimension of conflict (between the interests of competing actors) has to some extent weakened the effects of methodological individualism, yet without getting grips on the relationship between structure and agency itself (Esser, 1999). While psychological concepts normally do not focus on structural aspects of agency, they do not necessarily contradict to a dialectic relationship between structure and agency. As regards motivation, the generation of subjective interest can be seen as much as dependent on a person's social position (access to meaningful person-world-relationships). This is even more obvious with regard to the second factor of motivation: the perception of being in control over one's actions or the feeling of self-efficacy. Positive experiences of effective and successful action are closely related to social structure and thereby suggest to introduce the perspective of social inequality of motivation. In this regard, critical psychology argues that actors have to accept externally induced goals of action – to a larger or minor extent according to their social position (Osterkamp-Holzkamp, 1978).

### *Structure and agency II: social context*

The relation between routine and reflexivity points to another aspect of the relation between structure and agency: the role of social contexts and the question to what extent agency is individual and/or social. To what extent is the agency of young people influenced by and related to peers, families, communities, institutional or economic actors? How do they perceive and deal with competing influences?

Max Weber's basic concept of social action conceives of action as an individual behaviour which qualifies only as social if it is related to others or takes expectations or actions of others into account. Similar, rational choice starts from the individual cost-benefit-perspective without considering neither social aspects of generation of meaning nor on the limitations etc ( f on tes e

One could say that the same applies for psychological concepts such as motivation and coping which normally are perceived as referring to the level of individual experience and behaviour. However, motivation emerges from experience with meaningful relationships with the world and with achieving or not achieving own goals through one's actions, experiences which are structured by and embedded in social relationships (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Bandura 1997). Also coping strategies – not only by relying on social support and networks – are socially learned, shared and can be empowered by social milieux (Böhnisch, 1997).

Social context is prominent in the ethnomethodological perspective which could be distinguished from Weber's social action inasmuch as it conceives of all action as social. Each single act results from and is embedded in the social context which is on the one hand to be seen as a repertoire of routines and shared meanings while on the other hand it is the life world in which individuals form their identities – through acting (Garfinkel, 1967). The parallel with symbolic interactionism is obvious. Actors meet a flow of situations in which they are confronted with opportunities and expectations to act. These situations provide the interactions which are the basis of the socialisation process. They transport potential meaning while they require (and allow) subjective interpretation as well (Blumer 1969).

Interactionist perspectives stressing the importance of social contexts – without undermining the subjectivity of actors – of course have also been relevant for Habermas' theory of communicative action (Habermas 1981). Here – similar to Giddens theory of structuration – the ambivalence of social context is referred to as limiting (in Habermas' case functional systemic integration or colonisation) and enabling (the social life world where subjectivities are formed through reciprocal recognition; see Honneth 1992). Concepts of identity point into a similar direction. Individuals meet role expectations which they can not disregard without risking to lose recognition and weaken their social position. However, identity requires identification which means integration of values and meaning into the own self. Thus, identity is not a singular, individualistic endeavour. In fact, belonging to social communities providing recognition and access to practice is one of the key aspects of identity, and this implies different qualities of families, peers, schools, or the work place with regard to different actions (communities of practice, Wenger 1999).

As already shown, Bourdieu is more concerned with the limiting aspects of social contexts. Social fields not only restrict what identities can be developed but also regulate access to the resources necessary to acquire them; or: inasmuch as resources are limited also possibilities to think, imagine and perform identities (habitus) are restricted (Bourdieu 1972; 1979). This is obvious in his concept of social capital referring to social contacts that are more or less

convertible into economic or cultural capital. While social reproduction through social origin, gender, ethnicity or region is also highlighted by life course research, a biographical perspective implies a dialectic between individual subjectivity and sociality – whether this is the cultural repertoire of ‘biographical normality’ or the restricted and unequal access to resources for biographical construction (Alheit & Dausien, 2000). By sociality Zygmunt Bauman refers to the fact that societies are more and more fragmented: sociality as procedural modality of a social reality in which all structures are regarded as results of social processes (Bauman 1995). Individualisation is “transforming human ‘identity’ from a given’ into a ‘task’ and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task” (Bauman 2000, p.31; cf. Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). Sociality bridges the interactive aspects of social relationships but also the resources and opportunities to which social structures give or deny access;

them? How can social structures be understood as resulting from human action? Do young people ‘make’ society – or do social structures react to individual agency?

Almost all social theories introduced so far include concepts and reflections in this regard. On a very basic level both Weber’s theory of social action and symbolic interactionism conceive of social structures as the result of regular, repetitive and routinised action. This idea is also central for ethnomethodological thinking which is concerned with ‘how’ people produce and reproduce social order by participating in everyday practice (routine). The question regarding social differences thereby turns into questioning processes of differentiation. This shift from asking “what (is different?)” to “how (difference is made?)” has deeply influenced social constructivist thinking on gender as a result of processes of classification, categorization and validation (cf. West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Compared to this, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus provides a much more stable picture of social reproduction according to which structures need to be kept alive while focus lies less on the possibilities of changing structures. Coping could be seen as the psychological concept which is most compatible to a more structuralist sociological concept of agency inasmuch as it concentrates on a homeostatic perspective whereby action emerges as reaction to stress induced from outside. In a way, the drive to survive (to maintain control and agency) is the residual category while the objective of agency is to re-establish the level of agency prior to a critical life event or external constrain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Zeidner & Endler, 1996; Böhnisch 1997).

In his theory of structuration, Giddens proposes to reconcile these perspectives. Men produce society, but they do so as historically located actors, and not under conditions of their own choice. Social structures consist of (partly constraining) rules, but also of enabling resources. They are dynamic and agency-driven. Structure and agency are conceived as a “duality of structure”, which cannot be conceptualized apart from one each other. Structures exist only in the consciousness of actors. Structures differ in their rigidity or fluidity which means that – despite of traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things – these structures can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently (Giddens 1984).

In a certain sense, Habermas’ theory of communicative action is a more comprehensive approach to reconcile structure and agency as it gives space to understand both realms separately as well as in their dialectic relationship. On the one hand, we find the individuals as subjects who negotiate subjectivities and identities in the context of their social life worlds on the rational grounds of mutual recognition. On the other hand, we find functionally

differentiated systems addressing individuals as (partly external, partly internal) objects. Individuals need to use systems in order to achieve their subjective goals, systems are defined by addressing individuals and regulating their actions. Systems are dependent on the individuals assessing their needs and interest and negotiating them in their social life worlds (whether this means motivation for learning or working or love as the basis for family formation). Habermas observes an increasing colonisation of life worlds by systems aiming at producing specific life world rationality while at the same time depending on a certain residual of life world communication functioning according to its own rules and thereby according to subjectively and personally meaningful purposes (Habermas, 1981).

With regard to biographic construction, Alheit and Dausien have phrased these dialectics between subjectivity and intersubjective recognition in terms of the sociality of the biography and the biographicity of the social (2000; cf. Apitzsch 1990).

Joas' theory of creative action implies – and in this he goes back not only to Dewey but also to Giddens – that social change does not only coincide with functional differentiation but is also implicit to the self-reflexive creativity of agency in general. In this regard, it may be useful to distinguish individual and collective agency where individuals intentionally coordinate their actions in order to achieve common goals and/or change social structures. In this, regard Alain Touraine – before the backdrop of a decade of social movements (the 80s) – starts from conflict as an important factor for the constitution (and change) of societies (Touraine, 1985). While history may suggest to qualify the strength of collective action in social conflicts, the individualisation thesis may be re-interpreted as a fragmentation of social conflict which all have to fight, solve and or avoid individually (and alone). Yet, the sum of these individually lived and acted conflicts results in (non-intended) social change – like for example the drop of the birth rate as a consequence of the multiple private decisions to postpone parenthood. Joas speaks of the “democratisation of differentiation” inasmuch as he observes the diversification of shaping modern societies and the structure of their relationships with their environment. Not only political decision-making but also institutions differentiate as a consequence of their permeability for the communication of the societal members (Joas, 1992).

Following these reflections individual agency actually contributes to social change. However, less in an intentional way but rather as a side-effect of following personal intentions which need to be achieved within and negotiated or fought for against existing structures.

### **2.3 Social change and the life course**

The interrelation between life course and biography is one key mechanism in which the two perspectives – individual agency and social change – merge (cf. Mayer, 2002). The life course organises individual lives according to socio-economic needs and societal patterns over time. In modernity life courses were becoming standardised with adulthood centred around employment and family reproduction as the cornerstones of social integration and citizenship. A set of regulating institutions such as the education system or the welfare state constructs roles and secures life phases according to age and gender (Kohli, 1985; Marshall et al., 2002). Transitions between life phases can be seen as vulnerable moments of ‘liminality’: being between two statuses (Turner, 1969). Therefore, trajectories are institutionalised, regulated by ‘gatekeepers’ and symbolised by ‘rites de passage’ (Eisenstadt, 1967; van Gennep, 1961; Glaser & Strauss, 1971; Hagestad, 1991; Heinz, 1992). Life course structures depend on reproduction through individual agency. The biographical perspective relates to the way in which individuals appropriate their life course, provide it with subjective meaning and develop motivation. They develop life plans, take stock of the own life history and assess their current life situation in accordance to needs and plans but also in response to external demands (Alheit & Dausien, 2000; Chamberlayne et al., 2002; Heinz, 2002; Settersten, 2002, Zinn, 2004). One of the concepts meant to mediate between the structural or systemic life course and the subjective biographical perspective is ‘normality’. While relating to institutionalised and widely accepted norms (e.g. work = integration) normality also provides biographical orientation, social recognition by and a sense of belonging to a wider social context. By deciding over the legitimacy of individual actions it is directly linked with the perspective of social change.

Life courses and related assumptions of normality are subject to social change. Based on full employment, mass consumption and a demand-oriented welfare state the Fordist period guaranteed social integration and citizenship for all who followed the gendered ‘normal biography’ (Marshall, 1950; Kohli, 1985; Böhnisch, 1994). We refer to social change as modernisation and as the shift to post-Fordist knowledge societies with flexibilisation and individualisation as their most noticeable characteristics (Toffler, 1981; Giddens, 1990; Beck, 1992; Sennett, 1997; Bauman, 2000; 2001; 2002; Rodrigues, 2002). While individuals remain dependent on life course institutions, resources and opportunities remain distributed unequally according to class, education, gender and ethnicity and reproduction occurs more and more through individual decisions. De-standardisation implies that transitions tend to turn from institutionalised status passages into permanent life situations. Not only life phases but also

life spheres – especially the classical markers of adulthood work and family – undergo a process of de-limitation (Voß, 1998; Böhnisch, 2003) while uncertainty and insecurity increase (Mills & Blossfeld, 2003).

De-standardisation has up to now been discussed with regard to youth transitions and their shift towards a ‘mosaic’ of reversible ‘yo-yo’-transitions which – chosen or forced – are characterised by the simultaneity of youthful and adult demands (EGRIS, 2001; Chisholm & Kovecheva, 2002; Walther, Stauber et al., 2002; Biggart & Walther, 2005). However, it extends also to adulthood and old age (Settersten, 2002) while young adults are a key strategic group having to cope with emerging new structures of social integration.

### **3. Family, citizenship, work: understanding young people’s agency**

In this chapter the different concepts of agency are applied to the three sub-topics of UP2YOUTH which represent markers of adulthood and social integration – according to the societal model of their parents and the institutions which govern social life:

- !" *young parenthood*: young people have to deal with the situation (critical task) of family building while neither the practice nor the meaning of family is no longer self-evident within male and female life courses;
- !" *civic participation*: young people have to deal with the expectation of engaging for the ‘common good’ while it is no longer self-evident what is common, good, how it can be achieved and whether and how the common is related with their individual lives;
- !" *transitions to work*: work is still a central prerequisite for social integration and education is the king’s road towards the labour market. As work diversifies, becomes partly more precarious and segmented, its integrative potential is being undermined. This affects especially youth with immigration and ethnic minority backgrounds. They are faced by the demand to act into insecurity and uncertainty although their resources are restricted.

Specific attention is paid to the emerging issues developed in the draft thematic reports.

#### **3.1 Family Transitions**

Starting from our considerations on social change means systematically regarding two perspectives in analyzing young parenthood: an individual actor-perspective, and a structural perspective from the concerned institutions and policies and the distribution of power and resources. One problem appears when trying to balance these perspectives: There is much more knowledge about the institutional side of young parenthood (demographic and socio-

economic data; policy measures) than the subjective side (motives for getting children, strategies how to deal with the new status, stress in managing daily life), and there is particular scarcity as to the *interaction* of both sides of the concept of structured individualization (see for an exception the 5<sup>th</sup> Framework Project “Transitions”, Lewis & Smithson 2005; du Bois-Reymond 2007: 4).

