

Universitat de Lleida

Social Inequality in Higher Education: A longitudinal study of mechanisms of social reproduction in the University transition of young people in Catalonia

Tanja Conni Strecker

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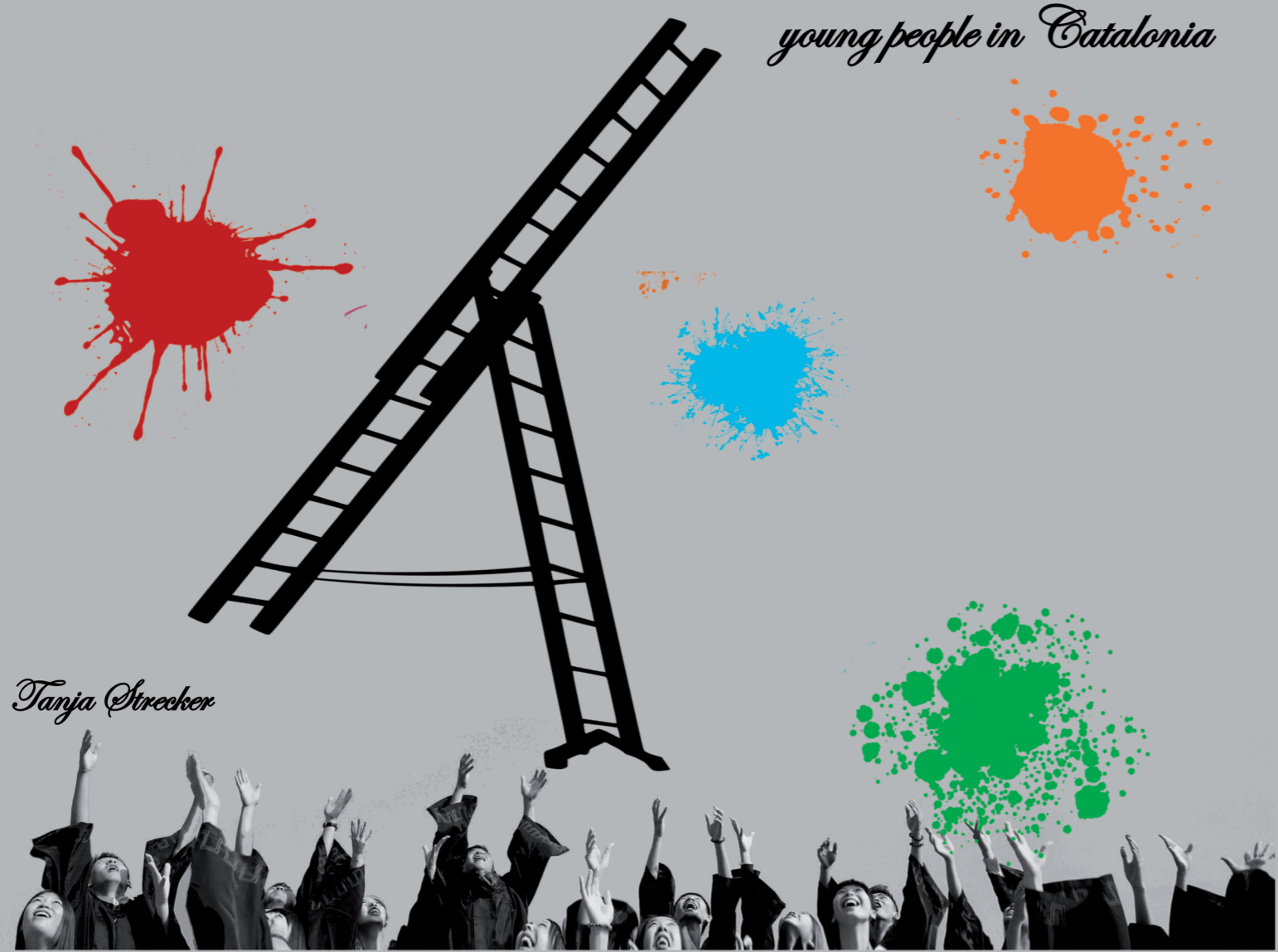
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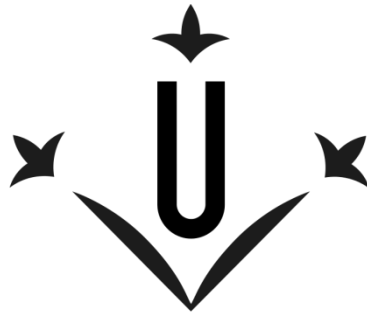
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Universitat de Lleida

Tesi Doctoral

**Social Inequality in Higher Education:
A longitudinal study of mechanisms of social reproduction
in the University transition of young people in Catalonia**

Tanja Conni Strecker

Memòria presentada per optar al grau de Doctor per la Universitat de Lleida

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Tutor: Daniel Paül Agustí

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En català es diu que un treball ha de tenir cara i ulls. Aquest treball té a més un cor i una ànima, o millor dit 17 cors i 17 ànimes, gràcies als meus participants. Aquest treball no és per a vosaltres, és de fet vostre.

Für meine Familie. Euch gehören mein Herz und meine Seele.

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"No sóc res. / No vull ser res. / No puc ser res. / Fora d'això, tinc en mi tots els somnis del món."

Fernando Pessoa, Portuguese poet (1888-1935)

Roda Mots 8.12.2015

Even though I like it to consider myself as a, in some regards, non-traditional PhD student, this does not mean that I have to break with all traditions surrounding this 'rite of passage' - as my supervisor, Carles Feixa, uses to call it. Writing witty acknowledgements forms part of a PhD thesis just as much as the conclusions - and the number of actual readers may be similar. So, to who do I wish to pay my tribute with these lines?

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If you asked me how to best support a PhD candidate, I would say that the secret lies in combining an interested appreciation of the topic under research, a strong conviction that an excellent thesis will be written, a pragmatic and non-judgemental attitude towards household chores and sealed lips, not even thinking the word "thesis" next to the candidate, when they chose to abandon their snail shell for a short timeout. Luckily, many of my friends were quite good in one or several of these virtues and did not get too angry, when the time between timeouts prolonged and prolonged. However, there is more to social capital than a supportive smile and a shoulder/WhatsApp chat to lean on. When working on this PhD, I came to reflect on my own mobilisation of social capital and noticed, to my surprise, that the most effective section of my social capital came from the *Ribagorza*. No matter if I was looking for someone to babysit on a trip to a conference in Sweden, needed help with a translation or had difficulties to hang a flat screen on the wall, in Castanesa and surroundings there was always someone who knew someone who was happy to help. When I first came to Castanesa, I thought it was a small village with an incredible view and a serious problem of depopulation. Now I know that generation after generation have raised children to become professionals in a broad variety of fields and send them out to many different parts of the world, while never completely losing the attachment to this zone, allowing like this the formation of a clot of one of the most potent social networks I have ever seen. Thank you for letting me form part of this! *Que sàpigueu que podeu manar en aquest món, si és que no ho esteu fent encara.*

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Abstracts

English

Social inequality is a longstanding topic in social research, but though its persistence is well-documented, little is known about the processes and mechanisms that enable its reproduction despite 'widening participation' policies. As in current Western meritocratic societies University credentials continue to be a requirement to achieve - and justify - certain social positions in the upper strata, Higher Education (HE) is an especially promising field for the study of social inequalities and their reproduction. This thesis studies social inequality in HE combining a Bourdieusian approach with intersectional analyses, avoiding the imposition of social divisions and allowing the systematic analyses of different social divisions and their intersections on different levels, namely considering social structures, social representations and identity constructions. The aim is to shed light on reproduction mechanisms in the University transition in Catalonia (Spain). The University transition, understood as the transition from school to university, the time spent in university and the transition to the labour market, is studied through a longitudinal project, following young people over 5 years through annual interviews (2011-2016), after a first data construction round through focus groups in High Schools (2011). In total, 17 participants were considered in the longitudinal analyses of the thesis. Though such extensive longitudinal research is rare especially in non-Anglo-Saxon contexts, the unique data set allows for insights into processes no research based on a single data-construction moment can achieve.

Main findings are 1) the imposition of the informed study choice as the only acceptable and correct way to choose, in spite of the impossibility to inform the study choice considering the high number of unknown elements in the equation; 2) the importance of a class-specific sense of entitlement that allows especially young people from upper-middle and upper-class *milieus* to experience their University transition in a positive way, even when faced with difficulties; 3) discouraging tendencies in schools, Universities and the public discourse that affect especially young people who lack a feeling of entitlement negatively, reducing their well-being and increasing their risk to dropout; 4) higher insecurities and levels of exhaustion especially among non-traditional students, and in particular in the intersection of social class and gender, that decrease their well-being, their future aspirations, their ability to 'sell' their itineraries and advantages and their CV-relevant activities, making them less attractive on the labour market; 5) the individualisation and invisibilisation of social inequalities; 6) the students' tendency to contribute to the reproduction of the system, even if they had been disadvantaged by it, especially towards graduation. Moreover, possible peculiarities of the Catalan case, in particular *pro-forma* enrolments, a special significance of social capital and gender-segregated study choices in the sense that men are underrepresented in almost all study fields and only maintain a clear dominance in Engineering and Architecture are discussed. Visibility is granted to the participants' own ideas how to improve their degrees and University and an extensive list of recommendations is elaborated, with the aim to improve the university experience for all students and to achieve social equality.

