

Abstract, "Time horizons in young people's narratives of careers", Catarina Lundqvist

Conference "Transitions, career learning and career management skills. Multi-disciplinary and critical perspectives", October 19-20, 2017, Stockholm University

Title of proposal: Time horizons in young people's narratives of careers

Type of contribution: Paper

Author: Catarina Lundqvist, PhD. Affiliation: Umeå University, Department of Applied Educational Science, Email: catarina.lundqvist@kfbd.se

Information on how the contribution is related to the conference theme: This paper investigates the temporal dimension of individual agency, to understand young people's career transitions, choices and time horizons in relation to structural conditions and temporal aspects of contemporary working life.

Keywords: career, transitions, time horizon, temporality and agency, young adults

General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

The context of young people's transitions has changed during the past decades. The individualized nature of contemporary society means that one's life are less likely to follow a traditional life course or coherent career path, as common only a generation ago. Transitions and careers are less linear and more fragmented, individualized and destandardized. The individual life-course and transitions are less predictable and therefore more unsecure, complex and at risk (du Bois-Reymond & Straber 2005, Evans 2002, Walther & Plug 2006 Trondman & Bunar 2001). In this respect, it can be difficult to make realistic plans for one's future. Age-based identities have also been weakened because of weaker timeframes guiding career transitions (Brannen & Nilsen 2002, Skelton, 2002). The individualization that characterizes today's society means that young people in several aspects are left to themselves to identify and assess options, take more personal responsibility and make more independent choices (Dovemark 2004).

Thus, contemporary society creates new temporal conditions with importance for the organization of education, work and planning of the individual career (Adam & Groves 2007, Woodman 2011). A substantial body of research argue that contemporary society makes it more difficult for individuals to position and orient themselves in a longer and coherent time perspective. Some research argues that today, young people live their lives in an "extended present", as focus lies on current priorities because of the unpredictability and increased difficulty to plan for the future (Brannen & Nilsen 2002, Nowotny 1994, Oinonen 2003).

With this background the study aim to investigate the temporal dimensions of career choices from the perspectives of young adults.

Aim of the study and research questions

Our perceptions of the past, present and future influence our choices, actions and understanding of opportunity structures. This paper aims to investigate the temporal dimension of individual agency, focusing on young people's career transitions, choices and time horizons. Young people's narratives of careers, from a biographical perspective, are analyzed within the context of temporal conditions of contemporary society. The analysis investigates the interplay between the individual's time perspective and his/her actions in relation to resources, social positions as social class and gender as well as socio-geographic space, societal structures and time orders.

Theory

The empirical interest is directed towards young people's careers and the study investigates how young people's temporal orientations and time horizons for careers are constructed in individual narratives. To understand the relationship between agency and structure and the social embeddedness of individual career choices, the theoretical point of departure of the study is

Bourdieu's (1999) theory of action along with Hodkinson & Sparkes (1997) careership theory. As a main focus is to investigate the temporal aspect of agency, the study takes additional input from Emirbayer and Misches (1998) theories which conceptualize agency as a temporally embedded process.

A theoretical starting point is that the social world is both spatially and temporally structured and that we use time as a tool for constructing reality. The theoretical concepts *Temporal orientation* - focusing on individual strategies using time as an aspect of making meaning - and *Temporal order* - focusing on the social context and the organizing function of time – are used as tools to analyze the agency/structure relationship and how individual time horizons are socially constructed (Närvänen 1994). The aim is also to investigate how the theoretical concepts "extended present" (Nowotny 1994), "time horizon" (Nilsen 1991) and "planning horizon" (Närvänen 1994) can be useful in analyzing individual time orientations in careers.

Methods/methodology

The methodological perspective of this study is influenced by narrative theory and method. A central starting point is that by studying narratives one can perceive how individuals construct meaning from different experiences and position and identify themselves in a social context. Further, narratives are understood as social actions and as acts of identification and positioning (Anthias 2002, Somers 1994).

The empirical material for the study comprise from 18 individual, qualitative interviews conducted with young people (young adults) aged 20- to 27 years. 9 young women and 9 young men participated. All of them are living in smaller towns in the northern regions of Sweden, some of them are employees, others are self-employed, unemployed or students. The interviews were semi-structured and had a narrative biographical approach, encouraging the informants to describe their educational and working life choices. Questions were asked about influences, critical moments and significant others. The interview also focused on the perceived future and how they imagined their future plans and choices. Because of the deliberately open questions, the biographical scope varied. For example, some of the informants talked about their childhood and episodes they interpreted had had a great impact on their future choices. Other focused the period from upper secondary school.

The informants were also asked to illustrate and sketch their careers and transitions as a timeline. They started off with an empty sheet, to avoid directing them into a linear perception. These timelines became an additional important material illustrating turning points, different interpretations of time, futures and sometimes imagined parallel futures. While some of the informants mainly highlighted structural turning points, others emphasized self-initiated turning points in a greater extent. Several of the timelines consisted of crossroads, highlighting a dimension of imagined parallel futures.

