2

Landscapes of Lifelong Learning Policies Across Europe: Conceptual Lenses

Sebastiano Benasso, Ruggero Cefalo, and Jenni Tikkanen

Across Europe, the structural and cultural changes which are long-term effects of the neoliberalisation processes (Jessop, 2018), make education systems and local labour markets challenging "environments" to stay in. Within the paradigm of the human capital (Dardot & Laval, 2014), the volatility of markets' needs entails a constant work of adjustment for individuals, who are responsible for the synchronisation of their educational and professional profiles through strategies of self-entrepreneurship. The accountability for making and dealing with professional and

S. Benasso (✉)
Department of Educational Sciences, University of Genoa, Genova, Italy
e-mail: sebastiano.benasso@unige.it

R. Cefalo
Department of Sociology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
e-mail: ruggero.cefalo@univie.ac.at

J. Tikkanen
Turku Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Turku, Turku, Finland
e-mail: jenni.tikkanen@utu.fi

S. Benasso et al. (eds.), *Landscapes of Lifelong Learning Policies across Europe*,
Palgrave Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-96454-2_2

educational choices is ascribed primarily to individuals, who make these choices and shape their life trajectories according to different types and amounts of resources they have at their disposal. Thus, the consequences of social inequalities and disadvantages on young peoples' lives are significant, particularly as young adults—amid their school-to-work and other life transitions—are among groups who deal with the hardest challenges in today's societies (Hamilton et al., 2014; Ilmakunnas, 2019).

Long lasting processes, such as the inflation of education and the decline of young adults' labour market conditions (both in terms of access and permanence), together with the more recent impact of the Great Recession (e.g., Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Sironi, 2018) have increased the distance between those youths who are socially and culturally well-equipped to manage their own trajectories, and those who struggle to achieve autonomy and fulfilling work and life conditions. Lifelong learning (LLL) policies targeting young adults are promoted in many European countries to tackle this issue in order to promote social inclusion—but simultaneously to facilitate economic growth. These policy interventions vary substantially regarding policy aims, intervention sectors, design levels, and target groups. Furthermore, LLL policymaking is extremely context specific, as previous research has pointed out (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020). Examination of regional-level functional and structural relationships has shown that LLL policies interact with sedimented economic and socio-cultural arrangements, thereby producing specific impacts on young people's opportunities and constraints.

Given the potentially non-converging overall aims of the LLL policies, namely economic growth and social inclusion, the analysis of their dynamics, which unfold at different structural, cultural, and micro-relational levels, enables exploring the effects that policies and discourses have on shaping of individuals' life trajectories within specific contexts. To disentangle the interplay among those different levels, the analyses of the case studies presented in this book draw on three main perspectives. First, Life Course Research approach (LCR) (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003) enables considering how biographies, here understood as product of a subjective meaning making concerning one's individual life course (Stauber & Ule, 2015), result from the interplay of manifold factors. They include subjective choices, resources, and embeddedness in

institutional macro-social frames (such as the labour market, welfare and education programmes), as well as in more intangible frames like social inequality, systems of relations, and age norms (Settersen Jr., 2003). The second theoretical lens is the Cultural Political Economy perspective (CPE) (Jessop, 2004; Sum & Jessop, 2013), which highlights the relevance of the cultural dimension for understanding and analysing multilayered social formations, such as LLL policies. It places a specific focus on the relationship between the discourses reproduced by policies and the construction of subjectivities and imaginaries. Lastly, the Governance perspective (GOV) (Ball & Junemann, 2012) calls attention to important shifts in visions and preferred concepts in the political field. Furthermore, it helps to address coordination issues among agents within the State, the economy, the labour market, and civil society at different scalar levels (Kazepov, 2010). Although such perspectives have informed all the case studies presented in this volume, the second part devotes particular focus to LCR (see Chaps. 4 and 5), CPE (Chaps. 6 and 7) and GOV (Chaps. 8 and 9).

In this chapter, we elaborate also on the dimension of opportunity structures, which in their institutional and discursive components emerge from the analyses of the case studies. Drawing on a rich vein of studies that opened the debate about the notions of "life chance" (Weber, 1946; Dahrendorf, 1979) and "opportunity" (Merton, 1968), we can place the concept of opportunity structure in relation to the visions and patterns of action applicable in response to culturally framed problems. Furthermore, we take into particular consideration how recent research (Koopmans et al., 2005; Roberts, 2009; Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015) has problematized the dimensions of discursive and institutional opportunity structures. Discursive opportunity structures shape public discourses circulating at different levels (from international to national, from mainstream to common sense) and determine what a problem is and how to deal with it. Institutional opportunity structures organise the implementation patterns and modes of action according to specific structural features at the national level, contextualising and actualising the discursive opportunity structures in relation to local systems.