Castellano

La desigualdad social es, desde hace muchos años, un tema de interés en investigación social, pero aunque su persistencia está bien documentada, poco se sabe sobre los procesos y mecanismos que permiten su reproducción, a pesar de políticas para ampliar la participación. Ya que en las sociedades meritocráticas actuales del occidente los títulos universitarios siguen siendo un requisito para obtener - y justificar - cierta posición social en los estratos superiores, la educación superior es un campo expresamente prometedor para el estudio de las desigualdades sociales y su reproducción. Esta tesis doctoral analiza la desigualdad social en la educación superior combinando un enfoque Bourdieusiano con un análisis interseccional, evitando la imposición de divisiones sociales y permitiendo análisis sistemáticos de diferentes divisiones sociales y de sus intersecciones en varios niveles, en concreto considerando estructuras sociales, representaciones sociales y construcciones de identidad. La meta es alumbrar los mecanismos de reproducción en la transición universitaria en Cataluña (España). La transición universitaria, entendida como la transición desde la escuela hasta la universidad, el tiempo transcurrido en la universidad y la transición al mercado laboral, está estudiada mediante un proyecto longitudinal, siguiendo a personas jóvenes durante 5 años mediante entrevistas anuales (2011-2016), después de una primera ronda de construcción de datos empleando grupos de discusión en institutos (2011). En total, 17 participantes fueron considerados en los análisis longitudinales de la tesis. Aunque la investigación longitudinal de semejante extensión es escasa, especialmente en contextos no-anglosajones, el conjunto de datos obtenido es único y permite adquirir nuevos conocimientos sobre procesos que ninguna investigación basada en un único momento de construcción de datos puede obtener.

Los resultados principales son 1) la imposición de la elección de estudios informada como la única aceptable y correcta, a pesar de la imposibilidad de informar la elección de estudios, considerando el número elevado de elementos desconocidas en la ecuación; 2) la importancia de un sentido de titularidad relativo a la clase social, que permite, expresamente a personas jóvenes de *milieus* medias-altas y altas, experimentar su transición universitaria de una manera positiva, incluso si se enfrentan con dificultades; 3) tendencias desalentadoras en escuelas, universidades y el discurso público que afectan de forma negativa expresamente a personas jóvenes que carecen de un sentimiento de titularidad, reduciendo su bienestar e incrementando su riesgo de abandonar los estudios; 4) inseguridades y niveles de agotamiento más elevados expresamente entre estudiantes no-tradicionales y, en particular, en la intersección de clase social y género, que disminuyen su bienestar, sus aspiraciones futuras, su capacidad de 'vender' sus itinerarios y ventajas y sus actividades con relevancia para su CV, haciéndolos menos atractivos en el mercado laboral; 5) la individualización e invisibilización de desigualdades sociales; 6) la tendencia de los estudiantes de contribuir a la reproducción del sistema, incluso cuando hayan estado entre sus perjudicados y expresamente hacia la graduación. Además, se discuten peculiaridades del caso catalán, en concreto matriculas *pro forma*, un significado especial del capital social y una elección de estudios segregada por género en el sentido que hombres están subrepresentados en casi todos los campos de estudios y sólo mantienen un predominio claro en ingenierías y arquitectura. Se otorga visibilidad a las ideas propias de los y las participantes de cómo mejorar sus grados y

universidad y una lista extensa de recomendaciones es elaborada, con el objetivo de mejorar la experiencia universitaria para todo el estudiantado y conseguir igualdad social.

Català

La desigualtat social és des de fa temps un tema de la recerca social, però, tot i que la seva persistència està ben documentada, se sap poc sobre els processos i mecanismes que permeten la seva reproducció tot i les polítiques per a l'ampliació de la participació. Com que a les societats meritocràtiques actuals de l'occident, els títols universitaris segueixen sent un requisit per a obtenir - i justificar - certes posicions socials en els estrats superiors, l'educació superior és un camp expressament prometedor per a l'estudi de desigualtats socials i la seva reproducció. Aquesta tesi estudia la desigualtat social en l'educació superior, combinant un enfocament Bourdieusià amb anàlisis interseccionals, evitant l'imposició de divisions socials i permetent els anàlisis sistemàtics de diferents divisions socials i de les seves interseccions en nivells diferents, en concret considerant estructures socials, representacions socials i construccions d'identitat. L'objectiu és il·luminar mecanismes de reproducció en la transició universitària de Catalunya (Espanya). La transició universitària, entesa com la transició de l'escola a la universitat, el temps passat a la universitat i la transició al mercat laboral, és estudiada a partir d'un projecte longitudinal, seguint a persones joves durant 5 anys amb entrevistes anuals (2011-2016), després d'una primera tanda de construcció de dades amb grups de discussió en instituts (2011). En total, es van considerar 17 participants en els anàlisis longitudinals de la tesi. Tot i que la recerca longitudinal d'una extensió semblant és poc comuna, sobre tot en contextos no-anglosaxons, el conjunt de dades obtingudes és únic i permet accedir a nous coneixements sobre processos que cap recerca basada en un únic moment de construcció de dades pot aconseguir.

Els resultats principals són 1) la imposició de l'elecció d'estudis informada com l'única acceptable i correcta, tot i la impossibilitat d'informar l'elecció d'estudis considerant el nombre elevat de elements desconeguts en l'equació; 2) la importància d'un sentit de titularitat relatiu a la classe social que permet expressament a persones joves de milieus mitjans-alts i alts viure la transició universitària d'una forma positiva, fins i tot quan es troben amb dificultats; 3) tendències descoratjadores en escoles, universitats i el discurs públic que afecten de forma negativa sobre tot a persones joves les quals manquen d'un sentiment de titularitat, reduint el seu benestar i incrementant el seu risc d'abandonar els estudis; 4) inseguretats i nivells d'esgotament elevats expressament entre estudiants no-tradicionals i en particular en la intersecció de classe social i gènere, que redueixen el seu benestar, aspiracions per al futur, l'habilitat de 'vendre' els seus itineraris i avantatges i les activitats rellevants per al CV, deixant-los menys atractius en el mercat laboral; 5) la individualització i la invisibilització de desigualtats socials; 6) la tendència dels mateixos estudiants de contribuir a la reproducció del sistema, fins i tot si els va desfavorint i especialment cap a la graduació. A més a més, es discuteixen possibles peculiaritats del cas català, en particular matricules *pro forma*, un significat especial del capital social i una elecció d'estudis segregada per gènere en el sentit que els homes estan sotarepresentats en gairebé tots els camps d'estudis i només mantenen un predomini clar en enginyeries i arquitectura. S'atorga visibilitat a les idees dels propis

participants per millorar els seus graus i la universitat i s'ha elaborat una llista de recomanacions extensa, amb l'objectiu de millorar l'experiència universitària per a tot l'estudiantat i per a assolir igualtat social.

Deutsch

Soziale Ungleichheit ist ein Thema mit langjähriger Tradition in der Sozialforschung, dennoch und obwohl ihre Fortdauer gut belegt ist, ist nur wenig bekannt über die Prozesse und Mechanismen die ihre Reproduktion trotz einer Politik der 'Hochschulöffnung' ermöglichen. Da universitäre Titel in gegenwärtigen westlichen leistungsorientierten Gesellschaften nach wie vor eine Voraussetzung sind um bestimmte soziale Positionen in oberen sozialen Schichten zu erreichen und zu rechtfertigen, ist Hochschulbildung ein besonders vielversprechendes Feld für die Untersuchung von sozialen Ungleichheiten und ihrer Reproduktion. Diese Doktorarbeit untersucht soziale Ungleichheit in Hochschulbildung durch eine Kombination eines in Bourdieu inspirierten Ansatzes mit intersektionalen Analysen, wobei das Überstülpen von sozialen Trennlinien vermieden und stattdessen die systematische Analyse von verschiedenen sozialen Spaltungen und ihrer Intersektionen auf verschiedenen Ebenen ermöglicht wird, und zwar bzgl. sozialer Strukturen, sozialer Repräsentationen und Identitätskonstruktionen. Ziel ist es die Reproduktionsmechanismen im universitären Übergang in Katalonien (Spanien) zu beleuchten. Der universitäre Übergang, verstanden als der Übergang von der Schule zur Universität, die Zeit die in der Universität verweilt wird und der Übergang auf den Arbeitsmarkt, wird durch ein longitudinales Projekt untersucht, wobei junge Menschen über 5 Jahre mit jährlichen Interviews begleitet wurden (2011-2016), nachdem eine erste Datenkonstruktionsrunde durch Gruppendiskussionen in Abiturklassen stattfand (2011). Insgesamt werden 17 Teilnehmer in den Längsschnittanalysen der Doktorarbeit berücksichtigt. Obwohl derart umfangreiche Längsschnittstudien, insbesondere in nicht angelsächsischen Kontexten, eher selten sind, ermöglicht gerade dieses einzigartige Datenmaterial neue Einblicke in Prozesse die Studien basierend auf einem einzigen Datenkonstruktionsmoment nicht erreichen können.

Die wichtigsten Ergebnisse sind 1) der Zwang zur informierten Studienfachwahl als einzig akzeptabler und korrekter Weg sich zu entscheiden, obwohl es aufgrund der hohen Anzahl unbekannter Elemente in der Gleichung unmöglich ist die Studienfachwahl informiert zu treffen; 2) die Bedeutung eines klassenbedingten Gefühls der Berechtigung das es insbesondere jungen Menschen der oberen Mittel- und der Oberschicht Milieus erlaubt ihren universitären Übergang positiv zu erleben, selbst wenn sie auf Schwierigkeiten stoßen; 3) entmutigende Tendenzen in Schulen, Universitäten und dem öffentlichen Diskurs welche insbesondere junge Menschen die sich nicht derart berechtigt fühlen negativ beeinflussen, ihr Wohlbefinden verringern und ihr Risiko eines Studienabbruchs erhöhen; 4) höhere Unsicherheiten und Erschöpfungsgerade unter nicht-traditionellen Studierenden, besonders in der Intersektion von sozialer Klasse und Geschlecht, welche ihr Wohlbefinden, ihre Zukunftshoffnungen, ihre Fähigkeit ihre eingeschlagenen Routen zu 'verkaufen' und Aktivitäten mit Relevanz für den Lebenslauf verringern und so zu einer geringeren Attraktivität auf dem Arbeitsmarkt führen; 5) die Individualisierung und Verschleierung von sozialen Ungleichheiten bis hin zur Unsichtbarkeit; 6) die Tendenz der Studierenden insbesondere in der Zeit des

Abschlusses zur Reproduktion des Systems beizutragen, selbst wenn sie selbst durch dieses benachteiligt wurden. Darüber hinaus, werden mögliche Besonderheiten des katalanischen Falles diskutiert, insbesondere *pro forma* Matrikulationen, eine besondere Bedeutung des sozialen Kapitals und geschlechtsspezifische Studienentscheidungen dergestalt das Männer in fast allen Studienbereichen unterrepräsentiert sind und lediglich im Feld der Ingenieurwissenschaften und Architektur eine klare Vorherrschaft beibehalten. Den eigenen Ideen der Teilnehmenden bzgl. möglicher Verbesserungen ihrer Studiengänge und der Universität wird Gehör verschafft und eine umfangreiche Liste von Empfehlungen vorgestellt, mit dem Ziel die universitäre Erfahrung für alle Studierenden zu verbessern und soziale Gleichheit zu erreichen.