The core emerging issue of the synthesis work on “young parenthood” consequently has been, that for such an integrated approach much more has to be known about the transition process to becoming young parents, form a family, manage the new tasks and use informal and formal resources. More research on that subjective side of structure is needed – despite foreseeable *methodological* problems for us as comparative youth researchers, caused by the lack of fine enough indicators to apply to all research countries alike. Although there are many studies and statistics which inform about reproductive behavior in comparative perspective, no theoretical-methodological agreement about the parameters to be used could be found. The welfare regime typology proved useful for some questions – especially concerning broad family policy indicators; already less so explaining differential fertility rates, but insufficient for others – especially subjective and cultural factors. To place *young people as actors* in the centre of research points to a neglect in existing studies of the specific problems of parenthood of *young* people in transition: in this complex situation they are faced not only with their (future) roles and new obligations of parenthood but with many other problems and tasks as well which belong to modern trajectories. In other words, it is the *simultaneity* of different transitions and trajectories which has to be studied simultaneously *and* in comparative perspective; no easy task even for interdisciplinary research. Finally, as to the role of young people as *actors* of their life before and after (or not) becoming parents, it can be concluded that contemporary young Europeans are realists about their dependency on systemic constrains, labour market conditions in the first place. They are also sober about the benefits of state family measures. In none of the countries under consideration they feel that they are sufficiently supported by the state and the public at large. It is mainly in the field of childcare facilities where they miss support, not only in lacking facilities but just as painfully in the disharmony between working hours and crèche hours. Also housing is a big problem for young families and for starters who might put off parenthood for that reason. It would be worthwhile giving more research and political attention to this aspect in relation to the life plans of young people and couples.

Starting from here, we nevertheless found, that young parents actively deal with a whole series of structural limitations to enfold the full potential of their agency:



- First of all: the postponing of parenthood already implies agency: young people actively draw their consequences from more and more complex transitions into adulthood (see Mauceri & Polliandri 2007).
- They try to combine family and work, despite the fact that labour markets in almost all our countries only badly respond to the needs especially for young people.
- They struggle for equality between the genders despite there are partly extreme gender pay gaps which give favour to patriarchal role division among the partners (the one with the lower salary – the mother – is staying at home respectively reducing her working hours)
- They manage child care despite of a lack of available and affordable public childcare facilities in all countries (with the exception of Bulgaria and Slovenia).
- They try to find a place to live despite there is a lack of available and affordable housing in all countries.

With the concepts of agency in mind, one could ask in how far young women and men in their transitions to parenthood correspond to the Weberian distinctions within social action – and above all to the approach which in his succession has been developed as rational choice theory. Whereas the value expectancy approach could perhaps correspond with the multitude of motives young women and men are driven, the pure rational choice approach clearly shows its limitations: It has been used within public discourses on the so-called “welfare-mothers”, blamed for intentionally getting pregnant (to an early stage of their life) in order to get benefits. And it is also used to blame high-qualified academic women for their “egoism” – not wanting to give up their career for becoming mothers. While both blamed groups of women display a much broader set of motives which drive them or hinder them to become mothers (symbolic, cultural, emotional, relational issues of all kind), we would argue that young women and men are realistic enough to see, that family building requires – besides a reliable partnership – a fairly stable economic, material and infrastructural basis – be it in terms of income and housing, be it in terms of employment prospects, be it in terms of (public) childcare facilities. A big part of them (here we necessarily need to stay vague by default of differentiated studies on the variety of attitudes) are realistic enough to evaluate their decisions to become parents against this background – which already is indicating agency in their transitions to parenthood. One hint is the sharp discrepancy between the (higher) number of children wished for the own family and the (much lower) number of children in real life, which we can observe in all our countries. These discrepancies might have different reasons in different countries.

But: transitions into parenthood are also a complex process, for which more differentiated explanations are needed. Here, symbolic interactionism and the ethnomethodological approach are much more appropriate to grasp transitions into parenthood in their complexity. With these approaches to agency, the dynamics which partly intervene in decisions and strategies to become parents can be understood, e.g. aspects such as a re-traditionalization of gender roles among partners when getting their first child. While there is general evidence on this phenomenon, empirical evidence is spurious, available only in some countries (see for Germany Fthenakis et al. 2002). There is a lack of knowledge on how parenthood is negotiated between the partners (see for Sweden Bergnéhr 2006) which adds to a lack of knowledge on the effects of media imagery on motherhood and fatherhood. It can be assumed that both levels – the one of daily routines and the one of media representation – might have further influence on the decisions and strategies of young women and men, and might leave their mark in terms of gendering effects (see for a more concretizing approach to the ethnomethodological concept of doing gender (West & Zimmerman 1987) the considerations of Ridgeway and Correl (2004) and also Deutsch (2007), for gendering practices Yancey Martin (2003)). But how and to which extent the latter occurs has to be specified in detail by further empirical research.

One important hint for such further research is given by the approach of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) who highlight the (varying) interplay of temporal dimensions: it seems to be highly relevant for our topic to explore in detail the iterative moments in young mothers' and fathers' agency, which relate to traditional models and normalities of parental roles, but also to specific family traditions how to relate to such models, or to individual experiences in the past leading to a specific interpretation of such patterns. Structural factors have their impact on this iterative dimension, and so does the set of imagery of fatherhood/motherhood. They are in a way framing the context in which concrete action is taking place. Also prospective components have to be considered: self-concepts of young women mean how they sketch their lives and see themselves in the nearer or farer future. The interesting question is how young women and men would contextualize the contingencies of the moment. And if and how they would fall back to (gendered) role conceptions in order to achieve some security.

If agency is regarded as a time-related process of interaction, studies which distinguish these time-related dimensions are expected to shed light into these complex transition-making processes (see the Learning Lives project, where this approach has been applied within biographical case studies, Biesta/Tedder 2006). If agency refers in one way or the other to overcoming problematic situations, or to “the capacity of actors to critically shape their own

responsiveness to problematic situations” (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 971) (or, in terms of pragmatism: to indeterminate actor-context transactions) and is not understood as creating different ‘futures’ just for the sake of it, we can locate social change and transformation within agency. As agency may vary from situation to situation, learning in this regard turns out to be such a difficult concept: Learning new practices (or un-learning habits) is important to achieve agency, but it is not sure if in a next situation this learning aspect would be supported or affirmed, or on the contrary would even force the young mother/young father to come to “new” solutions, which eventually look like very traditional ones. To put it more concretely: a context which allows young parents to opt for an equal partnership with shared responsibilities can be counteracted by another one in which the young father has to present this model to his employer. This example by the way indicates a severe problem of many young mothers and fathers, pointing to the time-lag which exists between the so-called private life and institutions respectively official policies.

This differentiated background (young parenthood as deeply rooted processes of social interaction which rework past, present and anticipated future, all of them transporting symbolic meaning), could now be transferred to concepts such as communicative action or creative action: How would young women and men in their present agency choose between different options, create new ones, draw practical and normative decisions, step into communication and negotiation with each other (within their partnership, with former partners, within their family of origin etc.), network (with equally concerned young mothers/fathers)? How can the solutions to which they come by communication and negotiation correspond with what Joas has described as creative action? In UP2YOUTH this concerns e.g. the question in how far young adults do create new spaces for political influence, and do create – by different mothering and fathering – new concepts of fatherhood and motherhood, and in how far they manage to establish new routes of transitions to work within a highly structured context.

Last but not least, we can ask with Giddens: How, by applying these different modes of agency, do young women and men re-structure or change former patterns of transitions into parenthood and create new structures? But (with Bauman) this question has to be enlarged: where would they need more public sphere to negotiate life politics acknowledging their ways of doing parenthood/doing family/doing gender (differently)?

Here we come closer to research issues emerging from the initial statement out of our state-of-the-art: Of course, and despite of disadvantageous conditions, we have hints regarding a lot of agentic shaping of transitions into parenthood in young women and men every day’s

practice. This agency can be regarded partly as traditional, partly as innovative, in a big variety of ways to do it, and always full of ambivalences. There is a lot of learning and informal policy implicit in young parents' agency. But these aspects often are not so obvious, which has to do with a still existing split between so-called private and so-called public discourses. Although some 70e aspeene

post-Fordist large flexibilisation can be connected to different processes such as the rise of the service sector, information technology and the knowledge economy as well as the partial decoupling of employment from education and globalisation. However, in the late 1970s when unemployment started to become structural and affected larger parts of the workforce, life courses were affected drastically by these economic changes. While for the older age groups this was for a long time compensated by the social insurance and social security systems, young people's transitions from education to work changed more significantly as the direct passage from school to work has lost its 'normality'. Phenomena like youth unemployment, lack of training possibilities, and the mismatch between qualifications and labour market demands have been complemented by atypical and precarious work arrangements from fixed-term contracts to involvement in the informal economy (Roberts, 1995; Müller & Gangl, 2003). This picture of changed transition structures however needs to be complemented by young people's coping strategies. In fact, many young people try to cope with uncertain transitions by balancing between formal trajectories – staying on in education and accumulation of qualifications – and keeping options open. Yet, persistent high rates of early school leaving and dropping out from training schemes accompanied by sub-cultural retreat suggest that many do not expect that adaptation pays off in terms of improved opportunities (du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Kieselbach et al., 2001; Julkunen, 2001; Furlong et al., 2003; Hammer, 2003; Bradley & van Hoof, 2005; Biggart, 2005; Weil et al., 2005; Leccardi, 2005; Walther et al., 2006). Public policies addressing changes in school to work transitions by developing new training professions or deregulating of conditions of labour market entry may be interpreted as means of re-standardisation. Raising school leaving age, postponing benefit entitlements and activating for lifelong learning may be seen more on the side of flexibilisation although distinctions are not clear-cut (Walther, Stauber et al., 2002; López Blasco et al., 2003). However, young people also react to policy changes. Especially in the Central and Eastern European transformation societies, many struggle with taking choices in and navigating through flexibilised education systems (Kovacheva, 2001). Others withdraw from coercive activation schemes and opt for a 'status zero' – beyond any registered activity (Williamson, 1997). In the meantime also careers and occupational positions of adults have undergone massive flexibilisation with transitions into unemployment, re-training, part-time work, self-employment, fixed-term contracts or between formal and informal work (Kieselbach & Mader, 2002; Chamberlayne et al., 2002; Steinert & Pilgram, 2002; Pfau-Effinger, 2003; EC, 2004). While more and more individuals are effectively concerned with transitional work situations de-standardisation affects also those who are not (yet) directly

concerned. The knowledge of the possibility of unemployment increases insecurity for all through higher work pressure, increased competition, higher qualification requirements, or reduced securities connected to standard employment arrangements (Asplund & Johansson, 2003; Whelan, 2004).

Social change in European societies is closely related to processes of mobility and migration although this refers to a broad range of situations if one takes old and new streams of immigrant workers into account, some in the second and third generation, immigrants from former colonies, refugees and asylum seekers as well as ethnic minorities with a long history as the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe or the Travellers in Ireland (EC, 2003). Research on ethnic minority and migrant youth for a long time has been dominated by a problem perspective relating to school and transition failure in terms of language deficits, the ambiguity of “living between two cultures”, young women retained in traditional gender roles (Breckner, 2002), or involvement in criminal activities. In the 1990s a growing body of research showed the emergence of new types of youth identities marked by hybridity (Hutnyk, 2005), multi-culturality and trans-cultural social spaces (Rex & Singh, 2003). Belonging to an ethnic minority began to be looked at as a source of particular biographical and social resources (Chamberlayne, 2002) corresponding to challenges of post-modern life such as flexibility and cultural diversity (Bauman, 2001).

At the same time, research on transitions to work showed the relative perseverance of “old” factors which influence young people's access to different societal positions such as socio-economic background, gender and ethnicity (Andersson, 2003). Migration and belonging to an ethnic minority has to be seen as a multi-generational project bearing the risk of losing family's cultural and social capital due to a lack of recognition of these assets in the host society. Differences in European societies how education systems and immigration policies succeed in managing diversity need to be taken into account (Heckmann et al. 2001; Castles & Miller, 2003; Singla, 2004).

