

STEPHAN DAHMEN

REGULATING TRANSITIONS FROM SCHOOL TO WORK

AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY
OF ACTIVATION WORK IN ACTION

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Stephan Dahmen
Regulating Transitions from School to Work

To Julius

Stephan Dahmen, born in 1982, is a postdoctoral researcher at the Faculty of Educational Science at Universität Bielefeld, Germany. His current research covers organizational ethnography in human service organizations and education, social inequalities in education and work, the transformations of contemporary youth and childhood and qualitative research methods.

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An Institutional Ethnography of Activation Work in Action

[transcript]

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1. Introduction

“The transition from youth to adulthood, is, however, not just a matter of how working-class young people see themselves. Their futures are ‘likely’ at least in part because of the categorizing work done by strategically-placed others. In a cumulative and complex process, different young people begin to experience life differently because of the resources and penalties that are distributed to them – on the basis of widely-shared categorizations such as rough/respectable, undeserving/deserving and unreliable/reliable – by those many significant others” (Jenkins 2002: 12).

Transition policies have undergone profound changes. In the wake of a “productivist reordering of social policy” (Lister 2003: 430), youth becomes a prime object of political attention and scrutiny. The early and fast integration of young persons into employment is mostly guided by the idea of preventing later losses of human capital, the idea of scarring effects of early unemployment on later income and the fear of welfare dependency of the younger generation. Investing in youth is mainly seen as an investment into the human capital of the future, as it “pays off” in terms of later monetary outcomes: As the European Commission youth guarantee scheme states, “preventing unemployment and inactivity, therefore, has the potential to outweigh these costs and as such represents an opportunity for smart investment in the future of Europe, its youth” (European Commission 2012: 8). Youth as a “smart” investment in the future discursively constructs youth as “citizen-workers” (Lister 2003) of the future and depicts the human capital of the future generation as a key impact parameter of the welfare state. This is reflected in the European youth guarantee scheme that serves as a prime example of a new type of transition policy that can be found (albeit with small differences) in different European member countries. These policies include at least four common features that have deep implications for the way life-course transitions are discursively and politically framed. They are underpinned by a series of normative assumptions and expectations about a young person’s social and economic activity. First, these schemes entail a conditionalization of benefits – or in the words of the European Commission – a strict coupling of “eligibility of social assistance

for youth at high risk of marginalization with a rigorous mutual obligation approach" (European Commission 2012: 118). Youth are conceived as rationally choosing actors that must be provided with the right incentives (carrots) and penalties (sticks) to enter work. Secondly, they often come with early tracking and monitoring devices for so-called "NEET's" or "youth at risk" of dropping out. This early monitoring and profiling are part and parcel of a social investment approach that aims at "prepar(ing) [...] rather than repair(ing)" (Hemerijck 2018: 811) and thus requires to identify "youth" based on risk factors prior to the occurrence of a specific life-course-event. As such, potentially all young people facing the transition to work come into the gaze of transition policies. Thirdly, these schemes focus on the avoidance of "inactivity" through focusing on an encompassing inclusion of young unemployed in employment or education measures. For instance, the European youth guarantee scheme proposes that a concrete offer is made within four weeks of registration. Finally, these policies have a strong focus on individualized counseling and guidance (individualization). As an example, the European Network of Public Employment Services highlights the aim to strengthen their role of "career transition management" (ibid.: 8) in order to "equip jobseekers [...] with the knowledge and skills to make informed career transitions and take control of their career paths" (European Commission 2012: 23). This individualization discourse "encourages young people to 'take charge of their biography', build their employability through improving or consolidating their skills" (Antonucci/Hamilton 2014: 263) and amounts to a "political production of individualized subjects" (Crespo-Suarez/Serano Pacual 2007). The policy paradigm of "activation" thus comes with an emphasis on active citizenship, where young people are seen as both responsible for and able to achieve economic self-reliance. The increased focus on conditionality criteria, the stronger individualization of services, as well as the implementation of a contradictory mix of "client-centeredness" and "compulsion" (Lindsay/Mailand 2004: 196) are common characteristics of contemporary reforms of transition policies. These changes have serious implications for the conception of the youth phase. Transition policies, such as those described above take part in the "institutionalization" (Kohli 2007) of youth as a life-course phase through standardizing and normalizing its various phases "by means of age-based rules and norms as well as materialized institutions" (Närvänen/Näsman 2004; Kelle/Mierendorff 2013). Historically, the youth phase as an "educational moratorium" (Zinnecker 2001) emerged as a process of decommodification, scholarisation and the institutionalization of an age-hierarchy (Mierendorff 2010), these newer developments point to a structural change of the youth phase. Heinz Reinders pointedly describes this as a change from a "youth moratorium" to an "optimization moratorium" (Reinders 2016) where the efficient preparation of the labor market is the key concern. And in fact, transition policies are "life-course policies", insofar they "provide(s) a framework of security, transition markers and entitlements (and) designs and monitors life scripts

