

Learning to Work: Trajectories and Discourses

Aprendiendo a trabajar: trayectorias y discursos

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Key words

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- Work experience contracts
- Work experience agreements
- Youth
- Segmentation
- Transition
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Palabras clave

Contratos de formación y aprendizaje

- Contratos de prácticas
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- Jóvenes
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- Transición
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Abstract

“Work-based learning” is positively valued by young people as a form of professional specialization and a rapid transition to the labor market. But the economic crisis has changed the trajectories of labour. Trajectories have been segmented. Today, a broad period of uncertainty in employment is accepted as normal, as well as a form of successive approximation to job stability. This study has been based on the statistical data of the MCVL and in five discussion groups with young people from 16 to 34 years.

Resumen

El «aprendizaje basado en el trabajo» es valorado positivamente por los jóvenes como una forma de especialización profesional y de transición rápida al mercado de trabajo. Pero la crisis económica ha cambiado las trayectorias laborales. Las trayectorias se han segmentado. Hoy se acepta como normalidad un amplio periodo de incertidumbre en el empleo, así como una forma de aproximación sucesiva a la estabilidad laboral. Este estudio se ha basado en los datos estadísticos de la MCVL y en cinco grupos de discusión con jóvenes de 16 a 34 años.

Citation

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INTRODUCTION¹

The objective of this work is to analyze the transition process and the trajectories of young people, aged 16 to 34, in the labor market. This transition is considered to be an important aspect within the framework of active employment policies of the European Union (European Commission, 2015). Therefore, the idea of “*work based learning*” (WBL) is especially relevant in order to adapt to current employment training. It is assumed that “*work based learning*” (an idea that is based on the functionalist approach, which we do not share, but which is useful for this study) facilitates the learning of competencies that are required for specific work positions, thereby facilitating a rapid labor transition for young workers, given that they can learn with the technology and the work organization of the company where they carried out their training. At the same time, companies will benefit since they will be supplied with a select labor pool thanks to this training and this will lower their costs for recruitment, search and selection (European Commission, 2015). Furthermore, the articulation between the education system and the productive system will also serve to improve the suitability or correspondence between training and employment (1983), a current suitability that is quite debatable (Martín Artiles and Lope, 1999; Planas, 2016), as demonstrated by the widespread phenomenon of over-education with respect to the employment. This promotes our perspective that training is not synonymous with work but rather, it is a factor that offers proximity to distinct employment forms.

On the other hand, from a perspective of active employment policies, it is assumed

that company training shall also contribute to the improved trajectories of young people throughout their life cycle. However, we can anticipate that these trajectories have not improved during the recent economic recession period. To the contrary, uncertainty, precarious employment and low salaries have characterized an entire decade (2007-2017).

Our goal is to examine a type of trajectories of young people (extracted from statistical data of the Continuous Professional Life Sample of the Social Security) and the discourse provided by the same, their meanings and connotations with regards to the transition between school and work, as well as with regards to their own trajectories. The analysis of training and apprenticeship contracts and work experience contracts are two elements of said transition. Work experience agreements between educational centers and companies are also important. A priori, it is assumed that these forms of transition via training contract or agreement will facilitate the young workers' labor integration and job stability and will improve their working conditions.

In the analysis of the discourse of the young people, we have identified distinct trajectories, perceptions and assessments of the role of in-company training. Both the statistical data as well as the discourse analysis obtained from the discussion groups have led to the distinguishing of three distinct trajectory types: unstructured, semi-structured and with expectations of success. Currently, these three trajectories appear to be quite distinct from those that Casal *et al.* (2006a) classified as early success trajectories in the 90s. Therefore, we should ask ourselves: *have the transition mode to the work force and the types of labor trajectories changed for young people? What relationship exists between the distinct trajectories and the segments of the labor market?*

In short, this article is divided into four sections. In the first section, we propose a

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theoretical framework, the conceptual uses, the hypothesis and the methodology. In the second section, we offer a statistical typology of the selection criteria to create the profiles of the discussion groups that were carried out. In the third, we analyze the discourse of the three groups and the findings with regards to the main hypothesis. Finally, in the fourth section, we offer some conclusions.

CONCEPTUAL USES

Work-based learning

The “*work based learning*” (WBL) concept is defined as the distinct procedures used to achieve the objectives of learning of the skills and competencies linked to the labor market (European Commission, 2015:13). This work based learning encompasses numerous forms in the European countries; therefore, it is a useful concept when discussing the distinct training traditions, given that it does not only include Dual Training, *strictus sensus*, but also the work experience systems used by companies. WBL has the purpose of acquiring technical knowledge, as well as the learning of standardized behavior, the acquisition of knowledge regarding interdependence in the performing of activities, the recognition of the common activity in the company and the training of reference groups and labor market connection networks. These are relevant aspects in the conception of employment policies, although they are rarely established as such. In short, *WBL is collective*, it provides an in-group transfer of knowledge, as observed by Marhuenda *et al.* (2010:156-157) and it also includes ongoing training in companies that promotes changes in work requirements (CES, 2015).

