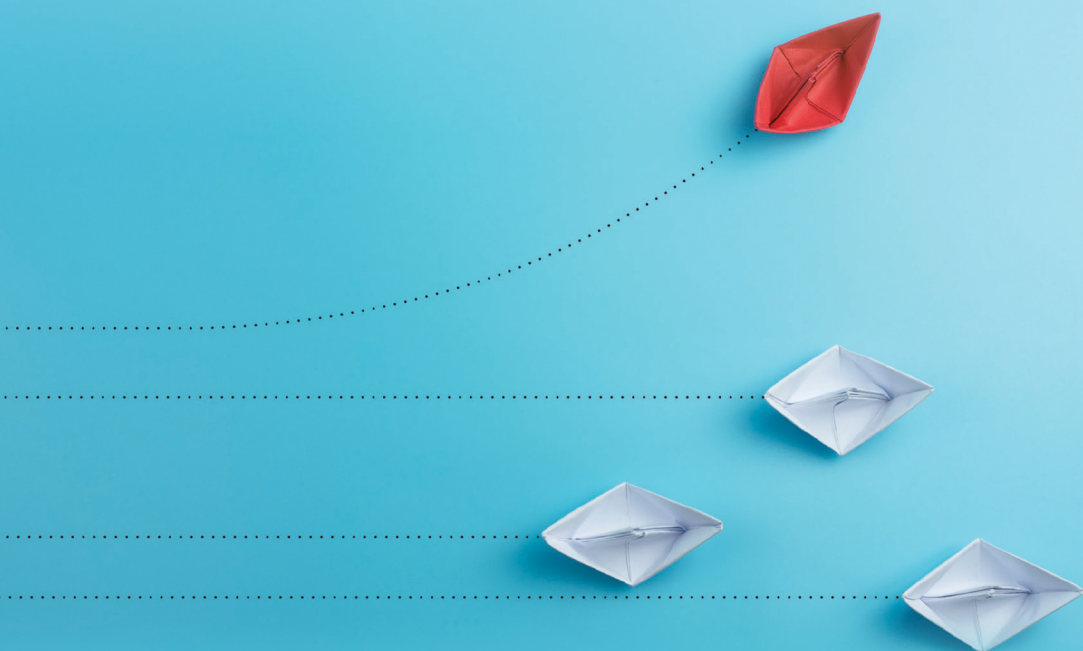


Lifelong Learning Policies for Young Adults in Europe

Navigating between
Knowledge and Economy

Edited by

Marcelo Parreira do Amaral,
Siyka Kovacheva, Xavier Rambla



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Telling the story: exploring lifelong learning policies for young adults through a narrative approach

*Mauro Palumbo, Sebastiano Benasso
and Marcelo Parreira do Amaral*

Introduction

Policy analysis has undergone important changes since the 1990s resulting in increasing acceptance of non-positivistic approaches, due to a number of different developments.¹ First, in reaction to criticism of its previous strong technocratic tradition, which was said not to account adequately for questions of democracy and power relations. Second, after the frustration with the large policy reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, the self-image of policy analysis as ‘problem-solving’ was questioned with regard to its ability to provide the knowledge needed by policy makers, but also to encompass the complexity of policy implementation (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). Third, policy analysis was faced with developments stemming from governance theory. The latter called attention to a change from an actor-centred to an institution-centred perspective (Schuppert, 2006). Policy was seen here as involving issues of government, management, coordination and regulation among various state and non-state stakeholders, at different sectors and levels that were immersed in non-hierarchical and network-like structures (Greany and Higham, 2018).

Faced with this high level of complexity, many policy analysts turned to interpretive approaches, which acknowledge and incorporate conceptual and theoretical discussions most often referred to as the cultural turn (Jameson, 1998), linguistic turn (Rorty, 1967), argumentative turn (Fischer and Forester, 1993) or ideational turn (Béland and Cox, 2011).

Departing from a non-positivistic understating of reality, current research focusing on lifelong learning (LLL) policies targeting young people across Europe has enquired into how these policies

are impacting young adult life courses. In this chapter, we present and discuss insights from comparative case-study research in 18 sites across Europe conducted as part of the YOUNG_ADULLLT research project. The multi-method and multi-level analysis of the case studies focused on the intersections between institutional, individual and structural aspects of the policy-making process and allowed exploration of the interactions among structural and biographical dimensions, the different stakeholders' points of view as well as consideration of the relations between the different levels of LLL policy design and implementation – from local/regional to transnational. The comparative case studies adopted a storytelling approach that aims at grasping the complex interrelations among the different actors in the field of LLL policy-making. By describing the development of policies from design to implementation as well as the effects on the intended addressees, we aim at highlighting how the meanings, values and interests of different actors interact and are socially built or modified during the concrete making of policies in their own contexts.

The chapter starts by briefly presenting and discussing the operationalisation of case-study analysis in YOUNG_ADULLLT with particular attention to the narrative strategy adopted for the case presentations. Next, the chapter discusses distinct narrative strategies to telling the story while attending to various perspectives of the policy-making process, the varying entry points as well as relational aspects. The chapter deliberates on how policy analysis as storytelling can help us advance from case to knowledge, for instance, by overcoming a one-sided perspective of policy-making to include addressees' standpoints in understanding policy-making while accounting for the complexity that characterises policy-making on the ground.