The timelines support the biographical narratives and in many cases, stresses the relational temporal dimensions at play. For example, it appears as if those informants who provided detailed reconstructions of influences and turning points from their younger years also were more oriented towards the future, as they tended to draw up an extended planning horizon. They were, for example, comfortable in illustrating how they imagined their careers in ten or twenty years from now. In the following paper this is analyzed in relation to resources, social positions, as well as social norms, opportunity structures and local context.

Expected outcomes/results

As the empirical analysis is in an initial stage, the results are preliminary and incomplete. The analysis of the empirical data highlights how temporal meaning is created, how time is described, evaluated and organized in relation to different career alternatives and how young people through different timetables position and identify themselves.

Abstract, "Time horizons in young people's narratives of careers", Catarina Lundqvist

Conference "Transitions, career learning and career management skills. Multi-disciplinary and critical perspectives", October 19-20, 2017, Stockholm University

The preliminary findings demonstrate the relation between time, space and mobility. The socio-geographic location affected the young people's views of themselves, their horizons of action and their time horizons. The findings of this study are in line with previous research (Ball et al. 2000, Reay et al. 2005) showing that geographical position, local culture and local opportunity structures are important. For example, public narratives of expectations to move to a bigger city were present in many of the personal narratives. Narratives of mobility seem interconnected to a temporal future horizon. References to a potential move to more urban areas were made within narratives focusing on the future. This normative narrative was closely connected to an idea that young people that hadn't left their hometown were "not moving forward", indicating an imagined stagnation in both a spatial and temporal sense. Even if the young people resisted such stereotypes, they were present as a reference in the personal narratives.

The analysis further shows how the informants related to public career timetables (Roth 1963) and life scripts (Frykman 1992) as they evaluated their own careers in relation to a perceived socially desired and premised chronology of transitions. Even though contemporary transitions are destandardized and from a temporal perspective more circular in nature, a public narrative of linearity of transitions were present as a social normative, functioning as a frame of reference affecting the young people's temporal perceptions.

Intent of publication: Yes, (where?)

References

- Adam, Barbara & Groves, Chris, (2007) *Future matters: action, knowledge, ethics: Supplements to The study of time*, Leiden: Brill
- Anthias, Floya (2002) "Where do I belong? Narrating collective identity and translocational positionality", *Ethnicities*, 2:4.
- Ball, Stephen, J., Maguire, Meg & Macrae, Sheila (2000) *Choice, pathways and transitions post-16. New youth, new economies in the global city*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1999) *Praktiskt förnuft. Bidrag till en handlingsteori*. Göteborg: Daidalos.
- Brannen, Julia & Nilsen, Ann (2002) "Young people's time perspectives: From youth to adulthood", *Sociology*, vol. 36:3, 513-536.
- Du Bois-Reymond, Manuela & Stauber, Barbara (2005) "Biographical turning points in young people's transition to work across Europe" i Helve, Helena & Holm, Gunilla (red) *Contemporary youth research. Local expressions and global connections*. Aldershot: Asgate.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa & Mische, Ann (1998) "What is agency", *American Journal of Sociology*, 103:4, 962-1023.
- Evans, Karen (2002) "Taking control of their lives? Agency in young adult transitions in England and the new Germany", *Journal of Youth Studies*, 5:3, 245 – 269.
- Frykman, Jonas (1992) "Biografi och kulturanalys" i Tigerstedt, Christoffer, Roos, J. P. & Vilkkö, Anni (red) *Självbiografi, kultur, liv: levnadshistoriska studier inom human- och samhällsvetenskapen*. Stehag: B Östlings bokförlag Symposion.
- Hodkinson, Phil & Sparkes, Andrew, C. (1997) "Careership: a sociological theory of career decision making", *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 18:1, 29-44.
- Närvänen, Anna-Liisa (1994) *Temporalitet och social ordning: en tidssociologisk diskussion utifrån vårdpersonals uppfattningar om handlingsmöjligheter i arbetet*. Linköping: Tema, Linköpings universitet.
- Nilsen, Ann, (1999) "Where is the future? Time and space as categories in analyses of young people's images of the future", *Innovation*, 12:2, 175-194.
- Nowotny, Helga (1994) *Time: the modern and postmodern experience*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Reay, Diane, David, Miriam, E. & Ball, Stephen (2005) *Degrees of choice. Social class, race and gender in higher education*. Trentham:Stoke-on-Trent.
- Roth, Julius. A. (1963) *Timetables. Structuring the passage of time in hospital treatment and other careers*. Indianapolis.
- Somers, Margaret, R. (1994) "The narrative Constitution of identity: A relational and network approach", *Theory and Society*, 23:5.
- Trondman, Mats & Bunar, Nihad (red) (2001) *Varken ung eller vuxen: "samhället idag är ju helt rubbat"*. Stockholm: Atlas.
- Walthers, Andreas & Plug, Wim (2006) "Transitions from school to work in Europe: Destandardization and policy trends", *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 13.
- Woodman, Dan, "Young People and the Future: Multiple Temporal Orientations Shaped in Interaction with Significant Others". *Young*, 2011, 19:111