Individualisation processes represent a double challenge for ethnic minority youth. Not only do they face difficulties of social integration in youth life, education and the labour market, they are also immersed in changing references and values and have therefore difficulties to function in a late modern individualised world. That often creates contradictions with their cultural background, especially when they have to depend on family support. In fact, young people from ethnic minorities develop collective and youth cultural forms of coping that are often antagonistic to mainstream society as well as to their family cultures (Roy, 2004). While many young people are able to manage these challenges, others react by dropping out from

training schemes and develop subcultures which often are stuck in disintegrated arenas (Walther et al., 2004). In this situation they are not only experiencing discrimination or racism but also frustrations in their ambitions for becoming recognised in every day life and the integrative arenas of school and work.

The working group on young people with an ethnic minority or migrant background's transitions to work deals with a huge diversity of groups in the countries involved in the group: from recently arrived juvenile refugees or young people from re-unified families over descendants of families who immigrated in the 50ies and 60ies to ethnic minorities who have been in the respective country for centuries. The groups are as diverse as migration history of the countries under study. But, the reason to include them into the study is a common background: they all share the experience of being labelled as “ethnically” or even “racially” different and are thus subject to structural and individual discrimination.

Two strands of questions have been prevailing in the social sciences dealing with ethnic minority and migrant youth in the past decades. One is comparing these groups with their “autochthon/indigenous”, “native” or majority counterparts in respect to their achievements in education and training: what are the reasons for their largely unfavourable results in the education system? Another strand of research often deals with their situation as newcomers or minority members: how do they cope with belonging to an “ethnically” different group? How do they cope with a life between “two cultures”? While there has been a paradigmatic shift in many European countries from looking at deficits to analysing difference, the amount of research that stresses the active role of young people from ethnic minority and migration backgrounds in shaping their transitions is still small. Therefore we know a lot about the limitations to agency in their transitions. Research and debate centres around the following barriers and limitations that affect their transitions:

- Young people from ethnic minority and migration groups on average reach lower educational credentials than young people in general. Although there are exceptional groups where the opposite is true, namely young Eastern European immigrants or young people from Latin America in Spain, this education gap is especially striking for young people from Roma communities.
- A lack of cultural capital stemming from the lack of proficiency in the dominant language and/or the devaluation of qualifications acquired in the country of origin.

- Most of the groups in our study face negative ascriptions and prejudices that hinder their access to the labour market. Individual and structural discrimination affects their integration into the higher segments of the labour market.

This results in a situation where unemployment and precarious jobs can be found in significantly higher shares among young people from ethnic minority and immigrants communities.

The question of agency in the transitions to work can be regarded with an approach drawing on Bourdieu's theory of social action and his theory of capitals. Young people from ethnised communities often possess less recognised social capital. Especially one could argue that the weak ties that labour market theorists have identified as playing a crucial role in getting access to certain parts of the labour market seem to be affected by the power gap between minority and majority groups. On the other side, using habitus as a way to understand the transmission or inheritance of inequality could lead to an analysis of the class aspects of ethnic minorities' and immigrants' situation: in some countries, the inequalities in the education systems are less pointed or even fade away if the socio-economic and class background status of parents is accounted for. One potential contradiction of this analysis could consist of the tendency of segmented assimilation we can see in some countries. Segmented assimilation means that contrary to the expectation that ethnic disadvantages (in educational achievements and labour market success) would vanish over the generations, some groups display a picture that features the opposite: in Germany and in Denmark, the second generation of immigrants performed worse in OECD's PISA tests than the students who arrived newly to the country while parts of this generation reach similar outcomes as the "native" Danes or Germans.

Habitus could also be used as a key to analyse the influence of inter-generational and family relationships on decisions. Is the fact that girls and young women have less problems with the education system in some countries due to the traditional gender roles that make boys and young men get more into conflict with institutions? With regard to the role of the family our findings are puzzling as well: in Spain the lack of family ties is regarded as a negative influence on young immigrants' access to the labour market while in other countries kinship relations often are regarded as social barriers that limit young people's occupational choices in the sense of „bounding social capital“. In the same vein, some theorists explain educational disadvantage by the lack of investment of immigrant families into the human capital of their children explaining this by the comparably high social costs that these investments bear and the potentially lower investments in social and cultural capital of the ethnic community



reference group. Therefore the role of communities for the agency of young people with an ethnic minority or immigration background can be analysed under the perspective whether they provide resources for active ways to cope with transitions to work or whether these communities rather limit the scope for agency by bounding young people's social capital.

Coping theories and identity that stress the creative ways of dealing with multiple reference points and social spaces in young people's transitions point to the shift that has taken place in migration research. "Living between two cultures" is no longer regarded as a problem per se, but more and more scholars are interested in the creative ways young people from a migration or ethnic minority background draw on the different sets of values and traditions they have access to. Their ways of constructing their identities are seen as highly inventive, creating new social spaces in between cultures and across spatial boundaries. One important question in this regard is: which individual factors do contribute to an "inventive" way of dealing with multiple value systems? Is this inventive strategy bound to high resources? In racialised and ethnised societies, what limits do young people face in imposing these new identity constructions against the mainstream? How can these new forms be converted into cultural capital? Can young people really "choose" their identities with so many powerful ascriptions related to their ethnic belonging? One productive way to look into these questions is to take up ethno-methodological conceptions of agency and look for everyday practices in youth scenes and communities where ethnic minority and immigrant youths are represented. How do they "do" and "undo" difference (cf. Featherstone, 2000; Butler, 2004) – particularly, do they find pro-active ways in dealing with negative ascriptions? This is also a very important question for the policy side of our research: how can institutions like public education "undo" differences in the sense of a reflective way of dealing with them without neglecting the inequality attached to these differences?

Temporal modes of agency are highly relevant for all inter-generational constellations of young people from migrant or ethnic minority backgrounds: The iterative mode of agency coined by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) is a particular good way of reasoning over the situation of the second and third generation of young people from labour migration families. Their parents migrated to join the working classes of (mostly) Western and partly Northern European countries at the time of "The Short Dream of Everlasting Prosperity" (Lutz, 1984). With post-industrial restructuring, their way of integrating into the labour force is vanishing. Many researchers and practitioners point to the eminent lack of reachable role models that descendants of labour migrants have to face. Therefore the question would be in which way their coping strategies are related to their parents' visions and outlook of life. Can their youth

cultures be regarded as sub-cultures any more? Another question would be in which way young people take up and vary traditional values and roles. Future prospects as a mode of agency comes into play if we look at the growing number of people with pluri-local relationships to social spaces. On what factors does it depend whether young people develop transnational identities and pluri-local forms of relationships to the spaces they have access to? So far, we are assuming an adult status in which local identity, certain boundaries of solidarity and active citizenship coincide. Which consequences do transnational and other „multi“-identities have on these concepts?

### *3.3 Civic participation*

The third major contribution, besides family building and working, expected from members of a society is their engagement and responsibility as active citizens. This question refers most explicitly to the overall objective of UP2YOUTH concerning youth as actor of social change. At the same time it relates to a growing concern of adults with the political participation of young people especially with regard to dropping election rates and declining membership in organisations. This development can be explained by the process of individualisation, especially early experiences of independence and negotiation of young people in the context of liberal educational practices as well as through the diversification of consumer lifestyles which are at odds with long-term obligations and commitment. However, they also discredit the leading political class and point to the malfunctioning of the political system. At the same time, various studies show that in fact young people are highly interested in being involved in collective projects and related learning processes – if they are considered and taken seriously as actors and if they can reconcile it with their lifestyles (Loncle, 2002; Lister, 2003; Loncle & Rouyer, 2004; Paakkunainen et al., 2004).

At the same time, a considerable part of young people encounter difficulties to reach full social integration in their transitions to work, parenthood, housing, welfare etc. If young people are not recognised as active citizens in all these areas, this damages the political legitimacy of these institutions (Held, 1995; Giddens, 1994; King & Stoker, 1996; France, 1998). This question is all the more pressing because young people belong to the main users of public services (not only educational institutions but also public transport, welfare services, public spaces, etc.). Therefore their opinions about and perceptions of these services are important and must not be neglected by policy makers. In fact, active citizenship and participation of young people affects the intergenerational renewal of values and solidarity – in particular through the financing of welfare systems. If young people are not involved in

society as full actors, the social “pact” itself is endangered (Hirschmann, 1970; Williamson, 1997; Geddes, 2000; Walther et al., 2006).

Attempts to bring young people (back) into the political system represent a major challenge which on the European level most prominently is documented by the White Paper on Youth (EC, 2001) while on local and national levels youth councils and youth fora are being implemented (IARD, 2001; Matthews, 2001; Lagrée & Loncle, 2001; Dwyer, 2005). However, one may critically assess participation policies as being restricted to the ‘soft’ areas of youth policies (e.g. youth work). In a cross-sectoral perspective, ‘hard’ policies such as education and training, welfare and labour market programmes either do not refer to participation at all, or only in a merely formal and passive way: participation as attendance rather than as influence. This is reflected by the fact that the most disadvantaged groups – ethnic minority youth among others – are largely underrepresented in and obviously not attracted by participation programmes (Walther et al., 2004).

The starting point of the thematic working group on participation is the observation of a decline in young people’s participation whether these are election or membership in organisations. The discussions in the working group therefore centred around the meaning of participation. While political participation represents a narrow definition of engaging in formally accepted and institutionalised settings, civic participation encompasses a variety of forms by which (young) people engage in communal affairs whether these are associations, initiatives, or short term projects and campaigns. This includes also a variety of – mostly local – programmes designed in order to attract and increase young people’s participation. It was however also suggested to include activities of young people which normally are either addressed as non-participation (e.g. non-voting), criminalised and stigmatised (e.g. squatting and riots) or referred to as riskful leisure (skating, public drinking, joy riding). In the following the key issues emerging from the draft thematic report are related to the dimensions of agency as elaborated in section 2:

! *What is the impact of the process of individualisation on young people’s participation?*

Individualisation refers to social change of the relationship between individual and society in the sense that social integration depends more on individual decisions whereas collective patterns become weaker. With regard to participation this means first, that the *meaning* of participation changes – for each single actor in a different way – and that this meaning evolves from trying to realise own interest in the public rather than being imposed by pre-defined goals and forms; rejecting certain forms of participation may

stand for subjective *intentionality* which does not find spaces and ways for expression. Second, the relation of participation to *social contexts* is being fragmented while also the relation between individual participatory acts and the overall process of social integration are changing. Rational choice theory tends to interpret a decline in political participation and steady involvement in associations that certain collective forms are no longer seen as effective for reaching individual aims whereby also the value of democracy is weakened. In contrast to this, Joas argues: “The concept of participation reveals the wish for public and liveable sociality and for an effective creative activity in the community which has not yet been eradicated by the tendencies towards privatisation.” (Joas, 1992, p. 374) Therefore, in a more comprehensive view it might be worth asking how the meaning of action (participation) is (re)constructed individually and collectively. Rather than a discrepancy between individual and collective goals the problem might lie in a decrease of possibilities of interaction in which individual needs are communicated and linked with collective structures. Nancy Fraser has referred to this as the late modern tension between redistribution and recognition in creating social justice (Fraser 1997). One might argue that more and more consumption and the media are the only collective spheres of action and experience (in fact ‘participation’ in terms of exposing oneself in TV and on the Internet shows increases; see communicative action, interactionism). The diversification and de-standardisation of life courses makes it more and more difficult to identify institutionalised forms of action as helpful for a meaningful life. Existing forms of participation are either too far away from own issues or experienced as not effective to make a difference (see coping, motivation, biographical agency). In sum, the relation between identity and sociality needs to be reproduced constantly and individually under conditions of lacking opportunities. Of course this needs to be differentiated inasmuch as *structures* of social inequalities may reflect different experiences with institutions (and collective forms of action) contributing to one’s own life which implies also that skills and knowledge necessary for active participation are acquired to a different extent. These inequalities are reflected in the iterative structure of agency inasmuch as, past habits (“participation does not make a difference for me”) are transformed into anticipated identification (“probably it will not make any difference; how could that be?”) and into defining situations of potential participation as requiring own action (“they do not mean me; this has nothing to do with my life”).

Consequently, a broad definition of participation needs to include all activities of young people which are carried out in the public and which are at least aware of their being

public. And – following the YOYO project (Walther et al., 2006) – it needs to include young people's attempts to take control over their lives in the context of public institutions such as youth policy and youth services, education, labour market policies or welfare.

