

# Changes in forms of transition in contexts of informational capitalism

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## Abstract

This article identifies the forms of transition of young people towards emancipation from the family based on earlier research, applying this theoretical approach to a survey of young people in an advanced capitalist region, with the aim of obtaining a picture of their educational, employment and emancipation profiles. Four basic forms of transition are described; young people between the ages of 26 and 29 are empirically classified in these four categories, and an examination is made of the key hypothesis that states that the categories of *early success* and *working class itineraries* are being displaced by the *successive approach* and *paths of precariousness*. An analysis allows a relationship to be drawn between changes in the structure of capitalism and changes in the forms of transition of young people towards emancipation and social status. Particular emphasis is laid on the form of *testing* used by young people, and what this means at a lifestyle level. «In the ways in which transition and the uncertainties of the future are faced (*testing*), we have seen substantial changes in forms of transition which increase the difference in experience and perception between parents and children, and we have observed that institutions have a broad area in which they can act to modify careers that would seem to present a negative future».

**Key words:** youth, transition, career, emancipation, employment, education, work, social mobility.

## Resum. *Canvis en les modalitats de transició en els països del capitalisme informacional*

L'article identifica les modalitats de transició dels joves vers l'emancipació familiar a partir de recerques anteriors i aplica aquest enfocament teòric a una enquesta a joves d'una zona de capitalisme avançat, amb la finalitat d'obtenir una distribució de trajectòries escolars, laborals i d'emancipació. S'hi descriuen quatre modalitats bàsiques de transició, s'hi realitza un exercici empíric de classificació de joves de 26 a 29 anys en aquestes modalitats i s'hi verifica la hipòtesi clau segons la qual s'afirma la recessió de les modalitats d'*èxit precoç* i de les *trajectòries obreres*, en favor de les modalitats d'*aproximació successiva* i de *precaritat*. L'anàlisi permet relacionar els canvis en l'estructura del capitalisme i els canvis en els models de transició dels joves a l'emancipació i la posició social. Particularment, s'hi insisteix en la forma de *tempteig* dels joves i el que això significa a nivell d'estil de vida. «En les formes d'encarar la transició i la incertesa del futur (el *tempteig*), intuïm canvis substancials en les

modalitats de transició que augmenten la diferència d'experiències i percepcions entre pares i fills i percebem que les institucions tenen un camp d'acció ampli destinat a modificar trajectòries que anuncien futurs negatius».

**Paraules clau:** joventut, transició, trajectòria, emancipació, inserció laboral, educació, treball, mobilitat social.

### Summary

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This article follows on from an earlier article by the same authors and presupposes a knowledge of the theoretical and methodological approach contained in our earlier piece. In that first article we proposed and defended a view of Youth Sociology based on the main concepts of *itinerary*, *trajectory* and *forms of transition*. The aims of this second article are twofold: firstly, we want to measure the results (though with reservations and limits) for young people in a central area of informational or welfare capitalism. Secondly, we want to reaffirm the hypothesis relating to the way in which the transition of young people has changed in this context of informational capitalism, and the effect that this will have on their social situation.

In order to understand the meaning and relevance of this article, it is worth revisiting some of GRET's earlier research to identify previous pointers towards the issues discussed here. During our early years of research at GRET-UAB (1986-91), in addition to setting out the theoretical bases for research on access into the labour market, we were able to carry out empirical research into the itineraries built on by young people in their process of social and professional insertion<sup>1</sup>. We were thus able to make a more in-depth study of how young people constructed their working careers and gained emancipation from the family<sup>2</sup>. During the second half of the 1990s we were able to improve our

1. Basically, two lines of empirical research and a lot of theoretical and methodological discussion. These involved studies using preliminary data from the end of the 1980s, which are now out of date (more than fifteen years have passed and the social situation of young people in terms of their inclusion and emancipation has changed enormously). Nevertheless, we feel it is worth to reference some of the initial publications that resulted from this research: MASJUAN, PLANAS, CASAL, *Bases teóricas y metodológicas para el estudio de la transición; Política*, nº 1, Madrid, UCM, 1988; *La inserción social y profesional de los jóvenes de 19 i 25 años* CIDE-MEC, 1988; *La inserción social y profesional de hombres y mujeres a los 31 años de edad*, ICE-UAB, 1990.
2. J. PLANAS, *Els usos formatius dels joves*, Ph. D. thesis, GRET- ICE-UAB, 1993; J. CASAL, *L'emancipació familiar dels joves*, Ph. D. thesis, GRET-ICE-UAB, 1993.

theoretical bases for the sociological analysis of young people and formulate criteria and working hypotheses on forms of transition<sup>3</sup>. Our work continued into the new millennium, firstly with our research into «failure at school» at ESO level (compulsory secondary education) and into the itineraries in the vocational training, and subsequently with our Survey of Young Catalan People three years ago. Our most recent work has involved an analysis of training pathways in secondary schools, in a specific study of the R&D research plan promoted by the Spanish government<sup>4</sup>. This article is, therefore, the result of a general research process, though it concentrates on an analysis of forms of transition, based on a survey that we have carried out among young people.

## 1. Forms of transition

One of the criteria that has always oriented our research is the many different ways in which young people deal with their itineraries and the transition process. In the first article we wrote for this publication, we referred to the socio-historical and territorial influences on young people, which seem to us to be a methodological «pre-requisite» in Youth Sociology. However, it is necessary to go from the young people regarded as separated individuals to «types» or categories of itineraries and transitions; this is one of the duties of sociological analysis<sup>5</sup>.

3. Some important articles produced by GRET on the subject of forms of transition are: J. CASAL, «Modos emergentes de transición a la vida adulta en el umbral del siglo XXI: Aproximación sucesiva, precariedad y desestructuración», in *REIS, Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (75-1996), Madrid; J. CASAL, «Modalidades de transición profesional y precarización del empleo», in L. CACHÓN (comp.), *Juventudes, mercados de trabajo y políticas de empleo*, Valencia, 1999; also, CASAL, MERINO, GARCIA and QUESADA, *Enquesta als joves de Catalunya 2002*, Generalitat de Catalunya, 2004.
4. M. GARCIA et al., *Percepcions i expectatives professionals dels joves; projecte Interreg; la formació professional transfronterera*, Government of Catalonia, 2003; M. GARCIA, *L'absentisme escolar en zones socialment desafavorides*, Ph. D. thesis UAB, 2001; R. MERINO, «Els fluxos d'alumnat en l'educació postobligatòria», in *Educar* magazine, issue 32, 2004; *De la contrareforma de la formació professional de la LGE a la contrareforma de la LOGSE: itineraris i cicles de formació professional després de l'ensenyament secundari comprensiu*, Ph. D. thesis UAB-2003; J. CASAL, R. MERINO, M. GARCIA and M. QUESADA, *Survey of Young People in Catalonia 2002*. Secretary General for Youth, Government of Catalonia, 2004; MERINO, GARCIA, CASAL and PLANAS: 16-19. Young People Transitions after Compulsory School (Research and Development National Plan, reference BSO2003-07739).
5. It is worth pointing out that the epistemological relationship between individual-protagonist and structure-agency presents a great methodological challenge. We want to maintain our structural analysis (which relates so much to a large area of sociology) free of atavism, but without falling into the trap of creating simplistic formula for methodological individualism (J. NOGUERA, «Individualisme ontològic», in *Papers de Sociologia*, 69, 2003, p. 101-132). In any case, it is a good idea to go beyond the metaphysical meanings of social theory (according to the same author) by applying MI (methodological individualism) with the correct anti-metaphysics. To the extent that forms of transition are not pre-ordained behavioural models but express and explain similar strategies and actions among individuals, we can say that we broadly agree with the methodological formula that this author (who

Earlier research has, among other things, indicated two factors in relation to young people: firstly, that entry into the labour market happens in a number of different and polarised ways, (very complex forms of transition as compared with others that are very simple, and signs of clear personal and social success in very depressed social situations). Secondly, that emancipation from the family also occurs in very different ways (very early for a few and much later for a great many young people<sup>6</sup>). In other words, in the second half of the 1990s, the entry of young people into the labour market was highly conditioned by mass schooling, the mismatching between the demand for education and the real work available in manufacturing and services. At the same time, emancipation from the family suffered a significant postponement<sup>7</sup>. In short, therefore, we have identified the entry into the labour market and the emancipation from the family as the variables to be considered in the construction of forms of transition. Our aim has been to build a two-dimensional space (in order to keep the model simple) in which all young people from a specific area in a particular social era or context can be placed in relation to their transition towards full emancipation from the family.

