# Educational Trajectories at the Crossroad between Life Course and Education.

## An Interactive Theoretical Approach

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## Abstract

Questo articolo delinea un quadro teorico sul concetto di traiettorie educative, riferendosi a come gli individui attraversino le diverse fasi nella propria formazione di cittadini e professionisti, lungo percorsi che si intersecano con quelli intrapresi nelle altre sfere della vita; vengono in particolari analizzate le modalità con cui tali transizioni sono affrontate e i modi in cui vengono prese le decisioni relative al percorso formativo. Nelle società della conoscenza europee, le interazioni tra educazione e corso della vita divengono sempre più evidenti, enfatizzate sia dai cambiamenti negli stili di vita umana nei bisogni, sia nella riconcettualizzazione *dell'educazione in lifelong learning*. Le ricerche sociali ed educative europee ripetutamente mettono in guardia sul rischio che, nelle condizioni attuali, l'apprendimento diventa più che mai un potente fattore di riproduzione sociale, e non di promozione delle pari opportunità. Il presente articolo si propone di contribuire al dibattito in corso sul tema del rapporto che lega istruzione e svantaggio, proponendo l'approccio interattivo come il più adatto per capire e quindi contrastare questo effetto ingannevole dell'educazione.

This paper presents the theoretical concepts of educational trajectories[1] that refers to how individuals proceed through different educational stages, how they combine them with other life spheres, how they cope with transitions and how they take decisions regarding their educational career. In the European knowledge societies, it becomes evident the interactions between education and life courses, deriving both from the changes in the human life

styles and needs and in the re-conceptualisation of education into (lifelong) learning. European social and educational researches repeatedly warn about the risk that under present conditions learning becomes more than never a powerful factor of social reproduction than of equal opportunities. This paper aims at contributing at the current debate on education and disadvantage, indicating the interactive approach as the most suitable to understand and therefore counteract this misleading effect of education.

**Parole chiave:** traiettorie educative, educazione, corso di vita, biografia, transizioni, decision-making

**Keywords:** educational trajectories, education, life course, biography, transitions, decision-making

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## Introduction

This paper aims at clarifying and conceptualising the meaning and the research implications of the concept of educational trajectories from its two underlying basic concepts: education and life course. The concept of life course allows us to evaluate the adequacy of education for social integration, as it describes how in modern societies individual lives have been standardised by institutionalising distinct life phases and the transitions between them. Historically, (public) education was introduced to prepare children for the demands of adulthood related to employment, family and citizenship; education thereby contributed to the emergence of youth as a life phase (Zinnecker, 2013/1997). Ongoing differentiation and de-standardisation of life courses have extended the perspective of school learning towards lifelong learning (Field and Leicester, 2002). Accordingly, life courses are addressed as lifelong educational trajectories.

In the first section, we introduce the most recent developments of the concept and perspective of the life course and the transformation of the traditional concept of education into (lifelong) learning that according to educational and sociological research risks to speed up the reproduction of education inequalities and disadvantages in the European knowledge societies. In doing this, we relate institutionally foreseen trajectories to individual reconstructions in terms of subjective biographies (structure vs. agency). In the second section, we present the meaning and interpretation of school transi-

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tions highlighting both their structural paths and the individual decision-making processes, which we do not consider as merely individual but as interactive. Consequently, we focus on the actors intervening in transitions considering both the contribution of institutional 'gate-keepers' and 'significant others' to the decision-making processes of students. In doing this, we illustrate two heuristic tools developed for comparing the ways in which transitions are institutionalised in European countries and the supports on which young people can count for coping with their educational trajectories and social integration. After that, a special focus is set on educational decision-making theories and their implication for the governance of educational trajectories. In the concluding section, we sum up what has emerged in the different sections of the paper.