1. *Introduction*

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the PhD thesis at hand, starting at its very origin: the PhD candidate behind it. In concrete, I describe how I came to develop an interest in social inequalities in Higher Education (HE), how I designed this project and how it then came to unfold itself. In some PhD theses you learn more about the candidate's personal background by reading the witty remarks in the acknowledgements than the thesis itself. In social sciences, self-reflection is, however, a central element and especially when it comes to overly ambitious PhD theses more information on the author is needed to understand the theses as a construction of scientific work in itself. One of the principles of the documentary method is that comparing forms part of our very nature. We compare different participants, different interviews and – consciously or not – our own history and experiences all the time. So, in a certain way, I am another of the participants of this study and just as my participants' trajectories, my story needs to be introduced. You will forgive me that I do this in much more detail than the participants' presentations later on. There is a good explanation for this hidden in the ethical part of the thesis, but we will come to this later.

“No és alligonador que ens vegem tan petits dintre els ulls dels altres?”

Lluís Ferran de Pol (Arenys de Mar, Maresme 1911-l'Hospitalet de Llobregat 1995)

Roda Mots, 16/02/2018

“Escriure senzillament és un regal que, de vegades, arriba tard. Cal molt de temps, molts anys, d'anar cercant la paraula precisa, aquella i no una altra, per a definir allò que, al nostre interior, vivim com un garbuix.”

Montserrat Roig (Barcelona 1946-1991)

Roda Mots, 13/06/2018

1. 1. *A frog's tale, Participant 0*

In academic fields like Anthropology it is common to include personal reflections on the chosen topic and how the research interest has been sparked (Ferrándiz, 2011). In the following, I want to offer more than this, introducing myself to the reader as another case of analysis, in line with the suggestions about self-reflexivity made by Bourdieu (2002) and the example of an academic striptease published by Reay (2013) to whom I pay homage with the choice of the title “a frog's tale”. Acknowledging that my own previous experiences do always inform my thinking, as a *Vorverständnis* I continuously come to compare with (Bohnsack, 2010) and as a habitus with its inherent limitations and a hardening rail plan for my train of thoughts (Bourdieu, 1985; Reay, 2004), I consider myself the Participant 0 in all my research and attempt to gain consciousness of the limitations and patterns in my thinking by analysing my own singular case.

I, Tanja Strecker (1985), was born in Germany, West-Germany in those days, as the fourth child of a divorced, unqualified worker and the first child of a carpenter and farmer who had just married a few months earlier the same year. Though it is difficult to situate yourself or your direct family members in social *milieus*, I suppose we could assume that my father belonged in his generation to a *milieu* of the “social centre”, the *milieu* of “skilled work” and “practical intelligence”, while my mother did probably belong to an “underprivileged milieu”, though her being female and an auditory incapacity developed in her childhood may have intervened in her educational attainment and professional trajectory negatively (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006, p. 67; 68, translated by TS). None of my older siblings and only one cousin had been to University and the cousin chose his engineering degree only after having completed a vocational training and achieved his A-levels in evening school. I was also born as a fraternal twin and just 7 months before my oldest nephew. My parents were already a bit older (mother 39, father 48) and as this was still rather unusual in those days, or maybe because my parents had lived a different life than nowadays 40-year-old *primiparas* do, this age difference and the twin-thing did for a long time seem to explain all the differences I perceived between myself and my classmates.

I do not actually remember my childhood-self speaking in the local dialect, but my mom is full of funny (and less funny) anecdotes about my ways to express myself and I do remember how I felt in primary school as if I was learning a foreign language. I came to call myself bilingual (standard and dialectal German), but my primary school tutor obviously had a different

opinion. One day chit-chatting with some other girls about our professional aspirations, she interrupted to tell me when hearing of my then dream to become a teacher that I should maybe reconsider. I answered that I could also envision myself as a doctor or a lawyer, but that I would really prefer to become a teacher. Her answer was laughter and the recommendation that I should think of something that would not require A-levels. I understood that day that I would have to work hard and might anyway never become a primary school teacher – and well, at the end she was right in that point.

So I became a much disciplined - but also very challenging - student and always waited for the day to fail academically. I never trusted that an exam would be easy or that homework would not count, so I always did everything and always as good as possible. And as the highly segregated German system still included 2 bridge years between primary and secondary school in those days in Hessen, my tutor's recommendation for me to continue my further schooling in "*Realschule*" was even less important than it is nowadays in Hessen (a federal state where parents have the ultimate vote where to send their children). In my fifth grade (the first year after primary school), I scored 5 As, in the sixth I was selected for A courses in maths and English and scored 7 As¹. The A-course system for these two subjects separated the pupils in levels from A to C that were pretty homologous with the posterior separation into *Gymnasium*, *Realschule* and *Hauptschule*². At the end of the 6th year, no teacher questioned my being among the 10 kids (all girls) from my class going on to *Gymnasium*, so even my parents who had wanted her daughters to stay together in one class, accepted that we were splitting ways at that point, as my sister was sent to *Realschule*. In *Gymnasium*, I basically got better scores every year. While my classmates started to fail in exams, I was already used to learning on my own (the day I had a discussion with my father about the existence of prime numbers he would stop to "help" with homework) and somehow got through with everything. When we took the A-levels, I achieved the highest score of all students from my grade (it was a small school and if I remember it right we were only 45 students taking the A-levels that year) and was selected by the school as a candidate for a scholarship by the *Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes*. Up to that point, I had not been completely decided whether to go to university or not, though I had not discarded the option either. With the scholarship in mind, I decided that I had to enrol and at least give it a try.

By then I had decided that I hated school and would never want to become a teacher, but I had not really dared to think of another option – whenever someone asked, I would either say "teacher" or "*McDonalds*", depending on the asker's age and if it was a relative of mine with a heart condition. In those days, my parents had still not installed an internet access at home ("you can have a computer to do homework, but there is no reason you might need internet for that"), so my study choice happened at the computer of my best friend's mother. As she (my friend, not her mother) had a boyfriend in town, she limited her institutional choice by a complicate calculation of distances in kilometres and in travelling hours with public transport – and I jumped on the same train, using the chance to write down some names of degree courses, while she was scrolling the lists for her favourite. I came to send my applications to

¹ Here I am translating the 1 from the German system from 1 to 6, in which one is the best and 6 the worst score, into the system of Academic Grading with letters more usual in the Anglosaxon context.

² For more information on the German education system see: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/germany_en [last access: 27.06.2018].

exactly the same universities she did, but while she applied everywhere for the same degree, I changed between history, psychology, pedagogy and political sciences. When the answers got in, I avoided the choice by waiting for my friend to get accepted. But as the time passed – and the deadlines in several of the universities that had accepted me but not her – I realized that I would have to make up my mind on my own at the end. I opted for Frankfurt a.M., feeling attracted towards the big city. However, shortly after inscription, I received a letter explaining that I had chosen two minors that were not compatible (psychology and psychoanalysis) and that I would have to change one. As the application round was already finished by then, I had the choice between subjects as tempting as "Slavic linguistic" or spending a year studying only one minor and then applying for a second minor for the second year. I was terrified. I did not want to study any of the minors on the available list and I did not want to "lose" a year and have to prolong my studies from the start. And after this experience of 'failure', I did not want to move all alone to such a big city. So I withdrew my inscription. At that point I was left with 2 options: the University closest to home or another small town university, in the direction towards Frankfurt. I chose the latter, the Justus-Liebig Universität Giessen, because I thought to myself "OK, you are scared to leave, but if you do not leave now, you will maybe never do." And so I left and became a university student in a town I had never been before and did not know anybody.

After a few months in university, I was invited to a selection seminar for that scholarship my school had supported my application for. The weekend is still among the top 10 of the most terrible weekends in my life. No, nothing terrible happened. I just felt completely dump and out of place. My grade point average had been a 1,2 – amongst the lowest of the scores the other candidates around me had achieved. On the first day, there was a vivid discussion with several of the others claiming that their average had actually been better than 1,0 and that the 1,0 had only been the result of "rounding". When they asked me for the second number behind the comma in my average, I told them that I had not bothered to calculate my average myself – and that I had no idea how to do so, given that my scores had been in a system over 15 and were then translated into a system over 6. Most of the others played piano or violin and conversations during the meals were concerned with international politics and breakthroughs in cancer research. Dinner was given out at 7pm, so I was starving at around 11pm and spent half the night eating cookies with another 1,2 average (she did not get the scholarship either). On the second day I had a personal interview with a Chemistry lecturer. Just before the interview, several of the others and I were sitting around in the hall waiting for our time to come. The chemistry lecturer passed by and greeted us overly friendly. One of the other girls started a conversation, admiring him for his ability to choose apt candidates for the scholarship programme. She asked if he had undergone some training to do so and he answered that no training in the world could prepare someone for such a task or for any pedagogical task at all. He claimed that a person had to be born with the right qualifications and that studies like pedagogy were completely useless in his eyes. The girl got visibly white for being scold like this. I had enrolled for pedagogy. For the next five minutes (the approximate time I had left before the interview), I had an internal discussion with myself: Should I show my stubborn self and confront my interviewer with his views about my studies, or should I smile and hope to get somehow through with at least an acceptable remark so I could still have a chance for a scholarship thanks to the second personal interview and the oral

presentation I had already given? I could not quite make up my mind. The interview was a disaster. From what I remember we spent most of the time discussing what I was studying. As I had chosen a Magister degree, I had indicated my major (pedagogy) and the two minors (psychology and penal law and criminology) on my application form, but the Chemistry lecturer was convinced that I had just mentioned "options" and that it was not possible to study such a combination. I was desperate to explain myself better, but he kept interrupting me and so I finally ended up saying "pedagogy", when he repeated the question "So would you finally be so kind to tell me what you're studying." From then on the interview is only a blurry spot in my memory – and that is probably better for my mental health. I did not get the scholarship. And I felt impotent anger about it.