The “*work based learning*” concept – inspired by the theory of human capital and with a suitability orientation (Planas, 2016) – allows us to focus our attention on the young people having training and apprentice or work experience contracts, which at the same time,

means considering young people with distinct education levels. The selection of this concept is quite broad, but at the same time, it is quite defined, given that it refers to Dual Training in its distinct accepted versions, as well as to work experience via agreements between education centers or universities and companies. The WBL concept fits in with the theory of Transitional Labor Markets (Schmid and Gazier, 2002), which also facilitates the following of the trajectories of the youth. On the other hand, this concept appears to be of special importance in the active employment policies, especially in the inspiration of programs such as the Youth Guarantee (European Commission, 2015).

Transition and trajectories

Transition and professional insertion may be simple or complex (see Casal *et al.* (2006b), with regards to the itinerary and level of training of the young people. The means of transition may be diverse and imply distinct strategies, such as simple and fast labor insertion, which is generally associated with low education levels or early school abandonment. Or, it may be complex, with successive stages, involving the development of strategies by the young people. In this case, the strategies depend on the professional specialty, the requirements of the work position, the opportunities and family support of the study period. The transitions also depend on education level, social and cultural capital, in such a way that some individuals can model their transition to the labor market more easily, as compared to others with less studies and limited social capital (Stauber and Walter, 2006).

Labor trajectory may be defined as a set of changes in professional category position, with advances, setbacks or stagnation occurring during a specific time period or throughout the life cycle (Horan, 1974). Thus, we speak of trajectories with upward or downward mobility. Similarly, labor trajectory refers to horizontal mobility, understood as

the change in activity or territory sector due to work causes (Spillerman, 1977). Labor trajectory may be an indicator of the opportunities offered by a society to its working age members. Thus, relatively structured labor trajectories have been a characteristic of the Keynesian/Fordist employment model, since they offer a transition that is somewhat well adjusted to school and work and, subsequently offer upward development of the trajectory, as reflected by the gradual improvement in professional category and income, especially amongst men.

Nevertheless, since the 80s, the transformation of the Fordist employment model towards a more flexible model has brought about changes in the transition modality. According to many studies (see Casal *et al.* 2006a; 2006b), it is possible to distinguish between six transition modalities for young people based on a dual axis spatial distribution: 1) time of transition and 2) adjustment of expectations. That is, an imaginary horizontal line referring to the transition time, such that in one end, there is the early transition (in labor and emancipation terms) and in the other, there is the delay in said transition. In the vertical axis, we find the adjustment of expectations, which ranges from simple to complex.

1. *Early success trajectories.* This type of very rapid trajectories towards professional positions of success is related to university degrees, accompanied by rapid professional insertion and family emancipation. Here, we are not examining the issue of family emancipation, although we are considering labor trajectory. We find that this modality is common in a stable and expansive economic context, such as that of the 90s. However, during the middle years of this decade, Casal *et al.* (2006a; 2006b) already suggested the idea of trajectory with successive approximation, for young people having university studies that were gradually receiving training and experience in the work position.

2. *Working class or laborer trajectories.* The previously cited studies (following Willis 1988) identified this trajectory as a form of rapid transition from a short scholastic training, which includes low professional qualification positions. The acceleration of the labor insertion is linked to a pattern of fast family emancipation, however, today, in the context of the economic recession, this emancipation is neither fast nor stable. The volatility of temporary employment and other forms of flexible employment have contributed to these trajectories being intermittent, with multiple entries and exits from the labor market, with rotation between contracts and changes of sector and companies.

3. *Precarious trajectory.* This trajectory is defined by a temporary work contract, by vulnerability in the employment and the risk of unemployment and by the limited accumulation of professional training.

4. *Erratic or block trajectories.* This trajectory identifies individuals who have spent years outside of the training and employment circuits, who have been unemployed for long periods and have a low level of employability. This modality may be similar to that referred to as the “unstructured trajectory”, in the sense that it presents difficulties in training and stable insertion. This unstructured trajectory, together with the precarious one, has a lengthy transition time and limited expectations.

5. Finally, Casal *et al.*, (2006a; 2006b) distinguished a trajectory of family affiliation, referring to young people who develop a transition that is linked to the continued practicing of a family-based activity, such as small businesses, small companies, etc.

The transition modalities and trajectories are ever-changing and depend on the institutional context; therefore, they are also historic (Busemeyer, Trampusch, 2011). Today, it appears that the trajectories are neither linear nor predictable, but rather, are variable and fragmented (Furlong *et al.*, 2006). The

move towards a society of knowledge (Schmid, Gazier, 2002), and the flexible post-Fordist model, together with the severe crisis, have all influenced the development of transition modalities and trajectories. Today, the adjusted expectations of young people have become a major problem and we propose that this adjustment be examined through discussion group discourse. Perhaps the idea of “simple expectations” mentioned by Willis (1988) has extended to both young people with low education levels as well as those with a higher level of studies. Another element is that, in general, transition time appears to have extended.

Polarization of the trajectories or labor market segmentation?

On the other hand, international research has found that in the trajectories of young people, there is a trend towards polarization; thus, it is expected that the current crisis would cause a distancing from the employment conditions as compared to the older workers. We can characterize this as an “inter-generational polarization” derived from the segmentation of the labor market (Hurley *et al.*, 2013). Young people are included in flexible labor markets, with atypical and precarious employment forms with respect to the previous generations that basically had a stable employment model.