### Educational trajectories: education in life course and biography

The institutionalisation of age-based social roles and positions in early modernity has produced the emergence of the societal order defined as life course. This social institution is intended either "… in terms of a set of rules that orders a key area or a key dimension of life" (Kohli, 1985, p. 1) or as an "age-based sequence of typical, socially defined conditions endowed with specific expectations (roles)" (Scherger, 2009, p. 532). Emerging from historical individualisation processes such as the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Industrial (and Capitalist) Revolution, modern life courses link the individual within the framework of a collective order through a gendered organisation of work, implying (male) productive and (female) reproductive roles. Thereby labour market and the family become the institutional cores of the life course and societal order, which are driven by institutional actors through life course policies (Leibfried and Leisering, 1997) corresponding to the powerful configuration of cultural, socio-economic and institutional factors according to which "normal" lives are recognised. Two key institutions regulate and order individual lives around work: education as the starting point for young people's socialisation into work-based lives and the welfare state as a system of incentives and guarantees privileging such work-based lives over other life styles (Lessenich, 2005; Mayer, 1997).

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Fordist economic model standardised in most Western countries individual life course, distinguishing three life phases: preparation for work structured through educational trajectories

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(childhood/youth), a life phase characterised by work (adulthood), and a life phase after work (old age). This standardisation of personal life and transition steps (starting a family or entering employment early and gendered choices within the labour market) was made possible by the presence of stable work positions, although of different statuses. A high level of uniformity of a gendered work division affected the vast majority of individuals; only few of them fell out of sequence or skipped the foreseen transitions (Kohli, 1985). In the case of a critical life event, individuals could count on a generous (Keynesian) welfare system, which was oriented towards this standard life course model.

The role of education in this life course regime (Kohli, 1985) was to provide qualification (preparation for a labour market career), allocation (selection to different segments of the labour market and societal positions), and integration (in terms of internalisation of dominant norms and values) (Fend, 1974). This (meritocratic) functionalisation of education paved the way for the bureaucratic model according to which success in school was legitimised as main factor of social reproduction. In the 1950s, the promise of social mobility through schooling set in motion mass education in order to "produce" future workers proficient in basic literacy, ready for a labour market promising mobility from repetitive worked on a production line towards specialized tasks. This bureaucratic education model privileged standardised knowledge curricula in accordance with the cultural capital of the upper classes over learning as a social practice that takes place in other than educational societal sites. Thus, education contributed to social control and reproduction. According to Foucault (1980), the introduction of mass schooling may be interpreted as a main contribution to processes of individualisation whereby individuals accept individual achievement as the principle of social integration. This education model recognises only (formal) school learning as intended by the dominant class, neglecting other forms - non-formal and informal - and processes - self-directed, conscious and tacit (Young, 1998; Coffield, 1999; Field, 2005; Mørch and du Bois-Reymond, 2006). It devaluates the role of individuals as active learners (Vygotsky, 1962) and learning as situated within social context (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1988; Chisholm, 2008). In the Post-Fordist era, the flexibilisation of the labour market increased the need for highly skilled workers, and young people started to postpone gradually their entry into the labour market due to the need to prolong their educational trajectories in order to compete for the best labour market positions. Individually, this shift went

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hand in hand with the emergence of new life styles and changes in values and norms, gradually leading to a decoupling of the school-to-work transition from other life transitions (family, housing, parenthood) and a consequent destandardisation of the life course. Stating the transformation of modern societies into late (high) or post-modern (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990; 1991; Bauman, 2001), contemporary scholars ascribe the destandardisation of the life course to the erosion of traditions and normative frameworks. In the context of a post-traditional order, life ceases to be something given and pre-structured and turns into an individual task. "The self becomes a reflexive project" (Giddens, 1991, p. 32), permitting choices in all life's spheres that no longer follows the linear ordering of the Fordist era, and overcomes the roles and meaning assigned to it by the traditional societal order.

Accordingly, the bureaucratic Fordist model- has progressively shifted towards a managerial model of education (Maroy, 2004; Young, 2007; Daun, 2007) in accordance with the need of firstly the information-based and then the knowledge-based economy. Within the life course perspective, learners' entrepreneurship represents the main proposal embedded in the new assumption of educational trajectories oriented to lifelong learning:

> Lifelong learning should comprise all phases and forms of learning from preschool to post-retirement … That … is reflected in the extended definition:… "All learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective". The breadth of this definition also draws attention to the full range of formal, non-formal and informal learning activity ... A key characteristic is the centrality of the learner within formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences. Equality of opportunity … is a crucial concern, not least because of the way in which knowledge and competences impact on citizens' life opportunities. (European Commission, 2001, p. 9)