And then I studied Bourdieu in class. At first, I had a hard time understanding the writing we were supposed to prepare for the class, but when the lecturer started to explain the main concepts, the penny dropped in my head. Suddenly I understood everything, especially my anger for my primary school teacher and for that chemistry lecturer from the scholarship programme. And this understanding helped me to get over it. Or not really over it, rather above it. Suddenly, I had found an interest to guide me through the jungle of elective subjects to choose from and whenever I heard someone speak in the Mensa about a topic I would not even know how to spell, I could not help myself but think about habitus and social class and give the person in question a scrutinizing look. In a way, I had turned from the victim to the supervisor. I did not feel like a fish in the water, I felt like the water, observing the fish. Most people around me never noticed my different habitus and probably just thought that I was from a middle-upper class background. And so I got through university. And I did everything the scholarship programme had wanted to foster in its scholars: I became an Erasmus student, studied 5 languages in parallel to my university studies (Spanish, Czech, Catalan, English and Polish), took my intermediate exams early, and got a job as a student assistant almost directly afterwards. I also worked outside university as a mentor for a group of young people doing a voluntary year in the health sector, volunteered for a youth helpline, participated in a law clinic on refugee law and worked as a counsellor in a refugee information centre, apart from babysitting and receiving Bafög³. The lecturer I was working for in University assumed that I wanted to do a PhD and considering my scores and my having a great time in university, I thought to myself: why not? As I had not really found a job that was to my liking, the option to prolong my time in university a bit longer or even stay as a lecturer myself appeared attractive. And so my brain started to develop an idea for a PhD project that was going to improve social equality and help people like myself.

Let me take the opportunity for a bracket and share with youth this graphic (Figure 1), which I found the 30th of November 2014 on Facebook. Despite the Portuguese, I think the idea what happens to ambition throughout postgraduate studies is quite clear:

³ The *Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz* (Bafög) is an income-dependent financial aid for students and trainees, who receive an amount calculated according to their parents' income (though a parent-independent application is possible under certain conditions), half scholarship and half credit, with special rules and limits regarding the back payment of the credit. For more information see: <https://www.xn--bafg-7qa.de/> [last access: 28.07.2018].

ambição na pós-graduação



Source: Posgraduando.com via Facebook [accessed and downloaded on 30.11.2014]. Shades of grey applied by TS.

Figure 1: Ambition in postgraduate studies (translated by TS).

The idea of a PhD project growing in my head was from the beginning on to study social inequality and its reproduction in University. Though I had not yet read Latour (2005), the persistence of social inequality intrigued me and I considered reproduction mechanisms as something that I could study, rather than assuming a 'hidden social force'. I was also sure about my qualitative approach to research, thinking of an interview project and used the ideas I had heard in some of my classes regarding research, to know that a longitudinal project would be best in order to gain real insides into processes and that a broad sample of students from different backgrounds who had successfully entered University would be best to avoid a deficit perspective on 'disadvantaged' (see *The invention of youth and development tasks*). I had already read Bourdieu's and Passeron's ([1964] 2007) book on students and culture and my idea for the project was quite developed at that point.

After my Erasmus in Spain, I dreamed of a return and when a lecturer in Lleida mentioned the possibility to gain a scholarship, I thought that I could just as well try it. I even developed a theory of how my habitus misfit might become completely invisible in another country, where people were more likely to explain any "difference" with my being German, rather than my social class of origin. And after 8 years living in Spain, I am still not sure if my theory was right, though I found certain support for it in studies on transnational habitus (Soong, Stahl, & Shan, 2017), but being German for sure had never been such an important element in my identity construction, especially when being introduced by others.

I moved to Spain, found myself a director for my PhD thesis and started with the data construction in early 2011. In this whole process and ever since, I had precious access to 'hot

knowledge' (Davey, 2009) thanks to my partner and his family who came to form the basis and main part of my social capital in the new context. My English became a crucial skill on the local labour market and got me a job as an English teacher in a private language school, so in combination with the salary and the rent-free living in a family-owned flat, I was able to maintain my economic independence. However, there were also setbacks in my migration process. When I finally received my degree title from Germany and brought it to the tertiary study office in the UdL, where I had been told before arrival that I could inscribe directly into a PhD programme if I wanted to with my 5-year studies, this turned out to be wrong. While this would have been the case in Germany, in Spain I was required to first study a master – and as this was also a requirement to receive a scholarship, another year of investment in educational titles became necessary and I came to juggle a master, my job and the ongoing data construction for my thesis in parallel.

After finishing the master, I applied for several PhD scholarships and conducted a 2nd round of interviews with my participants. I won the scholarship (well, actually I won two and changed after a month as a FI scholar for the four-year FPU scholarship) and started as a PhD scholar in February 2013. Regarding the scholarships, my migration from Germany turned out to be an advantage, as my final qualification had been in Germany decided through my final exams and a thesis only and ended in an 'A with distinction', as I achieved excellent results in all these. The Spanish applicants had to apply, however, with an overall average calculated considering all the scores they had achieved in the course of their undergraduate studies. Like this I achieved 4 out of 4 points for my academic results and as these made up 4 of 10 points in total, it was a clear advantage in the competition, especially as I was the only applicant on the published list with this score in academic performance.

Once officially a scholarship holder, a very attractive option appeared in my mind: The scholarship was for four years and my participants were already in year 2. Of course, I had not been able to transcribe and analyse all the interviews I had been doing so far, given that I had been working and studying a master in parallel, but now with the scholarship, I would dedicate myself full time to this project and would be able to follow my participants for several additional years. I could actually follow them throughout their whole degree. The idea was tempting and I could not resist. Ambitious was no longer the best word to describe my thesis. Again, I opted for doing everything. I wanted the international PhD title, so I did a 3-month stay at the University of Melbourne (Australia) in 2014 (again with a scholarship and the respective paper work), I presented my work at conferences and participated in 7 externally funded research projects coordinated by my thesis director in one way or another. I also studied Catalan and English in parallel to all of this, worked on several articles (some of which got actually published) and helped to develop proposals for even more projects that were dismissed. In 2015, my son Max Fondevilla was born – just a week before I turned 30, so my breast cancer risk is now significantly lower (statistically speaking) than if my son had waited another 8 days.

People tell you that children change your life and maybe that is true. But despite my workaholic tendencies, I had been aware for years that life is a precious good you should enjoy every day as you might lose it any second. My father had an accident in 2011 and has ever since been a nursing case. My best friend from school and a friend from my PhD are both

diagnosed with degenerative illnesses. People I know have had a stroke at the age of 32 or died from skin cancer at the age of 25. So when I became a mother, I knew that I was going to spend as much time as possible with my son. I interrupted my PhD scholarship for the maximum possible time, 6 months, though I could only apply for the recovery of the 16-week maternal leave and ceased to do long hours after my return. However, I continued to participate in further projects and took my whole family for a monthly stay as a visiting scholar to the *Universidad Nacional de Córdoba* (Argentina) in 2016. I conducted a fifth and last round of interviews in 2016, finishing the data construction with a total of 110 interviews (including 6 from Australia and 8 from Argentina). If analysing the countries I lived in over the years from a Southern Theory perspective (Connell, 2007), one could identify a certain move towards the south in my mobility, as I moved from Germany (a powerful country of the global North that has had some influence in global theory building), to Spain (a member state of the EU and a member of the global North, but at a rather peripheral position within the EU), to Australia (a powerful country in the global South) and finally to Argentina (a country in the global South with much less power, economically and politically, than Australia). However, I have not lived in any of these places as a German "researcher", but always as a "learner", trying to make connections with local researchers and to learn as much as possible. Though I only present the results regarding my work in Spain in this thesis, my research was in certain senses multisituated (Ferrándiz, 2011; Laine, 2012) and my other research experiences are noteworthy, as these escapes from the comfort zone (Reay, 2013) continue to influence my thinking.

Only from the interviews with my participants in Spain I got more than 6000 minutes of audios, more than 100 hours. Once my son got a placement in the nursery school, I spent more time nursing him and myself from all kinds of illnesses at home – and in the Emergency Room – than I did in the office. Though I reduced the number of conferences I attended, I triplicated my budget for them by travelling with my son and another adult to take care of him while I was presenting. With his 3 years, he has already been to Germany, Sweden, Argentina and England. When school choice was becoming a topic on our family agenda, I read articles on middle-class parents sending their children to public schools to promote social equality and how this leads to suffering for the parents and the children. Max got enrolled in a non-religious private school that receives public subventions.

My scholarship ended in May 2017 and even beforehand ended the PhD "plan" I was inscribed into, so I had to either finish my thesis by the 1st of May 2017 or request the change to the new plan. Everybody told me to present what I had, but my thesis was not finished. The longitudinal analysis was still missing and like this it could not live up to my criteria of quality and this meant that I had to continue, without a scholarship and in a new PhD plan. Avoiding unemployment luckily, I got a job as an associate lecturer and was contracted for administrative tasks in a research project, leading to yet another reorganisation of my time and me, writing the final words of this thesis in 2018 - 7 years after I started and more than a year after the end of my scholarship. At the end of this project, my future is not much clearer than the futures of my participants – and that is not the only trait in which our stories resemble each other.

Especially my relation to my participants gave me much food for thought over the years. Though I had initially considered myself to be an outsider researcher due to my different nationality (Stahl, 2016), I noticed in the course of the follow-up that I also was an insider in many senses, as I had been through University myself and am not that much older than my participants - depending where the line between generations is traced, we may be considered members of the same generation (see *Youth as a social generation*). Moreover, the longitudinal character of my project allowed me to gain over the years a certain familiarity with my participants and their stories, turning me, in a certain way, into an insider in their University transitions. So I noticed that my very perception of myself as an outsider or insider was highly relative and said more about my own processes of othering - especially regarding my migration experience - than about my relation to the participants and how they perceived me. Now I think that any researcher is always an outsider of the participants' heads and though being an insider in the spaces they move in may help to understand their utterances more accurately, it depends ultimately on their willingness to invite us in and make us insiders of a part of their thinking how the research develops (see *Insider / Outsider Status & Unconditional Love*). So at this point of my thesis, I do not know if my research will contribute to achieving more social equality or if any of my initial ambitions will come true, but I am incredibly proud of my fieldwork and grateful towards my participants. In the darkest hours of work on this thesis, when I doubted if I would even finish it, I used to tell myself that I owed it to my participants to finish this thesis. And as people tend to page past the dedication of a thesis and its acknowledgments, I finish this subsection repeating that this work was only possible thanks to my participants, who gave it a heart and a soul with their narratives. Rather than claiming this work 'for' my participants, I would say that it is actually theirs just as much as it is mine.