as temporal sequences of legitimate participation in the different spheres of life" (Heinz 2014: 240). Transition policies such as the European youth guarantee scheme enforce new normality patterns and life-course scripts and regulate the inclusion and exclusion in various domains of social life. The avoidance of "inactivity" highlights re- rather than de-commodification, the preventive glance highlights an earlier confrontation with life-course-related expectations (such as career choice) and the rationalization and optimization of transitions potentially institutionalize new temporal ("the earlier, the better") and normative ("you are in charge of your biography") expectations. While activation reforms, characterized by the shift of policy objectives from income protection to promoting participation in the labor market (van Berkel/Valkenburg 2007), have effects on all citizens, as newcomers on the labor market, young people are particularly affected by them (Antonucci/Hamilton 2014: 26; Crespo Suarez/Serrano Pascual 2004). This applies particularly to so-called "youth guarantee" schemes: different to a "welfare right" attributed on the basis of citizenship status, youth guarantee schemes are based on a "citizen-worker of the future" (Lister 2003) model, that legitimizes paternalism for the sake of later life-course productivity. The idea of a "guaranteed" offer often becomes – due to a lack of viable alternatives – "an offer you can't refuse" (Lodemel/Trickey 2000). The title of this book, "Regulating transitions from school to work" reflects the fact that youth as a life-course phase is regulated through transition policies that institutionalize specific life-course patterns. However, these patterns do not simply – as described above – "regulate(s) the movement of individuals through their life in terms of career pathways and age strata" (Kohli 1986: 272), they also become active in terms of "biographically relevant actions by structuring their perspectives for movement through life" (ibid.). The regulation of transitions is not restricted to the external enforcement of specific entry-requirements, age and structurally available career pathways. It goes deeper as setting norms and involves specific practices of self-formation. This process of regulation unfolds itself through shaping "biographical perspectives and plans" (Kohli 2007: 254). In this context, Elder speaks of a "loose coupling" of individual life-conduct and societal structural conditions (Elder 1994: 10). The regulation of transitions happens in concrete sites (schools, counseling agencies, public employment services), and involves specific actors and gate-keepers (parents, teachers, social workers, employers). As Heinz states in a seminar paper on gate-keeping and the regulation of the life-course, the opening of a status-passage requires that a person is defined according to membership criteria of a particular organization: "A student has to "become" a high or low achiever in order to receive counseling concerning his or her placement in a status passage leading to an academic or a vocational career" (Heinz 1993: 13). Processes of categorization and classification based on legal and administrative norms, expectations of other organizations, or based on institutionalized practices play a central role in these processes. Regulating life-courses on a practical level thus requires "people

processing” and “people changing” activities (Hasenfeld 2010), that aim explicitly at changing and forming identities, subjectivities, and self-understandings and often imply more or less explicit forms of social control. This is reflected in a specific conception of transition research that undergirds this thesis and that implies a focus on the specific practices implied in regulating transitions. This perspective bears similarities with Anselm Strauss concept of “trajectory”, focusing “not only the physiological unfolding of a patient’s disease but the total the total organization of work done over that course, plus the impact on those involved with that work and its organization” (Strauss et al. 1985: 8, read patients disease as “transition”). The need for this specific perspective on the “regulation” of transitions is accentuated by the qualitative research literature on activation, which has highlighted activation as a new form of production of neoliberal subjectivity (Dean 1995, Darmon/Perez 2011, Andersen 2007). This research highlights those “practices of self-formation” (Dean 1995: 567), involved in the making of employable subjects mostly based on Foucault’s theory of subjectivation. In fact, the institutional program of activation comes with a new rationality of governing the unemployed that – in comparison to old forms of social control stressing conformity and disciplinary power (for example the poor house), highlights self-responsibility, empowerment and individual agency of citizens. As Rose puts it, “governing in a liberal-democratic way means governing *through* the freedom and aspirations of subjects rather than in spite of them” (Rose 1998: 155, emphasis added). Perhaps the most striking example of this new form of governing the unemployed is the contractualisation of services, in which citizens are asked to individually negotiate “integration contracts” with state agents. The idea of the contract corresponds exactly to the idea of the citizen of the advanced liberal state that acts as a morally self-responsible person, autonomously setting goals for oneself, equipped with a strong will and able to comply with its self-set goals. In this context, Robert Castel has coined the term “negative individualism” to designate situations where the contractual matrix “demand(s) or indeed dictate(s) that impoverished individuals behave like autonomous persons” (Castel 1995: 449). Similarly, for Born and Jensen, the growing use of contracts between the state and its citizens constitutes a new societal rationality of governing people “that institutionalizes new expectations to the subjects, namely that they are to be reflexive and responsible for themselves” (Born/Jensen 2010: 328) and that aim at the “transformation of the poor into self-sufficient, active productive, and participatory citizens” (Cruikshank 1999: 69). As activation aims at promoting the desirable self-regulation of citizens, a micro-sociological analysis of the “practices” of activation appears as the most promising approach to analyze the core features that make up the “active” welfare state. The aim of the present research is to “open up” the Black Box of implementation of activation policies into concrete practices. Nevertheless, the concept of implementation is at risk of portraying the process of policy delivery in an under-complex way: commonly understood as those local

front-line activities that serve to pursue policies designed elsewhere (in the high level suites of politicians and administrators), it pays no attention to the fact that “activation in action” takes place in an organizational context crowded with different competing demands for action, a complex mosaic of accountability and a multiplicity of possible goals (of which the formal goals of a policy to be implemented is only one). As Cooney describes, the process of implementation has to be conceived as a “highly contentious process enacted by knowledgeable actors who engage, reject, and at times transform the value-laden structures in which they are working” (Cooney 2007: 687). Therefore, I prefer the idea that policies are “translated”, and in doing so, potentially re-interpreted and adapted to local contingencies and task-requirements. In a certain way, this research rather takes “A view from the street” (Manning/Maanen 1978) than from the “suites” and takes as a starting point the practices on a central “site” of activation.

This book examines how activation is enacted in human service organizations for young person's not in education and employment and aims at contributing to a better understanding of how transitions are regulated in and through practices of activation. The principal empirical material used are interviews conducted with frontline agents responsible for the implementation of young persons in the transition from school to their first employment – in this case- apprenticeships. While each of these interviews is a micro-sociological account of practice, they are analyzed as situated and embedded within a web of different social relations. In this research, frontline agents are neither conceived as “rational fools” (Sen 1977) that rationally adapt to the local constraints and restrictions in order to get their work done with the least effort possible, nor or they conceived as “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel 1967) that act based on unquestioned, habitualised norms and structural or organizational constraints. They are, as Boltanski/Thévenot put it, equipped with a “critical capacity” (Boltanski/Thévenot 1999: 359) to voice criticism, to produce justifications in order to support their criticisms and to operate skillfully with legal and cultural norms and rules of acceptability that operate within the field of activation services. They act, as Seo and Creed put it, as “partially autonomous actor situated in a contradictory social world” (Seo/Creed 2002: 230). That is the reason why – following the “methodological situationalism” (Diaz-Bone 2011: 49) of the sociology of conventions – this research attempt to analyze the situated application and interpretation of rules and cultural norms and describe how they prefigure (and not predetermine) specific practices.