LLL policy-making: a narrative case-study research strategy

Aiming to grasp the complexity of the analysed phenomena, in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project case studies were not selected from an already 'naturally' existing range of options, rather they were culturally constructed, focusing on the dynamic interrelations of LLL policies and their contexts at a local/regional level. A multi-level and multi-method approach to case construction and analysis was adopted to examine the empirical materials collected throughout the project that derived from different research approaches and levels of data gathering, including both qualitative and quantitative data at different levels – from the transnational to the regional/local. These aimed at capturing the

diverse viewpoints of stakeholders involved in the processes of policy-making and implementation, the addressees' subjective views, macro data concerning young adults' living conditions and the main features of the educational systems and labour markets. Hence, the YOUNG_ADULLLT case studies performed the function of systematising and connecting research materials and the insights that derive from them. Successively, the manifold stock of information that built the cases was analysed, addressing the various levels at which LLL policies are negotiated and displaying the interplay among macro structures, contextual features, institutions and subjective standpoints. Further, drawing on the three main theoretical references of the project (cultural political economy [CPE], life course research and governance), each case was analysed through a constant shift of perspective. This multi-level analysis involved 'moving' from the socioeconomic dimension (e.g. different structures of the labour market and economy, social inequality and demography), to the institutional (e.g. welfare state and the education system), from the cultural dimension of varying context-dependent understandings of age, labour, family, the individual and so on, to the individual dimension, that is, the subjective perspectives of young people, their aspirations and experiences as well as transitions and trajectories in their life courses.

The aforementioned multi-level analyses were carried out by drawing on the data set built through the integration of different research methods (see Introduction to this volume). Specifically, a number of LLL policy documents and related grey literature were gathered and analysed in order to map the most relevant references of the policy frameworks in the different contexts. Furthermore, quantitative data deriving from international and national databases in addition to data produced at regional level were taken into consideration, in order to address the overall conditions of populations in the different contexts and, within these, the structural dimensions that shape the opportunities and constraints with which young adults as well as policy makers interact in the field of LLL and in the broader scope of their lives. Furthermore, qualitative information was gathered through semi-structured interviews with experts operating at different levels in the LLL domain (from policy makers to street-level professionals) and through biographical interviews of young adults participating in the analysed LLL policies. The whole set of data and information was finally integrated through the case studies' construction and further analysed using comparative case-study analysis.

For reasons of space, presenting and discussing the findings from all cases studies is not possible here; the next section presents

three examples that illustrate different narrative strategies and their contribution to analysing LLL policy-making.

Storytelling as case-study analysis: three narrative approaches

The YOUNG_ADULLLT research adopted a narrative approach in order to grasp the complex intertwinement of the different levels, dimensions and perspectives accounted for in cases' construction. The main task of storytelling as an approach to case-study analysis was thus to highlight what made each case unique and what difference it makes for LLL policy-making and to young people's life courses. A central piece of this refers to establishing *relations between sets of relationships*. Accordingly, the LLL policies selected by the project partners were seen as starting points, from which the cases themselves can be constructed and of which different stories can be told. That stories can be told differently does not mean that they are arbitrary, rather this refers to different ways of accounting for the embedding of the specific case to its context, namely the diverging policy frameworks, patterns of policy-making, networks of implementation, political discourses and macro-structural conditions at the local level. Further, telling different stories also aims at representing the 'voices' of the actors involved in the process and making the different stakeholders' and addressees' views resonate to create an intelligible narrative for each case. Analysing each case started from a selected entry point, from which a story was told. Two entry points were used that focused on: (a) the evolution of a policy in terms of main objectives, target groups, governance patterns and so on in order to highlight the intended and unintended effects of the 'current version' of the policy within its context and according to the opinions of the actors interviewed; and (b) on selected biographies that aimed to contextualise the life stories within the biographical constellations in which the young people came across the measure, the access procedures and how their life trajectories continued in and possibly after their participation in the policy measure.

The following sections present three cases that illustrate different narrative strategies proposed as examples of storytelling. It is worth noting that the selection of these narratives did not aim at comprehensiveness or exhaustiveness in terms of potentially applicable narrative strategies, rather we sought to highlight different ways of apprehending and integrating the relations among the views of different actors participating in the cases at different levels and within different structural, cultural and policy frameworks.

Back to the Future: relating policy levels

The case of Back to the Future in the Vienna functional region (FR) was narrated as a case of ‘work ethics through work experience’, situated between the fields of social/youth and labour market policy. Indeed, its main aim is reducing the number of youths aged 18–24 who depend on needs-oriented subsidies by improving their employability. From a multi-level perspective, it is important to stress the regional and local role of Vienna in the Austrian institutional structure, which distinguishes it from other Austrian regions. Vienna is the capital city and at the same time one of the nine federal states, such that the local job market benefits from the fact that the city offers a relatively high amount of public employment in education, health and social services. Concerning LLL policies, it is noteworthy that they are regulated according to the federal institutional framework, so that regional and local patterns of policy-making and policy implementation refer to the same institutional architecture. Moreover, the Viennese economy has gone through structural changes during the last decades, with important impacts on policy-making and target construction of Back to the Future. The leading role of Vienna in the Austrian economy is confirmed by the high gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, closer to some of the richest European regions. Approximately 86 per cent of the Viennese GDP is created in the tertiary sector, with approximately 14 per cent in the secondary sector. Accordingly, the region presents a growing number of people working in the service sector such as hospitality, but also in more knowledge-intensive fields such as finance and insurance, information and communications technology, life sciences and research and development. In addition, the region’s population is increasing at a faster pace than the country’s average, reaching 1.8 million inhabitants in 2014. This is mostly due to growing migration flows. Currently, 42 per cent of the population is of migrant background, while more than 20 per cent of the Viennese inhabitants are non-nationals. Moreover, since mid-2016 approximately 21,000 refugees have sought asylum in Vienna. One of the consequences is that the share of young people among the overall population is higher than the Austrian average. Thus, Back to the Future addresses some of these new challenges in the Viennese context. First, the target group (people living on basic subsidies) has changed in the last 15–20 years, and now covers different educational backgrounds, heritages and social classes. Second, the skill formation system in the Vienna region is characterised by the expansion of higher education on the one hand and by the limited relevance of the dual system of apprenticeships on