It is worth pointing out that the aim of our research is more directed towards defining the way in which young people construct their personal futures (social position or category and complete emancipation from the family) rather than lifestyle (forms of behaviour, cultural and referential practices and identity). In this period of intense social change in both ways of life and cultural identity, there is a constant call for knowledge regarding changes in lifestyle. However, this is not our main objective. We want to use the research carried out to reflect on the forms of transition followed by young people (mainly social categorisation and emancipation from the family)<sup>8</sup>. The Euclidian space that we are seeking, therefore, relates to ways of acceding to social position and, secondly, the achievement of complete emancipation from the family. Our aim is therefore to identify the basic types of professional and family tran-

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is now a colleague in our Department) puts forward for MI. Also, K. EVANS et al., «Reconstructing fate as choice? Initial findings from the comparative study taking Control», in *Young*, vol. 9, no. 3, 22-28 (particularly in relation to the concept of «bounded-agency»).

6. The concept of polarisation should not be taken in its literal sense, as if there were no middle ground. Quite the contrary. Social diversity in the construction of the future does provide spaces for intermediate positions. This concept should therefore be understood more as a range of possible extremes rather than the result of the accumulation of resources at the polar extremes.
7. The employment crisis in the middle of the 1970s led to a significant number of reports and studies (France is a particularly representative case with the well-known Swartz report). Initially, the levels of youth unemployment were the ones most taken into account; a short time later, research showed that entry into the labour market was taking place in an atmosphere of complexity and uncertainty. At the same time there was a growing tendency to delay emancipation from the family, as clearly explained by J. L. ZÁRRAGA in his Report on Youth in Spain, 1984. The Ph. D. thesis on the emancipation of young people from their families (J. CASAL, op. cit.) confirms and further details this trend.
8. We will return to this point at the end of the article.

sition, which in our case we will reduce to four different types which result from two axes or variables.

— **Complex or simple construction of professional insertion.** A particular characteristic of being young involves constructing the bases by which one can pass from dependence (a typical condition of childhood) to full independence from the family. The construction of professional insertion therefore represents the social starting point from which young people go on to improve (or fail to improve) their professional status or career. In order to achieve this initial position<sup>9</sup>, young people gather at a «starting grid», like the competitors in a car race, arriving at the start of their working itineraries with the tools and the potential that they have amassed from their formal education and from their relationships with family and friends<sup>10</sup>. There are, therefore, many forms of professional transition. Those that involve strategies and successes during formal education, clarity and precision when choosing speciality of study, single-mindedness in the first jobs, taking advantage of opportunities, support from one's social and family environment during the early stages of employment, etc. At the opposite extreme one finds the desire to abandon formal education as quickly as possible, either due to failure at compulsory school or due to family influences, or both: manual labour is chosen as the pathway, with little opportunity to gain qualifications. Family influence in gaining access to employment can be reduced or weakened due to the absence of a social network, and the options for professional transition are dictated solely by a lack of opportunity or failure to take advantage. It should be stated that between the initial positions of success on the one hand and low-qualified work on the other, there is a wide range of intermediate possibilities, and the variety

9. The analogy involving starting grids for motor races is very interesting. Transition is not a question of how you arrive but rather how you set out. During the course of your professional life, your position may improve, stabilise or fail. This is therefore a question of upward or downward social mobility which sociologists have extensively studied. However, as far as young people are concerned, these are prior manoeuvres and exercises (as a «training sessions») aimed at obtaining a position on the starting grid, in which the leading positions are a sign of success and the lower positions a sign of failure or shocks. One only becomes aware that these positions are lower ranked when one looks at the ceiling in terms of salary or status. It should be said that for some young people this becomes clear very early on (the more working class) while for others it happens much later (those who leave school with higher qualifications). It is also worth stating that early or late transition into the professional arena does not necessarily have anything to do with levels of salary: sometimes well-qualified jobs with a future are badly paid, and sometimes the opposite is true. Our survey of young people confirmed this view.
10. It is worth recalling that all the *ad hoc* research agrees that personal and family relationships are central in determining one's starting point for a professional career. One should avoid the temptation of mechanistic social determination, but the social environment in which a young person lives plays a highly decisive role in terms of access to and taking advantage of opportunity. This does not in any way supplant the problems of downward social mobility, as we shall observe later.

of starting-out points is therefore very broad. We are not dismissing that fact in this article, but we feel it is important to examine the more extreme characteristics or situations.

- **Early or late emancipation from the family.** Another of the individual characteristics of being young involves the search for complete emancipation from the family (particularly in the *neolocal* context in which we find ourselves); furthermore, a more specific indication of the social condition of young people is the absence of emancipation<sup>11</sup>. There are those who are able to achieve emancipation earlier, and those who achieve it later. In our first article we talked about the many causes of early or late emancipation, given that one cannot always find a single explanatory factor that applies to everyone. There is an important convergence of favourable and unfavourable conditions that contribute to emancipation from the family at an earlier or later stage. The family may help with access to housing, or delay emancipation on the basis of a «marriage rituals». Moving at a young age for reasons of employment encourages early emancipation, while connections with the local labour market may delay it. Setting up home with a partner could aid emancipation, though life as a couple in some lifestyle contexts (such as «ritual marriage», for example) may delay it. The price of houses for first-time buyers has become a delaying factor, though the amount of public rented accommodation for the young may reduce the number of non-emancipated young people, a number which has been rising over recent years. It is worth saying, therefore, that emancipation from the family (though made more complex by cases involving those who end up returning home or those who find some intermediate form of emancipation) can be measured on a numerical scale (the age at which a young person moves to their own home or a home that is independent from their family), which allows us to establish early and late emancipation at the opposite ends of the spectrum (while remaining aware of the diversity that exists).
- **Four or more forms of transition.** The Euclidian space provided by the creation of these two axes (professional transition and emancipation from the family) is an expression of the results which we described and identified in earlier texts as the six forms of transition<sup>12</sup>, but which, after sub-

11. This aspect is particularly subject to debate (some, including young people, politicians, intellectuals and researchers, are not inclined to accept it easily), though it is very important to us. A large part of our work revolves around emancipation from the family. In complete emancipation from the family (access to one's own home) we see an important boundary between dependence and independence. It is true that during the first stages of marriage there are important changes in status, the use of time and the assumption of responsibilities. But we argue the central importance of emancipation in the construction of one's future (our survey of young people showed a clear difference between emancipation from the family and marriage).
12. J. CASAL, «Modalidades de transición profesional, mercado de trabajo y condiciones de empleo», in *Cuadernos de Relaciones Laborales*, 11-1996, UCM-Madrid, and by the same author, «Modalidades de transición profesional y precarización del empleo», in L. CACHÓN

sequent research (Survey of Young People in Catalonia, 2002), we reduced to four (two of the forms, «family membership» and «erratic itineraries», were not considered in our analysis of the young people's survey, due both to technical reasons and because these social profiles were not suited to the techniques used in the survey). It is also worth mentioning that there are other implicit, marginal or non-visible forms that we haven't taken into account: young people in penal establishments, young people without families, young members of socially and financially elite families, young people in special training or religious centres, young people who choose to work in international cooperation projects, etc.). In short, therefore, we are only studying an area in which there is room for four groups of dispersion or the four forms which were described briefly in our first article<sup>13</sup>.