A second trend is the growing “inter-generational polarization” in the trajectories of young people belonging to a same generation (Hurley *et al.*, 2013). This second polarization has increased during the crisis period. The increase in precarious employment of a low quality and of unemployment between 2007 and 2017 appears to profoundly mark the trajectory of young Spaniards. Thus, Verd and López (2013) sustain that “inter-generational polarization” is less frequent than as suggested by the research, while “intra-generational” is not in itself polarization, but rather, it is a form of segmentation. The causal

factors link together both the variables used by the segmentation theory (age, gender, study level, origin, etc.) as well as other structural variables (sector, company type, etc.) that are also used by this theory (Muñiz, 2012; Miguélez, López-Roldán, 2014). Thus, WBL may favor the trajectories of the young people, especially of the highly educated and those working in specific activity sectors. But it may also lead to job instability and these young workers remaining in low quality jobs, as suggested by the transitional markets approach (Lassnigg, 2011). The perspective of some with respect to their trajectory is linked to their labor position, but also to education level and class origins, influencing both aspects.

General hypothesis

Based on the European Union employment policies, it is anticipated that participation in WBL would improve the school-work transition and labor trajectories, favoring upward labor mobility based on the training received throughout their trajectory in the company (such as improved professional category, contractual stability, salary increase, etc.); although this improvement depends on the labor market segment, the activity sector and company size.

Specific hypotheses

H1. The transition from early success for those with university studies appears to be transformed into a prolonged and successive transition period, due to labor instability.

H2. The trajectories of precariousness appear to be extended as the weight of the secondary segment of the labor market increases.

H3. The discourse of the working class in the sense of rapid transition and practical learning based on work continues to be important, but there is also increased middle class discourse based on merit and individualism.

In short, the study of transitions between contracts resulting from training and apprenticeship contracts may be necessary in order to contrast the efficiency of WBL policies. The fact that some of the trajectories resulting after the first apprentice contract are unstructured and erratic may be explained not only by the low education level but also by the context of the major economic crisis and by the fraudulent use of training and apprentice contracts and work experience contracts.

Methodological approach

This study is based on an approach taken from the labor market and not from the sociology of education perspective. The trajectories have been studied from two distinct approaches: 1) from the structures that condition the careers, such as the activity sector, labor market segmentation and the availability of job position vacancies (Muñiz, 2012); and 2) from the actor, his/her subjectivity, strategy and interaction with institutions. Therefore, on the one hand, for the examination of the structures, we perform a statistical analysis of the data from the MCVL². And, on the other hand, we examine the subjectivity based on the discourse from the discussion groups.

The MCVL consists of 1,202,387 individuals who are representative of the set of workers affiliated with the Social Security system; therefore, it is sufficiently large so as to have a very low margin of statistical error: for a confidence level of 99%, the margin of error is 0.09, assuming that $P=Q=50\%$. The sub-sample, once cleaning the registrar data and filtering out only the young people between the ages of 16 and 34 years contains 238,181 individuals.

Furthermore, we have used a two-phase cluster analysis. This tool permits us to work with a large number of data, such as that of the MCVL, or to discover groupings based on a data set, which facilitates the construction of criteria to select the discussion groups that will be treated later. This procedure allows for the obtaining of an automatic number of clusters or to select a specific number of the same. Similarly, it has allowed us to create cluster models with both categorical and continuous variables.

The cluster analysis does not offer a unique result; rather, the result depends upon the combination of variables and the selection of number of groups; therefore, we have conducted distinct tests. The variables selected are indicative of labor trajectories of upward and downward mobility. Similarly, the discussion groups include training and apprentice contracts as well as work experience contracts. The inclusion of both contract types has been important for the study of the school-work transition, such that it has been useful in deciding the profile of the discussion groups that we shall analyze later.

In the selection of variables, we have used two criteria: a theoretical one (trajectory concepts, vertical and horizontal mobility) and another, of parsimony, with the selection of a group of continuous variables. With the MCVL data, we study the trajectories for the 2007-2015 period based on the following continuous variables: the number of labor contracts, the number of contractual relations in the same company and the number of contractual relationships in distinct companies. These variables reveal the great mobility, of stability or of volatility, of youth employment.

On the other hand, regarding mobility, we use the variable of variations in professional categories in contracts, which reveal the vertical mobility (upward and downward). With respect to the horizontal mobility, we have used two variables: change of province and change of activity sector.

² We wish to thank Professor Pedro López-Roldán for the preparation of the data matrix of the MCVL, as well as for the preparation of the variables for their exploitation.

The variable *education level* is especially relevant, given that it is linked to the two types of contracts being studied: training and apprentice contracts for young people under the age of 30 with low education levels and work experience contracts, for youth having upper level vocational training and university studies.

In the second phase, based on the conglomerates derived from the MCVL, we have conducted three discussion groups with different trajectory types between 2007 and 2017: unstructured, semi-structured and having a perspective of success. In all, 26 individuals participated and we carried out a content analysis of the expressed discourse. The discourse analysis was carried out using Atlas.ti, permitting us to construct categories to characterize the discourse of the trajectories.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

In Table 1, we compare the contractual rotation and labor mobility of the employee set with that of young people between the ages of 16 and 34, observing that during the 2007-2015 period, young people have experienced a greater employment rotation and more labor mobility. In other words, the young workers have had more contractual relations in the companies in which they have worked and more contracts in distinct companies. Both indicators highlight the employment instability and the brief nature of the contracts. Likewise, the young people have experienced more changes in professional category, with upwards and downwards mobility, in their successive contracts, demonstrating the vulnerability of their professional status. Finally, young people also are found to have a greater horizontal mobility, with more changes in the sectors and provinces where they work. In short, these indicators reveal the great contractual flexibility and huge employment volatility of young people during the severe crisis period.