the other. Combined with the upgrading of employment demand, this creates a relatively good match in the higher sectors of skills distribution, but also a lack of opportunities for low-qualified people, except for seasonal service sector jobs. This connects with migration in-flows, creating a condition of vulnerability in the passage to the primary labour market. Accordingly, the underlying success criterion of Back to the Future is the reduction of problems concerning the labour market integration of youths who, although registered with the employment services, were unable to find a long-term job. The recent rise of young people receiving subsidies and the concurrent massive decline in apprenticeships in the area of Vienna frame these phenomena in relation to the lack of employability of the potential young workforce with special needs. The policy aims at delivering 'safeguarded' opportunities to encounter real job experiences, namely transitional (paid part-time) work placements in socioeconomic employment projects, as well as intensified coaching and training services. In terms of the solutions devised, it follows an intervention logic that focuses on labour market integration, deeming it important to give the addressees chances to experience actual job situations where they can recognise the relevance and value of their own work, improving their soft skills and raising self-esteem. The main mechanism of intervention is at the individual level, as it aims at enhancing employability levels by reshaping young people's attitudinal dispositions to learning and working through practical work experience. Back to the Future represents an example of a complex governance regime involving various public and private actors, cooperating to manage the heterogeneous needs of its target group. Concerning the impact on the young adults' life courses, Back to the Future mostly focuses on the development of positive job experiences and soft skills improvement as a way to reduce uncertainty and lead young adults to 'revise' their future planning, favouring individual activation and also targeting a re-standardisation of youths' life trajectories, while its impact on immediate employability is limited.

The narrative of this case starts by referring to the frame of reference of Back to the Future, described as the result of a local 'impulse' triggered by the municipality in charge of social assistance and public employment services in Vienna. The main factors shaping the preliminary design of the policy are thus the daily experiences of local operators in the field of social and labour policies; however, reference is also made to forerunning projects and to international experience. Indeed the 'tension' towards policy patterns applied in other contexts (particularly in Germany) – and more generally towards emerging

components of the discourses shaping the cultural understanding of LLL at the European level – represent a recurrent element of this storytelling. Then, the narrative focuses on the changing features of the local skills ecology in order to stress the increasing difficulties met by the policy target in finding adequate market integration. While the capacity to absorb a growing population of low-qualified workforce is reported as one of the emerging challenges facing Viennese labour and education policies and vocational training is represented as the most frequent solution to Austrian active policies, *Back to the Future* is narrated as an alternative attempt to enhance the participants' human capital through working experiences, hence proposing a shift from the specialised skill-centred approach to a more holistic orientation towards soft skills.

Concerning the cultural level, there are continuities and divergences among different actors participating in the discourses animating the design and implementation of *Back to the Future*, with particular reference to the topics of welfare subsidies and activation programmes. Concerning the former, local media have emphasised criticism of the rationale behind subsidies distribution. While the mainstream press depicted welfare distribution as not properly controlled, the municipality explained the surge in young people drawing subsidies with reference to increased competition in the local labour market. However, this debate occurs in the context of a gradual change of paradigm in Austrian labour market policies, which realigns the activation approach, linking individual responsibility and (conditional) entitlement to social provision. By focusing on the discourse of individual responsibility, a connection between the local and the European dimension emerges, returning to the different approaches and meanings attached to skills development. The character of local policy as influenced by transnational discourses on LLL is stressed, taking into consideration the relation of such discourses with the relevance assigned to vocational training and practical experiences by Austrian LLL strategies. This entails the coexistence of two main narratives concerning the aims of LLL: while the first follows a logic overlapping labour market participation and personal development, the second is oriented towards job market needs and focuses on practical employment skills as the main way to respond to those needs (see Cefalo et al, 2018).

One peculiarity of this case includes the discursive justifications used to legitimise the intervention at individual level in the face of evident structural issues. Indeed, the task of reducing the distribution of subsidies is to be solved by operating at the individual level, drawing

on a common depiction of the target group as lacking realistic views of work and education. This stereotyping was shared among interviewed experts and seemed to pave the way for a paternalistic/pedagogical attitude towards the addressees, which threatens to further reinforce exclusion. However, these views can be contrasted with data gathered through biographical interviews with young adults, which allows a shift in focus from attitudinal problems to the lack of job opportunities for unqualified workers in the local area. Nevertheless, the growing heterogeneity of the population receiving subsidies is worth considering, framing this phenomenon in relation to the global process of labour market flexibilisation as well as education inflation and tertiarisation, which produces, at the Austrian national level as well as in many other contexts, dynamics of overqualification or, in other words, further forms of skills mismatch.

Finally, the narration of Back to the Future closes the ‘narrative circularity’ of its ‘plot’ with a reconstruction of the impact of participation in the policy on the addressees’ life courses – especially with reference to young adults’ attitudes towards future planning – highlighting strong resonance with previous reflections about the role of LLL as potential support for life transitions.

In summary, although in this storytelling ‘plot’ the main roles are played by the policy landscapes at different levels, the voices of subjects involved nevertheless find a proper space in the narrative. The main peculiarity of this case’s storytelling consists in the way in which it shows how particular LLL policy objectives are reflected in implementation and experience. Indeed, in this case the primary objective is to reduce the share of social subsidy recipients, thus not an explicit skills-related objective, which implies a programme of socialisation for work through work ethics and experience rather than involving the addressees in LLL. However, although actors from different fields are involved, the dominance of an activating welfare and labour market policy approach is still evident.