! *Learning to participate – participation in learning*

A wide-spread position is that most young people lack the competencies needed for active participation. In fact, these are used to legitimise young people's restricted scope of participation. In short, learning and education are related with participation in a double way: young people's lack of participation justifies a restriction of participation at present while education programmes and participation programmes are designed in order to educate young people for later participation. In schools, students councils' competencies largely restrict to issues of school culture (cultural activities, parties, shaping the school yard) while curricula, qualifications and disciplinary questions are decided top-down. At the same time in civic education, young people are taught the acknowledged routines and meanings of participation in order to make sure that they contribute to reproduce the established forms as adult citizens – in elections and as market actors. Implicitly however, young people often learn from involvement in this practice that participation does not refer to situations which are relevant for their lives but restrict to formally delineated themes and social fields. Their practice is being shaped by the ideologies and normalities inherent to situations of action which affect both the generation of motives and the development of a feeling of influence, control or self-efficacy. Ambivalent experiences of young people with participation in school are reported from different countries such as France, Italy and Slovakia where students' councils have only recently been introduced. In this regard, from a relational pragmatist view, non-participation can be interpreted as 'learned alienation'. German educationalist Michael Winkler (2000) argues that pedagogy (learning) relies on subjective processes of appropriation while being expected to take place within pre-structured and hierarchical settings according to educators' intentions. It therefore depends of being – partially – replaced by the political principle of participation, that is spaces in which meaning and practice are negotiated (Habermas, 1981; Bauman 2000). One could thereby argue that intentional civic education programmes in fact may have contradictory effects while self-initiated actions are often disregarded or inhibited. A core question in this regard therefore is whether young people are taught to accept sets of practices and meanings as given or to interpret them subjectively according to their own needs and interests and to change them accordingly. The focus on learning maybe implies trying to understand how young people develop agency in the public: how they relate past,

present and future – and how they select among different pasts, presents and futures in creating their acts; how they imagine themselves in the social public context and how this is reflected in their actions (cf. Joas, 1992).

! *To which extent does youth culture influence the forms of youth participation?*

In the draft thematic report reference is made to youth cultures some of which are termed ‘counter-cultures’. This term addresses both critical political movements as well as certain leisure scenes of sub-cultures. This refers to the fact that current participation programmes represent specific meanings of participation (meaning related both to the values and objectives implied as well as to the means and routines applied; cf. Giddens, 1984): there are pre-defined practices and symbols which mark a social field of participation requiring skills but also resources such as social capital (cf. Bourdieu, 1990). Our concern here is to scrutinise different forms of participation which may appear at the margins or even contradicting participation in the view of public authorities. On the one hand we refer to examples of political scenes reported in the Italian and Austrian reports such as squatting as a different culture of claiming autonomy and housing or anti-globalisation protest as a transnational networked community (connected by globalised media and youth culture). These groups/actions refer to the same issues which are also dealt with by formal politics from which they feel excluded and they express their alienation from the meaning officially connected to these topics and the practices applied as rational to achieve them. They relate to formal politics while consciously or not applying different practices of public action. On the other hand, we refer to cultural forms which do not primarily understand themselves as political but centre around leisure activities. A phenomenon which is so widespread that it has almost become a cliché but at the same time is a very good example is the scene of skaters (reported in the Irish report). Skaters occupy public spaces, first because of their extension and material (surface), second because of the visibility they provide. Skaters organise in loose scenes (qualifying for urban tribes rather than rigidly organised associations) and they compete with other groups in their claim for using public space. They thus use interstices of social space (Giddens, 1984) in order to introduce new forms of practice. The apparent materiality of their claim (space) makes them a favourite objective for consulting youth in processes of policy making because achieving a visible result – the skate park – seems feasible without interfering into the social order (cf. Weller, 2006). In fact, this neglects the process of meaning making involved in these scenes and in their public practice and the fact that as much as the practice itself their development is – through the process of meaning-making – is closely

related to the identity constructions of the actors. In fact, they may use the park while continuing to perform in public spaces – and only then the issue becomes politicised from both sides. In the French report it has also been argued that even burning cars in deprived suburbs needs to be interpreted as attempt of getting one's voice heard and to become visible. Young people in the riots of 2005 made reference to their citizenship rights which they felt restricted by the policies responsible for the conditions in the suburbs. The term of creative agency here is relevant in its broadest sense: produce, change, provide visibility (cf. Joas, 1992). Youth cultures are contexts in which sociality and identity are linked, related, integrated. They provide access to how young people – from their specific points of view – actually are involved in and contribute to the societal meaning making process, how they perceive and value sociality and the public, how they link past and future within present situations and how they relate it to their own identity work (Fornäs, 1995; Mørch, 1999; Stauber, 2004).

! *To which extent do policies facilitate participation experiences?*

If one agrees with Bauman's claim for public spaces in which new socialities can form, with Habermas claim for discursive negotiation, with interactionist and pragmatic insights into the need of social interaction, into coping and biographical agency requiring a linkage between collective situations and individual lives these are some criteria against which policies addressing young people may be assessed for their degree of participation. In contrast, their un-attractiveness for young people – rather than ascribing it to young people's lack of understanding of democratic procedures – may be interpreted as failing in becoming meaningful for the addressees. An interesting suggestion has been made by the social geographer Christian Reutlinger (2005). He describes current participation models as 'containers' as they are detached from young people's life worlds and the situations they have to cope with. Instead he suggests for 'maps of coping' where the spaces and situations in which participatory action might be meaningful for young people can be identified. Concluding, one may argue with Bauman that participation in late modernity means "more, not less, of the 'public sphere'" (Bauman, 2000, p.51), possibilities to congeal and condense "private troubles into public interests that are larger than the sum of their individual ingredients ... so that they can acquire once more the shape of the visions of the 'good society' and the 'just society'" (ibid.).

Summarising, one may analyse participation of young people according to

- the *meaning of participation* which has for the concerned actors and which emerges from interaction; if life situations, transitions, biographies diversify it is less and less likely that individuals succeed in relating participation (as well as society at large in general) with their own lives, their coping with uncertainty and their search for subjective meaning;
- the way how participatory actions evolve as temporal and relational processes as much as creative acts; how they oscillate between *routine* and *self-reflexivity*;
- whether communication, exchange and intersubjective production of meaning succeed depends also on the *positions of individuals* in societies, their access to processes of meaning-making but also to resources of agency; marginalized positions may imply experiences that involvement in institutionalised forms of action does not make a difference;
- what social contexts are relevant for acting individuals; where they see participation as relevant for themselves, where they see meaningful connections between their subjective identities and the society, how *sociality* is inherent to and expressed by their subjective identities;
- how their participation (in a broad sense) contributes to the *change* of the social contexts in which they are involved – but also what change of social contexts might acknowledge and empower their participatory acts.

### ***3.4 Culture and learning: keys to young people's agency in social change***

In order to take account of the specific choices and strategies young men and women adopt under conditions of social change, in the UP2YOUTH project two dimensions have been selected as keys to understand young people's agency: culture and learning.

#### ***Culture***

The fact that young people take actions differently with regard to family, citizenship or work compared to the generation of their parents and to the expectation of institutional actors may be either ascribed to different demands and constraints by which they are confronted, or it may be interpreted as different cultures of practice, of parenthood, work or citizenship.

Culture is one way of understanding the meaning of practice as it evolves both individually and collectively. It embodies the sets of practices developed by groups, communities or societies. These sets of practice are the totality of social actions which are interlinked within a given social context and which share values, principles and norms. Thereby they represent the



repertoire from which individuals construct meaning and relate it to specific forms of practice. Relating agency to cultural change implies that also practices and meanings might change – or that established and new forms of agency coexist and compete. The perspective of cultural differentiation has not only been referred to with regard to youth cultures, subcultures and life styles. It is also being discussed with regard to the linkages between social inequalities and cultural differences (diversity).

Cultural meaning-making for Weber was the counterpart to civilised-technical instrumental rationality. Parsons has developed this idea further, but his idea of culture as an integrative moment of the functional differentiated society often has been questioned. Do individuals internalise culture, i.e. norms, as a limitation to their egoistic maximising the personal profit attitude or does culture serve as a cognitive frame for the development of new cultural expressions (Goffman 1974)?

Symbolic interactionism relates agency and culture by looking at culture as a repetition of environmental and mental artefacts in day-to-day interaction. Ethnomethodologists would go one step further and rather look empirically at the meaning individuals make of culture, and at the ways *how* culture, i.e. distinctions and ascriptions, is made through social interaction and changes over time. Here we can find some closeness to Giddens concept of the duality of structure, which points to this meso-level of (re-)producing structure. These ways not necessarily can be reconciled with a rational choice approach, because of their abdication of intentionality. Here, instead, pragmatist approaches stress the impact of an everyday agency picking up traits from the past, which – with respect to future perspectives – are reworked over and over, thereby never only confirmed by but also adapted to current demands.

Also Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and its relationship to the societal status hierarchy and the reproduction of inequality is useful to relate culture to the agency perspective.

Youth research has taken up these approaches in many ways. The concept of subculture and studies conducted with this concept (especially in the tradition of the Birmingham CCCS (Willis et al 1991; Fiske 1987) argue that youth subcultures function as a way to satisfy two basic developmental goals: developing individuality and developing sociality.

Debates among scholars in youth studies discuss whether this concept is still able to analyse youth cultures appropriately. Some argue that consumption and lifestyles can cover individualised forms of symbolic meaning-making better (Miles, 2000). There are also authors who argue that concepts like scenes or neo-tribes (Bauman) are more apt to describe the meaning of cultural activities and symbols than the concept of subculture. Shildrick and MacDonald (2006) have re-introduced the concept as a way of addressing young people's

active strategies of dealing with inequalities and risks of exclusion; strategies which – due to their marginalized social position – tend to be disregarded, devaluated, stigmatised or criminalised by societal institutions. David Muggleton (2000) argues that contemporary subcultures display modern or postmodern sensibilities and forms, and that in their practices which relate to postmodern hyperindividualism, fluidity and fragmentation run alongside a modernist emphasis on authenticity and underlying essence.

Beyond these youth sociologist debates, the issue of doing culture in youth cultures for UP2YOUTH is relevant in various respects: Concerning transitions to young parenthood, a lot of young people's agency is dealing with a reconciliation of youth cultural life styles and new roles as fathers and mothers, and a lot of this agency is focussed on struggling for a new and more fitting (gendered) imagery. Concerning civic participation, youthful political articulation almost cannot be discerned from youth cultural features: on the one hand late modern political movements such as e.g. the anti-globalisation-movements do enfold a (youth) cultural activity, on the other hand youth cultures themselves are to be seen as participatory movements in terms of their use/appropriation of (public) space, in terms of the shaping of imageries by symbolic policies, in terms of identity policies (e.g. the shaping of gender identities). Although mainstream/dominant culture and subculture in late modernity cannot be discerned that clearly any more, those young people who are engaged in these movements often at the same time are engaged in identity policies based on distinction. For transitions of immigrant and ethnic minority youth (sub-)cultures are – at least in public discourses – under big suspicion; these discourses neglect that in the meantime and against the background of globalised youth consumption most of these sub-cultures cannot be grasped with the term “traditional” or “anti-modern”, but represent post-modern cultures that build new traditions from the demands they encounter and the cultural frames from which they emerge (Werbner&Modood 1997). Under the umbrella of “transnationalism” the pluri-local and dynamic forms of negotiating identity and culture become the focus of migration and post-colonial studies (Salih 2004, Vertovec 2005, Grillo 2007).

### *Learning*

The other key to the specific ways by which young people address parenthood, work or citizenship relates to skills and knowledge they dispose and the extent to which they match the demands and constraints they face. Strategies and practices are not intuitive but are developed and/or incorporated through the socialisation process. Learning both implies and enables action. Learning first, relates to meaning inasmuch as it includes the appropriation

and subjective interpretation of the culture of shared meaning; second, it refers to the acquirement of knowledge which allows for rational assessment, judgement and planning (of actions) as much as of skills through active practice; third, it means self-reflexivity, that is consciousness of the own agency or the self-concept as being an actor. While Weber's theory of social action does not refer to learning explicitly, it implicitly relies on processes of constructing meaning and of deve

in meaningful action. The concept of ‘learned helplessness’ (Seligman, 1975) refers to a socialisation process structured by experiences of failure which is ascribed to own inadequate action. The double reference towards learning applies also for the concept of coping. Coping strategies reflect individual knowledge and skills while learning is also a form of coping with new demands and uncertainty. The less individuals can rely on role models or on knowledge regarding the demands of the situation they face, the more they can only invent or explore coping strategies which implies explorative, experimental or spontaneous learning (by doing). According to the ESRC Learning Lives Project, “There is at least a double relationship between agency and learning possible. On the one hand the project seeks to understand how learning impacts on agency, both positively and negatively. The question here is how different forms, practices and processes of learning influence the capacity of individuals to give direction to their lives. On the other hand the project seeks to understand the implications of agency for learning. Here we can think, for example, of situations in which adults consciously decide to engage in forms of learning, for example to overcome particular problems, deal with challenges or give their life a new direction or at least create the conditions for doing so. The fact that the Learning Lives project focuses on learning

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While these aspects are dealt with excessively in existing research (documented as well in the draft thematic reports), we will concentrate on how different institutional arrangements which means different constellations according to which nation states regulate individual life courses through education and welfare. We start from the model of transition regimes which distinguishes the ways in which socio-economic, institutional and cultural structures contribute to different ‘normalities’ of being young and growing up.