Moreover, a third, relational component of opportunity structures has caught our attention due to the observed relevance of the processes of

negotiation of aims, strategies, and solutions among the actors involved in the field of LLL policies. Such processes address the grey area between structure and agency, objective and subjective elements in the theorisation on opportunity structures, and they impact the meanings attached to the participation in LLL policies by the different actors participating in the field. Thus, we seek to pave the way for further research on the relational components of opportunity structures. We do so by introducing the concept of relational opportunity structure, which highlights the structure of interactions whereby people negotiate the meaning of the LLL policies they enter (or reject), framing them as opportunities (or not). The dimension of relational opportunity structure helps emphasising the active character of the subject, whereas discursive and institutional opportunity structures mainly look at structuring agents and their impact on individuals' possibilities of choice. When applied to the analysis of case studies, the relational opportunity structure perspective enables exploring the effects of the multi-faceted intersection between individual biographies and LLL policies.

The following sections will present the main theoretical perspectives applied in the analyses of the case studies, as well as the reconstruction of relevant stages of the debate about opportunity structure. Finally, the relational opportunity structure is introduced as a new direction to be explored by further research.

2.1 The Three Main Theoretical Perspective Applied in the Case Studies Analysis

2.1.1 Life Course Research

The normative patters and pathways of age-proper behaviour and transition sequences that people tend to follow in their lives are typically institutionalised through the regulation of the welfare state and its institutions (Kok, 2007). The concept of life course refers to this institutionalised construction of culturally defined patterns of lives (see Stauber & Ule, 2015). In sociological research, the concept of life course has been defined

in various ways and with varying degrees of complexity from "people's movements through social space" (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016, p. 31) to "a temporal pattern of age-graded events and roles that chart the social contours of biography, providing a proximal content for the dynamics of human development from conception and birth to death" (Elder et al., 2015, p. 6). Particularly central to the concept is that individuals' life courses are multidimensional as they develop in different mutually related and influencing life domains (Mayer, 2004) that correspond to functionally differentiated spheres of modern societies (Heinz et al., 2009a). With regard to policies related to the different societal institutions, such as education and training, it is important to recognise that they represent public interventions aiming to bring about preferred visions of individuals' personal and social development (Walther, 2011; Heinz et al., 2009b), which relate to a desired "normal" life course in the society.

As a result of the profound changes that have taken place in Western societies in the last decades, life courses have become less similar and the domination of specific types of life courses has become weaker. This process is often referred to as de-standardisation of life courses (Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007), which has been noted in several studies (see Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Eurofound, 2014). Indeed, the view that life courses have become less predictable, less stable, and less collectively determined and, hence, increasingly flexible and individualised, has become widely accepted (Brückner & Mayer, 2005). The different transitions related to progressing from youth to adulthood have become more prolonged and non-linear, and the challenges young people face in constructing their life courses are unprecedentedly demanding, as they must navigate in an increasingly complex, insecure, and globalised world (see Tikkanen, 2019). Thus, the course and the sequence of the life course phases cannot be taken for granted in today's societies (Parreira do Amaral, 2020).

Life course research (e.g., Elder et al., 2003; Meyer, 2009; Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003) has no explicit and encompassing theory as such (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016). Thus, the life course approach or perspective should be rather viewed as a heuristic tool for studying how individual lives result not only from subjective choices and individual resources but also from their embeddedness in institutional macro-social frames. The latter include, for example, the labour market, education, and the welfare mix,

but also more intangible frames such as social inequality (Mayer, 2004) What follows is that the life course approach enables analysing the ways in which individual lives are affected by macro-level societal conditions and changes, and how different institutions have a filtering role in the way these changes impact individual opportunities, constraints, and decision-making (Kok, 2007; Mills, 2007). The usefulness of the life course approach in studying young people's lives derives from the logical framework it offers for analysing their perceptions, expectations, and abilities to create subjective meaning and continuity along the different phases, domains, and spheres of their life courses. It also enables taking into account the vastly diverse living conditions of young people across European societies in these analyses (Parreira do Amaral, 2020).