NEETwork: relating policies to biographies

The case of the NEETwork project in the Milan FR was told as a case of ‘targeting “weak” profiles in a “strong” context’. It was seen as a case of a ‘complementary’ policy integrated within the regional scheme of Youth Guarantee. NEETwork aims to compensate for the Youth Guarantee’s shortcomings, such as limited engagement with the most disadvantaged groups and its weak connection with the third sector. Furthermore, given that the policy was initiated by a

private foundation, it might be considered an example of subsidiarity in the private sector in the Milanese context. Moreover, as a long-term result of governance arrangements, the network established could acquire more contextualised knowledge of the targeted group, which is traditionally disengaged from institutions. The policy aims at providing both public and private actors with a set of useful skills and insights to fill gaps shared by most of the institutions collaborating in the field of labour and training policies. It aims to engage or re-engage youths who left education prematurely, are excluded from the labour market and are not effectively reached by the Youth Guarantee scheme. Specifically, NEETwork targets a particularly disadvantaged group, that is, 18–24-year-old NEETs (neither in employment nor in education and training), with a level of education below or equal to lower secondary level, who have been unemployed for at least six months. The target group is reached through a set of complementary channels to those already used in the Youth Guarantee policies: direct calls drawing on the lists of unemployed people registered with public employment agencies, as well as lists of candidates registered with a private employment agency (which is a project partner) and through interaction on the project Facebook web page. This latter aspect is worth highlighting, since it represents an innovative strategy for target group engagement in the Italian context. The main goal of the project is to motivate participants and help them to return to education/training and transition into employment. The underlying success criteria consist of the reactivation of NEET youths and the stabilisation of their relation with local services and institutions. This resonates with the general orientation of policy-making in the Milanese context, where educational, social and labour policies are particularly invested in the activation of young people, emphasising individual choice, trying to build a quasi-market environment and leaving to the addressees the responsibility of choosing which tools to use to improve their employability. The intervention offers a four- to six-month paid traineeship at a partnering non-profit organisation. The prevalent problem perception starts from the acknowledgement of dynamism in the local labour market, where the high availability of job opportunities produces strong competition especially among young adults, with particular disadvantages for those affected by conditions of vulnerability and generally disengaged from the local network of services. Indeed, Milan is generally depicted as the main ‘place for opportunities’ in Italy; in comparison to the majority of other Italian cities and regions, it offers more highly qualified job opportunities, has more medium-size and large enterprises and is

more innovative in its social policies. According to Eurostat data, Milan is the richest metropolitan area in Italy, with a GDP at current market prices of €186.045 million in 2013, about 10 per cent of the national GDP and third in the European Union (EU) after Paris and London. The GDP per capita, €44,700 is about 36 per cent higher than the national average. The value added per capita (2015) is €44,839 in Milan FR, while in Lombardy it is €32,001 and only €24,288 at the national level. Moreover, in 2015 Milan was ranked tenth in Europe for economic prospects (according to the European Regional Economic Growth Index). Furthermore, concerning the labour market, the Eurostat data confirm better performance than the Italian average: in 2016, the unemployment rate in Italy was 11.7 per cent while across the EU it was 10 per cent and in Milan FR it was 7.5 per cent. The unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2016 was 6.9 per cent compared to 7.8 per cent in the previous quarter. Overall, there were 322,000 unemployed people. The unemployment rate among young adults is 28.2 per cent in Italy, while in this region it is 10 percentage points lower (18.2 per cent). At the same time, NEET (18–29) rates in the Lombardy region show an increase from 12.9 per cent in 2004 to 22.1 per cent in 2015, with a decrease of 2 percentage points in 2016 (20.1 per cent). In absolute terms, NEETs have increased from 160,000 in 2004 to 229,000 in 2016, producing a discouraging effect for low-qualified young adults in a dynamic region. The solution proposed by NEETwork focuses on ‘protected’ work experiences in third sector organisations, which are deemed to be a proper environment for a ‘soft’ approach to work and basic/soft skills acquisition. The prevalent LLL logic is thus a mix between preventive and interventive. The main mechanism of intervention focuses on the individual dimension, although a change in the local institutional system is also fostered, given the almost unprecedented involvement of third sector organisations in the local traineeship system and, more broadly, the shared task of constructing ‘new’ knowledge and a deeper understanding of the NEET phenomenon. In terms of governance patterns, the case is an example of subsidiarity by a private foundation coordinating the network in order to overcome the limited effectiveness of a public programme (Youth Guarantee) in engaging a particularly disadvantaged group. The impact on the addressees’ life courses is mainly focused on reactivation, resonating with the mainstream discourses of individual responsibility in reaching a higher level of competitiveness, while the aim of compensating the qualification deficit through re-engagement with institutions reveals the underlying task of re-standardisation.