- *Early success*: high expectations of social position with promising achievements and relatively early emancipation from family.
- *Working class trajectories*: limited formal schooling and the choice of unqualified manual labour, though with strongly accelerated emancipation from family.
- *Successive approach*: high expectations of social position with promising achievements, though gained slowly through the use of a trial and error technique. Slow and precarious entry into the labour market (often in the form of part-time work while studying) and late emancipation (postponed for a variety of reasons that prolong dependence on the family home).
- *Precarious trajectories*: low expectations of social position and an absence of stable achievements and promotion at work. This sometime involves studying for long periods, though with no professional ambition, and emancipation from the family comes late because, among other reasons, the precarious conditions involved make it impossible. Within this trajectory there may be precarious situations that have resulted from chronic unemployment (this is actually a different form but we have included in the fourth form for reasons of opportunity).

The four resulting categories can be represented graphically in the form of the following figure 1. This clearly represents a reductionist approach to the complexity of entry into employment and emancipation from the family, but

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(comp.), *Juventudes, mercados de trabajo y políticas de empleo*, Valencia, 1999. In our case, we examined the transformations that occur inside central countries. In peripheral countries and socially excluded regions, events are very different. We refer to this in our 2<sup>nd</sup> Report on Childhood in Barcelona (Ciimu-BCN, 2004).

13. We believe it is important always to bear in mind the socio-historic and geopolitical aspects of childhood and youth. We have had the opportunity to write about this in our two reports on Infancy and the Urban World for CIIMU in Barcelona (First and Second Reports on Infancy in; 2002 and 2004 respectively). See C. GÓMEZ et al., *Infancia y familias: realidades y tendencias*, Ariel, BCN, 2004.

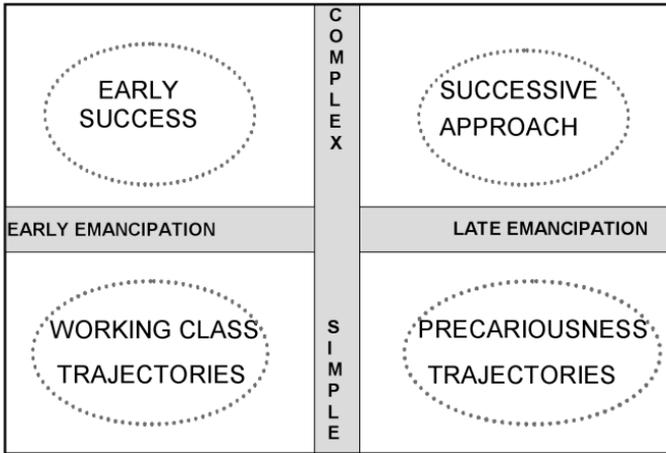


Figure 1. Forms of transition.

we hope that it will also offer an understanding of the changes in the way young people construct their futures in these central capitalist regions.

## 2. The regression and emergence of forms of transition

The hypothesis we have formed in relation to informational capitalism (as regards the central region formed by the richest countries in terms of GDP, which exercise control over the world economy, are strong on information technologies and involved in the international community) is that forms of transition that were strong under welfare state capitalism have fallen away, and that the transitional forms categorised as the *successive approach* and *precariousness trajectories* have begun to emerge and/or become dominant.

From the end of the 1970s until now (a time in which *informational capitalism* has gained in impact), young people have tended to construct their transition in the form of the *successive* and *precarious* approach (which include erratic trajectories or completely blocked ones, as mentioned above). This represents a real break in the transition process, and it results from contradictions in the relationship between demographic flows, mass schooling and the prolonged precariousness of youth employment (other aspects such as the cost of housing or methods of setting up home with a partner also play a decisive role, as we will observe at a later point). This break means that certain forms of transition have become more dominant. This does not mean that they are new forms, or forms that have only recently appeared. They are forms that were present in earlier socio-economic environments (liberal capitalism and welfare state capitalism), but have now emerged as more dominant forms, growing in

strength and carrying more importance in the transition of young people, doing a powerful influence on their lifestyles and expectations for the future.

The hypothesis that we have maintained in our research into «social change and youth» is that the *successive approach* form is the one that is dominant among young people in Europe, and this forms the central core of our understanding of the current phenomenon of the delayed transition of young people into labour market and away from their families. The higher the expectations of social position (these being generally constructed on the basis of interactions with school, family, cultural references and the mass media), the more complex the process of identifying horizons, taking decisions and accumulating partial successes<sup>14</sup>. This is a condition that doesn't only apply to the new middle classes. Its historical origins lie with the offspring of the new middle classes, but there is an important and growing number of young men and women from the working classes (in both towns and cities) who are displaying this form of transition. It is precisely the «inter-class» nature of this condition that leads to its being regarded as dominant in this phase of expansion of world capitalism.

This hypothesis also maintains that the *precariousness* form is increasingly emerging under informational capitalism, particularly because of the impact of employment deregulation and failing social welfare programmes. The labour market is becoming increasingly more precarious (particularly for those just starting out on a working career), and the schooling system cannot provide an answer for everyone as regards the creation of expectations of social position (particularly at university). For a long time now, the imagined steady relationship between training and employment has been what has driven the hopes and desires of young people, their parents and teachers, and even businesses and public policy relating to employment and welfare<sup>15</sup>.

14. J. CASAL, *Modalidades de transición y precarización del empleo*, op cit., p. 166. This work gives a more exhaustive explanation of this hypothesis. The aspect involving the positive accumulation of achievements is of special interest. Social successes are frequently more apparent than real, precisely because they cannot be added together or accumulated. When this happens, the individual is subjected to a form of social stress and a lack of any consistent accumulation of experiences. Consistency and inconsistency in the construction of a itinerary is a very important element which should be borne in mind, particularly by professionals working in this field: student group tutors, professional advisers and teachers and social workers in general.
15. We have examined and written about this imagined scenario at GRET. The model detailing the relationship between education and employment, which is of such great importance to ordinary people, those connected with employment and economic and social analysts alike, should be reviewed. It's not just that the model is not very appropriate any more (as a result of both social change and deregulation), it's probably a fact that it really only ever existed in the minds of the individuals and institutions involved. On this subject see, for example, J. PLANAS et al., «Marché de la Compétence et dynamiques d'ajustement» and «Hausse d'éducation et marché du travail», in *Les Cahiers*, 6 and 7 respectively, Lihre, Toulouse, 2002; C. BEDUVÉ and J. PLANAS, *Expansión educativa y mercado de trabajo*, INC-MEC 2002; PLANAS and RIFA (eds.), *La Formación Continua en Europa*, Forcem, Madrid, 2003.

It remains to be seen, as capitalism in its *informational* form develops, whether the form of transition that eventually comes to predominate will be the *successive approach* or the *precariousness trajectories* form. This is an issue that is still being debated, and we shall return to it at the end of this article (the final section, which contains our conclusions and a discussion of the results). It is almost ten years since we pointed to the predominance of the *successive approach* and the emergence of the precariousness trajectories<sup>16</sup>, and it now remains to be seen whether the *precariousness trajectories* form will end up predominating<sup>17</sup>. In any case, it is worth pointing out that there is great diversity within the *precariousness trajectories* (a condition that includes other subsections) to labour careers. It sometimes occurs among young people who have achieved good educational qualifications yet find themselves at the back of the queue when looking for qualified work, sometimes among those with qualified vocational training but with turnover, and sometimes among those with low or no accredited vocational training who swell the ranks of the low-qualified and low-stability workers. Regardless of who begins their working life in a precarious situation, the difference begins to become clearer when individuals remain a long time in this precarious situation and are unable to find the continuity required in order to achieve a definitive or permanent job. In these cases, the precariousness trajectories is not only encountered when entering employment, it remains as a permanent situation in the labour market.