2.1.2 Cultural Political Economy

At the heart of the Cultural Political Economy perspective (Jessop, 2004; Sum & Jessop, 2013) is "the analysis of the articulation between the economic and the political and their embedding in broader sets of social relations" (Jessop, 2010, p. 337). Through its multidisciplinary approach, the CPE perspective fosters critical readings of the political economic sphere. By drawing on a range of disciplines (e.g., economics, political science, and sociology) CPE tackles the complexity of multi-layered social formations, such as LLL policies, considering the concurrent processes of "culturalization" of the economics and "economisation" of the cultural (Biebuyck & Meltzer, 2017). The distinction between material and cultural dimensions, which has informed different traditions of research in political economy, is overcome by CPE, as it looks at the interplay between the discursive and cultural components intervening in the political field and the material elements of social life shaped by the economic dimension. In this view, the impact of the neoliberal turn on both sides of social structure and hegemonic discourses can be questioned through analysing policies as social formations embedded in cultural contexts and broad sets of social relations, which reflect selective interpretations of problems, their causes, and preferred solutions (Rinne et al., 2020). Hence, CPE puts a strong focus on the "study of policy discourses, economic and political imaginaries, their translation into hegemonic

strategies and projects, and their institutionalisation into specific structures and practices" (Parreira do Amaral, 2020, p. 6 f.).

Resonating with dominant discourses, such as the push towards self-entrepreneurship in neoliberal societies, policies convey imaginaries about what is generally understood as relevant (e.g., achieving greater employability through "adjusting" the individual profiles to the market needs) and feasible (for instance, pursuing the synchronisation between individual profiles and market through participation in LLL policies) in different economic systems. Policies tend to consistently promote specific practices as best ways for actualising problems and solutions framed as relevant in the hegemonic discourses. At the same time, the establishment of dominant understandings, meanings, and sets of practices by policymaking hinders the development and circulation of alternative views and related solutions. To explore these dynamics, the CPE perspective considers both material and semiotic factors informing the policymaking processes through mechanisms of variation, selection, and retention.

> A thorough CPE analysis would include the role of extra-semiotic (material) as well as semiotic factors in the contingent emergence (variation), subsequent privileging (selection), and ongoing realization (retention) of specific discursive and material practices. (Jessop, 2010, p. 340)

The variation occurs when narratives about "new" problems emerge at mainstream level pushing aside the current policymaking patterns to provide new solutions. To do so, policymakers need to select among the potential interpretations of such problems and to choose the solutions among the ones shaped by the political economy structures and the prevailing ideological orientations of their context. Once the new solutions are assimilated into stable regulatory frameworks, the retention phase consists of the institutionalisation of new policies.

Given its attention for both the culturally shaped processes of meaning making and the results of the interplay between discursive and material elements of social life, the CPE perspective fits the overall purposes of the analysis presented in this book, which aims to tackle LLL policies as multidimensional and multilevel "landscapes" where subjective, cultural, and structural factors intertwine.

2.1.3 Governance Perspective

According to Levi-Faur (2012), the concept of governance has at least four meanings in the research literature. Governance as a structure denotes the structures of formal and informal institutions. As a mechanism, governance refers to institutional procedures of decision-making. Governance can also be viewed as a process signifying the dynamics and steering functions involved in policymaking processes. For example, Le Galès (2004, p. 243) defines governance as a coordination process of actors, social groups, and institutions aiming to reach collectively defined objectives. Lastly, governance as a strategy signifies those efforts to govern and manipulate the design of institutions and mechanisms that aim to shape choices and preferences.

Despite the differences in the ways governance is approached, Stoker (1998, p. 17) emphasises that there is a "baseline agreement that governance refers to the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred". This view is also echoed in the three common features Kooiman and Bavinck (2005) distinguish in the variations of the governance perspective. Firstly, they underscore that governing is not only a matter of public but also private actors. In addition to governments, for example companies, non-governmental organisations, political parties, international organisations, and individuals are capable of addressing societal problems and opportunities as well as engaging in shaping societal futures. Closely related to this is the second common feature of the governance approaches; the emphasis on the way dividing lines between the public and private sectors have become blurred and interests are frequently shared. This implies a growing awareness of the fact that many societal problems and opportunities require the commitment of a broader set of actors and approaches than previously was the case. The third shared denominator is perceiving governance as both having a basis in and reflecting societal developments. In this regard, Kooiman and Bavinck (2005, p. 16) emphasise that

> the state of contemporary governance reflects the growth of social, economic, and political interdependencies, and trends such as differentiation, integration, globalisation and localisation. These processes result in length-

ening chains of interaction, stretching across different scale levels and sectors. In addition to other effects, the lengthening of chains increases the numbers of parties participating in them, while interactions among these parties also multiply.