The NEETwork case was narrated using two addressees' life trajectories, which were chosen in order to explore the 'black box' of the NEET condition. Indeed, in the Italian mainstream discourse this condition is very often represented through a one-dimensional representation, and most of the interviewed experts seemed to converge upon this point. Italian young NEETs are often depicted as unskilled, unreliable, 'lazily' inactive and basically unfit for employment and, more generally, for 'proper' adult roles. To question this widespread stereotyping, which largely neglects the effects of structural inequalities, the selected life stories of participants in the NEETwork policy show two particularly contrasting cases both in terms of biographical construction and subjective coping with the NEET condition. The biographies selected are Conchita (pseudonym), a very active and resourceful migrant young woman who left secondary school before graduating due to the birth of her son, and Fabio (pseudonym) whose views and attitudes were close to the hegemonic representation of NEETs before participating in the project, especially in terms of lack of orientation and limited future planning capabilities. Focusing on Conchita's learning biography, the coincidence between structural reform and an unpredicted life event is shown, taking into consideration how it affected the plans of a young woman who was forced to revise her choices and who was now looking for new solutions in the LLL field to fill the gap caused by her lack of qualifications. In fact, pursuing future employment in the administrative domain she enrolled in a professional higher secondary school, which at the time of her registration provided a qualification after three years. Yet, in the meantime, the national reform of secondary schooling based on the lyceum model postponed the threshold for qualification to five years, and her pregnancy prevented her from completing education. Here, a connection becomes visible between the specificity of a single biography to the broader structural and cultural phenomena, which builds an 'intersection' of different disadvantages in the Italian context. The latter includes a trend of educational segregation of migrant youths in professional schools, which is further enhanced by the recent lyceum-based reforms, the scarce availability of public services supporting family conciliation and the difficulties faced by migrants and particularly migrant women in labour market integration. Going back to Conchita's trajectory, the description of the tactics she applied in order to overcome the vulnerable condition she found herself in introduces the analysis of some relevant features of the national and local context, which shaped the opportunities she met. Indeed, regardless of her actual specialised skills as an administrative

technician, as an early school leaver she acknowledged her low chances of competing in the regular market. Thus, she addressed the irregular market and sought for a balance between low-skilled jobs (mostly in the context of care) and medium-high specialised activities in the administrative field (e.g. filling tax return forms or carrying out family reunification practices). In managing these activities, Conchita relies on a local community of compatriots, which constitutes both the target market for her administrative advisory activities and the network through which she finds and exchanges jobs as a caregiver. Moreover, it is the same community (here understood as an 'extended family') that supports her in conciliating family and work, providing informal babysitting services since her separation from her partner when their son was very young. Again, through this biographical account we acknowledge the family-centred welfare model characteristic of the Italian context as well as the strong ethnicisation, segregation and occupational specialisation of the (regular and irregular) labour markets, which is a widespread phenomenon in the national market. This is particularly prevalent in the Milanese local context due to the high competitiveness of its dynamic labour markets. Starting from the acknowledgement of her 'peripheral' positioning in the local market, the young woman tackles the urgent need for an income by proactively exploiting all the opportunities she is able to reach, regardless of their character of irregularity. At the same time, Conchita elaborates a plan according to which the LLL measures potentially represent a means for overcoming her low competitiveness, aiming for future compensation for her qualification deficit. The first solution she found was thus the enrichment of her curriculum with certifiable experiences in regular jobs, and she mostly interpreted the Youth Guarantee during and after the NEETwork project as a chance for emancipation from the trapping dynamics of the irregular labour market. This demonstrates that the strong emphasis placed on NEETs' needs for soft and specific skills acquisition and (re)activation by Italian policy makers does not necessarily fit all cases, and even a policy targeting low-profile groups such as the NEETwork project is subjectively reinterpreted using an instrumental perspective. By highlighting this divergence between subjective expectations and the prevalent discourses about NEETs, the second biography further shows different levels of (re)production of discourses about NEETs' assumed needs. It starts with Fabio's views: he expresses the internalisation of stigma attached to people who were not able to unfold linear, and thus 'proper', transitions. The neoliberal ideology of blaming the individual for biographical 'failures' (in his case, leaving school early) resonates in the young man's view, leading

him to represent his current lack of aspirations and orientation both as the cause and effect of his inadequacy and inactivity. At the same time, the reference to Fabio's learning biography introduces the issue of widespread distrust in the effectiveness of the school system among Italian youths, mostly due to its traditional top-down and theory-based approach, which is considered too far from 'real' work life. It is noteworthy that this judgement has often also been confirmed by interviewed experts and, more generally, it connects with the main directions of more recent reforms of the educational system, which are meant to fill the gaps in the educational system in terms of orientation towards more pragmatic and skill-based knowledge. Still, with these reforms a 'new' structural contradiction is produced, since the educational reforms are still ongoing and an established system for skill certification is still not set up at the national level. This leads to the coexistence of the crucial role of formal qualifications with a distrust in the only institutions that can provide them, embedded in a context where the lack of alternative solutions for improving market integration harms, above all, the most vulnerable profiles, as shown by Fabio's story. In fact, although the traineeship experience is narrated very positively both by Fabio and his tutor within the hosting organisation, despite his reliability concerning duties and schedules and the good attitude he has demonstrated, he is still requested to give further proof of his adequacy in order to be 'emancipated' from his NEET condition. Indeed, staff at the hosting organisation have acknowledged and given value to Fabio's contribution to daily work routines, asking him to prolong their professional relationship. But instead of proposing a standard contract, the organisation has offered a second traineeship. Here the cultural representations underlying the more obvious economic reasons for the organisation's choice clearly emerge. Indeed, the stereotypical rhetoric resonates in this dynamic, reproducing assumptions concerning the unreliability of youths and their necessity to learn how to overcome obstacles, which is often depicted as one of their main 'generational shortcomings', caused by alleged excessive protection given by their families – largely acknowledged as the paramount form of Italian welfare, while at the same time parents are blamed for the excessive pampering of their children, preventing them from becoming 'real' adults, even when economic conditions are not adequate to support inactive children for prolonged periods. In spite of Fabio's positive performance, he still seems to be required to give evidence of his 'adequacy' for an adult professional role. His story captures an intersection of structural and cultural weaknesses which contributes to 'freezing' him in a vulnerable

condition. Indeed, the widespread use of traineeships among Italian labour policy measures is integrated, addressing the rhetoric that views experience in actual work situations as the main gateway to more stable employment for the young unexperienced workforce, regardless of structural problems of labour market integration. In addition, a critical reflection about the traineeship (and similar) tool seems to be needed, especially when it targets people in vulnerable conditions who might acquire a new consciousness about their capabilities. Nonetheless, suffering from the lack of subsequent chances to stay in the market triggers a ‘side-effect’ of further frustration and potential exclusion, which is enhanced in a context where the absence of a system for skill certification at the national level prevents young people from finding these experiences useful in terms of enhancing individual skill profiles.