Finally, it should be said that the basic reason that explains the emergence and predominance of these two conditions (precariousness and the successive approach) lies in the particular relationship between the sub-systems of transition towards emancipation and the proliferation of contradictions and limitations. A list that is by no means exhaustive but which offers an idea of the size of the problem would include the effects of the «over-education» on demand, entry into the working environment based on offers requiring few initial qualifications, extended transition into the working environment as the result of two or three years on trial, the individualisation of labour relations, the cost of buying or renting housing and uncertainty in the establishment of lasting relationships or commitments (with a partner, at work, mortgage, etc.). In general, therefore, young people find themselves forced to build a future against a background of *uncertainty*<sup>18</sup>. It is perhaps this that provides the principal explanation for the behaviour and strategies observed, as we shall discuss at a later point.

16. See, *inter alia*, J. CASAL, *Modos de transición en el cambio de siglo*, op. cit.

17. P. Serracant and Toni Salvadó argue that the precariousness trajectories has established itself as predominant in the entry of young people into the social and professional spheres. Paper presented in the Catalan Sociology Congress, Reus, 2003.

18. The term *uncertainty* has lately been much used to define the current social environment. Some use the term *risk society* (like the much-cited U. Beck), while other prefer *uncertainty* (such as M. Fernández Enguita) and still others opt for *informationalism* (e.g. M. Castells).

### 3. Transition forms for young people in central regions

Based on this theoretical premise, this article presents the results of the relationship established between the data obtained from a biographical survey of older people in this group (between 26 and 29 years old) and the hypotheses formulated in respect of forms of transition. This is an empirical and validation exercise in a central informational capitalist region in deployment (in this case using Catalonia as the territory and 624 individuals aged between 26 and 29 years<sup>19</sup>). It is worth pointing out, as far as this article is concerned, that this territory represents a part of the European Union that also exhibits its own peculiar characteristics<sup>20</sup>, while in certain ways remaining illustrative of the network of urban areas in the central capitalist region. It is a known fact that emancipation from the family varies widely in terms of age<sup>21</sup> and country, but trends make it possible to make predictions that extend well beyond national borders. We will use this information as an example, while exercising a great deal of caution.

We have concentrated on the relationship between the types and categories examined: the age of emancipation from the family as a variable in time, and mobility inside the labour market as a variable in the construction of professional careers. This analysis is therefore aimed at examining the theory suggested above in detail: the itineraries of labour mobility as a form of classifying young people on the basis of greater or lesser success in finding a job and in constructing a professional status (simple or complex), and emancipation from the family, classifying young people according to age relating to their complete emancipation (early, modal, late or unsuccessful emancipation). The aim of this analysis involves constructing a two-dimensional space in which one can place the young people in the sub-sample<sup>22</sup> as regards with the four different conditions studied, and thus conclude where the changes are occurring and extrapolate the main implications.

19. It would have been better to have had a broader sample (including people aged over 30) and a larger number of people (we had to settle for 624 cases). The territory studied is limited to Catalonia, but we believe it to be strongly representative of a central or developed territory. In this regard, barring the distances involved, this group is highly illustrative of any region in terms of welfare and economic development.
20. The territory is Catalonia, a stateless nation in the northern Mediterranean with a metropolitan population concentrated around the city of Barcelona. The territory has specific features in terms of language, culture and links with the state, but very European in terms of GDP, planning, geographic mobility, family spending on ITCs and consumption. It has highly specific characteristics affecting delayed emancipation (e.g. the rising cost of housing) but is very European in terms of the situation of women in education and employment, etc. The opportunity to carry out comparative international research based on these theoretical and methodological suppositions would represent a welcome culmination to our research programme.
21. *Inter alia*, O. GALLAND, in «L' allongement de la jeunesse en Europe», *Revue de l'OFCE*, 72 (2000), 187-192.
22. The sub-sample involves 424 cases, as 200 are «missing» due to an absence of substantial information on labour mobility. These cases are reintroduced at a later point, since their eventual status as full-time student or employee is known.

As far as the sample of 26- to 29-year-olds that we interviewed is concerned, the «labour mobility» variable is very complicated, since not all of them were able to be included. 424 individuals (68%) show an active value in the table relating to labour mobility (temporary work, working while studying and currently in full-time employment). The other 200 (32%) could not be included for various reasons: 118 were students at the time of the interview (31 full-time students and 87 who were both working and studying), while 82 were unemployed at one of the two moments considered in the interview.

This added complexity led to the analysis being based on two premises. The restricted premise, which only takes account of the 424 26- to 29-year-old who show an active value in the table relating to labour mobility, and the broad premise, in which those who are studying or unemployed are also included and classified by means of a reasoned classification: students (probably they are studying at university) are classified in the category of complex professional transition, while the unemployed are classified in the category of simple transition (though this solution is problematic)<sup>23</sup>. The values that result from this classification relating to labour mobility allows one to combine and classify the subjects according to their transition to labour market in terms of success and qualifications and those who are descending or have few qualifications. To simplify the process, we have used three levels of qualification (high, medium and low or non-existent) and we record whether the subjects have improved or diminished in terms of employment qualifications (ascending mobility or dequalification). The results are as follows (table 1).

As regards the «age of emancipation» variable, all 626 individuals give a result (except for 5 cases for which there was insufficient data), though complete emancipation from the family is more complex than it at first appears: some young people leave the family home for an intermediate arrangement (student accommodation, other relatives, etc.), some return to their family home after a period away, and some move away from the family because they are working away. It is therefore not always easy to establish the age that emancipation occurs. Nevertheless, measuring emancipation from the family by the age at which an individual leaves the family home to go and live in their own accommodation (which does not mean it is really their own home, or that they actually achieve functional and financial independence), we get the following results (table 2).

We have classified emancipation as not being late when it is achieved by the age of 27 at the latest. This is subjective (particularly when one bears in mind the emancipation of young people in Nordic countries), though it allows us to classify 4 in every 10 people between the ages of 26 and 29 in «advanced»

23. Except for one case, the 26- to 29-year-old students (117 cases) are young university students who have not yet made the school-to-work transition, and they are assigned to the category covering the successive approach. Those who are clearly unemployed (self-defined as actually unemployed) are classified under simple transition, though the difficulties in classifying them are more notable here).

**Table 1.** Qualifications and mobility in employment (26- to 29-years old).

<b>Ascending mobility and university students:</b>		
Ascending qualifications from medium starting positions: 21 cases	3%	5%
Medium and high qualifications: 118 cases	19%	28%
Full-time students: 31 cases	5%	—
Students who work: 87 cases	14%	—
<b>Low qualifications and unemployed:</b>		
Ascending mobility in lower level beginning from the bottom: 68 cases	11%	16%
Permanent situations of low qualification: 191 cases	31%	45%
Dequalification processes: 25 cases	4%	6%
Unemployed or inactive: 82 cases	13%	—
Total number of young people (26 to 29 years)	624	424*

\* It is worth recalling that students and the unemployed cannot be placed in the table relating to employment mobility due to the absence of at least one piece of data. As a result, the number falls to 424; the inclusion of students and the unemployed in the table is, therefore, unsafe.

**Table 2.** Age at which complete emancipation from the family is achieved.

Before 21 («early»):	38 cases	5%
Between 21 and 24 («premodal»)	94 cases	15%
Between 25 and 27 («modal»)	125 cases	20%
28 and 29 («late»)	25 cases	4%
Not achieved at 29	337 cases	57 %
No data available	5 cases	—
Total people aged 26-29	624	100

categories. We classify emancipation as late when it is achieved at the age of 28 or 29 (also a subjective option) or when the individual still lives with his or her parents, a total of 6 in every 10 people between the ages of 26 and 29.