As clearly emerges from this European Commission's, the discourse of lifelong learning sets out to combine formal, non-formal and informal contexts and sites of learning, which are also life-wide. However, there is still little acknowledgment of learning outside formal institutions (Coffield, 2000; Young, 2007; Bekerman et al., 2006; Jarvis, 2009). In the political discourse, an individual active approach towards learning across the life course seems to represent the only antidote for coping with the stressful and risky

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labour market and life conditions of late modernity. Policy makers primarily justify this new approach to education on economic grounds, presenting it as a virtually obvious response to the challenges of globalisation and technological change. However, they seem to ignore:

- The failure of (compulsory) education systems, which - presented as the great equaliser of social opportunities for young people - act instead as discriminatory filter, reinforcing the classical lines of segmentation due to class, ethnicity and gender;
- The fact that the persisting low achievement and early school leaving of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds is primarily a social and economic problem and cannot be dealt with exclusively by the school or – even less – by individuals;
- The shift away from provision-led models of welfare towards activation policies implies that the responsibility for failure falls primarily on the individual's shoulders;
- The persisting need for low skilled and therefore low paid work force to be profitable employed in retail, seasonal farming and services.

As a result, this places the onus on individuals for their own learning careers and consequently their social integration and life course development, relieving the education system and welfare state of their traditional duties of supporting individual integration in the societal order.

Until now, we have introduced the institutional (systemic) approach to the life course; however, the process of social integration and reproduction implies a dialectic relationship between structure and agency (Giddens, 1984). Therefore, the life course perspective needs to be complemented by a biographical approach. Biography refers to the subjective life stories that individuals construct in the process of dealing with their identity and work while progressing through the institutionalised life course. This biographical perspective implies that individuals do not reconstruct their lives independently from life course institutions and dominant normalities but primarily according to subjective meaning and continuity. That corresponds to Emirbayr and Misches' (1998) temporal concept of agency as an interactive process across past, present and future, especially if understood as identity over time including retrospective assessment, prospective life plans and the strategies of coping with everyday life in which past and future culminate.

The relationship of life course and biography is dialectic because the life course provides individuals with keywords they (have to) refer to in their biographical construction – affirmatively or in terms of resistance, in explic-

it or implicit terms – while at the same time individuals must make use of structural givens in order to construct their biographies. In this perspective, educational trajectories become lifelong, overlapping with life course as a whole. Therefore, also educational trajectories need to be analysed and re-thought in terms of learning biographies (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000).

The duality between life course/structure and biography/agency developed in biographical educational theory and research contrasts the functional concept of education focussed on cognitive instruction and qualification (Marotzki, 1990; Alheit and Dausien, 2002; Walther, 2006; Koller, 2011). This last approach defines education in terms of Bildung transforming the self-world-relationships according to the subjective reflections of experiences and learning processes. In the research on lifelong learning this understanding of education is being associated with the concept of biographicity intended as the capability of reflecting the own life history and identity process in relation to external conditions and demands.

## Going through educational trajectories: the structural paths and social negotiation of the individual decision-making processes of students in transition

Starting with the assumption that in late modernity the 'script' of individual life course derives from the interplay of given conditions (social structure) and the individual's ability to exert power - despite these existing conditions - in his/her own decision-making process (individual agency), we suggest to adopt this dialectic perspective also for educational trajectories. This means considering educational trajectories both as a life course phase, in which individuals attend and progress through institutionalised education (structure) and at the same time as the experiences that the individual makes in other spheres of his/her life course (agency). Therefore, educational trajectories have to be conceived not only in a longitudinal perspective, but also in terms of horizontal or parallel life course trajectories (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). In this way, educational trajectories develop in learning biographies, which are related - but not limited - to school or other formal education careers. Although structured and institutionalised by formal education, individuals for their identity, work and biographical construction appropriate them. This interplay between structure and agency is evident particularly with regard to the transitions within educational trajectories. Educational transition must be analysed in the relationship between the institutionally

foreseen educational change and individual lives, focusing on the interplay of personal and institutional dynamics, which provides the temporal and social contexts for biographical planning and decision-making. Indeed, during transition time and outcomes of individual educational decisions are influenced by both economic and societal factors and institutional settings.