Classification analysis

The analysis of classification by similarities in the MCVL has allowed us to construct three clusters: the first represents 10% of the youth that have had an unstructured trajectory between 2007 and 2015; the second cluster is the largest, representing 64% of the young people who have had a semi-structured trajectory; and the third cluster represents 25% of the youth having a trajectory of success during this period.

Unstructured trajectories

Unstructured trajectory is the cluster in which we find the most unstable employment. In this cluster, employment rotation and volatility have been very high between 2007 and 2015, with a greater number of contractual relations with the employing entities (mean number of contracts equaling 34.3), highlighting the succession of temporary contracts having a very short duration. Here we also find a high number of company changes (9.83), changes in activity sector and changes in contract with a different professional category. These indicators highlight the fact that young people have experienced great contractual instability, with much horizontal mobility between precarious contracts as well as a high volume of temporary employment (72%).

Similarly, vertical mobility has been significant here, with changes in ascending and descending categories in the catalogue of ten labor categories registered with the Social Security system, especially amongst the laborers (who represent 28%), 1st and 2nd officials (16%) and 3rd (15%). These workers move in the lower categories of the scale, in addition to having oscillating movements (up-down) here, to which it is also necessary to add their frequent unemployment periods. All of this indicates a lack of continuity in the employment and an unstructured trajectory, due to a low training level and given that the successive contract changes have not permitted the consolidation of a clear professional profile for these workers.

TABLE 1. *Contractual rotation, vertical and horizontal mobility 2007-2015*

Contractual rotation	Number of contractual relations in the companies where they worked	Young people 16-34 years of age	9
		Total workers	6.7
	Number of different companies in which they worked	Young people 16-34 years of age	3.9
		Total workers	3
Vertical mobility: upwards and downwards	Number of ascending changes in professional category	Young people 16-34 years of age	1.2
		Total workers	0.7
	Number of descending changes in professional category	Young people 16-34 years of age	1
		Total workers	0.7
Horizontal mobility: geographic and sectorial	Number of changes in province where they worked	Young people 16-34 years of age	0.7
		Total workers	0.5
	Number of changes in activity sector	Young people 16-34 years of age	2
		Total workers	1.3

Source: Author's own creation from MCVL data (2015).

In this group, the training and apprentice contracts have been quite limited (7%). Here, precarious employment has been common for the young people working in the sectors of commerce, hospitality, agriculture and fishing, amongst others as well as in small companies with less than 25 employees. These tend to be youth having primary and secondary school studies, sometimes even school dropouts and the gender composition tends to be practically mixed.

Semi-structured trajectory

The second cluster has studied professional training and baccalaureate studies, is the largest of all of the clusters and is characterized by having a semi-structured profile, with less temporary employment during this period (47%) in comparison to the unstructured group (72%). Here, the number of contracts between 2007 and 2015 is only 5.53 and the number of companies is also notably less at just three. The time spent in a situation of unemployment is less than in the previous cluster, between the years 2007 and 2015 it

was 170 days as compared to the 340 days for the unstructured trajectory.

The majority of the apprentice and training contracts are in this cluster (93% of them). Education level is also medium-low and there are more men (54%) than women (46%); but the main difference here lies in the activity sector: these trajectories are found in sectors such as manufacturing, energy, construction and hospitality. The most frequent professional categories are laborers (24%), officials of 3rd (17%) and officials of 1st and 2nd (17%). That is, similar to the previous cluster, but with a greater stability in the employment.

Trajectory with expectations for success

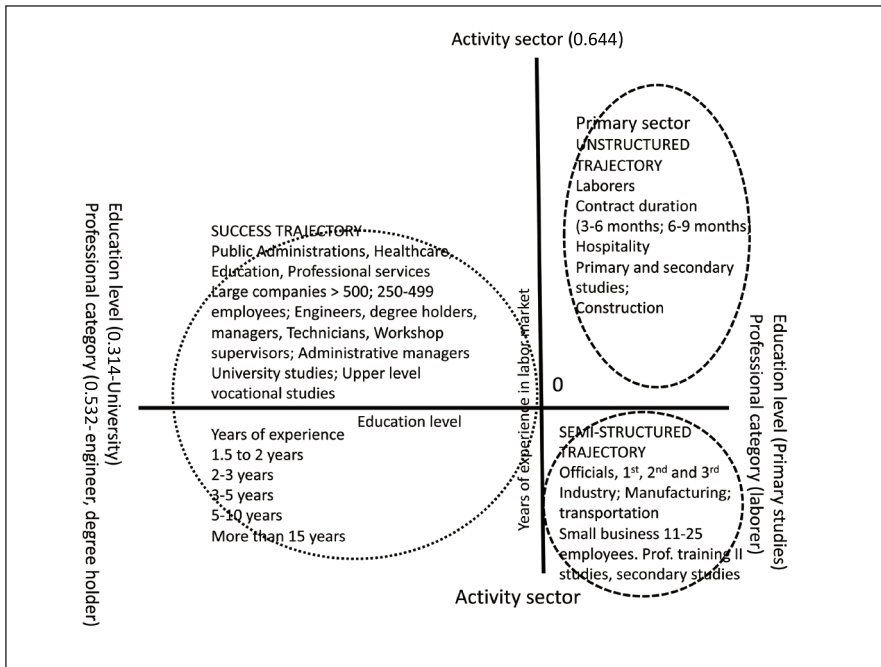
The third cluster is characterized by a trajectory with the expectation for success, defined by greater employment stability: it is the one having the most days of full-time open-ended contracts (948) between 2007 and 2015. The differences lie in the activity sectors, with this group containing jobs that demand a higher education level and level of qualifications,