This book is structured into seven chapters. The second chapter describes the organization of the education-occupation link in Switzerland and it's outcomes on a young person's transitions from the perspective of the theory of skill regimes and of life-course theory. It introduces the Swiss VET-System, describes the political course of events that led to the introduction of so-called “transitions measures” and analyzes the discursive framing of “problematic” youth transitions within the

Swiss political arena. The chapter gives a short comparative appraisal of transition policies in the three collective skill formation systems of Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. It shows how the category of “at-risk youth” has emerged and how new discursive patterns of interpretation of the youth unemployment issue become institutionalized. Chapter three introduces a theoretical toolbox that shows how institutions frame life-courses both on the level of an “institutional program” as well as on the level of subjective, biographical action orientations. It reviews how the framing of life-courses by welfare and educational institutions has been conceptualized in life-course theory and describes the role of human service organizations for the transmission of macro-institutional life-course programs towards biographical action orientations on the micro-level of the individual. Three concepts are presented that each focus on a specific dimension of the regulation of life-courses and biographies. The concept of “gate-keeping” describes how human service organizations act both as facilitators and selection devices for specific life-course transitions. The concept of people changing institutions highlights the categorization work of human service organizations, their interdependency with their organizational environment and the impact of such processes on the trajectories of clients. The last, concluding part of this chapter describes human service organizations as “subjectivation devices”, links the Foucauldian concept of “subjectivation” with the concept of biography and describes how human service organizations can be conceived as discursive environments for self-construction. Chapter four critically situates the scope of analysis of human service organizations within different organizational theories: Lipsky’s conception of street-level bureaucrats, neo-institutionalist organizational theory and the conception of organizations as “compromising devices” (Thévenot 2001a: 410) by the economy of conventions. In line with this theoretical approach, I argue that in order to analyze “activation in action” on the frontline level, one has to break both with an over-coordinated view of organizations focusing on bureaucratic rules, shared representations and common cultures as well as with approaches that overemphasize rational adaptation of frontline staff to ambiguous policy prescriptions. Based on the sociology of conventions, I propose to analyze how actors deal with the critical tensions that result from the complex organizational make-up of the Motivational Semesters. Chapter five describes the methodology, data collection, and analysis. It describes initial research design choices and translates the theoretical insights of the previous section into concrete methodological steps. A special focus is put on the analysis of documents and their integration into the overall research framework and a description of how and why this research can be understood as an institutional ethnography. Chapter six is an empirical chapter that describes the research results. Here, the focus of inquiry shifts from the level of policy programs to the level of frontline implementation of a specific transition measure (The Motivational Semesters). The regulation of the life-course is analyzed on the level of a specific organization of the

Swiss transition system. The final chapter reviews and discusses the main results, situates them within the field of existing research and outlines the contribution of this thesis for the different theoretical discourses.

2. Youth, Education and the Welfare State

Historically, the youth phase goes back to the institutionalization of a modern life-course, as a “pattern of socially defined, age-graded events and roles” (Elder, 1999: 302). Life-course patterns (childhood, youth, adulthood, old age, pre-work socialization phase, working phase, post-occupational phase) are established culturally around and through the occupational sphere, and function as a coordinating system for orientation. Historically, the emergence of “youth” is thus linked to the development of the modern life-course as it emerged in the industrial society – and coincided, according to Kohli and Meyer (1986) to state politics that introduced obligatory schooling and social retirement insurance. This led to the work-based distinction between childhood/youth, adulthood and old age, thus to a tripartite life course, which consists of the preparation for work, working, and retiring from paid work. The youth phase as a life-course phase came into being during the 19th century, with the socio-structural breakthrough of industrial capitalism. The demand for a skilled labor force leads to the increased exemption from work and to the de-location of the social “space” of youth from the factory to the school. This development is historically documented through the establishment of child labor-legislation and the general implementation of obligatory school age. The youth phase being dependent on specific historical structural preconditions raises the question of how the phase of youth changes and is structured nowadays. Youth can be conceived as a socio-historical constituted life-course phase, which is traditionally marked by a “moratorium¹”, exempted from wage-labor and devoted to experimentation, education and free-time activities. The specific make-

1 While the notion of “Moratorium” is consistently referred to in Eriksons developmental stages Theory, and defined as a period in which a temporary deviation from commonly accepted norms is legitimate (Erikson 1965), we do not focus on the youth moratorium as an outcome of bio-psycho-social development processes, but analyse it as “social fact” in the sense that is both sustained by specific social institutions, and that it is subject to social and economic change and whose character and form is interspersed with the interests of different actors. Youth as such is a “discursive struggle field” (see e.g. Dahmen/Ley 2016; Zinnecker 2003) and should not be reduced to biological and psychosocial development tasks.