In the field of social sciences, the concept of governance and the governance perspective have been used widely. According to Parreira do Amaral (2020), the governance perspective calls attention to the significant shifts of perspective from viewing the coordination of social activities as "governing", "control", or "steering" to an emphasis on regulatory structures. He highlights also that the usefulness of the governance perspective as a conceptual tool relates to the ways it enables researchers to "understand the interactions of different actors, at the different levels, and with different mandates, competences and varying degrees of leverage power at their disposal" (Parreira do Amaral, 2020, p. 11). In a similar vein, Daly (2003), who positions the relationships between the processes of policymaking and implementation together with the identity of the actors and the institutional setting at the heart of governance, argues that the governance perspective has three key strengths. These include its direct interest in policymaking, focus on the state, and the ability to connect different levels of action and analysis. Regarding particularly social policy, she views governance to be more than just a descriptive concept as it provides both a critical perspective to the connections between the distribution of power and the nature and role of the state and has potential to reveal how these connections play out in public policy (Daly, 2003, p. 125).

2.2 Institutional and Discursive Opportunity Structures

As discussed above, in contemporary societies, young people's transitions are shaped by a wide variety of institutional and structural settings and living conditions combining into different national, regional, and local landscapes. These landscapes can enable (or hinder) specific opportunities as a consequence of the interaction between multi-scalar institutional

configurations and local socio-economic conditions (Scandurra et al., 2020). At the same time, due to the increasing fragmentation of transitions within the broader processes of life course de-standardisation (Brückner & Mayer, 2005; Levy & Bühlmann, 2016), biographies appear as potential fields of agency and, thus, they cannot be seen as entirely determined by the influence of structural agents (Lehmann, 2005). Biographical choices are situated in contextual conditions and institutional settings (Roberts, 2018) that contribute to the structures of chances and constraints within which young people actively choose and make sense of their choices.

The opportunity structure theory introduced by Roberts (1968) to account for the different paths and trajectories observable in the analysis of youth transitions is particularly fecund. It argues that the interaction between structuring agents (e.g., family background, education, and the labour market) creates blueprints or career routes within which different groups of young people are required to make successive and reflexive choices (Roberts, 2009). Opportunity structures frame the configuration of possibilities and constraints for thought and action in any given context. They represent

> collective and individual responses to situations confronting us, [meaning that] our responses to these situations are fundamentally framed by the kinds of opportunities for thought or action that we have at our disposal, or by the range of both construals and constructions of the nature of the problem/issue we are confronting, and the range and kinds of responses from which we might select. (Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015, p. 30)

Opportunity structures are both strategically selective as they limit the courses of action that are likely to see actors realise their intentions, and unevenly distributed because the possible options differ among groups of young people according to their background, resources, and previous course of action (Hay, 2002). For instance, upon entering the labour market, school leavers are presented with different opportunity structures, which can be described as varying degrees of social proximity to different types of occupations. Subsequently, their opportunities become cumulatively structured following a dynamic course of intertwining

possibilities and individuals' choices of actions consistent with the depiction of youth transitions as process with a specific time-dimension that needs to be considered (Brzinsky-Fay, 2007).

The structuring agents produce two distinct but related opportunity structures. Discursive opportunity structures (Rinne & Parreira do Amaral, 2015) impact—mostly through proscription—the cultural meaning and prestige attributed to certain courses of action as they either rule out or contribute to the stigmatisation of specific ideas and choices. For instance, one of the overarching issues framed as a problem by the discursive opportunity structures (and presented in the empirical section of this book) is the scarce employability of young people, which is seen to be a result of their lack of relevant competencies, poor attitude, or limited experience. Accordingly, the improvement of skills via various types of training is one of the most applied solution to fix the perceived individual deficits in employability. Among the theoretical perspectives applied in this book, analyses using the lens of cultural political economy are particularly equipped to identify and elaborate on discursive opportunity structures.

Institutional opportunity structures, on the other hand, organise the implementation patterns and modes of action according to specific regulations and structural features at the national/local level, and they contextualise and actualise the discursive opportunity structures in relation to local systems. By setting points of decision-making, which are defined by rules, options, and requirements, institutional opportunity structures frame a positively sanctioned course of action structured around the sequence of transitions. We can think of, for instance, the specific upper secondary qualifications that are necessary to enrol into higher education, the requirements and conditionalities attached to accessing unemployment benefits (e.g., regular meeting with employment services operators, attendance of training courses), or the formal processes that need to be followed when certifying informal and non-formal skills in diverse contexts. Along this line, adopting the governance perspective allows analysing the "pathways of opportunities" shaped for their recipients by policies and regulations that aim at solving the "problems" through the "proper solutions" framed by discursive opportunity structures.