TABLE 2. Clusters according to trajectories for young workers between the ages of 16-34 (2007-2015)

Cluster name	Unstructured trajectory	Semi-structured trajectory	Success trajectory
Cluster distribution	10%	64%	26%
Company size	32% 1 to 10 workers 15% 11 to 25 workers	42% of 1 to 10 workers; 15% of 11 to 25 workers	31% Over 500 workers 15% 101-250; 12% 251 to 500
Sector	31% Commerce and repairs; 16% Hospitality; 10% Agriculture and fishing	34% Commerce and repairs; 18% Manufacturing; 14% Hospitality	38% Business services; 30% Healthcare; 18% Transport and communications; 16% Education; 8% Public Administrations
Education level	27% primary studies 40% secondary studies	48% secondary studies; 27% primary studies	54% University studies
Gender	52% Women 48% Men	54% Men 46% Women	37% Men 63% Women
Transition	Temporary Contract (Training/Apprentice contracts 7%)	Training/Apprentice Contracts 93%	Work Experience Contracts: 100%
Changes in professional category	9.74	1.37	1.6
Ascending professional category changes	4.9	0.73	0.69
Descending professional category changes	4.79	0.69	0.7
Labor contract changes	2.61	0.21	0.3
Changes in province	3.74	0.32	0.51
Changes in activity sector	8.19	1.25	1.49
Number of different companies	9.83	3.02	3.19
Number of contractual relations in the company where working	34.3	5.53	8.98

Source: Author's own creation from MCVL data (2007-2015).

GRAPH 1. Spatial distribution of the trajectories



Source: Author's creation with MCVL (2015).

such as services to companies, healthcare, transportation, education and public administrations. Furthermore, in this cluster a significant difference is observed in gender distribution (63% women, 37% men).

Another important difference is that this trajectory tends to occur with employees in large companies of over 250 workers or those of over 100. Large companies have a greater opportunity to offer professional careers given that they have more complex organizational charts with jobs in distinct professional categories, opening up more opportunities for the young workers to develop their careers. The professional categories registered in the Social Security system are high, including engineers (17%) or technicians (18%). In this cluster, there are many workers with university studies and the majority (55%) of the work experience contracts are found here, given that for this contract

type (according to the law) includes a higher training cycle or university studies.

Multiple correspondence analysis

The analysis of multiple correspondence allows us to offer a spatial representation of the trajectories and to distribute the discriminating variables based on a center (represented by a zero), which is the result of the crossing of two axes or dimensions. The first dimension is represented by a horizontal line defined by the education level, with universities at one end and primary school studies at the other end. The vertical line represents the activity sector. The variables having the most discriminating weight that characterize this spatial distribution are, in order, the activity sector (0.644), professional category (0.532), education level (0.314), duration of the labor relation (0.295), company size (0.168) and gender (0.068). The variance explained is 68%.

The success trajectory has a complex itinerary until reaching the highest professional categories (engineers, degree holders, technicians, managers, etc.). In the ascending mobility leading to these categories, level of university studies is discriminating. Success is not premature or fast, as occurs in the model by Casal *et al.* (2006a). Today, ascending mobility is most likely successive and complex, via contract renovation, going from temporary contracts to stable ones, changing company and sector, participating in training and professional requalification processes. To reach these positions, it takes between one and five years, as we will see in the analysis of discourse from the discussion group.

The semi-structured trajectory has a somewhat longer transition mode, affecting the intermediate professional categories, as officials of 1st, 2nd and 3rd; with professional training and secondary school studies. This group receives training from the company, as seen from the discussion group; but its trajectory is less complex; perhaps in its initial transition phase, they have brief contracts and later, somewhat longer work contracts.

Finally, in the unstructured trajectory, which affects the professional categories having the lowest education level, the transition is simple. The contract duration tends to be of a short duration: less than three months, between three and six months, and nine months, which is indicative of the very precarious nature of the employment. In fact, less than 72% of the members of this group have had temporary contracts between the years 2007 and 2015.

DISCOURSES ON THE TRAJECTORIES IN THE DISCUSSION GROUPS

Regarding the general hypothesis, it is found that each of the three trajectory groups has its own discourse, differentiated, given that the members of each of the trajectories has

a slightly different social origin profile, distinct modalities of transition between school and work, a distinct formal education level and distinct types of company training. However, they do share certain similarities.

The following table reveals the frequencies for all of the categories in each of the trajectories, without a quantitative purpose, but rather, to characterize the discursive differences of each trajectory. Overall, the category registering the greatest frequency is that of *expectation of professional growth* which generates company training. The second category is that of *credentials*, especially for those having professional training studies and university education, who are those that tend to insist the most on the *accreditation certification* of the company training to improve their power of negotiation with the management of the same. Third, the *hidden CV* is important for those having university studies: in the job interviews, questions tend to be asked regarding other non-formalized knowledge. Fourth, the *upward mobility* (change of professional category) is also important, given that it also would imply an improved salary, as well as social recognition and prestige. And, fifth, the idea of *suitability of the initial training to the job position* is another variable of a functional nature that is mentioned in the discourses.