1.2. *Research Questions*

In line with the considerations described in the theoretic section, I designed the research project of this PhD thesis based on the main research question: **How is social inequality reproduced in Higher Education?** My aims were to shed light onto the mechanisms of reproduction that influence - more or less concealedly - in the University transition of young people. Rather than explaining why some are more likely to abandon their degrees and to face difficulties on the labour market after graduation than others, I wanted to adopt a positive perspective, analysing successful cases to identify possible differences among students from different profiles regarding the difficulties they face and how they cope with them. However, such analyses do anyway allow for diverse conclusions regarding attrition and 'employability', too, as unsuccessful coping or the side-effects of successful coping with difficulties in HE, reducing for example the time and energy available for strategic CV construction, are the flipside of the success stories. In this sense, three subordinate research questions can be identified: Which aspects influence in the higher risks of non-traditional students to abandon their degrees or to complete them with worse results? How do young people cope with these aspects? And how do these aspects and their coping influence the students' chances on the graduate labour market?

A deeper understanding of the functioning of mechanisms of social reproduction and, in particular, the successful coping may, furthermore, enable the identification of means to deactivate or at least bypass these mechanisms, increasing social equality. In this sense, I also meant to develop recommendations how to overcome the reproduction of social inequality. Though this thesis was and is also bound by structuring elements itself, being conducted for example as a one-women-project rather than with a diverse team of researchers, I did my best to challenge, within the possible, my own thinking, seeking experiences in other contexts and repeatedly leaving my comfort zone, while reflecting on my own development (see *A frog's tale, Participant O*), my role in the research process (see *Ethics*) and the structural limitations imposed on research itself (see *Ethics and Criticism @ Ideas for Improvement*). Aware that my thinking is necessarily limited by my own habitus, I offer these recommendations to the research community, hoping to initiate a critical discussion of these and further recommendations, achieving a revised list of recommendations that may then actually come to be implemented.

Regarding the identified necessities to overcome a deficit perspective and to avoid the imposition of social divisions, I did not only design a project that included participants from different backgrounds rather than focusing on the 'disadvantaged' (see *The Project*), but furthermore developed, as an intermediate goal, a methodology to analyse constructed data, combining a Bourdieusian approach and intersectionality (see *Analyses*).

We can summarize the research questions as follows:

General Research Question:

Q1: How is social inequality reproduced in Higher Education? Which are the mechanisms of reproduction that influence in the University transition of young people?

Subordinate Research Questions:

Qa: Which aspects influence in the higher risks of non-traditional students to abandon their degrees or to complete them with worse results?

Qb: How do young people cope with these aspects?

Qc: How do these aspects and their coping influence the students' chances on the graduate labour market?

1.3. *Organisation of this thesis*

The thesis at hand is structured into 5 main parts and completed by this introduction, a discussion and conclusions. Following this introduction, the reader is first introduced into the characteristics of the Catalan context that form the backdrop of this project. This section focuses on the description of the context to which the theoretical and methodological reflections elaborated in later parts of the thesis refer.

The theoretic part is divided into the three main theoretic areas in the overlap of which the empirical research has been developed and conducted: youth research, social inequalities and

Higher Education. Moreover, a fourth section merges these different sections to delimit the concrete focus of the PhD project.

The methodological part combines sections on the methods and techniques used to construct and analyse data with ethical reflections on the different aspects of the research process. Situated at the heart of the thesis, the 17 participants who were considered in the longitudinal analyses are introduced. Though the thesis refers occasionally to participants who did not complete the follow-up, the main characters the reader will meet in the findings section are these 17 individuals.

The findings are divided into 5 sections with diverse further subsections in each. They follow the chronological order of events, focusing first on the transition from school to University, then on the development of study-choice narratives over the years, subsequently on the transition from University to the labour market and, finally, on the results of the longitudinal analyses. Afterwards, a section on the diverse criticism and ideas for improvement is added, in part, to acknowledge and transmit the participants' input in this sense, and, in part, to continue the analysis of reproduction mechanisms in these concrete examples and how they are presented.

The thesis closes with a three-part discussion, considering methodological questions and the answer of the research question regarding the reproduction of social inequality, followed by a last subsection on the generalizability of the results and the peculiarities of the Catalan case. A brief summary of the thesis and an outlook towards future research is offered in the conclusions.

2. The Context

This thesis is aimed for an international audience, but even among local readers it might be necessary to introduce or to bring back memories of certain contextual elements that shaped the local context in Catalonia in the time of this project.

2.1. *Geographic and political context*

This project has its geographical basis in Catalonia, an autonomous community in the North-East of Spain (Figure 2). In concrete, I began the data construction in 2011 in High Schools in Lleida and in a rural town in the North-West of Catalonia, but as the participants moved on to University, several came to study in Universities in Barcelona.



Source: Institut Cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya (ICGC). Mapa comarcal relleu.

Figure 2: Map of Catalonia

Lleida, with a population of approx. 140.000 inhabitants (INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística), 2016), is a Catalan University city with approx. 12.000 enrolled students in its different programmes⁴. Located close to the Aragonese border and at 160 km, approx. one hour in high-speed train from Barcelona, Lleida's local industry is based on agricultural production. The name of the rural town in which two further focus groups were conducted is not specified in this work, as this information combined with the chosen degree courses and sex of the participants could easily give away their identities. With less than 2500 inhabitants

⁴ For updated information see: <http://www.udl.cat/ca/udl/xifres/> [last access: 05.08.2018].

(IDESCAT (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya), 2015), the rural town does not count with any university in a commutable distance⁵, so that young people from this zone have to move out of their parents' home in order to go to university, unless they choose distance learning.

In Catalonia exist 9 public and 14 private universities⁶, 6 of the public and 12 of the private universities having their headquarters in Barcelona. The remaining 3 public universities are situated in the capitals of Catalan provinces: Lleida, Tarragona and Girona. The foundation of more universities, especially in smaller cities, has formed part of the expansion of the Catalan HE (Torrents, 2017). However, the smaller Universities do not usually offer the whole spectrum of degree courses, so even young people who live rather close to a University city but not in Barcelona, may be conditioned in their study choice by having to move there in order to study certain degrees presentially.

Catalonia has gained certain international fame for its movement for independence, which – despite going back to the year 1714, when Catalonia lost its self-governance – gained a special force in the years of realization of this project. It is difficult to describe the so-called “*procés*” (process) at this point, as the history books that will define its causes and consequences have not yet been written. Moreover, I decided not to include the participants' comments on the independence movement in the analyses of this thesis, as they were outside its scope. However, as the independence movement became an important aspect of the backdrop of this project and appeared repeatedly in many of the interviews, I will make an attempt of introducing the topic in the second subsection of this section, exaggerating my own outsider perspective – after 8 years living in a country, inside and outside become relative conditions – and aiming for outsider readers (as any insider will know much better than I do).

2.1.1. Demographics and University participation

A look at the Eurostat statistics about the population in Catalonia shows that the Catalan population makes up approximately 16% of the Spanish population (15.95% in 2016) and that the demographic weight of the young population has decreased significantly.

In Catalonia, children begin to visit the obligatory primary school in September of the year they turn 6. This means that children who were born towards the end of the year, begin their schooling with 5 and may potentially achieve their A-levels and enter University with 17, if they do not repeat any course. With a degree-course duration of usually 4 years, this means that HE students who entered HE directly after their A-levels are usually between 17 and 21 years old.

If we sum up the total population this age per year and calculate the proportion they represent over the total of the Catalan population, we see that the weight of the young population in “HE-age” has decreased from 6.98% in the year 2000 to 4.61% in 2016 (Table 1).

⁵ To determine a commutable distance it is important to not only consider the driving distance (in this case: approx. 2 hours to the next University city), but also the offer of public transport that would enable young people to assist their university lectures when travelling on the same day. Moreover, it has to be said that many of the young people attending High School in the rural town, lived in the surrounding villages and the connections from these villages were especially bad if existent.

⁶ See: http://www.altillo.com/universidades/espana/universidades_espana_catalunya.asp. [Last access: 06.11.2017].

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Table 1: Total Population of 17 to 21 year olds in the EU 28, Spain and Catalonia and proportion regarding the total population of Catalonia in percentage.