up of youth as a life-course phase is not an ontological fact, but goes back to specific institutional arrangements: youth as a life-course phase has to be seen as a social category, framed by particular institutions, especially education, the labor market and the family, and different social practices, such as getting educated, leaving home, finding a job and forming a family (Fornäs 1995: 3). Comparative research, often loosely building on Esping-Andersen's distinctions between different worlds of welfare has pointed to the fact that the institutional determinants of youth transitions (and the youth phase) highly differ within different "transition regimes" (Walther 2006), institutionalized arrangements (Van de Velde 2008) ideal typologies (Cavalli/Galland 1995) or distinct "regimes of public action" in relation to education and skill formation (Verdier 2010). Furthermore, recent developments in comparative studies have more profoundly analysed the political economy of skill formation (Busemeyer/Trampusch 2011; Trampusch/Rohrer 2010) showing that social stratification patterns, the relative stability of educational institutions as well as the specific organization of the education-occupation link is dependent on the historical evolution of training institutions and their interlinkages with the economy, the welfare state, and specific political power arrangements. The easiest way to assess these differences within the institutional determinants of youth transitions is to follow Esping-Andersen's concept of de-commodification (Esping-Andersen 1990). The concept of de-commodification goes back to Esping-Andersen's seminal work on welfare state typologies, but it is equally valuable when analyzing education and training regimes (see e.g. Busemeyer 2015). The notion of de-commodification is related to the Marxian notion of commodification, and it describes the extent to which citizens have to rely on selling their labor power and rely on the market for maintaining a livelihood (Esping-Andersen 1990). In Esping-Andersen's theory, a high degree of de-commodification is given when welfare state citizens receive welfare state benefits based on welfare rights that lessen their dependence on the market. This concept has, among others been used by Cecile van de Velde, who, in her comparative study of transitions to adulthood, asks the simple question: who, the state, the market or the family is in charge of the period between obligatory schooling and the labor market? (van de Velde 2008). The welfare system and the educational system play a central role in the institutionalization of the modern youth phase, as they define age-limits and entry requirements for certain educational and professional pathways. A thorough analysis of the Swiss transition system as those "relatively enduring features of a country's institutional and structural arrangements which shape transition processes and outcomes" (Smyth et. al 2001: 19), should thus start with an analysis of these features. The concept of de-commodification is also of value for analyzing the specific organization of educational systems. Marshall, in his seminal article on the concept of citizenship,

counts the right to education as a “genuine social right of citizenship”² (Marshall 1950: 25). Despite the main differences between education and the welfare state (the fact that the classical welfare state has developed as a tool to counter the negative effects of the market, while education is not designed to compensate income loss) the concept of de-commodification can be applied to educational systems. Is education seen as a tradeable good or as a right and entitlement? As a matter of fact, youth do not have the same social citizenship rights as adults. Depending on the welfare state arrangement in question, youth are seen as (more or less) dependent on their parents and many benefits are only indirectly accessed through their parents. The fact that age-criteria regulates access to many social benefits shows that young people are not full social citizens (Jones/Wallace 1992). This also shows that the transition to employment is seen as the prime marker to independence and marks the transition to full citizenship status, at least in employment-centered welfare states. Tom Chevalier identifies (Chevalier 2016) and empirically applies (Chevalier 2017) two ideal-typical figures of youth social citizenship (whereas in his typology, social citizenship designates their access to income support/income replacement). Familialized citizenship is characterized by maintenance claims for children after majority age, late access to social benefits (after 20, around 25) and a developed family policy. Individualized citizenship is characterized by an early attribution of citizenship rights, early access to social benefits and a needs assessment of young persons independent from parent’s income. The latter is characteristic of Beveridgean welfare regimes, while the former is more common in familiarized, Bismarckian welfare regimes (Chevalier 2016: 4). Welfare regimes thus can be differentiated according to their attribution of an independent citizen status to their young persons, a status that is also condensed in the degree of familiarization and de-commodification of each welfare arrangement. The youth phase as a moratorium depends thus on processes of de-commodification, in which concordantly – a right to basic education, legislation on child labor, an extension of institutionalized educational pathways – “frees” children and youth from the world of work. The welfare state plays a crucial role in this process of de-commodification: In theoretical terms, youth – as a life course phase devoted to education and preparation for entering the working world is dependent on specific social subsystems. Young

2 Interestingly, Marshall derives this right not as right specific to children or youth, but as a tool to stimulate the future citizen in the making and to shape the future adult: “The right to education is a genuine social right of citizenship, because the aim of education during childhood is to shape the future adult. Fundamentally it should be regarded, not as the right of the child to go to school, but as the right of the adult citizen to have been educated” (Marshall 1950: 25). This quote shows how the institution of an obligatory school period is both an important pillar of the “institutionalized youth land” (Reynard/Roose 2014) as well as the expression of an intergenerational relationship between the adult generation and the growing up generation.

people (and children) are not brought into the world as “commodities”, ready to sell their labor-power, and they are – (within de-commodified subsystems) typically cared for in families, in (publicly financed) schools, or in historically established institutions (like the youth moratorium). The reproduction of labor-power necessarily happens in these decommodified spaces. State policies and more particularly social policies play a crucial role in this process: According to Offe (2006), one of the central functions of social policies to provide those “institutional facilities under whose aegis labor power is exempt from the compulsion to sell itself, or in any event is expended in ways other than through exchange for money-income” (ibid., own translation). This is not only a benevolent expansion of welfare rights but relates to the necessary reproduction of labor power. Certain reproduction functions (like care-work, socialization and education) thus require to be sustained by other systems than the market. These functions are mainly taken up by families, but schools, universities, etc. can be counted to these institutional facilities. According to Offe, the youth phase constitutes one of these institutionally legitimated “escape routes” (ibid., own translation), that is why, in times of economic recession – “the extension of the phase prior to entry into the labor market, so that there is a stretching of the phase of adolescence, either within the family system or, more often, through the institutions of the formal educational system” (ibid., own translation) is a (politically and individually) obvious solution.