## The concept of transitions

In general, transitions may be seen as the crossroads of individual life course trajectories where processes of social integration as much as subjective identities are being negotiated and redirected in terms of the passage between different social states and situations. However, there are at least three different scientific approaches to this concept: the anthropological, the social psychological and the sociological. For the anthropologists the status passages between different roles or forms of membership reflect the need of social communities to deal with human ageing and development and the changing needs and capabilities connected to it (van Gennep, 1960; Turner 1969; Glaser and Strauss, 1977). Social psychologists are instead more interested in the ways individuals cope with the ruptures and discontinuities that transitions imply for them, or: how changing roles, coping strategies and self-concept interact implying non-linear and non-causal relationships (Adams et al., 1977; Welzer, 1993). From their side, sociological (life course) researchers approach transitions rather as institutionally initiated role changes marked by age, status, or achievement, which confront the individual with new expectations, status and practice (Elder, 1985; Heinz, 1991; 2003). According to this last perspective, people are confronted with individualised sets of roles, settings and expectations and consequently have to cope and experiment individually with switching between them, both diachronically in the lifetime and synchronically between life spaces (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Transitions are therefore social situations in which societal norms and structures of inequality are reproduced. Here, the concept of gate-keepers (see below) is central, referring to formal and informal actors making sure that general mechanisms of reproduction are applied in the individual case. Taking into account the interplay between structure and agency, we think that the sociological point of view should be complemented with the social-psychological perspective. This perspective highlights how transitions are interpreted from the individuals' subjective viewpoint in terms of meaning making and continuity and discontinuity in their identity

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process, in terms of increasing versus decreasing biographical options, and in terms of stress resulting from, and resources for coping with them (Adams et al., 1977; Welzer, 1993; Keupp et al., 1999). All transitions imply liminality between two statuses, which demands from individuals an intensive and continuous activity of choosing, negotiating, reconciling and decision-making, but in many cases, they are not recognised (and therefore not supported) in the institutional assumption of normality regulating the collective provisions of transition regimes (Walther, 2006).

## The structured path of educational trajectories

Educational trajectories, stating the age of school entry and exit, curriculum and expected outcomes, qualifications for stratified labour market positioning, are institutionalised in order to prepare young people for a standard adult life. The fact that children's education track and success are mainly determined by social and economic factors seems the evidence-based assumption of a wide range of comparative education and welfare analyses (Lessenich, 2005; Heinz et al., 2009). However, the emerging theories are equivocal in determining which specific social and economic factors contribute to its reproduction. Some authors (Sewell and Shah, 1967) explain reproduction through the individual educational aspirations, which are influenced and formed in the relationship with significant others - including parents and peers - throughout the socialisation process. Some others propose instead the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2004; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) to explain that children from lower social classes lack some knowledge and competencies schools evaluate and demand without succeeding in providing them. Other again identify the main cause in the lack of economic resources of lower educated families (Boudon, 1974), while another stream aims to demonstrate that inequality reproduction is inherent to the organisation of the education system (Gamoran and Berenson, 1987; Oakes, 2005).

Among the (f)actors involved in structuring students' educational trajectories, gate-keepers play a pivotal role (Heinz, 1992) with regard to upward or downward mobility. First of all, teachers, who are institutionally appointed to exercise the power of assessment, diagnosis and differential promotion, are deeply involved in influencing the progression of students through education, adopting a supportive (enhancing) or discouraging (cooling out, Goffman, 1959) attitude toward students' plans and ambitions. This role of

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the teachers differs according to the more selective or comprehensive nature of the education systems. In the first case, if they have failed to compensate students' learning gaps, at the moment of transition their guidance task revolves around tracking the best learning achievers towards general upper secondary education and 'condemning' the others to vocational paths without having the possibility to consider students' interests and aptitudes. Also non-teaching pedagogical staff (psychologists, social or youth workers cooperating with schools internally or externally) represent an important reference point especially for (disadvantaged) students who have not yet developed a clear idea about their future path or lack support in their family or social environment.

However, the most influential significant others in students' decision-making process are the parents who are concerned with future family status as well as the care for the well-being of their children and in this sense can act as gate-keepers, over or under estimating the learning attitudes, skills and interests of their children. At such a young age, also students' friends and peers represent significant others who can act as gate-keepers, as school experiences and future destinations are negotiated in youth cultural contexts (Willis, 1977; Helsper and Böhme, 2002). Although we have presented these actors separately, in many cases their role as co-decision makers develop conjointly and virtuously when they move in the same direction, and with confusing consequences when they do not, and students have to flank one or other position without no clear rational.