In summary, the Italian case narrative was selected mainly because of its strong focus on the intersection between a policy and two different addressees’ biographies, which are presented in order to highlight the contrast between different potential subjective approaches and meaning constructions in relation to a policy with limited leeway for personalisation in its implementation pattern. Indeed, the biographies show how different individual profiles belonging to a (supposedly) homogenous target group may ‘adapt’ the policy to their needs, which are to some extent different, yet still include common contextual issues (namely the strong emphasis on formal qualification in the Italian context and the very competitive labour market in their FR context). Starting from the ‘intersection’ of the biographies with the policy (namely considering the most relevant interactions with the experts they met during their paths within the policy), this narrative is also able to refer to broader discourses and underlying assumptions in the local and national LLL domain.

Ohjaamo Centre: relating biographies to contexts

The case of the Ohjaamo Centre in the south-west Finland FR was constructed as a case of ‘holistic support to develop employability’. Although in terms of sector orientation it is considered mostly as a youth policy, it is important to highlight that in the Finnish context youth and social policies are deeply intertwined with both education and labour market policies. Consequently, its narrative presents the case of a guidance centre integrated within the regional scheme of Youth Guarantee, particularly stressing the diverse nature of the services it provides. Although the Centre has a broad target group (youths under 30 living in the region) and a low-threshold access,

special emphasis is placed on young adults who have problems related to their educational or occupational pathways as well as those living in otherwise challenging situations. Its activities unfold in the south-west Finland FR, the second largest economic area in Finland with strong links to the Stockholm business area. The main industries of the region include the naval industry and metal construction. However, over the past few decades, these traditional industries have been complemented by the growing service sector. Moreover, south-west Finland is a strong educational region with 75 post-compulsory educational institutions, two universities and four universities of applied sciences. The Centre gathers under one roof and rationalises a number of services, particularly focusing on youth unemployment and promoting participation in education. The forms of support provided include personal advice and guidance, support in life management, career planning, social skills, as well as education and employment support. Then, as a multi-service centre, it also aims to facilitate participants' overall well-being and life management skills, which are here mainly interpreted as 'prerequisites' for becoming employable and/or participating in education. Furthermore, as a more general goal, the programme aims to strengthen and simplify services for young people and eliminate the duplication of activities. The prevalent problem perception focuses on the potential inadequacy of youths as future employees, and the main solution proposed focuses on the support of their transition to the labour market. When it comes to the different logics of LLL policies, due to its very broad target group and wide scope of available services, four types of logic can be distinguished in the operations of the Centre (prevention, compensation, activation, empowerment). The main mechanism of intervention is focused on the empowerment of individual educational and professional profiles through individualised support. The governance pattern of the case is based on large networks integrating different services and experts, with significant leeway for adaptation and interpretation of the national policy (mostly focused on the holistic approach), which in this case is particularly geared towards employability. Concerning the impact on young adults' life courses, the policy is clearly based on assumptions of the prevalence of standardised normal life courses: enrolling into education or entering the labour market are seen as the ultimate goals for the participating young adults.

The Ohjaamo Centre case narrative was introduced by contextualising it in relation to the local landscape of LLL policies, showing how the patterns of policy planning and implementation are coordinated between the Finnish national and regional authorities. As

a cross-administrative and cross-level programme, the evolution of the Finnish Youth Guarantee scheme is then shown, due to its relevance at the international and national level and, moreover, its function as an ‘umbrella policy scheme’ which interacts with the Ohjaamo Centre policy. Indeed, in its turn the Centre is presented as a cross-administrative policy designed for local adaptation aimed at taking regional conditions into account, both in terms of socio-demographic context and the local opportunity structures that interact with young adults. Concerning this latter point, the main challenges for the area are highlighted in terms of their relevance in shaping the opportunities actually available to young adults. Specifically, the shortage of skilled workers in the growing industrial fields (e.g. ship-building industry) is reported as a factor of skills mismatch, which seems hard to tackle in spite of institutional efforts to integrate unemployed youths in this field, and in the face of a general good availability of measures devoted to supporting education-to-work transitions. Indeed, many young people’s occupational aspirations and goals seem not to fit those fields where there is a shortage of workers. Furthermore, the reference to Youth Guarantee allows us to introduce a reflection about the prevalent conception of youth issues at a cultural level in the Finnish context, which is particularly relevant in the case of a policy oriented towards the holistic approach, such as the Ohjaamo Centre. Indeed, the symbolic status reached by the Youth Guarantee in Finnish public discourses is stressed, as are its ambivalent effects. In fact, the Youth Guarantee has contributed to highlighting the precarious conditions of a relevant proportion of Finnish young adults, yet by its ‘dominant’ position within the Finnish public discourses on youth, the programme seems to have clouded other significant youth issues, such as basic youth services, disregarding their multidimensional understanding (see Tikkanen et al, 2018).