2.1 How Institutions Structure the Youth Phase

The impact of different institutionalized arrangements on the youth phase – both in terms of their temporal elongation and their entry age into employment, as well as in terms of the subjective “experience” of the youth phase, has been highlighted by different comparative studies. Van de Velde (2008; 2013) shows – drawing on Esping-Andersen’s typology of welfare-regimes – the ways in which different institutional arrangements of de- and re-commodification yield very distinct outcomes on both structure and experience of the youth phase. Drawing on a mixed-methods study in six countries, Van de Velde posits that the prevailing experience of youth as a period in which one “finds oneself” (van de Velde 2008) – devoted to self-exploration, and in quantitative terms corresponding to an early exit from parent’s house paired with a long explorative period before definite entry on the labor-market corresponds to the institutional arrangement of the “social democratic” welfare state regime. The effects of the welfare state are essential in this case. In Denmark, serving as a study-case for Van de Velde, the “policy for young students or unemployed people institutionalizes the existence of a long and exploratory-character of the youth phase: a direct and universal assignation guarantees the economic survival of the young adult with independence from the family resources” (ibid.: 55). The

temporal elongation of the youth phase and its content thus seems to be linked to a specific educational and welfare regime, which in the case of social-democratic regimes – is characterized by an early and easy access to citizenship rights, generous subsistence sustaining benefits, and a system of educational grants which ensures high participation in higher education, independently of parent's income. In contrast, in the “liberal models” of the welfare state (for instance the UK) the youth phase is guided by an aspiration to early individual emancipation, in which the logic of “assuming oneself” (*ibid.*) prevails. An early entry in employment, the outcome of a university system based on private investments and loans, and access to social security benefits at the age of 18 highlighting individual self-sufficiency independently from parental resources are at the basis of this regime type. In the Southern European countries, characterized by a “familiarist” model – or in Esping-Andersen's typology- as a “sub-protective regime” and a weakly institutionalized welfare-system, access to (low) social security benefits exist only later in life. Accordingly, a strong dependency from the family exists. This leads to the fact that many young persons' transition experience amount to a feeling of “installing oneself” (*ibid.*: 57), in which the “transition” from youth to adulthood corresponds (differently than in UK and DK) to exiting the parents' house and accessing a job which allows economic independence. Similar findings are presented by Cavalli and Galland (1995) who identify that young persons in Italy may stay with their parents longer than in other countries, as due to the lack of a strongly institutionalized support system, the family presents a central role for the economic support of youth. In such a system, the entry age into employment is relatively high and accordingly, the economic independence from parents happens relatively late. On the contrary, in France, serving as an example of the “corporatist” regime type, transition experiences are, according to van de Velde, characterized by a semi-dependency of youth from the state and the family strongly devoted to studying and initial training, as these constitute entry requirements for the labor market and have a huge impact on the later career. France would correspondingly be a “hybrid” model due to it's relatively familiarist character³.

2.1.1. Regimes of Youth Transitions

Andreas Walther et. al (2006) develops a similar typology but pays more attention to the role of education systems and employment protection models. Based on the distinction of different welfare-regimes by Esping-Anderson (1990), further developed by Gallie and Paugam (2000), Walther develops a typology of transition regimes that covers similar aspects of Van de Velde's typology. Walther stipulates

3 In France, access to social assistance is restricted to persons of 25 years of age compared to access to specific programs for young persons starting at the age of 18 in liberal regimes.

a concordance between institutionalized arrangements, conceptions of youth and biographical experiences. Walther delimits that universalistic welfare regimes correspond to a conception of youth that is based on personal development and youth's citizenship. Again, the generous training and employment benefits are the supporting pillars of such a conception, ensuring early independence from the family through de-commodification of the youth phase. In the same vein, southern European, sub-protective regimes come with a conception of youth without a distinct status compared to other countries. Walther et. al extend the regime typology by differentiating between concepts of "youth unemployment" and conceptions "disadvantage", "in terms of ascribing disadvantage to either "individual deficits" or "structures of segmentation" (Walther 2006: 125). According to Walther, "policies also depend on and reproduce context-specific notions of youth, reflecting the main societal expectations towards young people" (ibid.). While structure-related explanations for youth unemployment dominate in sub protective regimes, liberal regimes tend to ascribe responsibility to the individual. Walther (2007) extends his typology by a comparative assessment of different manifestations of active welfare-state reforms for young beneficiaries, showing that despite converging tendencies, huge differences remain within different regime types. We see that Walther's notion of transition regimes relates to the interplay of structures and cultural properties, in which certain "climates of normality" (Walther 2006: 45) gain validity as "considerable structuring power" (ibid.) for individual biographical orientations. As heuristic devices, they separate different patterns of institutionalized arrangements within the field of education, the labor-market, youth-employment policies and specific expectations pointed towards the young persons.

The importance of understanding the youth phase as embedded within different institutionalized arrangements, and more specifically, in terms of their "de-commodification" and "defamiliarisation" (van de Velde 2008: 112) comes from their considerable impact on the transition from school to work and to adulthood, especially for more vulnerable groups. The idea of a youth moratorium devoted to education and preparation for the sphere of work is closely linked to specific institutional arrangements. In an ideal-typological fashion, the idea of the youth moratorium as an exploration space seems to correspond to those regimes with a high degree of de-commodification, early and universal access to social rights which allows an early independence from family life and a preference for higher education, like for instance the universalist regimes in the Scandinavian welfare states. While institutional arrangements do not explain everything, this short excursus serves as an illustration as to what extent institutional arrangements play a role in understanding the characteristics of youth transitions. Institutionalized regimes, including processes (de)familiarisation" and (de)commodification also have important outcomes in terms of the autonomy of young persons. In the case of universalized regimes, the reduced pressure to sell one's labor-power and the reduced

need to draw back on parental resources opens up a larger space on exploration possibilities, while regimes with more familiarized elements, in which the early independence is not supported to the same extent, the necessity to draw back on the resources of the family may push people to take up employment earlier. While we must be cautious not to posit the “extended youth moratorium” as found idealtypically in the Scandinavian countries as a normative blueprint, idealizing the early autonomy from parents and the universal access to subsistence sustaining benefits allowing higher educational participation, it is clear that the institutionalized patterns of welfare state arrangements – in leaving certain domains to the private, familiar sphere, others to the market sphere and again others to the sphere of the state – produce different patterns of disadvantage that play a crucial role for inequalities in the space of youth.