The two classifications obtained for young people in the 26-29 age group in terms of professional mobility and emancipation from the family allow us to make a quantitative estimate of the four basic forms of transition set out above. It should be said that the percentages recorded for each category should not be interpreted on the basis of the intervals of the above figure, but that they result from the two different scenarios considered in respect of labour mobility (i.e. with and without the inclusion of students and the unemployed): in the first scenario we are classifying the itineraries taken by young people on the basis of a sample of 424 subjects, and in the second we are classifying it on the basis of a sample of 624 individuals.

Taking all these considerations into account, therefore, we obtain results that allows young people to be classified in terms of the form of transition pursued (both professional and as regards emancipation), on the understanding that the objective pursued is not so much to allocate specific young people to the form of transition displayed, but rather to provide an overview of how these are distributed. Furthermore, the classification of these people into different categories is also related to other variables in the survey based on the consistency and description of their relationships (social origins of the family, level of education and school itineraries, speed in finding a job, working conditions and gender) which, for obvious reasons, go beyond the remit of this article and are worthy of examination in their own specific study<sup>24</sup>. The results obtained allow the young people studied to be classified as follows in the four categories mentioned above<sup>25</sup> (figure 2).

#### *a) Early success*

This is the category in which we have classified young people who have achieved emancipation from the family before the age of 28 and have described an labour mobility itinerary based on success and high expectations. They have generally completed a dedicated university education and their entry into the labour market has been positive with upward qualifications. Strictly in terms of labour mobility, they represent 12% of the 424 cases. The inclusion of young people of this age who are still studying (either full time or at the same time as working) does not substantially change this proportion (15% of the sub-sample of 624 cases), since these people are, in the main, in a situation of dependence (there are only a few cases of emancipated university students who have not clearly begun the labour insertion).

We do not have any comparable data for previous decades, but from a hypothetical point of view we believe that this is a form which, while still existing, could be diminishing in importance. There are young people who look to the future with the aim of achieving high social positions that involve cumulative successes in terms of both training and work and who, furthermore, have tackled emancipation from the family (either on their own or with help, generally from the family itself). However, it is probable that the number of young people taking this path has decreased.

24. The relationship between forms of transition, gender and social class is only mentioned in passing here because it deserves specific sociological examination. However, in another point in this article we refer to the inter-class nature of the «successive approach» form, though social classes that possess social capital have a quite clear effect on social diversity. This is also the case as regards women, who are highly represented in the «successive approach» category.
25. We would repeat here that the labels are our own and may not be sufficiently precise. Some labels may be perceived in another sense or meaning. We apologise. Labelling is only valid for the purposes of general description, and in some cases is not entirely precise or convincing.

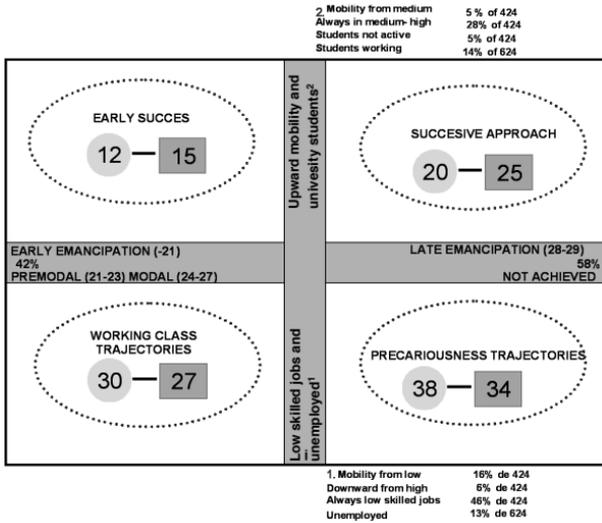


Figure 2. Representation of 26- to 29-year-olds in the four basic transition categories.

Key: the percentages in the diffused background refer to the N = 424 or restricted scenario; when the percentages are in the squared background they refer to the N = 624 or broad scenario. It is important to make this distinction so that these results are not confused with the usual interval for statistical error. We should recall that the broad scenario includes young people whom we have not been able to classify in terms of employment mobility as they were unemployed at one of the survey points or because they were studying at university.

The «early success» form has a lot to do with original social position and aspects of social reproduction, though some interesting observations can be made. Young people who come from families with middle to high social positions are highly represented in this category, and there are few examples of people who come from lower ranking positions. Nevertheless, young people originating from all social classes are represented in this category, albeit in different proportions.

Access by young people to an elevated position is highly influenced by success in their educational itineraries (as an essential requirement for good insertion). In addition to a successful education, family support could carry a significant amount of weight (as regards opportunities for entry into employment and help from the family in gaining emancipation). As a result, this category of early success displays a relationship with medium to high social position.

It should be stated, however, that late emancipation from the family (a phenomenon sufficiently shown in the results of our survey) could hide cases of early success in professional transition. Gaining good entry to labour market does not in itself encourage emancipation. It is an important incentive, but not in itself sufficient (also important are circumstances relating to mari-

tal situation, housing, decision-making, influence of cultural context, etc.). It is therefore highly probable that some young people may have an effective training and working itinerary (classification) based on success and the early achievement of goals, while their emancipation from their families is delayed for reasons of marital tradition, resources to obtain housing and other causes. The weakness in the scenario presented would lead us to believe that an effective policy of reducing the cost of housing could indirectly lead to an increase in the proportion of young people showing success in this area.

Although the emancipation of young people is not important in terms of gender, it should be said that both girls and boys give fairly equal results in this area, though with a slight difference in favour of girls<sup>26</sup>.

### *b) Working class trajectories*

This category includes young people who have achieved emancipation from their families before the age of 28 and described working itineraries based mainly on low skilled occupations for which they have not been through university. Qualification through vocational training is not a requirement, though it does allow for better working qualifications. In general, labour mobility follows other routes. These are either young people who have found themselves in processes of dequalification (passing from better to worse professional positions) or those whose entry into labour market is marked by low levels of qualification and who have a low ceiling. Indeed, the majority of cases are found in this area. Working conditions are restricted by low levels of recognition (low salaries, long hours, stability conditional upon the company's production rates, etc.). Young people in this category, like blue collar workers and people without any specific qualifications, are subject to changes in the market and the company they work for. In other words, they are caught up in the more general process of deregulation and precariousness, even though they would probably remain among the positions defined as «occupational» or «trade».

This category includes 30% of the 424 young people surveyed, and in the event that we included those who were unemployed or inactive this figure would not change much (in any case, such changes would be negative), given that such situations are not favourable to early or advanced emancipation (it falls to 27% for the sub-sample of 626). It is also true that there are cases of young working class individuals who show quite advanced levels of emancipation due to the fact that they have set up home with a partner, though in general this situation has a significant effect on delayed, due to difficulties in help from the family for this initial step.

It is for this reason that, as for the previous category, we seem to be dealing with a form of constructing the future that is becoming less common. In other

26. Bearing in mind that the fact that boys and girls show different behaviour as regards emancipation may in part aid an understanding of the differences.

words, some young working class individuals (it may be that some of them did not even start out as working class) describe working class trajectories, though the majority of them have moved across to other categories, as we shall observe below.

Although there is a link between this category and the working-class origins of the young people in question, it should be said that the number of young people coming from high-class families is highly represented. However, we would relate a few cases to the issue of descending social mobility (young people from middle-class backgrounds who nevertheless do not achieve good levels of education or work).

By contrast, in relative terms, girls are slightly more represented in this category than boys<sup>27</sup> (above all due to the relative importance of precariousness for boys, and perhaps due to the difference in age at which emancipation is achieved).