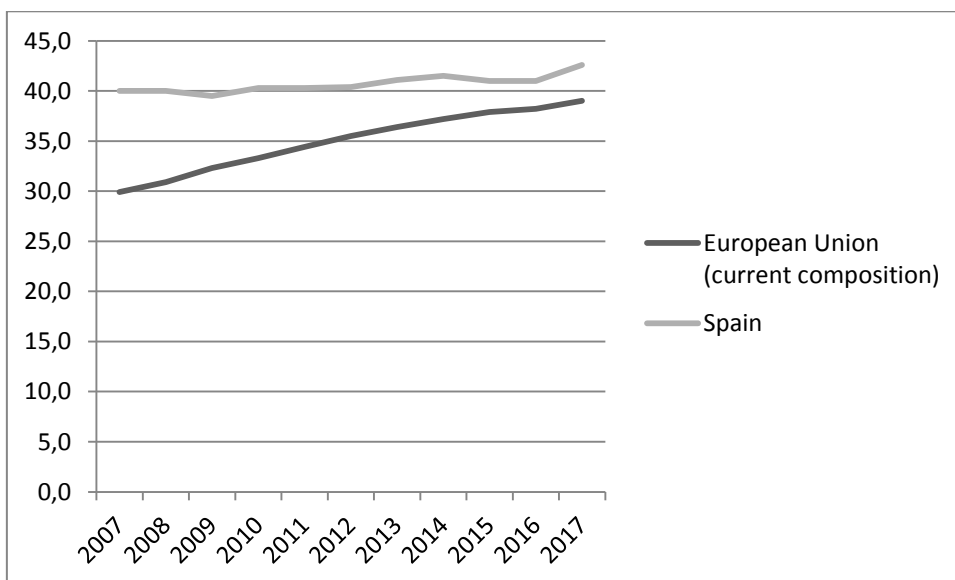
GEO/TIME	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
EU (28 countries)		31.957.051	31.681.785	31.414.731	31.249.503	31.071.475	30.974.099
Spain (ES)	2.990.263	2.843.813	2.728.336	2.654.683	2.580.254	2.518.551	2.480.869
Catalonia (CAT)	438.450	410.737	389.620	382.045	372.664	365.672	362.422
% 17-21 year-olds in CAT	6,98	6,50	6,11	5,83	5,55	5,32	5,17
Catalonia (all ages)	6.283.101	6.314.849	6.380.492	6.556.900	6.712.748	6.870.811	7.010.859
GEO/TIME	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU (28 countries)	30.882.291	30.784.937	30.554.383	30.300.522	29.744.728	29.218.355	28.546.134
Spain	2.460.371	2.462.413	2.432.228	2.393.601	2.349.830	2.302.731	2.252.591
Catalonia	360.803	362.329	361.184	356.788	352.041	348.745	343.592
% 17-21 year-olds in CAT	5,05	4,96	4,86	4,78	4,70	4,64	4,59
Catalonia (all ages)	7.151.682	7.311.146	7.427.092	7.463.488	7.493.263	7.514.991	7.480.921
GEO/TIME	2014	2015	2016				
EU (28 countries)	28.088.371	27.753.412	27.648.789				
Spain	2.206.077	2.175.297	2.163.009				
Catalonia	339.073	338.806	341.747				
% 17-21 year-olds in CAT	4,57	4,58	4,61				
Catalonia (all ages)	7.416.237	7.396.991	7.408.290				

Source: Elaboration by TS employing data from Eurostat: Population on 1 January by age, sex and NUTS 2 region [demo_r_d2jan]. Last update: 08.09.17.

Extracted on: 24.09.17. Sex: Total, Age: 17-21 years (except when "all ages" is indicated), Unit: Number, except when the percentage of the 17-21 year-olds over the total Catalan population is calculated.

As the comparison with the figures from Spain and the European Union in the same table shows, this decrease of youth population is a common trend in the European Union⁷. As immigration increased since the year 2000 significantly in Spain, the proportion of foreign nationalities in the young population has increased, moderating the dramatic demographic change in the total figures. However, young people with a migration history are less likely to access HE in Spain (Rahona Lopez, 2009). In the context of this PhD thesis, these tendencies are of interest as they show that cohorts with a low birth rate are entering Universities.

Spain has been for years among the leaders of HE participation in the European Union, experiencing an impressive increase in educational participation and participation in tertiary education ever since the 1970s (Torrents, 2017), whereat 41% of the Spaniards between 25 and 34 years possessed University credentials in 2015 (Eurostat, 2016). As the following figure shows, the Spanish lead was over years much more pronounced and has decreased due to a constant increase in the participation in tertiary education in the European Union.



Source: Elaborated by TS employing data from Eurostat (2018a): Population by educational attainment level (tertiary education), sex (total) and age (25-34 year-olds) (%) [edat_ifs_9903]. GEO: Spain and European Union 28.

Figure 3: Share of young people (aged 25-34) with tertiary education in Spain and the EU-28 (%).

Some authors have spoken of the deformation of the Spanish educational *pyramid* into a *sandglass* shape, with many people with high and low levels of education and few persons at intermediate levels (Perez Garcia, Cucarella Tormo, & Hernandez Lahiguera, 2015). As my co-author and I have displayed elsewhere (Strecker & Fondevilla, 2017), the sandglass shape is achieved when only medium-grade vocational training is considered in the intermediate category, while all obligatory levels of education are summed on the one side and superior-grade vocational trainings are added to university education on the other side. However, if University studies are considered separately and superior vocational trainings and vocational

⁷ For more information on the share of young people and children in the population of different European countries see, for example: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Children_and_young_people_in_the_population,_1_January_2016_\(%25_share_of_total_population\)_BYIE18.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Children_and_young_people_in_the_population,_1_January_2016_(%25_share_of_total_population)_BYIE18.png) [last access: 14.08.2018].

trainings are summed up, the resulting shape is that of a pyramid (Strecker & Fondevilla, 2017). Moreover, we detected an important difference in the educational attainment between young people with Spanish and non-Spanish nationalities in the city of Lleida (Strecker & Fondevilla, 2017), questioning the usefulness of the sandglass comparison further.

The increase in University participation has been characterised by an important increase in female participation (Torrents, 2017). Though this has been a common tendency in Western societies in this period (Connell, 2009), women in Spain have come to outrun their male peers in many sectors in which other countries continue to experience a masculine domination, so only Engineering and architecture continue to present a male domination in the present, while several other branches are clearly dominated by female students (see Table 2). In 2009, young women were almost twice as likely as men to possess or currently pursue University studies in Spain (Torrents, 2015). Social inequality regarding other social divisions persisted in spite of this broadened access to University, as mainly children from “relatively rich and well educated families” (Rahona Lopez, 2009, p. 285) benefitted from the expansion. The social origin continues to determine the probabilities of access to University studies in Catalonia, with only a 12.3% probability of access among young people whose parents only achieved low levels of educational attainment (Torrents, 2015, p. 133) and a recent increase in the exclusion of the lower social classes from University education has been observed and ascribed to the effects of the economic crisis from 2008 (Torrents, 2017).

Table 2: Enrolled students per sex, branch of studies and academic course (2011-12 - 2016-17).

	2011-12			2012-13		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
Total	810.076 ⁸	448.622	361.454	1.027.823	571.449	456.374
Social and Legal Sciences	377.414	230.412	147.002	487.368	298.954	188.414
Engineering and architecture	151.139	36.868	114.271	189.194	45.730	143.464
Arts and Humanities	87.145	53.103	34.042	105.907	65.161	40.746
Health Sciences	147.485	104.254	43.231	185.217	130.856	54.361
Science	46.893	23.985	22.908	60.137	30.748	29.389
	2013-14			2014-15		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
Total	1.190.042	658.406	531.636	1.250.822	686.555	564.267
Social and Legal Sciences	567.630	346.518	221.112	589.571	355.553	234.018
Engineering and architecture	219.484	53.603	165.881	232.118	57.224	174.894
Arts and Humanities	119.577	73.264	46.313	126.081	77.078	49.003
Health Sciences	213.370	149.321	64.049	227.870	158.300	69.570
Science	69.981	35.700	34.281	75.182	38.400	36.782
	2015-16			2016-17		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
Total	1.275.688	698.626	577.062	1.284.041	704.598	579.443
Social and Legal Sciences	598.596	357.627	240.969	600.500	358.247	242.253
Engineering and architecture	232.449	57.458	174.991	231.806	57.597	174.209
Arts and Humanities	128.648	78.674	49.974	130.266	80.004	50.262
Health Sciences	237.328	164.695	72.633	241.170	167.756	73.414
Science	78.667	40.172	38.495	80.299	40.994	39.305

Source: Elaborated by TS employing data from Educabase (2018b); S.G. de Coordinación y Seguimiento Universitario. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte. The shaded parts indicate the only branch, Engineering and architecture, in which male participation is above female participation.

⁸ EDUCAbase only shares the total numbers rather than percentages. As age groups are not differentiated and mature-aged students have gained importance in the Spanish Universities over the last years (Torrents, 2017), it is not recommendable to simply calculate percentages over the HE-age group presented further above. However, mature-aged students continue to represent a small minority of the student population, so the above observed decrease in the HE-age group may still serve to highlight the increase in the HE participation, as the absolute numbers continued to increase in all study branches in the considered academic courses, except for a certain decrease in Engineering and architecture in 2016-17 in comparison to the two previous years.

2.1.2. *The Independence Movement*

"Feliz el pueblo cuya historia se lee con aburrimiento."

Charles Montesquieu (1689-1755) Chronicler and French political thinker.

Maybe it is just because I moved to Catalonia in 2010, but I will start the history of the independence movement in 2010, the year when the Spanish constitutional court declared the latest statute of autonomy (approved by the Catalan and the Spanish parliaments and in a referendum⁹ by the Catalan population in 2006 (Agencias, 2009)¹⁰, but brought to the constitutional court in the same year by the PP and in the following as well by several autonomous communities with PP governments) unconstitutional (España, 2010b). *Òmnium Cultural*, a non-profit association founded in 1961 that describes its own aims as "*protegir i impulsar la llengua, la cultura i afavorir la cohesió social i l'educació*"¹¹ (to protect and advance the language, the culture and to favour social cohesion and education), promoted a demonstration against this decision in July 2010 with 1.500.000 participants according to the promoters. This demonstration with the slogan "*Som una nació. Nosaltres decidim*" (We're a nation. We decide) featured already many "*esteladas*" – the Catalan flag with a star added on one side, representing the independence. In the following years, *Òmnium Cultural* and the *Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC)*, an organisation legally constituted in 2011 that seeks the political independence of Catalonia¹², among others, organized diverse demonstrations, concerts and other activities to promote Catalan independence – mainly in Catalonia but also abroad¹³. Especially the demonstrations on the National Day of Catalonia, the 11th of September, were said to outperform themselves continuously in the numbers of participants – despite a big variety between the official numbers given by different entities. For instance, the *Via Catalana* on the 11th of September 2013 counted, according to the Catalan *Departament d'Interior* with 1.6 million participants (EFE, 2013)¹⁴, the ANC claimed that more than 20% of the Catalan population had participated¹⁵, the Washington Post (Associated Press, 2013)¹⁶ and Los Angeles Times¹⁷ spoke both of more than one million and the Spanish *Ministerio del*

⁹ To avoid misunderstandings, it might be necessary to explain that this referendum was legal, as several autonomous communities - including Catalonia – have a right to run referendums in their statutes. A referendum about the independence of Catalonia is considered illegal, not because it is a referendum, but because the independence in itself is anti-constitutional, given that the Spanish constitution speaks of the unity of Spain. However, referendums are rather rare and the 2006 referendum was only the second Catalan referendum since the transition to democracy. For more information on these referendums, see <https://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=eler&n=402> [last access: 17.10.2017].