Both institutional and discursive opportunity structures develop according to a multi-scalar configuration as supra and sub-national contexts have a deep impact on youth trajectories. On the one hand, the expansion of the knowledge-economy and the Europeanization of education (Dale & Robertson, 2009), the sharpening global competition for highly rewarded jobs (Brown, 2003), and the consequences of the Great Recession of 2008 play an important role in structuring the list of available options. On the other hand, local socio-economic conditions and local welfare arrangements shape regional skills ecosystems (Dalziel, 2015) and regional opportunity structures (Cefalo & Scandurra, 2021) contributing to significant intra-national variations of youth transitions (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2020; Scandurra et al., 2020).

In order to be researched, these interplays call for analytical approaches that combine actor-related and structural analyses of institutions and discourses: macro-processes like globalisation, tertiarisation, and family changes are filtered through national and local institutions at the meso-level and they interact with young people's reflexivity and agency at the individual or micro-level. It is especially regarding this latter point where we see room for further reflection as it has often constituted a "blind spot" in the opportunity structure theory. For instance, although including subjective agency as a defining trait of opportunity structures, Roberts (2018) claims that youth's agency in school-to-work transitions ultimately finds its way through pre-determined material and cultural possibilities. Young people exercise agency within specific opportunity structures, thus propelling their careers forward biographically, but by doing this they tend to consolidate pre-built pathways and trajectories. Consequently, their aspirations would mostly adapt to the direction that their careers take them (Roberts, 1968).

Several scholars have criticised this standpoint, considering the interaction between structuring agents and youth a less rigid and predetermined process. These authors advocate the necessity of further theorising the interplay between social structures and individual agency (Moensted, 2021) to capture the nuances of decision-making and their impact on educational trajectories, career building, and labour market insertion (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2019; Atkins, 2017). Dale and Parreira do Amaral (2015) have shed some light on the nexus between

structure and agency in their theoretical and analytical elaboration on opportunity structures. They argue that opportunity structures frame possibilities, but do not necessarily determine them, as they do not rule out the existence of competing framings of issues or alternative legitimate courses of action. In this view, the opportunity structure approach leads to a focus on how the menu of possible choices is formed as a preliminary to choosing within it (Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015). More room for taking into consideration individual agency in dealing with opportunity structures is opened up in the ongoing debate. For instance, scholars working on the relationship between opportunity structures and social diversity categories in the field of entrepreneurship (see Ozaris Kacar et al., 2021; Villares-Varela et al., 2017; Ozasir Kacar & Essers, 2019) have made a further step towards the exploration of components of opportunity structures which overcome the objective dimension of rules and resources. To do so, they combine the opportunity structure theory with the intersectionality approach. Starting from Giddens' structuration theory (1984), they show how "structural forces often reproduce a given social group's intersectional positioning" (Romero & Valdez, 2016, p. 1554 quoted in Ozaris Kacar et al., 2021, p. 92). This approach sheds light on how inequalities can be produced by the varying relations between opportunity structures and "multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (Romero & Valdez, 2016, p. 1554 quoted in Ozaris Kacar et al., 2021, p. 92), broadening the scope of analysis beyond the understanding of opportunity structures as structurally and culturally pre-determined options, which shape individual agency. From a different standpoint, research on street-level bureaucracy has confirmed the existence of discretionary spaces in the provision of welfare policies and services (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). In some cases, these spaces may imply a highly shared construction of objectives and instruments between policy operators and beneficiaries.

Hence, the link between the formation of the "list of possibilities" and the choices within it represents a relatively grey area in the opportunity structure theory calling for further reflection and investigation of a relatively under-explored field of relationality and interaction. This process takes place within the frame set by institutional and discursive opportunity structures, but its results are not necessarily pre-determined in the

strict reproduction of rules and ideas, for it also opens up for possibilities of negotiations, flexible adaption, selective appropriation of meanings, and even construction of alternative pathways.

2.3 Accounting for the Relational Dimension of Opportunity Structures

The research presented in this book shows that the negotiations of the meanings attached to LLL policies by different participants and stakeholders take place especially at a micro-level of interaction between actors. Indeed, as it emerges particularly from the chapters mostly devoted to the LCR perspective, the relational dynamics prompt different reactions and lead to different results in terms of impact of the policy participation on the addressees' biographies. The interviewed young adults participating in the analysed LLL policies showed different forms of agency especially in relation to the "use" they were able to make of the policies for supporting their biographical work. For instance, participating in a LLL policy has improved the plan-making ability for some of them, which does not result only from guidance actions about the system of opportunities available in their local contest, but is also a consequence of reflexive work about their aspirations based on a renewed capacity to acknowledge their own potentials. However, others framed their participation as a form of culturally spendable "justification" of their current inability to "see" their own future while still staying active. More generally, different degrees of overlapping between the goals of the policies and young adults themselves were observed, and the leeway for framing (or reframing when needed) the meanings attached to the participation in the policies depended mainly on the kinds of relations the young adults were able to build "around the policy". According to the case analyses presented in the empirical section of this book, this was particularly relevant when the interviewed youths were facing disadvantages at different levels. Some were struggling to adapt their profile to the formal requirements for accessing the opportunities provided by local institutions. For others, their very capacity to "see" opportunities and find links with their