Discourse in the expectation of success trajectory

In the success trajectory, the most important category is that of the work experience agreement between universities and companies, given that it constitutes a turning point to define professional specialization and trajectories. Those included in this trajectory are distinguished from the others by their education level, by the holding of qualified jobs and, as a result of this, by the greater importance that they give to the training received in the company that generates upward mobility perspectives. For this trajectory, the

TABLE 3. *Most frequent categories in the discourses according to labor trajectories*

	Unstructured	Semi-structured	Success	Total
1. Suitability of the initial training to the job position	0	50%	50%	100%
2. Accreditation credentials training	14%	41%	45%	100%
3. Hidden CV	3%	3%	94%	100%
4. Professional growth expectations	2%	43%	55%	100%
5. Upward mobility	0	57%	43%	100%

Source: Author's creation with Atlas.ti.

learning of crosscutting competencies (attitudinal and behavioral) plays a major role, as does the capacity for communication and teamwork, among others. In this group, discourse related to gender is common, specifically by some of the women in the group, with the discrimination that arises from gender roles for their labor trajectories, as well as the weight of the domestic workload on the possibility of accessing training. However, success is not precocious; it arrives with delays, in successive stages, with changes in contracts and in professional categories.

Discourse in the semi-structured trajectory

In the semi-structured trajectory, the most frequent discourse category is that of training and apprentice contracts, which create a major turning point in their transition to the labor market. Another turning point involves the transition from a temporary contract to a stable one. But the training received by the company is important, especially for those who have held training and apprentice work contracts, marking the difference with respect to the unstructured trajectories. The young people included in the semi-structured trajectory have a relatively fast transition to the labor market and a good part of them begins working at the age of 15 or 16. In part, their transition is simple and in part, it is semi-complex, if we are to follow the terminology used by Casal *et al.*, (2006a). It

may be considered semi-complex since part of this group receives welcoming training in the company or completes work experience in it, based on agreements with their education center. This implies a certain structuring in the transition process of these youth to the labor market, having the expectation of attaining contractual continuity and job stability, in line with the traditional expectation of the working class trajectory; that is, it is a fast and “learn as you work” labor insertion. Similarly, in the semi-structured trajectory, the working culture discourse shares elements, such as those of “camaraderie” among others, with those suggested by Willis (1988). Here, in the discussion group, there are many indications from the young workers, who refer to the help received from their colleagues, in order to learn the tasks, or to handle problems in job performance when their solutions have not been indicated by supervisors.

The training received in the company by the young workers with a semi-structured trajectory is imparted differently to the previous group, which may possible be explained by several factors, such as a higher degree of institutional formalization in the job transition, the existence of cooperative school-company agreements, the existence of work experience contracts, a higher education level, and, surely, since this group holds more qualified job positions as compared to the workers having unstructured trajectories.

Thus, in this trajectory, we find that the forms of WBL are based on the fact that the training is accompanied by a tutor, which in the case of the school-company agreements, should follow and assess the learning advances (in addition to relying on another tutor in the education center). In this case, the work experience training is a part of the academic curriculum and may be evaluated. In this group, it is found that the young people take some informal learning initiatives, such as “on-line” learning with YouTube, or deciding to consult instruction manuals, engaging in training outside of the company, consulting with a colleague, etc.

Discourse in the unstructured trajectory

For the unstructured trajectory, of youth having a low education level, the most frequent category is that of coaching in the job position, which indicates that these young people do not receive training, but rather, simple and brief coaching in their work position, given that these are low qualification positions. The transition is simple and fast, in accordance with the notion of the previously mentioned working class trajectory. The transition takes place at very early ages, between 16 and 20 years, frequently linked to low education levels or early school drop out. But its relationship with employment is not continuous, via temporary contracts, informal employment, unemployment, changes of companies and sector and very little welcoming training, in the form of coaching. Therefore, the trajectory may be qualified as unstructured and with difficulties in accumulating training in the job site.

GENERAL HYPOTHESIS CONTRASTING

With regards to the general hypothesis, we find that it is not necessarily evident that participation by young workers in WBL facilitates the transition to the labor force and improves the labor trajectories (as assumed by the EU policies) since it depends on struc-

tural factors such as social origin, education level, type of learning and, most of all, company size and activity sector. The transition and the trajectories depend on the segment of labor insertion.

However, the training and apprentice contracts have a dual assessment by the youth. On the one hand, they are positively assessed by a specific age cohort (16-20) as the initial form of labor insertion. These contracts are important in the transition, not only as WBL but also as a form of socialization and a link to a reference group that may provide them with a sense of affiliation and usefulness.

But there is also a very critical attitude when these contracts are mere forms of temporary hiring with intense work, without any links to training and as a means of cheapening the cost of labor. The fraudulent use of these contracts, which has been noted in diverse studies (Fernández, 2009; CES, 2015; CCOO, 2015), is present in the discourse of various groups. Work experience contracts are valued more positively, given that they are intended for individuals with university studies and are linked to medium to high professional categories. Thus, these contracts may open the doors to ascending mobility in young people who offer optimistic discourse with expectations of success. For this group, the turning point in their trajectory took place earlier, via the work experience agreement between the university and company.