Considering the strong emphasis placed on employability by the Youth Guarantee discourse, the issue of balance between the focus on youths’ personal empowerment and more narrow interventions in labour/skill-related dimensions emerges for a low-threshold and multi-functional service like the Ohjaamo Centre. Furthermore, the importance of the rationalisation of the local skills ecology is also reinforced by the regional youth strategy agenda, which tends to relate youth participation to labour-related issues. Therefore, as it is positioned at the ‘crossroads’ of these cultural tensions, and in order to be able to respond to the manifold needs of such a broad potential target group, the Centre necessarily requires high levels of flexibility in providing its services. In order to represent this heterogeneity and

at the same time preserve the maximum anonymity of the interviewed young adults, two different 'ideal-typical biographies' are introduced. Both of the stories were narratively constructed by incorporating experiences, trajectories and visions deriving from the biographical interviews carried out. In this way, two contrasting profiles of users were used to examine the actual capacity of the Centre to adapt to the addressees' expectations while maintaining a strong relation with the context. Moreover, the social, cultural and structural 'distance' between the two profiles resonates with the increasing segregation of young people in the FR: those who are 'succeeding' in their trajectories and those who are clearly in disadvantaged life positions. The stories of Harri and Niko contrast with each other in terms of educational trajectories and relation to the labour market. On the one hand, Harri is presented as a young man in his mid-twenties, who graduated from a university of applied sciences and at the time of the interview was looking for a job after a short period of unemployment. Harri contacted the Ohjaamo Centre in order to get help with finding employment. On the other hand, Niko was introduced as a youth in his early twenties who has completed compulsory education but has no other educational qualifications. Niko's life story was quite fragmented and his motivation for participating in the Ohjaamo Centre's activities is related, as he sees it, to his need to 'get his life together' by maintaining a reasonable daily rhythm, having something meaningful to do and getting support in planning his future steps (see Tikkanen et al, 2018).

The unfolding of Harri's life trajectory is narrated by mostly referring to his capacity to plan and set medium- and long-term goals (e.g. studying engineering at university), which gives a general meaning and orientation to his choices. Moreover, his story is constructed in order to highlight the importance of maintaining a certain degree of reversibility even for the most relevant life choices, which, as in Harri's case, might need to be revised due to a number of potential contextual factors and, more generally, due to the increasing unpredictability of labour markets. Given his attitude and capacity for 'biographical self-management', Harri's expectations towards the Centre are mostly concerned with its function as a guidance and counselling service, which he uses to further enhance his ability of skills self-assessment, also taking the opportunity to extend the range of channels for his job-seeking activities. Very evocatively, his story ends with Harri declining his counsellor's offer for more in-depth guidance services, because of his exclusive interest in strictly employability-related activities. Here, it becomes clear that a narrow focus on employability might also be

expected by some users, especially by those who rely on a consistent set of resources to be applied when pursuing their professional goals.

The story of Niko is instead strongly characterised by continuous ‘interruptions’ and recurrent ‘failures’, as they are represented in reference to his difficult learning biography. Niko’s problems in education are then narrated as combined with alcohol addiction and other typical effects of the structural disadvantages he ‘inherits’ from his background. Consequently, the unqualified and very poorly oriented Niko primarily finds in the Centre support for his (initially very limited) capacity to recognise his aspirations, assess his opportunities and skills and plan accordingly. Here the issue of personal empowerment through a holistic approach thus becomes apparent as a different task for the Centre. In order to maximise the contrast with Harri’s profile, his very access to the Centre is narrated differently in the case of Niko. Indeed, while the first actively chooses to use the service following friends’ advice, the latter gets in touch with the Centre by the intermediation of an outreach youth worker who directs him towards a rehabilitative workshop. At least initially, Niko’s profile is thus represented as particularly far from the proactive neoliberal subject able to self-determine their biography by relying on personal and social resources. And his story concludes with reference to his will to (re)engage with the educational system and acquire a qualification, which is, however, hampered by his doubts about his capacity to ‘keep the pace’ of and properly respond to expectations and duties related to education and work situations. Finally, summarising the main features of the ideal-typical biographies, the contrast in terms of different addressees’ needs is brought to the fore. The cases of Harri and Niko are understood as opposite ends of the ‘addressee continuum’ of the Ohjaamo Centre. Harri is depicted as a goal-oriented young man with a reliable support network of family and friends, and with good study and job-seeking skills. Consequently, he is represented as a young adult able to acknowledge his own skills and to apply high functional abilities in general, who accesses the services only as an extra support to his job-seeking activities. On the other hand, Niko is represented as being in a much more vulnerable situation, which results in his need for multidimensional, in-depth services. The meaning attached by the two young adults to the same policy is very different, since Niko attributes to it a far more comprehensive meaning than Harri, for whom the policy is much more of an instrumental tool for his own professional project.

In summary, the storytelling applied in the Finnish case is a valuable narrative strategy, since it relies on the construction of two ideal-typical

biographies, which preserve the anonymity of the interviewed youths and further polarise the distinction between potential profiles within a very heterogeneous target group. The (re)construction of ideal-typical biographies by drawing on biographical materials actually gathered throughout the research, allows us to further show different 'patterns of needs' and subjective expectations from the policy, stressing the contrast between the need for very focused and instrumental support in the process of labour market integration and the need for a more holistic and guidance-oriented approach due to vulnerable conditions.

Conclusion: from case to knowledge – storytelling as policy analysis

The use of storytelling as a tool for policy analysis aims to overcome a rather common constraint in the extant literature. Indeed, in this domain there is a quite widespread use of narratives focused on the policy problem, which tend to reproduce the perspective and the conceptual frames of policy makers, or, more generally, of the people who design or implement policies, leaving little or no room for addressees' viewpoints (see Polletta et al, 2011). This tendency particularly emerges in situations in which different kinds of narratives are produced by different actors in a potentially conflicting scenario, with different interest groups (e.g. McBeth et al, 2005). At the same time, it is noteworthy that storytelling has been widely considered as a fruitful tool for policy design and planning (van Hulst, 2012), but also as a way, in the health care sector, to deliver care in unbalanced relationship situations (Banks-Wallace, 1999).