The space and time of action and interaction of these actors, and therefore their power of supporting or hindering students' decision-making processes in transition depends on the structure of the education systems. In order to analyse the role of educational trajectories in reproducing education inequalities and disadvantages in European knowledge societies, it should be considered that different systems have historically developed different mechanisms of reproduction. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt heuristic tools granting the comparison. Our interactive approach suggest to embrace first the Allmendinger model (1989) that proposes a classification of education systems based on the two dimensions of standardisation and stratification.

This typology refers to standardisation for indicating the extent to which the education system of a certain country is regulated by centrally defined standards - with regard to aspects like teacher training, curriculum, school cycles and leaving certificates -, which are supposed to ensure a certain homogeneity across the national education system and through educational tra-

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jectories. This dimension indicates the levels of centralisation and autonomy within education systems. It could be assumed that a centrally managed education system shows a higher level of standardisation, which should grant similar education outputs and a basic level of quality for all. In contrast, a higher degree of autonomy can be supposed to expand freedom and innovation processes in schools on one hand, while on the other hand it risks increasing the segmentation of educational achievement according to the human and economic resources at its disposal. If the school staff had more freedom in designing the curriculum and teaching methods, we could suppose that educational trajectories were better tailored to the needs and interests of students, but at the same time, differences between schools could grow according to their territorial location and catchment areas. Correspondingly good students in affluent regions or schools could get even more chances, while in adverse school conditions the average and disadvantaged ones may fall even further behind.

The dimension stratification refers to the level of internal and external differentiation (tracking) within an education system, which determines the percentage of a given age cohort able to attain the highest level of education foreseen in the system. This tracking process usually takes place at the (lower or higher) secondary level of education. The higher the proportion, the less stratified the system. In other words, stratification states "the degree to which systems have clearly differentiated kinds of schools whose curricula are defined as 'higher' and 'lower' (Kerckhoff, 2001, p. 4).

As a final consideration, it should be highlighted that within the same system the degree of stratification differs across education levels and influences the level of individual decision-making that an education system allows students. Apparently, it could be argued that education inequalities are more likely to occur in more stratified education systems especially as they imply a higher level of rigidity in the educational trajectories.

To analyse students' educational trajectories in a life course perspective, the typology of education system has to be combined with the welfare dimension that takes into account other youth-specific dimensions, such as access to social security, orientations of policies for youth unemployment and the level of support available to students inside and outside school. To this aim, it is necessary to adopt a second heuristic: the model of transition regimes (Walther, 2006), which combines Allmendinger's typology with the model of welfare regimes of Esping-Andersen (1990), modified by Gallie and Paugam (2000) and Ferrera (2000).

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For the time being, four regime types have been modelled for Western European Countries:

1. The liberal transition regime in the Anglo-Saxon countries is grounded on the individual responsibility; unemployed young people face major pressure to enter the workforce. The labour market is structured by a high degree of flexibility, providing multiple entry options and at the same time a high level of insecurity.

2. The universalistic transition regime of the Nordic countries is based on comprehensive education systems in which general and vocational education are largely integrated. In labour market oriented activation policies, the range of choice is rather broad to secure individual motivation.

3. The sub-protective transition regimes of the Mediterranean countries is characterised by the lack of reliable training pathways into the labour market and transitions often involve a waiting phase until the young people are in their mid-thirties and the outcomes are unequal. Young people depend to a significant extent on their families, as they are not entitled to any kind of social benefits.

4. The employment-centred transition regimes in the continental countries are characterised by a differentiated and partly highly selective school system, which is connected to a rigidly standardised system of vocational training.

Concerning the post-socialistic countries that recently enter the EU, it should be said that they can neither be subsumed under existing regime types nor form a separate one. While sharing the heritage of a socialist past, internal differences and dynamics of transformation towards Western models do not allow a clear categorisation yet (Parreira do Amaral et al., 2011).