Specific hypothesis 1

With regards to the first specific hypothesis (H1), no early success in labor insertion and ascending mobility was observed in the young workers with university studies, as was observed in the 90s by Casal *et al.* (2006a). Today, the transition is successive, with a turning point taking place in the practical work experience that permits the youth to outline their professional specialization, followed by a work experience contract and later, by successive temporary or even open-ended con-

tracts, with changes of company and sector. Perhaps the context of the severe economic crisis has prolonged the transition period and the stages of its trajectories for many young people, regardless of their education level. We can deduce that education level and origin of class strongly condition the transition to the labor market, the period in which it takes place, at an early or later age; dropping out of school or continuing one's education and going on to university; immediately entering the labor market or waiting to have better training and a stronger CV, as highlighted by Stauber and Walther (2006). But, generally speaking, today the labor trajectories are not linear between the school and work, or between work positions. That is, they are not predictable: the trajectories are ever more fragmented, complex and successive, having implications on the ongoing training across the life cycle (Furlong *et al.*, 2006).

Specific hypothesis 2

The precarious nature of employment has marked the unstructured trajectories, and in part, the semi-structured ones. The growing precariousness of employment is a fact that has been confirmed during the crisis period and has accentuated the segmentation of the labor market (Marhuenda *et al.* 2010; Martín Artiles, 2014; Verd and López, 2013, among others). In this way, no polarization appears to have occurred in the trajectories in terms of winners and losers, but rather, a stratification or segmentation of labor trajectories in the context of strong uncertainty which has marked the 2007-2015 period.

Specific hypothesis 3

We have verified two discourse directions: one whose narrative is that of the working class (see Willis, 1988) and the other that is more linked to the "middle class". Here, we should emphasize that these are *discourse directions and not of belonging to the working class or middle class or of working class or middle class trajectory*. The *working class discourse*

has been identified with the fast transition to the labor market, at very early ages, sometimes dropping out of school and as a simple form of transition in which it is anticipated that one shall learn while working. On the other hand, in the *middle class discourse* (or new middle class discourse) we have seen that the incorporation into the labor market occurs later on, after the age of twenty since the young people continue their studies. The transition may also be gradual, combining periods of study with sporadic jobs, seasonally, but it is anticipated that one will learn by studying and working, receiving training from the company.

In the working class discourse, the idea of learning while working appears; it is a pragmatic concept to apply the knowledge acquired with which these young people hope to learn through coaching or training in the company (WBL). The training or apprentice contracts are highly valued by some of them, since they have permitted the improvement of their knowledge and have allowed them to reach some expectations, such as having a stable job, remaining in the company, improving their professional category, etc. But ascending mobility has a short pathway in terms of professional category, from laborer to official of 3rd, official of 2nd and official of 1st, as seen in the previous pages.

In contrast, the middle class discourse is characterized by a longer training period and higher degrees (university and upper level training cycle studies). Also, because the company offers these young people welcoming training, co-financed training outside of the company (courses, Masters, etc.) and contributes to generating success expectations. These young people have a more optimistic, individualist discourse of trust in the assessment of merit. Therefore, the certification and accreditation of their training is important as a competency instrument, of professional updating and as a means to adjust to the changing employment conditions.

TABLE 4. *Working class vs. middle class discourse*

	“Working class” discourse	“Middle class” discourse
Transition	Fast transition: first labor insertion 15, 16 years (informal or formal) Simple transition	Delayed transition: long study period. First insertion at 20-24 years Complex transition, gradual
Training	Early school abandonment. In-work training; assessment of the practice, applying acquired knowledge Coaching and training in the company Positive assessment of training and apprentice contracts Negative contract assessment Positive assessment of school and company agreements	Long formal study period University studies. Second cycle FP Welcome training in company Positive assessment of work experience contracts Positive assessment of work experience agreements between university and company
Expectation	Expectation of job stability Upward mobility of a short path: worker to officer of 1st, 2nd and 3rd Expectation adjustment at early age	Expectation of success based on credentials, degree Individual expectations, idea of merit Upward mobility expectation, bosses, higher categories: technical, engineers, degree holders, directors Delayed expectation adjustment
Suitability or credential	Expectation of suitability to work position. Limited awareness of the accreditation in the unstructured trajectories	Importance of the degree, training accreditation and certification
Trajectory	Unstructured Semi-structured	Semi-structured Trajectory with expectation of success
Origin	Working class	Working class Traditional middle class New middle class

Source: Author's own creation.

Finally, regarding social origin (defined by the parents' position), the discourse of the working class appears in the groups that have been identified as being of this origin, but the middle class discourse also appears amongst the youth of this origin when having high education levels; as well as in the discourse of the traditional middle class youth and those of the new middle classes. In other words, the individualist discourse has got-

ten through as a value of the working class, although with certain nuances.

Simple transition versus complex transition

The *simple transition* is found in the group of unstructured trajectory and that of the working class. For this group, the transition is simple and fast to the extent that, immediate labor insertion is sought, initial training is limited and there is no welcoming training of-

ferred by the company, which only provides workers with some coaching in the job position during a brief learning period. Therefore, we can deduce that in the “simple” form, the young people desire an early labor insertion, but their low education level and limited qualifications may subsequently hinder their trajectory. These youths are subject to successive employment changes as well as changes in contract, company and sector, to the extent that unemployment periods, in such a way that the simple and brief insertions occur throughout their trajectory.