The model has been developed from typologies of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990, Gallie and Paugam, 2000; Ferrera & Rhodes, 2000) which distinguish socialdemocratic/universalistic, conservative/corporatist/employment-centred, liberal, and mediterranean/sub-protective types of welfare states. The term of regime refers to the power that such constellations have inasmuch as they do not only explain the rationales of policies but also serve as makers of individuals’ biographical orientation. However, a regime typology should be misunderstood as describing different realities, it clusters different groups of national transition systems which are similar in their Gestalt of addressing youth and young adults. The weakness of the model lies in differentiating within regime types and in understanding social change. This shows especially in the problems in dealing with non-western societies, be it Central and Eastern European countries or contexts in Asia, Africa or Latin America. Transition regimes have taken into account the following dimensions:

- ! Structures of *welfare* in terms of state versus family responsibilities and the conditions and rules of individual access (Esping-Andersen 1990; Gallie & Paugam, 2000).
- ! Structures of *education and training*, especially in terms of the extent to which school systems allocate pupils to different educational pathways with unequal outcomes (stratification) and the standardisation of education and training qualifications (Allmendinger, 1989; Lasonen & Young, 1998; Shavit/Muller 1998).
- ! Structures of *labour markets* differentiating organisational systems of labour market entry implying on-the-job-training and considerable mobility in the early career stages, and occupational systems in which initial careers are more stable due to standardised training relating to the needs of and acknowledged by employers. This affects the degree to which labour markets are open or closed to outsiders (Smyth et al., 2001; Müller & Gangl, 2003).
- ! *Policies against youth unemployment* result from the relationship between education and training, welfare and labour market structures; they may prioritise re-entering education, re-training or direct labour market entry (McNeish & Loncle, 2003). They reflect different explanations for youth unemployment as well as the different ways of interpreting

‘disadvantaged youth’ as either resulting from segmented labour market structures or stemming from individual deficits (Walther, Stauber et al., 2002; Walther et al. 2006).

- ! Mechanisms of *doing gender* are a cross-cutting dimension allocating young men and women to the same or to different trajectories that in turn can be of equal or unequal status and perspective (Sainsbury, 1999).
- ! Finally, ‘behind’ different institutions *varying representations of youth* can be identified, that is based upon the social expectations of young people (IARD, 2001; Walther, 2006).
- ! With regard to the issue of immigrant and ethnic minority youth it needs also to be taken into consideration how access of newcomers to *citizenship status* is regulated. In this regard, Heckmann (2004) distinguishes three modes of integration: the republican mode aiming at providing immigrants citizenship status on the basis of which no distinctions are made (France), the multicultural mode which lays focus recognising diversity regardless of citizenship status (UK, NL), and the welfare-oriented mode according to which immigrants are primarily addressed with regard to the social problems which they have and/or create (all others).

With regard to the interplay between socio-economic, institutional and cultural structure transition regimes may serve for the comparative analysis of the scopes of action young people have in different contexts. Therefore in the following, the existing model is applied to the three topics of young parenthood, participation and transitions to work of immigrant and ethnic minority youth to work and also to the set of countries involved. This allows either to identify relations between the different scopes of action young people find in different context with regard to family, work or participation and wider social, institutional and cultural normalities, or – in case that the model does not ‘fit’ for all themes and countries to the same extent – it means that the model needs to be differentiated and revised.

### *The universalistic transition regime*

...in Nordic countries is based on a comprehensive school system. General and vocational routes lead four out of five school leavers to post-compulsory qualifications opening access to higher education. While regulated according to nationally set standards, education and training are being increasingly diversified to allow for individual learning and training plans. Training is mainly school-based but includes various practical elements and internships while also being steered according to labour market demands. The relation between individual rights and responsibilities is embedded in the collective regulation of social responsibility.

Social assistance is available to young people from the age of 18 and is linked to their citizenship status (therefore the term ‘universalistic’), while those who are in formal education or training receive a comparable income in the form of an educational allowance. Counselling in all stages of education, training and the transition to employment aims to primarily reinforce personal development and motivation, which is the primary definition of youth in these societies. Universalistic youth policy addresses youth as a resource not only for society but – in terms of a biographical resource – for the individuals themselves. As a consequence, there is an expectation that young people should be in education rather than in the labour market. Even within labour market activation programmes the importance of choice is acknowledged in order to ensure individual motivation. Although disadvantage is ascribed to the individual in terms of not being ready for an individualised choice biography, policy responses aim to (re)open structural access towards regular and recognised options. Despite of the deregulation of policy since the early 1990’s the share of precarious work arrangements has remained low while the extended public sector provides a broad range of opportunities. This is reflected in high rates of female employment. As long as young adults remain within ‘the system’ they are encouraged and supported to experiment with their educational paths and welfare options.

In UP2YOUTH the universalistic regime type is represented by *Denmark* and *Finland*. However, the two countries perform quite differently. While Denmark has low levels of youth unemployment, in Finland these are above EU average. Competencies according to PISA are much higher in Finland than in Denmark although education can be seen as the core ideology of the Danish transition system much more than in Finland. There – due to the high levels of youth unemployment – active labour policies play a much bigger role. Denmark also stands for the approach towards *flexicurity*.

*Transitions into parenthood:*

A clear characteristic of the universalistic regime type with regard to family building are generally generous welfare subsidies in order to guarantee early financial independence of young people from their families of origin and a specific variation of the male breadwinner model: There is a high female employment in the Nordic countries (around 70 % in all Nordic countries), which is facilitated through the broad public service sector and a widespread system of public childcare, whereby young women do not have to anticipate problems in reconciling childcare and employment. Female part-time work is between 18 % (Finland) 34 and 37 % (Sweden) (male: between 9 (Finland) and 12 % (Denmark and Sweden). But: if part-time work gets necessary due to child-care obligations, it is mostly done by women (in Sweden: to 90% done by women). At the same time the fertility rate is high in EU comparison (in 2004, Sweden: 1.75; Denmark: 1.78; Finland: 1.80). This gives evidence that countries with more effective reconciliation policies have not only higher female employment rates, but also higher fertility rates. The fact that age of birth is lower than in many countries of continental and Southern Europe can be also explained by a better

economic situation of young adults due to more generous welfare states, but also by the fact that especially young Danes are younger when they enter the labour market while also those in higher education encounter child care and assistance.

*Transitions to work of immigrant and ethnic minority youth:*

In terms of unemployed youth, priority lies on re-integration into the education system providing second chance opportunities for personal development and life planning rather than quick labour market insertion. With regard to immigration, the Nordic countries operate on the basis of the welfare-oriented integration mode which means that on the one side immigrants and their descendants are incorporated into the support systems of the welfare state. On the other hand this means that they are looked upon from a deficit perspective. In sum, immigrant and ethnic minority youth represent a challenge for the Nordic welfare and education systems as they do not seem to be able to provide immigrants and their descendants with qualifications at a similar level as members of the majority. In labour markets which are regulated on the basis of qualified work this undermines young people's long-term perspectives for stable careers. Although the situation largely varies – also due to the differences in the number of immigrants present in the respective country which varies from about 2 per cent in Finland to above 8 per cent and more in Denmark and Sweden.

*Civic participation (no countries involved in the thematic working group):*

The specificity with regard to participation in the universalistic regime type lies primarily in the meaning and implementation of individual citizenship status which guarantees all individuals from 18 years onwards full social rights. For young people this means that also in 'hard' policy sectors such as school and welfare policies they enjoy individual rights. An example is the Swedish youth policy bill from 2004 aimed at securing young people "the power to decide – the right to welfare". Activation in labour market policies is interpreted in a wide sense while leaving participants options for choice. In schools and training courses students choose and follow individual education plans. Schools provide non-formal education to some extent so that a 'soft' policy approach is operating within the 'hard' sector. At the same time this has the consequence that the scope of an independent sector of youth work is narrower than in other less education-oriented transition systems. However, in general youth policies address young people as citizens whose citizenship statuses includes the task of life style development which implies choice and active influence (cf. IARD 2001). Recognition of non-formal education has been forwarded, especially in Finland through the national youth organisation Allianssi.

The degree of membership in organisations and associations is rather high. Only 25% (38% in Finland) do not belong to any association (Eurobarometer 2001).

### *The liberal transition regime*

... stands for the model developed in the Anglo-Saxon countries, which value individual rights and responsibilities more than collective provision. Education in most regions is organised along comprehensive lines until the age of 16, with some exceptions. Over the last few decades, post-compulsory education has been developed and become more diverse, creating a flexible system of vocational (school and employer based) and academic options



with a variety of entry and exit points. Up until the early 1980's a majority of young people entered the labour market directly after compulsory school at the age of 16. Unemployment benefits or jobseekers allowances are available for all persons from the age of 18. However benefit levels are low and increasingly time-limited so that universal access does not contradict the high level of emphasis placed on personal responsibility in the compensation of social risks. The assumption of youth as a transition phase that should be completed as quickly as possible which otherwise is addressed as a 'problem' is still reflected within youth policies which are classified as community-based because they intervene mainly where this early transition is in danger. Correspondingly, the main objective of unemployment programmes is labour market entrance and individual responsibility is claimed through workfare policies such as the New Deal. Education and training options tend to be short-term and of variable quality. The labour market is characterised by a high degree of flexibility and is weakly regulated in terms of qualifications with many access points. This has resulted in a high rate of female employment with female unemployment rates lower than among men. However, the trend from male full-time manufacturing jobs to female part-time service jobs has resulted in an increasing share of the population, and in particular women, that are confronted with precarious work conditions. Women also bear the main responsibility for childcare due to a lack of public provision. The liberal transition regime is characterised by flexibility that provides a diversity of access options but also results in high individualised risks for young people in their transitions.

In UP2YOUTH the liberal regime type is represented by the United Kingdom (with a focus on England and Northern Ireland) and the Republic of Ireland. Recent policies addressing young people have undergone changes in terms of increased state activity, yet following an understanding of inclusion that refers to individuals as self-responsible market actors, e.g. by flexibilised education trajectories and compulsory activation programmes.

*Transitions into parenthood:*

Some elements of a liberalistic regime type are clearly represented by the United Kingdom and Ireland: Due to such liberalist welfare policy, at-risk-of-poverty rates are high. Ireland is the European "leading" country with about 23 % females and 20 % males at risk of poverty; the United Kingdom is not much below with percentages of 19 % females and 15 % males at risk-of-poverty in 2002 while rates for young people tend to be even higher). Teenage pregnancy is extremely high in the United Kingdom with 26,9 %, and – partly related to this phenomenon – the United Kingdom has the highest percentage of single parents (mostly mothers) in Europe. This is increasingly being addressed in terms of welfare dependency. Therefore activation programmes such as the New Deal for Single Parents aim at their re-integration into the workforce). Fertility rates are with 1.8 for UK (and almost 1.9 for Ireland) among the highest in Europe.

On the other hand, the United Kingdom has a relatively high female employment rate (69,1 % in 2005), despite of mostly private child care. There has been a strong labour market flexibilisation, however the UK of today is the country with lowest levels of fixed-term contracts. The country has developed a strong service sector; not surprisingly, the UK is (after the Netherlands) the second with high female part-time work (around 43 % in 2004). A particular factor in the Irish Republic is the cultural heritage of the Catholic Church, where traditional family ethics narrow the scope for young women to develop individual careers and church-related third sector organisations play a major role in providing services to vulnerable youth.

*Transitions to work of ethnic minorities and immigrant youth:*

Contrary to England, Wales and Scotland in Northern Ireland as well as in the Republic of Ireland secondary education is differentiated. The economic boom of the late 1990's has shown that developments in modernising the training system have not been deeply rooted in the transition system, as with the increasing demand for labour, neither employers nor school leavers pay much importance to vocational qualifications. With regard to ethnic minorities and immigration, the UK as a post-colonial state has seen different routes of immigration: besides the early and on-going immigration from former colonies and Commonwealth states, there has been a recent trend for the UK to become one of the prime countries for refugees from most of the crisis areas of the world and for labour migrants from Eastern Europe with Poles having become the largest immigrant group in recent years. The same trend holds for the Republic of Ireland which as a traditional emigration country since the 1990ies has become a country with significant intake of immigrants. In contrast to the welfare-oriented mode of integration, the UK has long followed a multicultural model of integrating ethnic minorities and immigrants. This means that anti-discrimination plays a larger role in transition policies than in other European countries where compensatory measures have a stronger focus. Nevertheless are the outcomes in terms of unequal access of some ethnic minority groups to labour market significant. Especially young people from Black African, Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds face higher rates of unemployment than the average population. For some groups this even counteracts their relative success in accessing higher education and calls for a closer look into the ethnic gap on the labour market itself.