¹⁰ <http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20060618/51273953235/el-estatut-aprobado-por-amplia-mayoria-y-con-baja-participacion.html>. [last access: 17.10.2017]

¹¹ <https://www.omnium.cat/qui-som/presentacio>. [last access: 10.10.2017]

¹² <http://assemblea.cat/quisom>. [last access: 10.10.2017]

¹³ https://www.omnium.cat/qui-som/historia#timeline_2010. [last access: 10.10.2017]

¹⁴ <http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20130911/54382324945/interior-cifra-asistencia-via-catalana-1600000-personas.html>. [last access: 10.10.2017]

¹⁵ <http://www.assemblea.cat/?q=node/6139>. [Last access: 10.10.2017]

¹⁶ http://archive.is/20130912151051/www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/catalans-in-favor-of-breaking-away-from-spain-form-huge-human-chain-to-advertise-their-cause/2013/09/11/0ce45f06-1afa-11e3-80ac-96205cacb45a_story.html [last access: 10.10.2017]

¹⁷ <http://www.latimes.com/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-catalonia-independence-demonstration-20130911-story.html>. [last access: 10.10.2017]

Interior of 400.000 participants¹⁸. Politically, the Spanish state had passed in 2011, after advanced elections, from the president Zapatero (PSOE) to the president Rajoy (PP)¹⁹, while Catalonia was governed since 2010 by Mas (then CiU)²⁰, reelected in 2012²¹. In parallel to the growing public support for independence, grew – or arose – a politic support, at least among some of the Catalan parties and the idea of a legally binding referendum. The 9th of November 2014 became the date of the "*consulta*" (popular consultation, translated by TS), despite its suspension on the 29th of September 2014 (Fabra, 2014)²². This 'survey' was made possible through recruited volunteers and consisted in the questions: "*Vol que Catalunya esdevingui un Estat? En cas afirmatiu, vol que aquest Estat sigui independent?*" (Do you want Catalonia to become a state? In case of affirmative answer, do you want this state to become independent?). Out of 2.305.390 persons who voted, 80,76% voted yes to both questions (ACN, 2014)²³. The participation can only be calculated approximately as no official census existed, the voting age was 16 and Catalan residents without Spanish nationality but a *Número de Identidad Extranjera* – Spanish ID for foreigners – were allowed to vote. According to the newspaper *El País* the participation was of 37,02% (Pérez & Ríos, 2014)²⁴. After an unsuccessful attempt to achieve a referendum from the Spanish government, the Catalan president announced early elections for the Catalan parliament for the 27th of September 2015 with a plebiscitary character (Gil del Olmo & Ríos, 2015)²⁵. Mas announced that should his list win in these elections, independence would be gained within 18 months (Noguer, 2014)²⁶. Almost all parties supporting the Catalan independence formed part of one list, called "*Junts pel sí*" (together for the yes), while another party that supported the independence in its programme presented a separate list and all parties that either did not support the independence, did not wish to pronounce themselves in this regard or were internally divided about the question presented their individual lists. With a participation of 74,95%, *Junts pel Sí* achieved the 39,59% of the votes and 62 seats. The CUP – the other independence supporting list – achieved 8,21% and 10 seats²⁷. This way, both independence-supporting lists together hold the majority of seats (72 of 135) but not of the number of votes (1.966.508 of the 3.942.961 votes that were given to political parties that entered the parliament, 49,87%). After several months of negotiation between the two Independence-supporting lists, Carles Puigdemont, a member of *Junts pel Sí* but not their presidential candidate, became rather surprisingly the Catalan president in January 2016 ("Carles Puigdemont, investido presidente de la Generalitat," 2017;

¹⁸ <https://www.elplural.com/politica/2017/09/10/diada-de-catalu%C3%B1a-independencia>. [last access: 10.10.2017]

¹⁹ <http://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2011/generales/senado/>. [last access: 13.10.2017].

²⁰ <http://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2010/autonomicas/09/index.html>. [last access: 13.10.2017]

²¹ <http://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2012/autonomicas/09/index.html>. [last access: 13.10.2017]

²² https://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/09/29/actualidad/1412005295_056524.html. [last access: 10.10.2017]

²³ [http://www.directe.cat/noticia/376586/9n-2.236.806-persones-han-votat-amb-el-96-8-de-meses-escrutades?utm_source=directe!cat&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+directecat+\(directe!cat\)](http://www.directe.cat/noticia/376586/9n-2.236.806-persones-han-votat-amb-el-96-8-de-meses-escrutades?utm_source=directe!cat&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+directecat+(directe!cat)). [last access: 10.10.2017]

²⁴ https://politica.elpais.com/politica/2014/11/09/actualidad/1415542400_466311.html. [last access: 10.10.2017]

²⁵ https://elpais.com/ccaa/2015/01/14/catalunya/1421241562_100506.html. [last access: 10.10.2017]

²⁶ https://elpais.com/ccaa/2014/11/25/catalunya/1416939342_197205.html. [last access: 13.10.2017]

²⁷ http://www.gencat.cat/governacio/resultatsparlament2015/resu/09AU/DAU09999CM_L1.htm [last access: 10.10.2017]

Sastre, 2016)^{28,29}. In his installation speech³⁰, Puigdemont called his legislation one of post-autonomy and pre-independence. In the meantime, Spanish elections had been celebrated in December 2015, in which Rajoy lost his absolute majority³¹. After the failed attempt to install Rajoy as the president, reelections were celebrated in June 2016, leaving the PP with a better result than in 2015, but still without absolute majority³². This time, Rajoy was confirmed as the president through the abstention of almost all representatives of the PSOE (Cruz, 2016)³³. In the same month, the CUP announced in Catalonia that they were not going to support the budget plans (Piñol & Cordero, 2016)³⁴, so Puigdemont announced the celebration of a vote on no-confidence in September 2016 and the convocation of re-elections should he lose (Cordero, Pellicer, & Piñol, 2016)³⁵. A day before this vote, Puigdemont announced in a speech the celebration of a referendum within a year, in September 2017, with or without the support of the Spanish government (Puente, 2016)³⁶, winning the vote a day later with the support of the two independence-supporting lists³⁷. As the last interview held for this project took place on the 10th of December 2016, there is no need to describe the Catalan history further as the events could not show repercussions in the interviews any longer. This liberates me from the difficult task to describe the referendum, celebrated on the 1st of October 2017, and its consequences in the context of which this thesis is written.

As another element that might or might not³⁸ be related to the growing independence movement and that certainly forms part of the backdrop of this project, I would like to mention the cases of corruption in Spain. As the dark figures of cases are supposedly high and the number of reported cases may include cases of very different extent and public resonance,

²⁸ http://www.abc.es/espana/catalunya/politica/abci-directo-investidura-carles-puigdemont-como-presidente-generalitat-cataluna-201601101222_directo.html. [last access: 13.10.2017]

²⁹ <http://www.elmundo.es/cataluna/2016/01/10/5692783246163f46068b4695.html>. [last access: 13.10.2017]

³⁰ <http://estaticos.elmundo.es/documentos/2016/01/10/discursopuigdemont.pdf>. [last access: 13.10.2017]

³¹ <http://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2015/generales/congreso/index.html>. [last access: 13.10.2017]

³² <http://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2016/generales/congreso/index.html>. [last access: 13.10.2017].

³³ <http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2016/10/29/5814b9cb46163fce668b4581.html>. [last access: 13.10.2017].

³⁴ https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/06/07/catalunya/1465306125_265699.html?rel=mas. [last access: 13.10.2017]

³⁵ https://elpais.com/ccaa/2016/06/08/catalunya/1465373732_781773.html. [last access: 13.10.2017]

³⁶ http://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/politica/Puigdemont-anuncia-convocara-referendum-acordarlo_0_563794297.html. [last access: 13.10.2017]

³⁷ <http://www.elmundo.es/cataluna/2016/09/29/57ed3886e2704ebb2c8b45fa.html>. [last access: 13.10.2017]

³⁸ None of the participants actually argued to pursue independence because of the corruption in Spain, but in most interviews where corruption and independence were mentioned, both topics appeared within the same section of the interview. Moreover, some of the participants mention the corruption when explaining their dislike for Spain and their wish to live in an independent Catalonia, leaving the impression that the corruption did add fuel to the flames. However, all the numbers given in the following do refer to Spain as a whole and include cases of corruption from Catalonia, like the case Pujol, which also gained high public resonance throughout the follow-up. (see for example: <http://www.elmundo.es/t/ca/caso-pujol.html> [last access: 20.10.2017]).

it is difficult to assess corruption in few lines. According to the Heraldo (EFE, 2017a)³⁹, the cases of corruption increased significantly since 2010, though the numbers for 2016 were slightly smaller than in 2015 (see Table 3).

Table 3: Cases of corruption in Spain in 2010, 2015 and 2016.

Year	Number of Corruption cases
2010	444
2015	1.182
2016	1.116

Source: Elaborated by TS with data published in the Heraldo (EFE, 2017a).

As these numbers do not differentiate regarding the extent and public resonance of the concrete case, it is interesting to have additionally a look at the list of corruption cases elaborated by 15Mpedia, a website that describes itself as a "*enciclopedia libre sobre el 15M*"⁴⁰ (free encyclopaedia about the 15M). The list, contained at the moment of my consultation 127 cases and had been last actualized on 31st of May 2017 (15Mpedia, 2017)⁴¹. *TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL (TI)*, a NGO that is according to its website "devoted to combating corruption, brings civil society, private sector and governments on a global coalition"⁴² (TI, 2017, what is TI), shares results on the evolution of the Corruption Perception Index, which measures the perception of corruption in public administration expressed by "*quienes están en posición de advertir esta práctica en el sector público*"⁴³ (those who are in the position to alert to these practices in the public sector) (TI, 2017, *preguntas frecuentes*). This index worsened from 65 in 2012⁴⁴ (position in the country ranking: 30)⁴⁵ to 58 (position: 41) in 2016⁴⁶. It would take a whole PhD thesis to comment and analyse the Spanish corruption in detail, but let me mention at least that some cases, like the case *Bárceñas*, gained important visibility throughout the follow-up interviews, so several participants made references to the corruption cases and their legal prosecution.