### *c) Successive approach*

This category includes young people who live with their parents or who have achieved emancipation rather late (between the ages of 28 and 29), but whose working careers display success in terms of upward job mobility. They have usually studied at university and their job expectations are high, based on success at entry level, or because they are on ascending pathways. Nevertheless, emancipation from the family comes late (for whatever reason). This involves 20% of the 424 cases, though it can be as high as 24% in the sub-sample if we include young people of this age who are still studying. This category is also identified by the existence of testing: facing up to the uncertainties of the future and a dominant trend for personal success, marked by going through university and the establishment of strategies to improve labour mobility. Some young people do this quite quickly, while others may remain a significant time in the initial training stage (postponing actual entry into labour market). In general however, the successive approach offers good opportunities for success as regards delaying processes of achievement, particularly where this applies to emancipation.

Delaying emancipation and slow but extensive forms of constructing professional ability (long periods in education and high expectations of social mobility) dictate the testing strategies employed and the gradual approach to the achievements being sought. Perhaps this is a different way of facing up to the future given the uncertainties of the present. This is probably not something that has just begun to happen. It probably began long ago and is closely related to the exchange value of qualifications, the deregulation of the labour

27. Perhaps the observation contained in the previous footnote (difference in emancipation age) is also valid here. In any case, it is worth looking at the issue of precariousness in employment according to gender, as this is an important issue which remains open for examination.

market, the cost of buying and equipping a house and the forms in which people set up home with their partners. In short, this means that this category contains a great class mixture, even though the young people that it contains have a significant anchoring point in their original families: there is a significantly high number of middle- to upper-class people, though the other classes are also represented. The hypothesis is that in the current social context, this is a form that is widely used by young people constructing their futures, not so much because they have decided this themselves but because of the impact of their social context (where they studied, future social positions, increased housing costs, new ways for couples to live together, etc.).

In this case one can again observe a difference between boys and girls. The successive approach is a method in which the latter predominate, in comparative terms. Perhaps this more prolonged and testing course is well suited to the constrictions placed on girls as regards their professional future.

#### *d) Precariousness trajectories*

This category includes young people who live at home with their parents or who have gained emancipation at a late stage (after the age of 28), and whose employment mobility offers rather unattractive prospects. They may have perhaps suffered from dequalification processes, or they may have always been in the low-qualified bracket (which means worse working conditions and low and very defined wage ceilings). This includes 38% of the 424 cases, though this figure falls to 34% when applied to the sub-sample (626 cases).

Precarious and destructured pathways<sup>28</sup> began to emerge years ago. The emergence of this type of itinerary was already being noted in the mid-1990s<sup>29</sup> within a background of informational capitalism. Almost 10 years have passed since that first mention, and the impact of global capitalism has continued to have an influence on forms of transition.

The emergence of this phenomenon (including destructuring) has a lot to do with the precarious labour market and the cost of housing. Precariousness is generally found among young people with little education, though it is prone to have a «knock-on» effect on the jobs of certain university graduates. In any case, the evolution of precariousness would lead one to think that there is a broad range of influences in terms of social policies.

All in all, these trajectories include more boys than girls (maybe greater delays in achieving emancipation and greater restrictions on labour mobility). The fact that the precariousness category contains a greater number of boys than girls is surprising and may be contrary to other studies on the precariousness suffered by women. We believe that an important role is played here

28. It should be remembered that there is a category (erratic or non structured itineraries) that is not taken specifically into account here and, in any case, is considered within the category of precariousness trajectories.

29. J. CASAL, «Modes emergents de transició...», in the journal *REIS*, 75 (op. cit.).

by the fact that the majority of girls obtain better results and are more successful at school. We should not in any way deduce from this, however, that precariousness is a more masculine phenomenon: precariousness clearly reflects a combination between poor results at school, labour market deregulation and the abusive use of temporary job contracts.

In terms of social position, there is clearly a strong bias towards young people who come from the lower social echelons, though this phenomenon remains an inter-class one to a certain extent (due to the external constructions of work and emancipation).

In short, the Survey of Young People in Catalonia allowed us to link some of the results for young people between the ages of 26 and 29 with the hypotheses dealing with forms of transition. While this analysis allows us to take a closer look at the way young people progress towards the future, this is no so much a question of classifying young people and placing them in boxes but more one of building a reference, in heuristic and approximate terms, of the ways in which they construct their futures. These days, «growing up» leads one along specific pathways and tracks that are very different from the ones taken just a few decades ago. Young people spend more time in both compulsory and post-compulsory education (while some remain definitively excluded). Young people are faced with the challenge of finding work as quickly as possible, though perhaps more as a means to an end than as a way towards learning a trade (while some remain excluded). Young people have a greater level of functional independence but a greater dependence on superfluous forms of consumption (even though it is said that economic poverty occurs younger now than before). Young people find it difficult to deal positively with levels of income, personal spending capacity and the ability to take on long-term debt, even though there are some that have a great deal of help from their families. In short, each category is interesting in itself and has implications in the field of public policy. The two following sections are devoted to these considerations.

#### **4. Conclusions and discussion of the results**

The space defined by the two axis that we have created leaves room for many forms of transition. There are fundamentally six of these, though an analysis of the data only allows us to work on four. The application of qualitative techniques would allow broader and better descriptions, though our aim lies precisely in being able to make a quantitative approximation of how young people experience professional transition and emancipation. The exercise we have carried out, though with the limitations expressed, allows us to give an overview of how young people living in central informational capitalist regions make this transition. An analysis of the group of young people surveyed has led us to certain conclusions in this area, though it also raises questions about some aspects of the hypotheses that we have elaborated.

- **The decreasing of early success:** in our theoretical hypothesis we explained that in the move from welfare state capitalism (strong growth in production, city communities and the welfare state) towards *informational* capitalism (the capitalism of globalisation), the early success form have probably decreased. This would appear to be the case from our analysis (it can be applied to only 10 to 15 per cent of young people), though we are unable to make comparisons with groups of young people from thirty years ago<sup>30</sup>. If we bear in mind that young people from previous generations have had more opportunities for intra-generational social mobility and for gaining access to their own homes much earlier (which may previously have been a key element), this is now diminishing. It nevertheless remains one of the forms that is open, though only to a few young people. Some have both internal and external support or possibilities that enable them to take advantage of these opportunities, displaying no problems in developing professional careers (long periods of study and qualified jobs) and successes in the emancipation process (mainly access to housing). The influence of family and the social capital of the young person context and his or her relationship network have a great bearing on the achievement of early success.
- **The number of young people following working class trajectories is also decreasing:** the way that profession or trades are constructed in enterprises and the labour market is very different now from thirty years ago. Staying in school for the minimum compulsory period and then going straight into unqualified manual work, obtaining qualifications while working in a trade or moving across the labour market was more common then than now. The reasons are several and complex, though they have been widely studied in the area of sociology of work<sup>31</sup>. We would therefore say that number of people falling into this category of *working class trajectories* is also diminishing. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that 30% of today's young people develop an itinerary without any vocational studies, involving manual and intensive labour with few or no qualifications, and that emancipation (probably through marriage) is for them a short-term goal. Work for a large number of young people is, while more precarious, very intensive, continuous and pursued at a low professional level. This

30. We are not in a position to provide data on young people from previous generations. The study by Boudelot and Establet (*avoir 30 a.*, op. cit.) is particularly interesting on the French case, where it is easier to make a comparison of the statistics. P. Miret, on the other hand, has made a comparative analysis between generations using EPA surveys, which exposes the differences between generations in terms of schooling, work and emancipation from family, op. cit.