The semi-structured trajectory group has a *semi-complex transition*, linked in part to prior professional training: at times they are inserted in their job via the agreements between the education center and the company while at other times, through training and apprentice contracts. The company offers welcoming training or coaching in the same job position. The transition time is not very long and, in the discourse, they describe practices such as a rapid transition path. For this group, the turning point in their trajectory is passing on to a stable contract and is not linked to a training period, as occurred in the trajectories with expectations for success.

On the other hand, the group of trajectories with expectations for success has a *complex transition*, with a long transition period between their education and the company; given that the level of qualifications demanded by their work position requires regulated training and specific training that is linked to the position. The transition is made through agreements entered into by the training center and the company and through work experience contracts. The transition is complex because the time is longer, linked to the obtaining of degrees, credentials and the accumulation of experience, leading to the generation of expectations of professional progress in terms of qualifications and payment.

Expectations adjustment

The adjustment of expectations is an important aspect in the transition and in labor trajectories and implies the adaptation of the expectations of the young workers with the specific reality of their job position, professional category, payment and social prestige. In the unstructured trajectories, expectations are low and focus on finding a stable job, but without any expected upward mobility or professional improvement. The adjustment of expectations takes place at a very early age, given that their transition is also very fast, occurring between the ages of 16 and 20, in accordance with that which we have referred to as the working class trajectory profile (Willis, 1988). The self-esteem of the members of this group tends to be low, as is their social prestige.

In the semi-structured trajectory group, the expectations also refer to job stability and the aspects related to training and requalification are not always important. Similarly, the profile is in line with that considered to be the working class trajectory, implying that these individuals *learn by doing* and gain *work experience*. The adjustment of expectations is also very rapid, implying a certain degree of conformism, since it is important to have a job and if it is open-ended, even better. For this group and the previous one, in their discourse, the normative work organization contributes to socializing their disciplined work behavior.

The group of *trajectory with expectations of success* sustains an argument that is based on continued training effort and the recognition of individual merit. In the examined age cohort (20-34 years), the group still sustains a major expectation of success; the reason why training offered by the companies is valued and sought out and why they have self-learning initiatives. The trajectory is complex and represents efforts of training, degree obtaining and accreditation, as well as mobility between companies and, at

times, sectorial and even geographic mobility, until achieving employment opportunities that imply upward mobility with professional category promotion. But success is not always soon to come, as sustained by Casal (1999) and its delay may be explained by the limitations resulting from the major economic crisis. Furthermore, the fact that this group tends to have university education generates high expectations (Planas, 2016), although the economic context may also influence the adjustment of individual expectations and affect their behavior. It is possible that the university graduates who have not had any prior work experience may experience a major shock with a reality that does not adapt to their expectations.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

What has changed due to the economic crisis? Perhaps, the expectations of the so-called working class trajectories have changed: precarious employment generates a sort of resigned realism (of “normality”), a certain acceptance of the limited framework of opportunities; this is of special significance in the unstructured and semi-structured trajectories. This is not the case with the trajectory of expectations of success, where individual strategies are appreciated. During a certain period of their life cycle, young people maintain individualist expectations with regards to their professional careers, economic income and social prestige.

On the other hand, during this crisis period, early success appears to have disappeared. In earlier years, this success was associated with those having university studies and it has been substituted by a success of successive approximation which is related to the idea of learning throughout the life cycle, characterizing the current knowledge society: thus, the importance of continuous training for the trajectory group having expectations of success.

Nevertheless, the trajectories are not only determined by the individual actor, their education level and strategies. Even more significant are the structural factors such as activity sector, company size and vacant professional categories. We have found evidence that the primary labor market segment, where the large multi-national companies and activity sectors such as finance, public administration, education and healthcare are located, may offer or limit professional opportunities. Some of these structural aspects have been corroborated in other studies (Muñiz, 2012; Miguelez and López-Roldan, 2014; Martín Artilles, 2014). To conclude, not only are the inequalities of class reproduced in the transition and in the trajectories, but furthermore, labor market segmentation limits said trajectory, which may become trapped in a limited mobility path. Our critique is that striving individuals who have accumulated merits via WBL may be trapped in a specific segment of the labor market. This entrapment may bring into question the suitability hypothesis of the theory of human capital, which inspired EU policy (Planas, 2016).

Furthermore, one of the findings is that the intra-generational trajectories have become segmented or differentiated in three levels for young workers; this is quite distinct from the polarization referred to in international research (Hurley *et al.* 2013). This finding is in line with that described by Verd and López (2013) and reveals how those benefiting from WBL are not the set of young workers, as established in the initial hypothesis, but rather, are some of those having high education levels and who, thanks to WBL, have been able to gain qualified employment positions.

Ultimately, WBL has been positively assessed by the young people. Thus, for the unstructured trajectories, it represents an opportunity to socialize on the job and to receive professional coaching; for the semi-structured and structured trajectories, work experience agreements and contracts represent a signif-

icant turning point, as well as an opportunity to acquire professional specialization. But WBL has also been criticized due to the possibility of its leading to fraudulent contracting, extended over time, with precarious working conditions and a lack of payment regulation.

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