*Civic participation:*

The participation discourses can be distinguished by a more participation driven discourse in the UK and a discourse relying on social capital in Ireland. In the UK participation programmes rely on the positive notion of the autonomous citizen. This is increasingly reflected by rather large scale participation programmes and policy directives. Youth councils and youth fora are wide spread (Matthews, 2001). In the course of this, interesting models develop such as young people making up 50% of boards responsible for distributing EU-funds in a city or young people included in evaluating youth services (Ray & Pohl, 2006). In the education system choice is possible between courses due to flexibility while participation within educational courses is limited. But the modularised system allows permeability between youth work and education in terms of recognising non-formally acquired competencies (e.g. the ). Important actors in this regard are the National Youth Agency and the National Agency of Adult and Continuous Education. With regard to labour market policy, the New Deal offers choice among options in case of unemployment, however only among limited options while non-compliance is sanctioned.

In Ireland, participation is much more interpreted in terms of voluntary engagement which however is endangered by the economic boom due to which young people can earn their leisure activities through paid employment to a higher extent. Youth councils or youth parliaments exist in most municipalities while their influence varies and/or is criticised as being too limited. An important role in promoting youth participation plays professional youth work which is characterised by a strong community-based approach.

43% (Ireland) respectively 53% (UK) of young people are not members in any association or organisations (Eurobarometer 2001).

In terms of counter cultures reference is made to youth cultural scenes rather than to political movements.

### *The employment-centred transition regime*

Continental countries are indicative of the corporatist or *employment-centred* transition regime. In these contexts secondary education is typically organised on a differentiated basis that selects and allocates young people to different educational and occupational careers of different status. Vocational training can be school-based like in France, company-based, like the dual apprenticeship system in Austria and Germany, or mixed as in the case of the Netherlands. In all cases it is highly formalised and reproduces a rather rigid employment regime with a protected core, in which women are clearly under represented, and a precarious periphery. This is reflected in the structure of the social security system that distinguishes between high levels of compensation for those who have been regularly employed and paid sufficient social insurance contributions, and a residual system of social assistance that provides a basic but stigmatised safety net (therefore ‘employment-centred’), only the Netherlands apply a guarantee system where all young people are entitled to social assistance on the basis of their citizenship status. The concept of youth is centred on the allocation and socialisation of young people into social and occupational positions. Youth policies comprise youth work as well as youth services which are characterised as protective because focusing on the potential deviations from the normal life course (addressed as need of assistance). Youth unemployment correspondingly is interpreted as resulting from deficits in socialisation and educational attainment or social skills. Programmes are designed to compensate such deficits before re-integrating young people into regular training and employment. The exception to these individualised programmes is the ‘emploi-jeunes’ programme in France, which created additional regular jobs in the public sector. In general, yo-yo-transitions in this regime mean that young adults have to navigate between the strong demands and implications of standard trajectories, and the construction of an individual career; a process of

reconciliation that they have to pursue individually against the normative power of institutional assumptions.

In UP2YOUTH *Austria, France, Germany* and the *Netherlands* represent this regime type. While Germany comes closest to the idea type, the Netherlands are a hybrid type including also traits of the liberal and the universalistic regime type. In Austria and the Netherlands youth unemployment is rather, in Germany it has reached medium level while in France it is above EU average.

*Transitions into parenthood:*

In countries of the employment-centred regime type, female employment is medium in Germany (albeit with differentiations between East and West), Austria; in France, female employment is also high in young mothers due to the availability of public child care; in the Netherlands, which is not clearly related to this regime type, we have Europe's highest share of female part time work including women into the labour market without questioning female responsibility for family and care. Regarding gender and family policy, the internal differences within this regime type have to be highlighted: First, Germany regarding crucial aspects of our topic (the availability of public childcare, the normality of working mothers etc) still is two countries; Second, France is more similar to the universalistic regime type than to the employment-centred regime type. Indeed, in France the state is as engaged in family policies as in the Scandinavian countries (7<sup>th</sup> German family report 2006); and the gender pay gap in Germany, the Netherlands and Austria is 20% resp. 18 %, but in France it is 12 % (EC 2007 – Gender report). Due to an extended system of crèches (écoles maternelles), gainful employment of mothers in France is self-understood. At the same time, fertility rates in France are the highest in Europe (1,94). France belongs to those European Countries, which (after Sweden and Latvia) have the highest amount of children born out of the wedlock. In France – contrasting to the other countries of this type – the decision to have a child is defining young adults' autonomy, and not the other way around: that young people are forced to organize the prerequisites for their transition to parenthood.

*Transitions to work of ethnic minority youth:*

According to the PISA-study of the OECD the German selective school system contributes to the most unequal educational outcomes across Europe. While access to higher education is restricted to only a third of a cohort, the dual system of apprenticeship, which is culturally based on a normative concept of work as 'vocation', represents a monopoly in providing access to acknowledged non-academic careers. Yet, the decrease in apprenticeship places over the past two decades has increased competition, forcing those with low school qualifications into the 'holding patterns' of pre-vocational schemes, which do not necessarily improve their starting positions. Corporatism in Germany also is at the heart of the integration mode for immigrants: integration is primarily organised along the lines of welfare organisation. In France, the same type of transition regime mixes with a different mode of integration. The republican mode of integration of immigrants and their descendants focuses strongly on their formal status as citizens which leads to a certain tendency to ignore everyday discrimination practices. This contradiction may sound ideological in the ears of young people feeling discriminated in the labour market and in their neighbourhoods. France as another employment-centred regime in terms of immigration has a completely different tradition than Germany. The „republican“ model of integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants is largely based on the status

of immigrants as „citizens“. Therefore positive action is not very wide-spread in the transition system as it is not foreseen in this model to treat any „ethnic“ group differently.

*Civic participation:*

The citizenship status of young people (also beyond the age of 18) is limited inasmuch as social rights are dependent on prior work or the family (until 27 in Germany). The selective formal school system does not leave a lot of scope for individual choices while, especially in Germany and Austria, early differentiation channels students into different tracks according to performance whereby choices at later stages are additionally narrowed. In schools students councils are wide spread but their competencies are restricted. The company-based dual training system in Austria and Germany implies the possibility of membership and representation in and through the trade unions which however is rapidly declining. In Germany, non-company-based training measures explicitly exclude trainees participation by law.

In labour market programmes, young people do not enjoy choices while activation is primarily interpreted as recruiting individuals for a restricted range of measures.

The German Children and Youth Service Act from 1991 includes various dimensions of participation with regard to local youth policy planning as well as with decisions regarding placements in public care etc. However, it is one of the key contradictions of the Act that services address parents rather than children and youth whereby support against the parental will is hardly possible. On the local level forms of participation are developing but often rather formal (e.g. youth parliaments). In youth work participation is a central principle but the sector is strictly separated from formal education and youth services.

Membership in associations varies from 46% in France, 59% in Austria and Germany (here much higher in the West than the East) to 79% in the Netherlands (Eurobarometer 2001)..

Among counter cultures alternative political movements, right-wing and nationalist groups as well as youth cultural scenes are relevant. “The riots” in France represent a phenomenon of collective but un-organised resistance while students’ protest has a longer tradition.

*The sub-protective transition regime*

... applies primarily to the Southern European countries. Characterised by a low percentage of standard work places, coupled with a high rate of unprotected living conditions, which gives rise to a specific ‘dualistic’ welfare regime in which the family and informal economy play a significant role. Compulsory education is structured along comprehensive lines and at least until relatively recently early school leaving rates were high as school qualifications were not perceived as a reliable resource on the labour market. Vocational training is not well developed; and is largely provided through professional schools with a low level of company involvement. Due to the economic weakness within many regions and the focus of employment law in protecting (male) breadwinners, youth transitions are even more prolonged than in the case of the other regimes. Young people are not entitled to social

benefits and tend to be employed in unstable jobs, either in the informal economy or through fixed-term contracts. The centralised approach implies Youth policy development started late and still is weakly implemented both locally and nationally. Young men and women are almost completely dependent on their family of origin until they have a stable job, and in most cases they only move out when they get married and start their own family.

Segmentation and structural deficits contribute to the high rates of youth unemployment, particularly among young women for whom biographical choices are additionally reduced through traditional family values and a lack of public childcare. Higher education plays an important role in providing young people with a status in this waiting phase. Policies that address youth transitions can be characterised by the discrepancy between comprehensive reform and the heritage of structural deficits in implementing reform. The main policy objectives are to prolong school participation, to integrate and standardise vocational training, to strengthen labour market policies through incentives for employers, and to develop career guidance and assistance with self-employment. In brief they aim to provide youth with some form of institutionally recognised status, be it education, training or employment. Unlike other regimes yo-yo-transitions do not develop against the dominant assumptions of youth but through a social vacuum that is compensated by a prolonged period of dependency on the family.

In UP2YOUTH, this regime type is represented by *Italy, Portugal and Spain*. The structural deficit of the transition system is most obvious in *Italy* where also region matters. In the South youth unemployment reaches 60 per cent and even higher among females. In contrast, the North West with a prosperous past of car manufacturing during the Fordist period is now undergoing a period of de-industrialisation. Finally, the North East is a wealthy region with a dynamic structure of small and medium enterprises and high levels of self-employment. The region is also well known for its innovative social policies, especially on the local level, due to a strong left wing political culture. In *Spain* young people also react to the difficulties of labour market entry by remaining within education, which leads to considerable over-qualification. While unemployment has considerably fallen over recent years due to flexibilisation and deregulation policies, young people are increasingly affected by precarious work conditions. The rate of fixed-term contracts is the highest within Europe where labour market entrance does not necessarily make young people independent from their parents. *Portugal* has developed as one of the most dynamic labour markets of all the Southern European countries in the past decade has become a model for European cohesion policy. Yet its society continues to be structured by a stark contrast between rural areas where child labour still exists, and urban areas like the metropolitan zone of *Lisbon*. Here in contrast, social problems culminate with integration problems of immigrants from the former African Colonies such as the Capverdian Islands, or youth from other ethnic minorities such as the Roma.

*Transitions into parenthood:*

In Italy, Spain and Portugal explicit family policies are broadly underdeveloped. Family issues traditionally are regarded as a private topic. Therefore, fertility rates did decrease extremely within the last decades. These countries - formerly known for big family sizes – today are the European leaders of one-child-families. Especially young families have disadvantageous conditions due to a rather difficult entry into the labour market: unemployment rates among younger people are rather high (with rates for the 15 to 24 year olds between 24% for Italy, 19,7 % for Spain, and 16,1 % for Portugal in 2005, see EU-LSF), and especially young adults are confronted with precarious work and limited contracts. Educational attainments of young women are considerably higher than those of men, but gender gaps with regard to employment rates still exist to a high extent, above all in Italy and Spain.

Only scarce options of public child care are available, although in European comparison there are even bigger “laggards” as concerns this problem (countries such as Germany, Luxembourg, and the countries of the liberal regime type). However, the Spanish government, which since 2003 engages in a national family policy, forces employers to set up child care facilities on a private basis.

With regard to the “normalities” of family building, especially for Italy a regional approach is unavoidable: whereas in the North those who can afford start to have higher numbers of children, in the South the “modernity” of having one child has arrived. This at the same time is an indicator for dealing very carefully with terms such as “traditional” or “modern”.

*Transitions to work of immigrant and ethnic minority youth:*

Spain, Portugal and Italy only recently have faced the change from emigration to immigration countries. Beyond the huge differences between these countries they have in common that the transitions from education to work being lowly formalised one dominant route for young people is the direct transition into unskilled and semi-skilled work. This trajectory is especially pertinent to the majority of young people from immigration backgrounds as they often issue out of the education and training system with lower qualifications than „native“ groups.

Integration policies of new immigrants follow the same pattern as transition policies: they are weakly institutionalised. One feature of this policy approach has been that quite important amounts of immigrants in an undocumented situation have had the opportunity to naturalise, e.g. in Spain.