31. It is not possible to provide a bibliographical list of all the sociology of work texts dealing with changes in production between Fordism and post-Fordism because this is a central area of this discipline. The work by F. Miguelez and R. Prieto more than covers this field. M. Castells has also focused on the changes in labour relations, while Sennett has specialised in putting forward changes in professional identity in the new labour market. In short, we can remember some classic in the analysis of work and society (Schaft), etc.

involves working long hours against a background of unemployment, low salaries and apprenticeship directly in the work place. It should be mentioned that these are all attributes of the kind of work that years ago was considered to represent that of the working classes. It should also be said that marriage models play a significant role among these young people, meaning that they tend to move in with their partners relatively early, something which some authors have ascribed as characteristic of the working classes<sup>32</sup> and their children. It is also true that the establishment by young people of a working career is today more strongly affected by the precariousness of employment and delayed emancipation from family. All in all, therefore, we can conclude that being a young worker is different today from the way it was before.

- **The dominance of the successive approach:** the transition of between a fifth and a quarter (20-25%) of all young people today corresponds to the successive approach. We have seen that professional itineraries are slower: it takes more time to obtain a higher qualification (sometimes because of changes from one educational discipline to another), entry into qualified jobs is also more difficult and occurs later (the path to continuity at work is more complex), and emancipation (though desired) is generally postponed until the age of thirty or later. It is a way of «growing up» by using a system of testing and waiting. Some authors use the term «moratorium»<sup>33</sup>. However, from the data gathered, only between 20 and 25% of young people will follow this form of transition, when ten years ago our initial hypothesis established this as being set to become dominant. Our hypothesis would be seen to be much more valid if this category covered a third or more of all young people. It is also true that more than a third of young people place their hopes in completing a university education and achieving a good professional starting point, but the qualified job market does not account for more than 15 or 20% of the jobs available. It could be, therefore, that this category involving the successive approach (which is taking shape slowly but nevertheless progressively and successfully) does not cover as many young people as might have been imagined initially. The cost of obtaining housing, the deregulation of labour and the segmentation of the market have had a great effect on this form of transition (delays, testing, trial and error, etc.), and the boundaries between it and the precarious pathways are very blurred and ill-defined. It could be that the negative prospects that many young people see in gaining successful achievements in terms of training and jobs in the medium term persuade them towards paths involving continued precariousness. They become disillusioned with university courses and their impact on professionalism, giving priority to work as a means to an end instead of taking the more positive long-term option,

32. E.g. O. GALLAND, *On youth sociology*, op. cit.

33. The list of texts in this area is very long. From among the authors who have published work on this subject, we could select *L'allongement de la jeunesse*, Poitiers, 1993.

following their desired preconceptions of a particular job, etc. This could therefore lead a large number of young people away from the successive approach (progressing slowly and gradually through the transition process) towards precariousness almost as a way of life.

- **The emergence of precariousness:** ten years ago we wrote that precariousness and destructuring were emerging in the context of informational capitalism, in the sense that these were forms that were seen to play a key role in transition due to the conditions of the labour market against a background of globalisation and neoliberalism<sup>34</sup>. Precariousness was the result of the way in which labour market and turnover had been deregulated, while destructuring was the fruit of the exclusion of a proportion of young people (regarded as surplus to labour market or rejection to work). Precariousness as a form of transition (in our analysis this includes erratic itineraries) and the young people classified as belonging to this category represent more than one third. It should be said, therefore, that its emergence is very clear, though it is also a itinerary that has three potential outcomes: moving up towards the successive approach through the achievement of good results at work; remaining in a position of complete precariousness that recalls the texts on secondary labour market written many years ago<sup>35</sup>, or descending into forms of exclusion or self-imposed exclusion from regular employment, particularly after having repeatedly suffered situations of heavy unemployment and a lack of jobs, a circumstance that leads to disaffection at work (periods of inactivity for no reason, working illegally, etc.). In any case, precariousness in employment and late emancipation from the family now affect many young people.
- **Unequal transition within groups:** not everyone is equal in transition. This conclusion has been amply demonstrated, though it is often not taken sufficiently into consideration, and bold generalisations are made, as if young people formed part of a highly homogenous generation<sup>36</sup>. In practice we can say that the forms of transition pursued by young people can be divided into three groups. The first is based on the construction of professional expectations and can lead to positive but slower results (early success and the successive approach combined). The second group involves those who study only a little or not at all and who look to employment as a way of building their future or a trade (even though they have few qualifications) while trying to achieve emancipation based on living with a partner, preferably in some form of marriage. This we have labelled as «working class trajectories». Finally, the third group uses the precarious route and postponement of emancipation as a way of building the future. This includes young

34. E.g. J. CASAL, «Las modalidades...», in the journal *REIS*, op. cit.

35. Throughout this article we have taken account of Piore's contribution and the theories of the segmentation of the labour market.

36. We examined this issue widely in our first article, particularly given the temptation involved in attributing generational qualities to groups of young people.

people who use precariousness as a way of keeping their options open, young people who don't want to take this itinerary but are obliged to, and young people who don't even reach the stage of precariousness because they spend a long time without any kind of work at all.

- **Uncertainty and testing during transition:** «growing up» or making this transition in an informational capitalist context means facing up to the uncertainties of the future and testing the current situation through a system of trial and error. Perhaps a third of all young people have a tangible and relatively controlled solution for their future (working class trajectories), but the rest face the future with a great deal of uncertainty: uncertainties in the form of training pursued and the expectations created by both school and family, uncertainties in the transition from education to work (and, in particular, uncertainties in the relationship between the professional studies completed and the actual job opportunities), uncertainties in taking on mortgages or long-term financial undertakings and, finally, uncertainties regarding the stability of setting up home with a partner. All in all, therefore, this means that the majority of young people are forced to face the future in a state of personal uncertainty. The test comes with the complex selection of what to study (from the many different areas and forms of schooling), the choice of one's first job (many job opportunities with little eventual scope), the options relating to emancipation (making long-term financial or emotional commitments), etc. For those who take either the successive or the precarious approach, testing becomes a way of life.
- **The uncertainty of those who carry out research into young people:** if young people are in a state of uncertainty as regards building their future, we sociologists who study these issues are also uncertain of the results and their durability. At times we question these results, and at times we are sure of them, but we remain unsure of their general application and wonder whether they will remain valid over time or gradually become obsolete. It is for this reason that we believe that it is worth identifying aspects of our analysis that could be debated on the basis of some of these uncertainties. This represents a positive approach. We will introduce some issues here, though we are sure that our readers will come up with a longer and more productive list.

Our first concern is the contrast between the complexity of the different forms of transition and the simplicity of the analysis that we have presented on the basis of the very simple crosstab between two variables (professional career and emancipation). The complexity involved cannot be compressed into individual crossovers and a hypothetical construction of the different forms. It would appear that that if one goes into greater socio-statistical detail, this will generate greater certainty. We believe that, without underestimating any one single aspect, it is precisely the simplicity of the hypothesis and the results that provides an endless source of ways of getting at the truth.

The second subject for debate relates to the dominance and emergence of forms of transition: the proportion of young people on precarious path-

ways (though in the end these must have some kind of solution, as we have indicated) is very high when compared with those in the successive approach category, in the manner described above. Precariousness should, therefore, be redefined. Perhaps the most significant aspect of precariousness is not so much the way one gets a job but the way one leaves it, and the time spent forging one's working itinerary. The way to working itineraries seems to us to be particularly fertile. The boundaries between the successive and the precarious approach are blurred, but continuity in a professional career (over the course of time) gradually positions young people in the segmented labour market. The theory of labour market segmentation, though it has been around for a while now, retains an interpretational potential that we believe it appropriate to underline<sup>37</sup>.

The third aspect to be considered is the multi-causal nature of the pathways or itineraries of transition. We have noted the many causes for delayed emancipation<sup>38</sup> and for choosing to take a particular itinerary. We have recorded effects of social class, social origin and gender, though the different forms of transition are biased in respect of the classic social determining factors. For this reason we have underlined the inter-class nature of the successive approach. The fact that an individual itinerary is of one type or another cannot be simply due to cause and effect. Making decisions and taking advantage of the opportunities available involves environmental elements, together with social and biological personality traits. We therefore believe that «biography» is a useful tool for achieving a convincing picture of structure, agency and actor.