2.1.2. Welfare State Typologies, Educational Systems, and Transitions from School to Work

While the last chapter has highlighted how different welfare state regimes shape the youth phase, the following chapter will explore how the transition from school to work differs according to different structural features of education and training systems. Following Heinz, institutional arrangements “influence passages from school to work by providing more or less organized pathways” (Heinz 2009: 392) for transitions. Heinz points the attention to “the linkages between markets, institutions and actors in which transition decisions are embedded” (ibid.: 393). This can be shown exemplarily by the differences in skill formation systems, in which dual-apprenticeship systems constitute highly distinguishable structural contexts for transition, in contrast to systems in which a majority of young persons are following a higher education pathway. These differences in the social organization of transitions do not only impact on the entry age of a specific cohort into employment, but comes with the attribution of a different status, a different socialization space (the “firm” vs the “university”) and with different cultural models of “standard” or “normal” transitions. As Heinz describes referring to differences between Germany and Great Britain, these models can be seen as “institutional arrangement(s) of time-and-space coordination” (ibid.: 395) which “regulate(s) the individual (life) course” (ibid.) and leads to a recognized occupation. While Heinz (2009) focusses on the impact of institutional determinants on differences within for instance the transition age of different cohorts, Verdier (2010) develops a catalog of questions for analyzing these institutional arrangements as spaces in which coordination between different actors (training institutions, employers, the state) proceeds based on different conventions. For instance, these different arrangements also come with different spaces in which a young person is asked to integrate oneself: (a professional community in dual apprenticeship systems, a hierarchical sys-

tem in school, etc...). The organization of individual trajectories can also depend on different modes of justification: (state-defined rules of selection, meritocratic status-competition), up to different approaches for the compensation of initial inequalities. Allmendinger and Leibfried (2003) showed that national specificities of education and training systems produce specific patterns of employment careers. They point our attention to the differences between the US (with a non-stratified comprehensive school system and a very low standardization of the education occupation-link) and Germany (being characterized by a stratified educational system and a very standardized transition to employment system). Markus Gangl elaborates on the structure of labor market entry in Europe and analyses cross-national differences within European countries. Gangl highlights the role of institutions in shaping the entry patterns of young people, distinguishing between an occupationalised labor market (OLM) and an internal labor market (ILM) system for the organization of the education occupation link. The former, amongst which education and training systems with VET-systems, are described as "arrangements allowing for a structured labor force integration in the sense of a strict educational channeling of individuals into positions and an immediate close match between qualifications and LM-positions" (Gangl 2003: 110). In contrast, labor market entry in ILM systems is described as "less tightly structured by education, less orderly, more amenable to career contingencies and discretionary employer behavior" (Gangl 2003: 110). Based on EU-LFS data on leavers from upper secondary education Gangl computes three country clusters: (1) a cluster of southern European countries comprising Italy, Greece, and Portugal, (2) a cluster of north-west European countries including Belgium, France, Ireland, the United Kingdom, but also Spain, and (3) a final cluster consisting of Austria, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. Gangl describes that compared to the other country clusters, countries with a strong VET-system have very low unemployment rates amongst labor-market entrants. But, ten years after school leaving, there is remarkably little variation in unemployment rates between European countries. What differs between countries is the extent of "unemployment risk in the very first stages of careers and the time needed to arrive at the inherent unemployment level for workers of that country" (ibid.: 116). The southern European cluster distinguishes from the other European countries through low mobility rates in early career and higher unemployment rates especially for the lower educated. The clusters 2 (Belgium, France, Ireland, the United Kingdom - the "ILM"-countries) and 3 (Austria, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands - the "OLM"-countries) can be distinguished by the fact that unemployment is not concentrated on market entrants (but rather on the lowest qualified) and by a "stronger tendency to hire workers for skilled jobs from external markets" (ibid.: 125). Apart from that, the "dispersion of status attainment with time in the labor force is lower and young people also tend to enter low skilled employment less often at the outset of their careers than is the case in

ILM contexts" (ibid.). Due to VET-countries specialized training credentials and a high degree of standardization, countries with a well-established VET system have a lower unemployment rate at labor market entry. The flip side of standardization is low job mobility as it is difficult to switch between occupations as the training is standardized according to occupational images (Kohlrausch 2012). This also means that initial training may determine one's occupation over a life-time. Leisering and Schumann (2003) show how the temporal structure of the life-course differs between the liberal, the conservative and the social democratic welfare regime. They also take account of the degree of stratification of the educational system and the degree of standardization of vocational training. Taking the German welfare state as an example, they show that conservative welfare state regimes combine a high stratification of an educational system and high standardization of the access roads to VET with a relatively low class and job mobility. The conservative welfare state "conserves" social inequalities – not only through the structure of welfare state benefits but also through a corresponding educational system.

2.1.3. The Comparative Political Economy of Skill Formation

In the previous chapter, we have seen that in the outcomes of different training regimes differ considerably in quantitative terms. This chapter explores the institutional characteristics of these training regimes through looking at some qualitative aspects of these regimes through the lens of the political economy of skill formation. As the focus of this book is vocational education and training, the chapter features comparative research on the institutional arrangement of VET-Systems. Switzerland, Austria and Germany are key examples of such regimes, characterized by a high involvement of employers and employer associations in the administration and financing and training and by the provision of portable, certified occupational skills (Thelen/Bussemeyer 2008: 7). The comparative political economy of skill formation approach highlights the links between regimes of human capital formation, regimes of welfare production (Iversen/Stephens 2008) and of production regimes (Hall/Soskice 2001). For instance, liberal regimes of skill formation like the US are characterized by the provision of general skills through higher education and by highly deregulated labor markets. This corresponds to a production model putting emphasis on mass production and radical product innovation. Coordinated market economies, in contrast, are characterized by strong vocational training institutions and of a generous welfare state that encourages individual investments in occupational skills. Collectivist skill formation systems, like Switzerland, Germany, and Austria focus on portable, certified occupational skills. This means that skills are transferable within the same sector and mostly lead to occupations protected by collective wage agreements. This, in turn, corresponds to an economy characterized by diversified quality production (Iversen/Stephens 2008) and by the