*Civic participation:*

The structural deficit of life course structures in education and welfare – reflected especially by the lack of benefit entitlements of young people – extends to youth policy and to established means of participation. In all countries, the introduction of youth policies on a national level is a rather recent phenomenon.

While youth work is developing in terms of ‘social and cultural animation’, the development of local youth policies occurred strongly through implementation of youth information centres. This may be seen as a non-directive, participatory approach addressing young people as active individuals. However, at the same time this neglects different access to and use of information according to gender, region and education.

Youth councils and youth fora exist in few municipalities. The development of the youth sector involved to a large extent the third sector which means that through voluntary engagement young people can participate (depending on the ideology of the organisation). Membership in associations accounts for 30% in Portugal, 35% in Spain and 44% in Italy (Eurobarometer 2001).

Among counter cultures alternative political movements are important (anti-globalists, urban Indians, squatters) while also youth cultural scenes and right wing youth play a role.

### *The situation in post-communist countries*

... is much more difficult to allocate within existing regime types and at the same time too diverse to be reflected by referring to a single post-communist regime type. First, up until now limited data and research findings make it difficult to relate them to existing models. Second, these countries share the heritage of a political system in which individual and collective issues were largely organised by the state while transformation processes have increased the differentiation between these societies.

In a certain way the old model combined aspects of the employment-centred regime, where all spheres of life were organised around employment, with universalistic traits such as the right to employment. The communist state gave every adult reliable access not only to an income but also to housing, public childcare and social security, although individual choice was restricted. Women's employment rates were almost as high as those of men and included jobs in technical professions and in middle and high management positions. Education and training were integrated and closely tied to the needs of the planned economy.

In the current situation, compulsory education continues along comprehensive lines. In secondary education and especially among school-based vocational routes there are difficulties in keeping pace with accelerated economic change and private training providers and third sector organisations tend to enjoy a higher level of credibility. Public career guidance provision and labour market policies also have a poor reputation. Although, immediately following the socialist period unemployment benefits and social assistance schemes were introduced to which young people were also entitled, over the past decade these have been curtailed and thresholds of eligibility raised (Kovacheva, 2002). Where family resources are available young people accumulate education while waiting for a secure career, emigrate to find employment, or alternatively set up their own business. Women are not only restricted to labour market opportunities to a much greater extent than under communism, but also have to compensate for the decline in public services for the family.

The increasing differences among countries in Central and Eastern Europe are partly related to economic performance that was already apparent during communism and to the extent to which the rural population has benefited from careers in administration and industry (like in the former GDR; but something that has drastically changed following reunification). Many rural people remain in low qualified jobs within agriculture, in particular among the Roma



minority. Other aspects result from the policy choices taken by post-socialist governments in terms of privatisation, institution building and also in their orientation either towards the liberal or employment-centred model in dealing with increased unemployment, however in some cases the reality is closer to a sub-protective model (cf. Roberts et al., 1999; Barnes, 2003; Walther & Pohl, 2005). In sum, the transformation process has induced a process of individualisation in which the range between opportunities and risks is even greater than in Western societies. Young people who have been affected most by labour market and welfare restructuring have to cope with the ‘leap’ into post-modern complexity (Kovacheva, 2001).

Transition countries involved in UP2YOUTH are *Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia* which in itself represents a high degree of diversity. Slovakia and Slovenia joined the EU in 2004. Since then *Slovenia* has been in some respect with referred as one of the model countries not only towards other new member states but in general, for example for its lifelong learning policy, low youth unemployment and high expenditure on education. *Slovakia* in the first years was characterised by one of the highest youth unemployment rates. Policies concentrated on attracting foreign capital by lowering taxes and introducing activation policies to make the labour market more fluid. The most disadvantaged group are the Roma who are affected by unemployment, poverty, low schooling (often in special schools) and open discrimination. *Bulgaria* and *Romania* stand for those post-socialist countries with a difficult struggle with the process of transformation. Although unemployment rates are lower than in other Central and Eastern European countries young people are affected by a considerable lack of career opportunities. One reason is that many are not registered but statistically fall under the category of ‘inactive’. The societies are structured by ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, especially German and Hungarian (in Romania), Roma, Turkish and Muslim (in Bulgaria) minorities.

#### *Transitions into parenthood:*

Despite of very heterogeneous starting points and routes of the post-socialist countries, some common heritages can be stressed: there is mostly sufficient public child care facilities, at least when looked from a quantitative perspective, and there are still rather high rates of female employment, mostly as full-time workers. Some, but not all of these countries still have a lower mean age of women when getting their first child (see e.g. Slovenia with 28,8 years), and the fertility rates are rather low (between 1.14 in the Czech Republic and 1.33 in Hungary). However, there are far more differences between these countries, and therefore putting them under one umbrella is almost impossible: Whereas a group of four eastern European Countries (Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia) allows young people earlier independence from their families of origin and follows the route of employment centred regimes (albeit – with the exception of the Czech Republic – youth unemployment rates are high), Slovenia would much more fit to the universalistic model with its well developed youth policies, and also with the country which provides excellent parental leave facilities for young parents. The south east of these countries (Bulgaria, Rumania and the instable and (still) war-torn former Yugoslav republics) represents a type of de-institutionalized system, which also affects the whole structure of family policies. Housing problems are big, and the dependency from the family of origin is strong.

And a last group of former members of the Soviet Union again in itself is very heterogeneous (see Kovacheva 2006).

*Transitions to work of immigrant and ethnic minority youth:*

Although the post-communist countries in central and Eastern Europe have a negative migration rate, i.e. more people are moving out of these countries, they also are seeing an increase in immigrants, though still on a low level. While immigrants still represent only small proportions of the population, Romania and Bulgaria are the countries within UP2YOUTH with the highest shares of Roma minorities. The social exclusion of some Roma communities has very negative effects on the educational attainment and the transitions to the labour market of young people from these communities. In some countries, especially Hungary and Slovakia high percentages of young Roma attend special schools which reproduces socio-economic and socio-cultural segregation while unemployment in some communities reaches exceeds 75%.

*Civic participation:*

In post-socialist countries youth participation is ambiguous and structured by a number of key factors. The process of restructuring youth policies is still in progress. For example in Slovakia the decentralisation of competencies has contributed to a structural vacuum in many regions and municipalities (Council of Europe, 2005). This vacuum is often filled by NGOs who are shifting between shadowing statutory institutions (like for example the national youth council in Slovakia which at the same time represents only a few youth organisations) and operating at grass-root level while networking on (and being funded by) a European or global level. These NGOs enjoy a high level of credibility while state bodies often are still distrusted due to the communist legacy and a perceived lack of effectiveness in shaping the transformation process (important especially in countries like Romania and Bulgaria; cf. Machacek, 2004; Walther et al., 2006).

In education, there is divide between progressive lifelong learning policies implying also the recognition of informal competencies like for example in Slovenia and differentiated, selective systems (including a high share of special schools where especially children and youth from the Roma community are over-represented) like in Slovakia.

Local youth councils or youth fora are being implemented in many municipalities although there is little knowledge as regards the sustainability of these experiences.

For the moment no figures are available concerning membership in organisations.

Relevant counter cultures are political movements in the big cities but increasingly also right-wing, nationalist scenes.

## *Conclusions*

Although based on a rather narrow range of evidence, our analysis allows to pose two questions with regard to the model of transition regimes:

- Is the model applicable also to issues such as young parenthood, youth participation and school to work transitions of ethnic minority youth?
- Do the different transition regime types correspond to different scopes of biographical agency of young people?

1) As regards the question regarding the appropriateness of the model for issues neighbouring transitions to work the following aspects appear to be crucial:

- With regard to *young parenthood* there is a clear correspondence with other features of the regime types including the hybrid position of the Netherlands displaying universalistic and employment-centred traits and the fact that differentiation is needed among post-socialist countries. A country which displays similar hybrid traits at least as regards young parenthood is France where universalistic principles of family policy coexist alongside employment-centred structures, education, welfare and labour market. An issue in this regard may be that so far cultural, and especially religious or confessional aspects have been neglected which may be of high relevance especially with regard to family issues (Pfau-Effinger, 2004; van Oorschoot, 2007).<sup>3</sup>
- With regard to *youth participation* the issue is less obvious. At first, except of political participation, the issue – despite of political rhetoric – seems to be so low on the agenda that too little research has been undertaken in the countries involved in order to allow for comparability. Obviously membership in organisations is higher in employment-centred and universalistic regime countries than in liberal and sub-protective ones while participation seems to be higher also in the hard policy sectors in the Nordic countries. As regards to explicit participation as well as with regard to the recognition of counter cultures however there is no sufficient evidence.
- With regard to the *school to work transitions of immigrant and ethnic minority youth* the situation is ambiguous. On the one hand the model covers quite well the area of transitions to work and the measures addressing disadvantaged youth. However, on the other hand there are difficulties when it comes to immigrant and ethnic minority youth. First, policies with regard to the legal status of immigrants and ethnic minorities seem to follow different rationales than welfare, education and labour market policies; second, policies, especially in the Nordic countries, seem to perform less successfully with regard to minorities than in

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<sup>3</sup> Regime types regarding the topic “transitions into parenthood” only represent a very broad framework of analysis, which sometimes even is misleading: In two of these regime types, differences between the countries are so big, that they hardly could be subsumed under one header. This is the case in the employment centred regime type, where France in many regards is very different from the other countries subsumed under this type; and it is even more so the case within the cluster of the formerly communist countries, where a rich and in terms of welfare policies highly developed country such as Slovenia hardly can be compared with countries such as Bulgaria or Romania. And even internal differences within countries are enormous, so that for some of them a regional approach would be much more appropriate. This is the case e.g. in the unified Germany with still big differences between East and West, and this is the case in Italy, with almost non-comparable situations in the North and in the South. But one has to be careful again: this regional approach would not fit to a country such as Bulgaria, where ethnicity is defining life situations much more than region.

general; third, the immigrant and ethnic minority populations differ considerably as regards size, origin, and everyday practices of integration.

It needs to be taken into consideration that modelling transition regimes primarily refers to institutional logics rather than to performance (e.g. different unemployment rates between Denmark and Finland) inasmuch as many structural differences do not result solely from different ways in addressing and shaping family, work or citizenship while different economic dynamics need to be taken into account as well.

2) As regards a more general assessment of young people's scope of biographical agency there seems to be some correspondence with the model. In this regard, available options for choice may be a fruitful indicator for different "space between because different structures impact" structure and agency (Settersten & Gannon, 2007). This seems to be higher in the universalistic regime than in the other contexts. Scopes of agency and choice are least guaranteed institutionally in the sub-protective regime and in post-communist countries, especially as Bulgaria and Romania, and to some extent also Slovakia, are concerned. In the liberal and employment-centred regimes this is ambiguous. While in the UK and Ireland choice is provided, there is limited evidence that young people are effectively empowered to use available options and supported to cope with the respective risks. In the employment-centred regime choice is restricted institutionally in education and training while welfare tends to reproduce rather than balance inequalities (except for young women's orientation towards reconciling work and family in France).

At the same time it can also be argued that regime differences account less the higher the social, economic and cultural capital young people have at their disposal.

## **5. *Doing society differently? Conclusions for social integration and social policy – or: "the concept formerly called 'life politics' "***

Relying on an understanding of changes of the youth phase which reflect fundamental changes of life course structures we suggest to interpret young people's agency not only in youth sociological and youth policy categories but in theoretical terms of social integration. What is to be learned for social integration at large if one analyses how young people act under conditions of social change? What does it mean for society in general and for the institutionalised life course in particular if they 'do' family or parenthood, citizenship and work – that is the key markers of the adult status – 'differently' compared to previous generations and compared to the assumptions of normality governing state institutions? State policies aim at including young people 'back' into the institutionalised life course structures

from which both social change as well as their attempts to shape their lives have diverged. This on the one hand may be interpreted as increasing discrepancy between social and systemic integration (Giddens 1984). On the other hand it may be seen as undermining social integration itself – or leading to anomie (Durkheim) – as means of systems integration themselves prove to be dysfunctional.

What concept of social integration is the answer, if agency has been the question? From the work done up to date in UP2YOUTH we would a perspective towards social integration which starts from individual and collective coping strategies on an informal level. In all three topics – transitions into parenthood, civic participation, and transitions of immigrant and ethnic minority youth to work – it is quite obvious that analytical attention<sup>4</sup> has to be re-balanced. Albeit structural, institutional and cultural frameworks for doing transitions cannot be left out of sight, especially not, when we are talking about social integration, much more attention has to be given to the ways *how* within young people deal with structures with regard to the three thematic strands, *how* institutions are used, and *how* culture is reworked. In short: re-balancing analytical attention towards social integration means to give more weight to the *agency* of young people. This includes different challenges:

The first challenge is to highlight informal aspects without ignoring the formal ones, moreover: to regard and discuss informal contexts for agency in their internal relation to formal aspects.