projects was limited by a heterogeneous range of factors, such as their family or ethnic background, the prevailing cultural assumptions about what youths "should" aspire to, or the problems experienced in relationships with significant others. In most of these cases, it was mainly through the construction of positive relations with LLL policy professionals, tutors, employers, and other actors participating in the field that the structural rigidities or the limits reinforced at cultural level were overcome—or at least questioned—fostering processes of self-reflexivity, improvement of self-confidence, and life-plan revision. Thus, the relational dimension had an impact on the amount and nature of the opportunities achievable by these youths often by broadening them. In other words, we can argue that different relations contribute to both bridging the gap between structure and individuals' choice, therefore impacting the institutional and discursive opportunity structures faced by youths in their contexts, and to creating more room for their agentic capacity.

Exploring such relational and contextual processes requires lenses that, from a micro-level, enable looking at the interplay between objective and subjective dimensions in shaping the actors' choices and actions within systems of opportunity structures. Therefore, a sensible solution to be employed is to take into consideration how different interactions lead to different opportunity structures. We propose to frame such perspective as "relational opportunity structure". Relational opportunity structures follow an operational logic as they target the interaction between objective and subjective elements that intervene in the negotiation that takes place at the micro-level and results in a specific course of action. The objective aspect of relational opportunity structure is shaped by the varieties of contexts—material, organisational, administrative, professional, locational, and so forth—as well as by discursive and institutional structures. The subjective elements reside in particular local "logics of action" which result from individual resources and attitudes, and are shaped by the relations with other actors participating in the field. The unfolding of relational opportunity structures includes a range of outcomes. At the level of structures, outcomes may include a selection of a course of action within the list of possibilities, an exclusion of some options, and a creative opening of new opportunities; they can reproduce but also modify previous institutional and discursive opportunity structures. At the level

of the subject, outcomes may include consequences of choices on life course events and impacts on identity construction.

Relational opportunity structures can be investigated fruitfully through several theoretical lenses that share an attention to the relational and the context-based elements outlined above. The life course perspective can tackle relational opportunity structures and their outcomes especially at the individual and subjective levels, shedding light on perceptions, expectations, and creation of subjective meaning. Cultural political economy appears to be particularly suited for investigating the linkages between relational and discursive opportunity structures, thus facilitating an understanding of how discourses impact and are impacted by the unfolding of relations at the micro-level. Finally, a governance perspective allows to observe the linkages between the relational and institutional by looking at discretionary spaces in the provision of policies and services.

References

Atkins, L. (2017). The odyssey: School to work transitions, serendipity and position in the field. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 38*(5), 641–655.

Ball, S., & Junemann, C. (2012). *Networks, new governance and education*. The Policy Press.

Biebuyck, W., & Meltzer, J. (2017). Cultural political economy. *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: International Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.140.

Boyadjieva, P., & Ilieva-Trichkova, P. (2019). (un)realized agency in a situation of early job insecurity: Patterns of young people's agency regarding employment. In B. Hvinden, C. Hyggen, M. A. Schoyen, & T. Sirovátka (Eds.), *Youth unemployment and job insecurity in Europe*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Brown, P. (2003). The opportunity trap: Education and employment in a global economy. *European Educational Research Journal, 2*(1), 141–179.

Brückner, H., & Mayer, K. U. (2005). De-standardization of the life course: What it might mean? And if it means anything, whether it actually took place? *Advances in Life Course Research, 9*, 27–53.

Brzinsky-Fay, C. (2007). Lost in transition? Labour entry sequences of school leavers in Europe. *European Sociological Review, 23*, 409–422.

Cefalo, R., & Scandurra, R. (2021). Territorial disparities in youth labour market chances in Europe. *Regional Studies, Regional Science, 8*(1), 228–238.

Dahrendorf, R. (1979). *Life chances: Approaches to social and political theory*. The University of Chicago.

Dale, R., & Parreira do Amaral, M. (2015). Discursive and institutional opportunity structures in the governance of educational trajectories. In M. Parreira do Amaral, R. Dale, & P. Loncle (Eds.), *Shaping the futures of young Europeans: Education governance in eight European countries* (pp. 23–41). Symposium Books.