strong bargaining power of business interest organizations in the process of educational policy formulation. The theoretical approach of “varieties of capitalism” (Hall/Soskice 2001) explains the emergence of three worlds of human capital formation through historical differences in the organization of capitalism and party politics, defining both the modes of production of companies as well as the redistributive policies by the welfare state. This approach argues against the focus on de-commodification in current literature on the welfare state, stating that important dimensions of the welfare state (Estevez-Abe et. al 2001) rest on specific historical compromises between employers and workers – in which the role of skill-formation plays a crucial role. According to these authors, the “welfare-skill-formation nexus” (ibid.) is dependent on the incentives that different institutional arrangements give for workers to invest in firm and industry-specific skills (which favor the development of dual vocational systems) or in turn, to invest in general skills (as in systems with a high prevalence of tertiary education). According to Estevez-Abe et. al (ibid.: 150), as firm and industry-specific skills make workers more vulnerable and dependent on particular employers and market fluctuations, “workers will only make such risky investments when they have some insurance that their job or income is secure. Otherwise, they will invest in general, and therefore portable, skills” (ibid.). The institutionalization of labor-protection laws and high unemployment replacement rates would constitute a specific “incentive” to workers (and prospective workers) to invest in industry-specific skills. Employers would thus be in favor of a strong welfare state in cases in which their production model requires workers with skills gained through apprenticeships. Specific welfare state settings are explained by the need of employers to rely on a specific skill pattern. In the case of Switzerland, with a high degree of small and medium enterprises and a diversified quality production (Streeck 2001) in specific economic niches operating on a world market – these are firm-specific skills gained in a dual vocational training system. In this approach, institutional differences are thus not explained in terms of de- and re-commodification, political alliances or path-dependent developments of institutional arrangements based on political preferences (like most welfare state typologies do), but explains them through the mode of organization of the supply in skilled labor-force and the ways in which economic actors gain specific advantages through gearing their production model towards the availability of certain skill-patterns. This is strongly linked to the “production regime” (ibid.) that reigns in a certain country. If firms require more specific skills (because the production regime is based on diversified quality production), employers are willing to invest more in the skill formation of their employees and support generous welfare benefits and replacement rates, and tolerate high employment protection levels. If on the other side, a production regime is based on mass production, requiring more general skills (like the US), employment protection is low: “the absence of such institutions, in countries such as the US and UK, gives workers a strong incentive

to invest in transferable skills. In such an environment, it then also makes more economic sense for firms to pursue product market strategies that use these transferable skills intensely” (Estevez-Abe et. al. 2001: 146). The question is whether the majority of young persons maintains an employer-financed dual apprenticeship-system (with an early entry age in the labor market, a tight occupation-education link, and employers as main gatekeepers, and relatively strong collective bargaining and labor-protection) or if the majority of a cohort follows higher education, also depends on specific economic arrangements.

2.2. Situating the Swiss Transition Regime

How can the Swiss welfare state, and correspondingly the Swiss transition regime be classified according to the presented typologies? The notion of a coordinated market economy delineates that skill-supply is shaped by “joint committees, as constituted variously by employers’ associations, chambers of commerce, trade unions, works councils, educators, and public officials” (Piopiunik/Ryan 2012: 14). The German apprenticeship system is often invoked as a prime example of a collective skill formation system, involving at “sector/occupation level co-operation between employers’ associations and trade unions to determine training standards, and at district level between companies, chambers, trade unions, and educators to determine the eligibility of companies to offer training and of apprentices to become qualified, and at workplace level by companies and works councils to determine the size and content of particular training programs” (Busemeyer/Trampusch 2012). Collective skill formation regimes have three central characteristics: First “employers and their associations are heavily involved in the administration and financing of training, second, the systems provide portable, certified occupational skills” (Thelen/Busemeyer 2008: 7) and third, historically, employers’ interest in skills may lead to training regimes that evolve as ‘dual’ schemes. The specificity of collective skill regimes is that – in contrast with liberal skill formation regimes like the US or the UK, that the content, access, and provision of training is defined by these corporatist organizations. This practically corresponds to the situation in Switzerland. As the first article of the federal vocational act describes, vocational training is seen as a “common task of the federation, the cantons, and the organizations of the world of work” (Vet-act 2002⁴, own translation). While firms, through sector-specific organizations define the content of different vocational training professions, administer the admission to these professions and operate the certifications

4 §1, Bundesgesetz vom 13. Dezember 2002 über die Berufsbildung (Berufsbildungsgesetz, BBG) SR412.10, henceforth: VPETA (Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act).

and tests, the federal-state supervises and sanctions the creation of new apprenticeships and overlooks that the certifications and content of training is constant throughout different firms and cantons. The fact that the federal state only sets general rules rather than intervening actively in the economic process refers to the “liberal corporatism” (Merrien 2001: 214), in Swiss vet-policies – the dual system works on a corporatist basis of consensus-building between the concerned professional groups and teaching institutions. Federalism leaves a large margin to cantons and to the professional organizations. Federal agencies (mainly the OPET⁵) set quality standards and pays subsidies to technical schooling institutions. The legal frame is set by the cantons. Firms are forced to respect guidelines in technical training, but as this is defined as a “common task”, neither the federation nor the cantons take a direct impact on the provision of apprenticeship places, which is fully left to the companies.