In YOUNG_ADULLLT, a narrative approach has been used to analyse the case studies constructed during the research, in order to take into account the points of view of the three main actors of the policies, analysing them according to the three theoretical references of the project research.

This interpretive approach has proved useful in reading the same case from diverse points of view, since this allows critical analysis of the correspondences or divergences between the underlying assumptions in policy-making – the 'official' CPE – and those which affect and shape implementation, capable of deeply modifying the 'official' aims and purposes of the policy – including for reasons other than adaptation to the context – as already highlighted by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973). In addition, storytelling is also a main tool for giving room to addressees' voices before and after the crossroads between their trajectories and the policies (and vice versa, because

policies are also changed by the addressees' reactions, but designers and policy makers are often not necessarily aware of this). Thus, the approach to the case studies chosen allows each of the main actors to 'tell their story', and the narrative strategy applied in order to put the different perspectives into relation provided two main 'entry points' for case storytelling: the evolution of the policy in context and the life stories of addressees. In this way, for instance, the addressees' paths within the policy were observed from the decision-makers' standpoint, or that of the street-level professionals. At the same time, the more 'biographical' entry point allows exploration of the relations among the individual trajectories, the policies and their context, yielding insights into the subjective negotiations of goals and meanings of LLL policies.

Storytelling allowed contextualisation of the match between addressees and implementers, considering each of them as a 'hub' of social, parental, small group, organisational and institutional relations that shape this match of two different worlds and are also shaped by the match itself. Fabio's situation, for example, shows the case of a clash of different presuppositions: he changes his attitudes towards work, but, while the implementer's view is open to his 're-standardisation' as a result of his learning path through the measure, the firms that participate in the project assume he needs only an internship, in other words, assume that the paradigm of activation must always operate and are not able to accept (and to detect) that the behaviour of the NEET can be changed thanks to the effectiveness of the first internship. In the Finnish case, we can see that the importance of the Youth Guarantee scheme, which reproduces the successful policy of this country at the European level, shows that the mix between activation paradigm and employability goals may sound positive, but is not so successful as part of a holistic approach needed to meet 'multi-problematic' young adults. Finally, also in the Austrian case the 'dual-system implicit model' embedded in the policy analysed in the case study seems to consider skills as the functional equivalent of a study certificate and so the real aim towards addressees is to push them to fill the gap between pre-existing and needed skills, regardless of the young adults' needs and expectations; after all, already thinking about needs and gaps rather than about expectations is emblematic of a 'qualification-driven' approach.

In trying to establish 'relations between sets of relationships', storytelling allowed us to find meaningful sets of relations without a dramatic simplification of the reality, a price often paid by comparativists when making comparisons between overly abstract versions of reality. In other words, a serious limit of comparison is

the strong simplification of cases needed to allow comparison itself, because generalisation is permitted only at such a high level of abstraction as to render the generalisation useless. On the contrary, by highlighting relations between sets of relationships the storytelling approach shows, particularly along the biographical entry point, that the relationships among the designers', implementers' and addressees' points of view are sometimes divergent, especially when the activation paradigm seems to promote the so-called 'Matthew effect' (Merton, 1968), according to which only the less disadvantaged part of a target group can be supported. The approach also shows how sometimes, in a Paretian situation,² the 'right' choice is made by the addressees for the 'wrong' reason, obtaining the intended results according to a diverse mechanism. This happens because young adults react in diverse ways to policies, striking a strong similarity with the situation described by Merton in 1968, when he noted that Americans believed in social goals such as success and material wealth, but the absence of equal access to those goals generated a strain between the socially encouraged goals of society and the socially acceptable means to achieve them.

In the case of young adults, to paraphrase Beck (1992), the impossibility of tackling systemic contradictions (mismatch between job supply and demand) with biographical solutions (e.g. vocational training, guidance), leads to different kinds of adaptation to this contradiction. In particular, we think that the most widespread adaptation strategy could be *conformist* for people who work hard and try to succeed despite their difficulties, or *ritualist*, that is, accepting the means but not the goals (following the available policies without the belief that they can really be useful), or indeed refusing both means and goals, the *retreatist*, social dropout in Merton's scheme, prone to drug use or crime. On the other hand, *rebellion*, according to which some people might want to replace the means and goals with new ones, could be assimilated into the situation in which people look for ways other than standard employment (compatibility with the de-standardisation of life courses). According to this scheme, both ritualists and conformists accept the means, and this is the only thing that we can see from the point of view of the policies, but storytelling can explain the reasons why a conformist could more successfully fulfil the goals of the same policy than a retreatist. Understanding the diverse ways in which two addressees participate in the same policy with opposite results is crucial to investigating the 'success' of the policy. Hirschman's scheme (1970) can also help us to understand young adult conditions: while loyalty can be assimilated into Merton's conformism, between exit and voice a trade-off in terms of uncertainty (exit) versus

tolerance to unsuitable conditions (voice) exists; in our analysis we have evidence of a low level of attention to young adults' voices, which leads young people to drop out of the measures or not even considering participating in them. A better understanding of these phenomena is crucial to designing more effective and better focused policies for the different users.

Notes

- ¹ Although this chapter is the result of the collaboration of the three authors, Marcelo Parreira do Amaral has written the first two sections; Sebastiano Benasso has written the third, fourth, fifth and sixth section and Mauro Palumbo has written the seventh section.
- ² We can recall that, according to Pareto's view (1916), people usually act in a 'non-logic' way, and sometimes this behaviour leads to the result that the designer hypothesised, albeit following a different causal path.

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