Dale, R., & Robertson, S. (Eds.). (2009). *Globalisation and Europeanisation in education*. Symposium Books.

Daly, M. (2003). Governance and social policy. *Journal of Social Policy, 32*(1), 113–128.

Dalziel, P. (2015). Regional skill ecosystems to assist young people making education employment linkages in transition from school to work. *Local Economy, 30*(1), 53–66.

Dardot, P., & Laval, C. (2014). *The new way of the world: On neoliberal society*. Verso Books.

Elder, G., Kirkpatrick Johnson, M., & Crosnoe, R. (2003). The emergence and development of life course theory. In J. Mortimer & M. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the life course* (pp. 3–19). Kluwer Academic/Plenum.

Elder, G., Shanahan, M., & Jennings, J. (2015). Human development in time and place. In M. Bornstein & T. Leventhal (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science* (pp. 6–54). Wiley.

Elzinga, C. H., & Liefbroer, A. C. (2007). Destandardization of family-life trajectories of young adults. *European Journal of Population, 23*(3), 225–250.

Eurofound. (2014). *Social situation of young people in Europe*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Furlong, A., & Cartmel, F. (2007). *Young people and social change: New perspectives* (2nd ed.). Open University Press.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society*. University of California Press.

Halvorsen, R., & Hvinden, B. (2018). Youth, diversity and employment in times of crisis and economic restructuring—An introduction. In R. Halvorsen & B. Hvinden (Eds.), *Youth, diversity and employment: Comparative perspectives on labour market policies* (pp. 1–31). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Hamilton, M., Antonucci, L., & Roberts, S. (2014). Introduction: Young people and social policy in Europe. In L. Antonucci, M. Hamilton, & S. Roberts

(Eds.), *Young people and social policy in Europe: Dealing with risk, inequality and precarity in times of crisis* (pp. 1–12). Palgrave Macmillan.

Hay, C. (2002). Globalisation as a problem of political analysis: Restoring agents to a 'Process without a Subject' and politics to a logic of economic compulsion. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 15*(3), 379–392.

Heinz, W. R., Huinink, J., Swader, C. S., & Weymann, A. (2009a). General introduction. In W. R. Heinz, A. Weymann, & J. Huinink (Eds.), *The life course reader: Individuals and societies across time* (pp. 15–30). Campus Verlag.

Heinz, W. R., Huinink, J., & Weymann, A. (Eds.). (2009b). *The life course reader: Individuals and societies across time*. Campus Verlag.

Ilmakunnas, I. (2019). *Economic difficulties during the transition into adulthood in Finland: A register-based study*. University of Turku.

Jessop, B. (2004). Critical semiotic analysis and cultural political economy. *Critical Discourse Studies, 1*(2), 159–174.

Jessop, B. (2010). Cultural political economy and critical policy studies. *Critical Policy Studies, 3*(3–4), 336–356.

Jessop, B. (2018). Neoliberalization, uneven development, and Brexit: Further reflections on the organic crisis of the British state and society. *European Planning Studies, 26*(9), 1728–1746.

Kazepov, Y. (Ed.). (2010). *Rescaling social policies towards multilevel governance in Europe: Social assistance, activation and Care for Older People*. Routledge.

Kok, J. (2007). Principles and prospects of the life course paradigm. *Annales de Demographie Historique, 1*, 203–230.

Kooiman, J., & Bavinck, M. (2005). The governance perspective. In J. Kooiman, M. Bavinck, S. Jentoft, & R. Pullin (Eds.), *Fish for life: Interactive governance for fisheries* (pp. 11–24). Amsterdam University Press.

Koopmans, R., Statham, P., Giugni, M., & Passy, F. (2005). *Contested citizenship: Immigration and diversity in Europe*. University of Minnesota Press.

Le Galès, P. (2004). Gouvernance. In L. Bousssaguet, S. Jacquot, & P. Ravinet (Eds.), *Dictionnaire des politiques publiques* (pp. 242–250). Presses de Sciences Po.

Lehmann, W. (2005). Choosing to labour: Structure and agency in school-work transitions. *Canadian Journal of Sociology, 30*(3), 325–350.

Levi-Faur, D. (Ed.). (2012). *The Oxford handbook of governance*. Oxford University Press.

Levy, R., & Bühlmann, F. (2016). Towards a socio-structural framework for life course analysis. *Advances in Life Course Research, 30*, 30–42.