According to Stoltz and Gonon (2008), Switzerland can be described – alongside with Germany and Austria – as an employment-centered transition regime. The three-tiered school system, the dual system, and accordingly the relatively early educational tracking is characteristic of such a transition regime. Traditionally, and due to the specific organization of the education-occupation link through the dual-system, these regimes are characterized by a high degree of formalization and institutionalization in comparison to, for instance, under-institutionalized, southern European models. If we look at studies on the Swiss welfare state, the blunt classification of Switzerland as an employment-centered, continental welfare state alongside Germany and Austria might be too hasty. A deeper look into the literature on the position of Switzerland in welfare state-typologies shows that this classification is not self-evident. Armingeon (2001) describes that the Swiss welfare state made – from the 1970s on – a qualitative shift from a “liberal” or “residual” welfare state, characterized by low public-sector size, low social security transfers, and a comparatively late introduction of social security schemes towards a continental welfare state (see also Olbrecht 2013). The Swiss welfare state, with relatively high monetary benefits and a (historically) late but strong institutionalization of compulsory insurance schemes, in which social security is predominantly financed through contribution-based rather than tax-based system, structured around a male breadwinner model, indeed corresponds to the continental welfare state. On the other side, core features of the liberal regime-type remain: as Armingeon describes, “Switzerland is a continental European welfare state with a liberal face” (Armingeon 2001: 151). Administration of schemes is often left to private organizations (particularly in

5 Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET), which in 2012 has been merged with the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER/ SBF) into the SERI (State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation) and now are both part of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs.

the field of secondary education provision either through the corporatist model of the dual system, governed mainly by firms and their representative organizations or “private” professional schools for which pupils will have to pay). Also, other insurance systems show strong liberal traits, for instance the health insurance system or the pension system. Similarly, the strong administrative controls and relatively strict eligibility criteria and conditionality of benefits (particularly for younger unemployed) rather corresponds to the liberal regime type than to the continental one. Obinger argues that the specificities of the Swiss welfare state lie in the fact that the delayed development from a liberal to a continental welfare state has been inhibited by Swiss federalism which “geared the path of welfare state evolution in a more liberal direction but have also dampened social expenditures” (Obinger 1998). In fact, Bonoli shows that in OECD average, social expenditures spending as a percentage of GDP is closer to Italy and Greece than to Germany and France – while in all these countries the extent of contribution-based expenditures (vs tax-based) amount to the same percentage. The installation of compulsory insurance systems came with the continuous transfer of responsibilities from the cantons to the federal state, (Obinger 1998: 435), with a situation in which cantons either felt no obligation or no incentive to enhance social security, while the federal level was not empowered to do so. In fact, the political structure of Swiss federalism is far less developed than in other federalist continental states, (like for instance Germany and Austria) and should in Switzerland “be seen in a similar vein to that in Japan and the USA” (ibid). This point is also of crucial importance for the field of educational legislation, as we will see below.

While Stoltz and Gonon (2008) interpret the fact that the recent policy discourse is focusing on integrating young persons into the regular training system as an implementation of elements of a “universalistic regime type”, combining the same individualizing, compensatory measures and structure related labor-market policies (they cite the new vocational training legislation on the federal level as an example), we will see below that these “universalistic” elements are dampened by the negotiations in the federal arena. Firstly, the “universalistic elements” cited by Stoltz and Gonon are very distinct to those features existing in the classical universalistic countries. Especially the organization of the educational sector – and more particularly upper secondary education which is fully organized in a corporatist mode of coordination, has a very high involvement of the market. This would forbid to talk about a “universal” transition regime in a strict sense. Nevertheless, Stolz and Gonon strike an important point when describing that a political will towards integrating all young persons into the regular training system persists – The reform of the vet-act in the period between 2002-2004, as well as the discussions accompanying the apprenticeship crisis, may have led to the partial introduction of “universalistic elements”, introduced under political pressure by trade-unions, educational actors and players in the field of social assistance. Nevertheless, as

we will see below, these are dampened by and mediated through specific interest constellations. The specific political structure of Swiss federalism, as well as the distribution of responsibilities between the cantons and the federal state, led to a slowdown of reforms that aimed towards a stronger “universalization” of aspects of the Swiss transition system.

In trying to answer Van de Velde’s question: “who, the state, the market or the family is in charge of the period between obligatory schooling and the labor market?” (van de Velde 2013: 134), we get a good image of the place of the Swiss transition system in international comparisons. In comparison with continental welfare states, Switzerland has a relatively low share of state-led intervention in the transition period. Obligatory schooling – the legal age-phase in which young persons are under the auspices of state-provided universal education is 16. (Germany, for instance, has a “vocational training obligation” until the age of 18, while Denmark – as an example of a universalistic country, access to university is guaranteed through generous support for students). This is also an outcome of the fact that educational legislation is in the responsibility of the cantons, a fact that prevented federal regulations on the possible elongation of the obligatory schooling period⁶. This shows that Armingeon’s thesis that Swiss federalism has dampened the development of more universalist characteristics and led to the “liberal face” (Armingeon 1999) of the Swiss welfare state also applies to transition regimes. Upper secondary education is – despite a range of far-reaching reforms (see below) fully in the hands of employers and firms, with a very low level of state regulation, also in comparison to other countries with a dual VET-system. This system is clearly geared towards the market, as this quote from the federal office for professional training and technology shows: “Vocational education and training enables young adults to make the transition into the working environment and ensures that there are enough qualified people in the future. It is geared to the labor market and is part of the education

6 It is only since the introduction of the article 62 in the Swiss constitution (the so called “educational article”) after popular vote in the year 2006 that the Swiss federation can – only in case that no harmonization by means of coordination between the cantons is possible – prescribe the legal school age. As will be shown later, within the parliamentary discussions on the failed attempts to introduce a right to vocational training (2001), proponents of the initiative pointed to the discrepancy that despite the fact that a VET-degree has become a necessity for a successful working life, the school obligation period had, since the 1971 never been prolonged (see among others, the statement of Maya Graf in the proceedings 00.086 on the popular initiative “for sufficient VET-offer” on 21st December 2001). The SKOS (2007) In a position paper on young persons in social assistance, encouraged the introduction of an obligatory period of VET after obligatory training until the age of 18 (SKOS 2007: 7), a obligation that should then also be enforced by social assistance. These propositions were nevertheless never taken up.