The fourth issue for debate refers to the absence of any empirical retrospective evidence, given that we do not have sufficient data to measure the forms of transition pursued by young people thirty years ago. As a result, the changing forms that we are studying here are based on perceptions for which there are sufficient grounds but no empirical validation<sup>39</sup>. The main generational differences have already been mentioned. Young people today study more and longer than they did before. Girls and boys have become more equal both at school and at work. Setting up home with a partner involves highly distinct paths. It is not possible to make a comparison of housing prices, the age at which emancipation is achieved is clearly differ-

37. The reference to precariousness is constant in all research work. In our field we would make special mention of the work by B. ALBAIGÉS with V. isto and J. A. ROMÁN entitled «Crisi del treball i emergència de noves formes de subjectivitat laboral en els joves», *Aportacions*, 24, OCJ-SGJ, Generalitat de Catalunya, 2004.
38. The many causes of delayed emancipation were established in our analysis of the Survey of Young People in Catalonia, 2002, op. cit.
39. Martin Serrano has made a comparative study between generations for INJUVE, though he was not able to deal directly with the issue of forms of transition. Boudelot and Estabier have more of an opportunity as they have a more elaborated set of statistics from INSEE, op. cit. Account should also be taken of the work that P. Miret carried out on the basis of the EPA surveys (op. cit.).

ent, etc. Statistical comparisons are complex and difficult to make. A biographical analysis, however, allows one to identify and interpret the forms of transition followed by young people and the older generations. An analysis based on such biographical analyses would offer an important contribution.

## 5. Changes in forms of transition and understanding these changes

This last section seems like a play on words, but it is not tautological: the change in the forms of transition offers an explanation for the majority of the significant changes of lifestyle shown by young people.

The exercise that we have completed, while limited, allows us to take a further step towards an understanding of the changes in the references used by young people and the way in which they cope with the future. It would seem that the most noticeable aspects of the world of the young (at least for older people) are the potential absurdities and differences that can be observed in some of the ways that young people act (so-called juvenile lifestyles). This view, which we took the opportunity to criticise in our first article, is one that is reinforced by the press<sup>40</sup>.

We do not in any deny the importance of research into lifestyle and identity, but from our point of view it seems that an analysis of forms of transition occupies a central place in any attempt to explain the changes that have occurred. If forms of transition change, lifestyles and hierarchical value systems change, not the other way round. There is a certain danger in decontextualising lifestyles and separating them from the living conditions (social context) experienced by young people and the time at which they are required to build their own transition.

The current era is dominated by an «uncertainty» that has resulted from the drastic and highly disturbing changes in the rhythm of social living and the structures of world capitalism. On a general (or world) level we have *globalisation*, the *network society* and *digitalisation*; immediately around us (our environment or surroundings) we have *mass secondary education*, the *individualisation and deregulation of labour practices*, and the personal *costs* of emancipation from the family. As a result of all this, *testing* has become a prudent way of adjusting to the uncertainties of the future for young people, whether they are full-time students, or are forging a working trajectory, or have succeeded in overcoming the challenge of emancipation from the family.

The turbulence and uncertainties caused by social change are aspects of the times that affect everyone. Older people experience them in one way and

40. We above all criticised the adultocratic dimension of the majority of statements regarding the social status of young people. As far as the media are concerned, it would appear that generalisation is a tool that is commonly used in order to attract people's attention (violence, drug-addiction, immigrants, the «generations»).

parents in another. Young people have to make decisions about the future in a situation of complete uncertainty and the very young are not yet old enough to have a voice. As a result, each group is affected differently by the impact of the period in question, and this seems to us to be fundamental to an understanding of the changes involved.

In short, the changes observed as capitalism has moved towards the digital and *information era*<sup>41</sup> have led to different ways of constructing the labour insertion and emancipation. Our conclusion is that certain forms have taken hold: the *successive approach* as the dominant form and the *precarious trajectories* as the emerging one, along with erratic itineraries that lead to forms of social inhibition or reaction (or a reactive withdrawal or response).

As a consequence, therefore, *testing* has emerged as a way in which young people can face up to the future: *testing* in their educational itineraries (making decisions and pursuing qualifications within the educational confines of mass schooling), *testing* in one's first job (sometimes while still a student and sometimes after initial training), *testing* in the construction of a profession or trade (sometimes consistently and others not), *testing* in the establishment of emotional relationships, and *testing* when making decisions about emancipation from the home or family.

*Testing* is, in short, present in the majority of the itineraries taken to transition by young people (though not all, as we have already observed), and in some cases this is eventually optimised by taking positive advantage of opportunities and successes (the *successive approach*), while in others transition is continuously postponed by the negative effect of differences between expectations of training and the actual work available and by instability and breaks in the employment route taken (the *precariousness trajectories*). Finally, some individuals reach an impasse or a block that frequently generates reactive attitudes to training and work (*erratic itineraries*). *Testing* therefore means bringing forward «juvenile forms» from childhood and delaying the eventual moment of emancipation from the home, a circumstance that has led many to underline the phenomenon of the extension of the juvenile phase<sup>42</sup>.

*Testing* should not, however, be confused with the possibility of returning to the point of origin or regressing with no effect<sup>43</sup>, nor should it lead one to think that young people have all the time in the world to make this transition,

41. The well known trilogy on social change by M. Castells forms just the tip of an iceberg of specific work on this issue. Not all authors are in agreement, but there is a common denominator in the literature regarding the speed and turbulence of change, its effect on individuals and the forms in which they organise themselves socially in respect of uncertainty and risk. The Information Age, three volumes. Alianza-Madrid.

42. E.g., *inter alia*, A. CAVALLI, O. GALLAND et al., *L'allongement de la jeunesse*, Poitiers, 1993. Also CASAL, MERINO, GARCIA and QUESADA, in the *Survey of Young People in Catalonia 2002*, Generalitat de Catalunya.

43. The «yo-yo» hypothesis applied radically to transition is not valid. There is not always agreement between different authors as regards the meaning and conclusions to be drawn. Authors, *Misleading trajectories*, op. cit.

nor should it be confused with the hypothesis put forward regarding those who remain in a permanent state of childhood or suffer from a Peter Pan complex<sup>44</sup>. On the contrary, *testing* indicates procedural methods based on trial and error and decision-making (the strengthening of rational selection), a confrontation with the external reality affecting the individual (educational training, the manufacturing system and labour market, the cost of housing), and thus represents the structural dimension of transition and, in the end, the variety of opportunities for equality provided in the range of different paths and political actions offered by the institutions concerned.

In short, as regards the ways in which transition and the uncertainties of the future are being approached (*testing*), we sense substantial changes which widen the differences of experience and perception between parents and their children. We have observed a consolidation of the differences between achievement and success among the young people themselves (different career paths and approaches) and believe that institutions have a broad field in which they should act to modify any career paths that suggest a negative future in terms of financial, social and cultural achievement. If the future is to be constructed on the basis of uncertain prospects, *testing* is a sensible way of proceeding. Nevertheless, this issue is very complex and dependent upon the biography of the individual concerned and the opportunities available, and the strategies used do not always offer the desired or appropriate consistency.

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44. The Peter Pan complex as it applies to young people refers to adolescents who do not want to undertake any responsibility and prefer to remain in a juvenile state. This is more of a journalistic definition rather than a real analysis of the social situation of the individuals in question.
45. The literature on youth sociology is highly extensive and we cannot make an exhaustive list for the purposes of this article. We have only included texts that we feel are appropriate as references. This does not mean in any way that we always agree with the authors. They are all texts that are closely connected with the approach that we propose, though we often disagree with their content or the analyses carried out. It is also worth pointing out that there are perhaps some authors who are not listed here. This is due to our own inefficiency and we would therefore ask them to forgive us.

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