## The social negotiation of individual decision-making processes in educational trajectories

An educational transition confronts students with the task of identifying the type of school or training in which their education trajectories are to be continued. Adopting a biographical approach, educational transitions oblige students to "goal-directed behaviour in the presence of options" (Hanssons, 2005), that is: to a (cognitive) decision-making process which will lead to a choice among different possible further educational trajectories. This task implies a complex reflexive activity concerning the contents of teaching,

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training and learning, status and functionality for general life plans. Such decisions are expected to be scheduled and supported by the education system for all students of the same class/year/cohort. In some cases, however, they are influenced by changes in other life spheres (e.g. moving house), individual responses to negative experiences in current education (e.g. bullying) or problems with coping with the demands of a specific educational course (again upon own assessment or 'pushed' by the system). Also age and poor past life experiences make this task particularly difficult, as marking the initial status passage from youth to adulthood, it implies the acceptance of educational trajectories and future work careers of different status at a very young age (academic vs. vocational). In order to highlight more in depth the educational trajectories of (disadvantaged) young people, it would be necessary to reconstruct how their decision-making in transition evolves differently: How do young people refer to decision-making, what criteria are most relevant for them, how do they experience and express choice and constraint and what other actors are involved and in what way.

Theoretically, we start from the assumption that decision-making in transitions is a very complex process "in which habitus, personal identity, life history, social and cultural contexts, actions and learning are inter-related" (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997, p. 46). Therefore, it cannot be exclusively considered as an intra-individual process (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997; 2000) ignoring the significant social factors which influence educational decisions (class, social and cultural capital, gender, and ethnicity). At the same time, it cannot be intended exclusively as an automatism translating structural constraint into individual action (Furlong and Cartmel, 2006), failing in this determinism to explain exceptions and (statistical) minorities of young people who actually take decisions and realise particular trajectories despite of structural barriers (Walther, 2006). Decision-making emerges from the interplay between structure and agency. It is embedded in relationships, communication and negotiation and is affected by psychological, social and economic factors in the living environment of decision-makers. It implies cognitive and emotional aspects, combining individual motives and preferences, feelings of self-efficacy with the available structural opportunities and alternatives as well as disposable information and family resources.

We agree with Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997), who put forward three key elements of a pragmatic (hybrid) decision-making process, which:
-   is part of a wider choice of lifestyle (influenced by social context and culture);

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- is part of an on-going process in life-trajectories;
- evolves in interactions with others, so decisions are in fact the outcome of negotiations between people's social networks of friends, family members, acquaintances etc.

Moreover, referring to the temporality of the relationship between structure and agency (Emirbayr and Mische, 1998) it could be useful to assume decision-making as relating experiences and imagination/desires regarding the future to present situations structured by different/unequal chances and barriers.

This theoretical excursus should have demonstrated that individual decision-making in educational trajectories is not a simple dependent variable of institutional input and/or structural factors but evolves in complex interactive processes.

## Conclusions

Both educational and life course research analyse the relationship between them in terms of the one being a factor of the other (implying a separation of both), instead the concept of educational trajectories starts from the assumption of both being fundamentally integrated – education being a constitutive part of the life course as well as the life course structuring educational processes. This does not apply only in terms of socio-economic structure but also in a biographical perspective. Inasmuch as individuals reflect their learning and experience, they construct identities and self-concepts over past, present and future. Educational trajectories are neither linear nor continuous but structured by transitions that are both institutionally scheduled and deriving from an individual decision-making process, which in turn evolves through interactions with other actors.

The perspective underlying the concept of educational trajectories aims at avoiding the traps of both methodological individualism and structural determinism. It implies that individuals are endowed with motives and interest, are active in interpreting social situations such as educational demands, relating them to their identities in everyday life and in a biographical perspective in terms of developing preferences and priorities. At the same time, intention, interpretation and decision-making are far from evolving in isolation but are embedded in multiple interactions structured by power relationships, mutual ascriptions and the interests of others, institutional actors as well as significant others such as family and peers.

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For the analysis (and the planning) of educational governance as well as of life course politics, this implies that assumptions of cause and effect with regard to educational choices should be replaced by more elaborated models which takes into account more seriously a biographic and interactive perspective in order to counteract the misleading effect of education as a tool of social reproduction and not a mean of individual emancipation.

**Notes**

[1] This concept has been developed in the framework of an EU-funded project on Governance of Educational Trajectories in Europe (GOETE) that involves researchers of eight countries (Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom) with the aim of analysing the role of school in re-conceptualising education in terms of lifelong learning by combining a life course and a governance perspective.

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