Mayer, K. (2004). Whose lives? How history, societies, and institutions define and shape life courses. *Research in Human Development, 1*(3), 161–187.

Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure* (3rd ed.). Free Press.

Meyer, U. K. (2009). New directions in life course research. *Annual Review of Sociology, 35*, 413–433.

Mills, M. (2007). Individualization and the life course: Toward a theoretical model and empirical evidence. In C. Howard (Ed.), *Contested individualization: Debates about contemporary personhood* (pp. 61–79). Palgrave Macmillan.

Moensted, M. L. (2021). Social citizenship aspirations: An alternative line of analysis of the social reproduction of youth inequality. *Young, 29*(3), 236–255.

Mortimer, J. T., & Shanahan, M. J. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of the life course*. Kluwer Academic Publisher.

Ozaris Kacar, S., Verduijn, K., & Essers, C. (2021). Opportunity structures from an intersectional perspective. In T. M. Cooney (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of minority entrepreneurship editors* (pp. 87–115). Palgrave Macmillan.

Ozasir Kacar, S., & Essers, C. (2019). The interplay between identity construction and opportunity structures: Narratives of Turkish migrant women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands. *International Small Business Journal, 37*(7), 713–731.

Parreira do Amaral, M. (2020). Lifelong learning policies for young adults in Europe: A conceptual and methodological discussion. In M. Parreira do Amaral, S. Kovacheva, & X. Rambla (Eds.), *Lifelong learning policies for young adults in Europe: Navigating between knowledge and economy* (pp. 3–20). Policy Press.

Parreira do Amaral, M., Kovacheva, S., & Rambla, X. (Eds.). (2020). *Lifelong learning policies for young adults in Europe: Navigating between knowledge and economy*. Policy Press.

Rinne, R., & Parreira do Amaral, M. (2015). Reading Discourses in the Governance of Educational Trajectories of Youth in Europe. In M. Parreira do Amaral, R. Dale & Loncle P. (Eds.), *Shaping the Futures of Young Europeans: education governance in eight European countries* (pp. 67–86). Symposium books.

Rinne, R., Silvennoinen, H., Järvinen, T., & Tikkanen, J. (2020). Governing the normalisation of young adults through lifelong learning policies. In M. Parreira do Amaral, S. Kovacheva, & X. Rambla (Eds.), *Lifelong learning policies for young adults in Europe: Navigating between knowledge and economy* (pp. 106–126). Policy Press.

Roberts, K. (1968). The entry into employment: An approach towards a general theory. *The Sociological Review, 16*(2), 165–184.
Roberts, K. (2009). Opportunity structures then and now. *Journal of Education and Work, 22*(5), 355–368.
Roberts, K. (2018). Explaining education-to-work transitions: Thinking backwards, situating agency and comparing countries. *Review of European Studies, 10*(1), 72–82.
Romero, M., & Valdez, Z. (2016). Introduction to the special issue: Intersectionality and entrepreneurship. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 39*(9), 1553–1565.
Scandurra, R., Cefalo, R., & Kazepov, Y. (2020). School to work outcomes during the great recession, is the regional scale relevant for young people's life chances? *Journal of Youth Studies, 24*(4), 441–465.
Settersen, R. A., Jr. (2003). Age structuring and the rhythm of the life course. In J. Mortimer & M. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the life course* (pp. 3–19). Kluwer Academic/Plenum.
Sironi, M. (2018). Economic conditions of young adults before and after the great recession. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues, 39*, 103–116.
Stauber, B., & Ule, M. (2015). *Life course—Biography*. GOETE Glossary. Retrieved December 5, 2020, from http://www.goete.eu/glossary
Stoker, G. (1998). Governance as theory: Five propositions. *International Social Science Journal, 50*(1), 17–28.
Sum, N. L., & Jessop, B. (2013). *Towards a cultural political economy: Putting culture in its place*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
Tikkanen, J. (2019). *Constructing life courses in times of uncertainty—Individualisation and social structures in the context of Finnish education*. University of Turku.
Tummers, L., & Bekkers, V. (2014). Policy implementation, street-level bureaucracy, and the importance of discretion. *Public Management Review, 16*(4), 527–547.
Villares-Varela, M., Ram, M., & Jones, T. (2017). Female immigrant global entrepreneurship: From invisibility to empowerment? In C. Henry, T. Nelson, & K. V. Lewis (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to global female entrepreneurship*. Routledge.
Walther, A. (2011). *Regimes der Unterstützung im Lebenslauf. Ein Beitrag zum sozialpädagogischen Vergleich*. Barbara Budrich.
Weber, M. (1946). *The theory of social and economic organization*. Free Press.