The second challenge is to regard social integration as a *general* topic, which cannot be restricted to especially vulnerable groups – and thus thinking against the mainstream of political as well as scientific discourses. This is important, because any “problem-bias” almost immediately would lead to a system-oriented thinking (“integrating (problem) groups into...”), instead of exploring the integrative aspects of their agency. Here, of course there is a trap to over-emphasize individual agency and therefore reproduce the ideology of individualisation.

The third challenge is to be open for the heterogeneity of agentic “solutions” for the notoriously open problem of social integration: Instead of starting from generalized assumptions concerning “typical strategies” of groups of young people, the way they develop their strategies has to be taken as an empirical question. As soon as such strategies are analysed in depth – at least this is the result of re-constructive approaches to young people’s

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<sup>4</sup> Attentiveness may be the more appropriate term inasmuch as we do not refer to attention for a specific aspect of social integration but rather to a scientific and political attitude of ‘paying attention’ for the – often not very obvious – potential of young people’s strategies for innovations of social integration. For reasons of readability we use the term ‘attention’.

agency – unexpected internal differences within groups or communalities between groups – even in different countries – can be detected. Only *after* such in-depth analysis it is possible to construct types of strategies and to start to generalize with regard to the needs these strategies would indicate.

The fourth challenge is not to restrict informal agency to the individual level – it can also include communal agency: often, it directly derives from the needs of individuals or groups trying to solve their problems themselves or to shape arenas of public discourses differently by articulating their needs, protesting against undesirable political or economic developments. Informal agency could also refer “to a colourful chain of different communities: groupings such as one's family, neighbourhood, immediate environment, sub-cultures, civil action and communities of civil society on the local level. ‘Common’ also refers, however, to markets and marketing as well as the activities of communal and state institutions, and the effects that they have. (..) This means wandering in the area between the individual and society, as well as in the area between the individual and the state” (Hoikkala 2000:5). Moreover, collective coping strategies such as informal networking on a local level, grass root policies or social movements are important for all three topics of UP2YOUTH, most obviously for the issue of participation.

A fifth challenge lies in the dynamic nature of these strategies, which also ‘affects’ the concept of social integration and turns it into something highly dynamic – from a societal as well as from a subjective point of view. What has been crucial for a feeling of “being integrated” 20 years ago might have shifted, and with regard to the highly fluid communities (of youth) there is probably much more dynamic from a subjective point of view that ever has been grasped by surveys.

The latter indeed is the core of the UP2YOUTH question: because only in such a dynamic concept of social integration the idea of social change in which young people are regarded as actors can be implied. Corresponding to our understanding of social change, such a concept of social integration would theoretically be located within modernisation processes, which are multi-faceted and non-linear, and which are driven by – often conflictual – appropriations of technical, economical and ecological developments. This implies the consideration of power relations and the distribution of material, educational and cultural resources, which structure these processes, but which change their appearance by modernisation. The question, *how* the social positioning of individuals or groups is organised by such processes, again is a matter of further empirical research (which in principle is an endless task of social science: ever new appearances afford ever new analysis on the ways this social positioning of individuals or

groups occurs) which requires to reconstruct also the agentic part of young people in these processes in order to detect where they can and actually do influence them.

### *Social integration and public acknowledgement*

Social research as systematic ways of trying to understand social integration is closely linked with societal mechanisms concerned with achieving, maintaining, or recalibrating social integration. While on the one hand any social action can be understood as (aiming at) contributing to social integration, there are also practices which over time have become routinised – or institutionalised. This is why social theorists distinguish social and systemic integration. While the former relies on direct communication, the latter allows to establish and thereby automatise rules and practice over time and space (Habermas, 1981; Giddens, 1984). These theorists have further interpreted social change as contributing to an increasing decoupling between social and systemic integration contributing to alienation, disembedding, disorientation and colonisation of life worlds. If young people in this situation increasingly adopt informal strategies this can be interpreted both as resistance against and as distrust into the effectiveness and intentions of systemic integration. Both stand for a discrepancy between existing rules and available means on the one hand and the effects of social integration on the other as well as for a lack of communication between individuals and institutions in this regard.

At this step of our argument, the question of the social recognition of informal strategies and the public sphere come into play. A crucial dimension in this regard has been highlighted by Zygmunt Bauman. According to him, a totally different stream of critique is needed, which in a way re-detects the positive notions of the public and safeguards the dimension of a (different) public sphere:

“Public power has lost much of its awesome and resented oppressive potency – but it has also lost a good part of its enabling aspects. The war of emancipation is not over. But to progress any further, it must now resuscitate what for most of its history it did its best to destroy and push out of its way. *Any true liberation calls today for more, not less, of the ‘public sphere’ and ‘public power’ [highlighted by Z.B.]. It is now the public sphere which badly needs defence against the invading private – though, paradoxically in order to enhance, not cut down individual liberty [highlighted by the authors]*” (Bauman 2000:51).

Bauman is searching for ways to close the gap between the de jure individuality of today (with its practical impotence) and the facto individuality. This means with regard to youth as actor of social change: how could, once their agentic role has been identified, be guaranteed

that their agency can leave the playgrounds of individuality and achieve public recognition? Starting with Bauman from the diagnosis, that in late modernity everything is getting possible, but also irrelevant, the crucial question thus is how such agency could step out of such irrelevance and how the dimension of social change implicit in this agency could be made visible?

A concept which goes in a similar direction inasmuch as it implies a re-thematisation of both the understanding of and processes for social integration is the concept of ‘life politics’ (Giddens, 1991; 1994). This concept assumes that under conditions of late modernity contradictions threatening social integration can no longer solely be understood in terms of economic disparities and inequalities and in one-dimensional hierarchies – which justify redistribution as well as emancipatory politics as appropriate ways to reinforce social integration. Life politics refers to the fact that individualisation increasingly requires conditions which are favourable for the development of individual, subjectively meaningful life styles which are no longer reproduced collectively (also if collective actions and structures such as networks remain highly important). The concept of life politics potentially may be seen as the political complement of the concept of social integration the UP2YOUTH project is striving for. However, its reception has been ambivalent with frequent (mis)interpretations as politics of self-responsibility. Therefore, these remarks restrict to clarification while we do not subsume our reflections under this concept.

Another trace towards a double focus on resources and public attention as a crucial prerequisite of social integration is the work of Nancy Fraser on relation between policies of redistribution (related to inequality) and politics of recognition (related to identity). Within her model of participatory parity (Fraser & Honneth, 2003), the (material and symbolic) recognition of heterogeneity develops into a criterion for real public recognition: Public recognition means, that the whole multitude of individual (or communal) coping strategies are finding respect and acknowledgment in a public arena, without deciding in advance, which of them have to be supported, and which of them ignored. Social integration thus points to intersubjective recognition. The latter cannot be left over to individual ‘fate’; moreover, as Bauman argues, it is a political task to provide public arenas in which this recognition can happen. This implies a shift of the boundaries between public and private, which then would set individual or collective coping/agency more easier into the spotlight of public awareness.



In a further step of our research, we will ask for the conditions which could facilitate this process (of turning individual or collective coping/agency into content for politics). This is, as Bauman has put it, a matter of resources, monetary resources as well as infrastructure, which both would cover immediate needs so far that people get some space to become visible, raise their voices, articulate. But it is also a matter of “politics of attention”, and here we are with Fraser (and Honneth) again, who say, that means and spaces for negotiation already start to change the power division within this – powerful – play of social recognition.

### *Social change and the role of the state*

What is or can be the role of the state in late modern social integration? De-standardisation and individualisation of life course transitions imply a diversification of normalities. Apparently, ordered structures of social integration are being replaced by a more ‘fluid’ model of social structuration (Bauman, 2000; cf. Giddens, 1984): insecurities can no longer be reduced to calculable risks; the relation between cause and effect becomes increasingly blurred; the future becomes open and uncertain; institutions can no longer guarantee and secure outcomes of social reproduction; while subjective and systemic views on social integration increasingly diverge (Castells, 1996; Urry, 2000; Thrift, 2001; Beck & Bonß, 2001; Bauman, 2001).

But what structures are to be expected from inconsistencies or even contradictions between individual coping strategies and public policies? Above we have characterised a range of individuals’ coping strategies which in sum can be characterised as ‘muddling through’ by a mixture of compliance with and resistance to public institutions and to reconcile fragmented life spheres which may imply contradicting demands. At the same time policy responses have to find a balance between available resources, effectiveness and legitimation both from addressees and tax payers.

Public institutions are concerned in a double sense by the process of de-standardisation: first, institutions are confronted with changes in the behaviour and coping strategies of individuals; second, institutions are questioned themselves in their function to standardise social action and relationships over time and space; the ‘collapse of social engineering’ (Bauman, 2001).

In fact, de-standardisation confronts policies with dilemmas such as between increasing female employment and declining birth rates, between lifelong learning and the struggle of motivating young people for education, between activating individuals while the labour market does not provide sufficient jobs, between increasing the age of retirement and securing

labour market entrance of young people etc. (Hantrais, 1999; 2003; Esping-Andersen, 2002; Walther, 2003; EC, 2005a).

In the contest of post-Fordist restructuring there are two fundamental directions of policy measures: flexibilisation and re-standardisation. Policies of *re-standardisation* aim at adapting existing institutions to changing situations such as creating new professional qualifications or addressing financial constraints of the welfare state by a mixture of increased contributions and reduced provisions. Policies for *flexibilisation* in contrast do no longer aim at securing the standard life course. Priority is to provide individuals with access to employment. While this may involve comprehensive policies of lifelong learning or family policies in the sense of securing transition rather than status (Lewis & Ostner, 1995), in many instances this means to reduce the citizenship status consisting of civil, political and social rights to the mere right of access (Rifkin, 2000). In sum, policies primarily aim at increasing employment but creating the necessary conditions produces new costs – either directly or indirectly. Behind this stands the need of re-balancing *flexibility and security* (flexicurity), a challenge which obviously transcends the rationales of institutional thinking and acting – at least in most contexts (cf. Schmid & Gazier, 2002).

The dynamic and interactive understanding of social integration outlined so far implies rather than adapting individuals to existing institutional structures regarding family, work or citizenship implies to open spaces for negotiating agency, learning, and culture. Politics of social change thereby take young people's agency as one source of social change into account while at the same time facilitating agency for social change. This means to develop a different relationship towards young people as actors of social change. Currently their actions are mainly assessed in terms of conformity with existing demands and structures. They may not only be understood as coping strategies but also as different practice connected to meaning making process and thereby containing potentially innovative cultural codes necessary to decipher the new situations of social integration or exclusion. Inasmuch as it is obvious that the standard life course has ceased to serve as a collective orientation mark for both individual and political/institutional decision-making, the objective of state policies – also if this may sound contradictory for institutional actors – is to enable individuals to develop biographical orientation – not in isolation from each other but in reciprocal exchange. The notion of biographicity thereby is not only a goal for individual biographical learning but also a quality of public space where experiences and strategies are negotiated and reflected.

Recourse to the role of the state is especially important under conditions of a late modern trend towards the ideological celebration of subjectivity and agency. The ambivalences of agency have most prominently been analysed by Foucault in his works on power and discourse and his studies on governmentality (Foucault, 1976; 1994). In this perspective, subjectivity – and thereby agency – is the constructed result of a modern discourse. In the recent decade, this perspective has been taken up by a series of authors to criticise the withdrawal of state responsibilities – especially in areas such as education, welfare or labour market policies – whereby the self-responsibility of individuals for their life course trajectories and for coping with social risks in particular and for social integration in general has increased. They argue that individualising discourses centring around ‘the self’ prepare the cultural grounds of acceptance for political and structural individualisation (e.g. Levitas, 1996; Rose, 1999; Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2003). On the one hand this implies critical analysis of apparent correspondence and complementarity between the meaning-making processes in young people’s actions and the demands posed by late modern (neoliberal) societies and labour markets. On the other hand, this perspective does not mean to reduce young people’s agency to fitting into a neoliberal culture of self-responsibility. Attention needs also to be paid for the ‘stubbornness’ (Schütz, 1967) and intentionality of human agency as well as the emergence of new forms of sociality resulting from such agency. In fact, the notion of responsibility (Leccardi, 2005b) may deserve additional reflection and analysis as it includes both reacting to external demands and subjective interest in and contributions to the maintenance and change of social relationships.

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