³⁹ <http://www.heraldo.es/noticias/nacional/2017/05/10/2016-cerro-con-116-casos-corrupcion-con-126-detenidos-investigados-1174745-305.html>. [last access: 20.10.2017]

⁴⁰ <https://15mpedia.org/wiki/Portada>. [last access: 20.10.2017]

⁴¹ https://15mpedia.org/wiki/Lista_de_casos_de_corrupci%C3%B3n. [last access: 20.10.2017]

⁴² <http://transparencia.org.es/en/what-is-ti/>. [last access: 20.10.2017]

⁴³ http://transparencia.org.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/preguntas_frecuentes_ipc-2016.pdf. [last access: 20.10.2017]

⁴⁴ As the method and scale of measurement changed in 2012, it does not make sense to compare the index with previous years, though the TI itself publishes a table doing so (TI, 2017, *preguntas frecuentes* and *comparación-ipc-2016-2008*). http://transparencia.org.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/preguntas_frecuentes_ipc-2016.pdf and http://transparencia.org.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/comparacion_ipc_2016-2008.pdf. [last access, in both cases: 20.10.2017]

⁴⁵ The points indicate in a system over 100 the perception of corruption expressed, whereat 0 indicates the perception as highly corrupt and 100 as highly transparent. The country position ranks the indices of all included countries, so the position may vary just because of a change in the number of countries considered. (TI, 2017, *preguntas frecuentes*). http://transparencia.org.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/preguntas_frecuentes_ipc-2016.pdf. [last access: 20.10.2017]

⁴⁶ http://transparencia.org.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/comparacion_ipc_2016-2008.pdf. [Last access: 20.10.2017]

2.2. *Education and degree course organisation*

"El sistema educativo español, al menos en su tramo obligatorio, parece cada vez más el experimento de un discípulo loco de Bourdieu para observar la reproducción social a gran escala. Madrid es su laboratorio."
César Rendueles, 18/03/2016⁴⁷

To understand the University transition in its local context a short description of the educational system is necessary.

Though participation in infant education (3 to 6 years) is exceptionally high in Spain in comparison to the EU-28 mean (Eurostat, 2017), compulsory education begins as in many other countries with primary school and includes primary (6-12 years) and secondary school (12-16 years)⁴⁸. The system of compulsory education is comprehensive, but a certain differentiation and social stratification is given through a potent sector of private schooling⁴⁹. Especially regarding infant and compulsory education many private schools are eligible for public funding and can hence be considered 'semi'-private/public in the sense that they are obliged to accept students according to the same criteria as public schools to receive funding, but may require monthly payments from the families, among others for additional services like the cafeteria, transport etc., excluding like this especially students from low-income families⁵⁰.

High School is not compulsory so only few private schools receive public subventions for these two years of schooling. They are divided into three streams: Arts; Sciences and Technology; and Humanities and Social Sciences, though not all schools offer all streams⁵¹. According to the chosen stream, High School students study different subjects and present for different exams in the *Prova d'avaluació de batxillerat per a l'accés a la universitat* (PAU, University Entrance Exam)⁵². The scores achieved in the PAU, offered in June and in September, together with a consideration of the grades achieved throughout High School determine the final score of a student. University places are assigned according to these scores, whereas the *numerus clausus* represents each year the score of the last student who obtained a place on degree course x, at university y. In some degrees, additional tests are required to gain access, for

⁴⁷ <https://espejismosdigitales.wordpress.com/2016/03/18/elitismo-educativo-escuelas-concertadas-y-bilinguismo/> [last access: 10/02/2017]

⁴⁸ <http://queestudiar.gencat.cat/ca/>. [Last access: 06.11.2017]

⁴⁹ According to César Rendueles and Financial Red, 32% of Catalan pupils of compulsory education attend private schools. See: <https://espejismosdigitales.wordpress.com/2016/03/18/elitismo-educativo-escuelas-concertadas-y-bilinguismo/> [Last access: 06.11.2017] and <http://financiarred.com/diferencia-de-precios-colegio-publico-privado-o-concertado/> [Last access: 06.11.2017].

⁵⁰ http://www.eldiario.es/norte/euskadi/obligacion-pagar-cuotas-colegios-concertados_0_62188824.html. [Last access: 06.11.2017].

⁵¹ <http://queestudiar.gencat.cat/ca/estudis/batxillerat/info-general/>. [Last access: 06.11.2017]

⁵² http://universitats.gencat.cat/es/pau/que_heu_saber/. [Last access: 06.11.2017]

example for sports and – since 2016⁵³ – for teacher training⁵⁴. Alternative access routes to University are possible through superior-grade vocational trainings⁵⁵ and were additionally facilitated in 2010 (Torrents, 2017) - just before the beginning of the data construction for this project - leading to an increased access to University from vocational trainings (Torrents, 2017).

The duration of degree courses in Catalonia had been, until the academic course 2008/09 - only years before the beginning of this project - of either 3 or 5 years, as "*graus*" and "*licenciatures*" were differentiated. Reforms in the wake of the Bologna process, led to the introduction of official master degrees and an adaptation of the degree duration to regularly 4 years (Lorenci, 2006), though exceptional 5-year degrees existed, for instance in veterinary medicine. The Spanish Minister of Education decided in 2014 on another reform, reducing the degree duration to 3 years and prolonging the duration of masters from 1 to 2 years. Especially the much higher costs for master degrees led to a strong polemic around this decision, accompanied by immense student protests (Congostrina, 2016; Sanmartin, 2014, 2015), so the *Conferencia de Rectores de Universidades de España (CRUE)* (Spanish University Rectors Conference) decided on a moratorium for the application of the reform until the academic course 2018-2019 (Ibáñez, 2018) - when the participants in this project had already finished their studies. In consequence, most of the participants studied 4-year degree courses, except for one participant who had chosen a 5-year degree course (Nadia, veterinary medicine).

With the law 1393/2007 (España, 2007, 2010a) a '*trabajo final de grado (TFG)*' (final degree work) became an obligatory part of all degree-course study plans in Spain. These works differ, however, widely from one degree to another, so some students are allowed to complete the work in groups while others have to do so individually, in some degrees the work counts only 6 ECTS, in others up to 30 ECTS and while some TFG tutors consider themselves supervisors that hardly intervene in the development of the work, considering that the students have to show that they are able to complete it on their own, others understand the TFG as another subject and offer their students much guidance and help in the development of this academic work⁵⁶.

University fees increased significantly in the last years (Sacristán & França, 2013) so Spain is now among the eight European HE systems with the highest fees after the UK (Eurydice, 2017); graduate wages are, however, low (Koskinen, 2007). Catalonia is the autonomous community with the highest enrolment fees (Torrents, 2017). The University fee per credit depends on the branch of studies and family income and is successively higher for students who re-enrol for previously failed subjects. Ever since the 2012-2013 academic course, the mean price per credit for the reformed degrees has been 33.52€ plus taxes (Catalunya, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016). In 2011-2012, the year this project began, the mean price per credit was with

⁵³ As the participants in this study began their university studies in 2011, they did not have to undergo this test.

⁵⁴ http://universitats.gencat.cat/es/preinscripcio/prova_apitud/. [Last access: 06.11.2017]

⁵⁵ http://universitats.gencat.cat/ca/que_puc_fer/estudiant_cicles/ [Last access: 05.08.2018].

⁵⁶ These details were explained by Glòria Estapé Dubreuil in a course about TFGs offered by the ICE (UdL), I was able to attend on the 20th of April 2017. Her power point presentation is available online at: <file:///C:/Users/Tanja/Downloads/PresentacioTreballsFinaldeTota.pdf> [last access: 05.08.2018].

20,11€ plus taxes significantly lower (Catalunya, 2011)⁵⁷. This means that the participants in this project were among the first students to encounter higher enrolment fees, but had taken their study choice before this increase.

2.3. *Crisis and social change*

Other important characteristics of the backdrop of this project were certain technological innovations and the economic crisis that hit Spain in 2008. Regarding technological change, I noticed especially the increased prevalence of smartphones and with them the use of applications like WhatsApp, which came to influence my project directly as I came to change my contact medium to my participants (see *Facebook*). I have described changes in the political climate regarding corruption and the independence movement of Catalonia above (see *The Independence Movement*) and commented on student mobilisations against the 3+2 reform passed in 2014 (see *Education and degree course organisation*), both topics that appeared repeatedly in the participants' interviews, though only few mentioned to actively engage in the diverse mobilisations. Other topics that came to worry some of the participants in the course of the follow-up were the refugee crisis and climate change, but also humanitarian issues in general, as some of the participants also seemed to gain an increasing awareness of social problems in their surroundings, commenting for example on beggars asking them for money on the streets. Though such an orientation towards societal and global issues may be typical of the maturity processes of this age group (see *Youth Research and Transitions*), the extent of humanitarian crises and their visibility in the news may have contributed to this growing awareness. However, the one topic that accompanied the project from the beginning on was the economic crisis.

Though a global phenomenon with its origin in the USA⁵⁸ and several other European countries are more notorious in this context, the economic crisis from 2008 did also hit Spain hard⁵⁹ and led to prolonged effects⁶⁰ that have just recently seemed to improve, at least if we consider the unemployment rate as an indicator (Figure 4). A recent study on the effects of the crisis for the mental health in Spain showed that the prevalence of poor mental health increased for groups with secondary and primary studies (Córdoba-Doña, Escolar-Pujolar, San Sebastián, & Gustafsson, 2016). This may indicate that individuals with tertiary education are less affected by the social consequences of the crisis. However, other research has shown that the effects of the economic crisis have aggravated the previously existing tendency to overeducation of graduates and declassification of academic titles, so among graduates in their 30s in particular women, graduates born in foreign countries and those whose parents only achieved a low

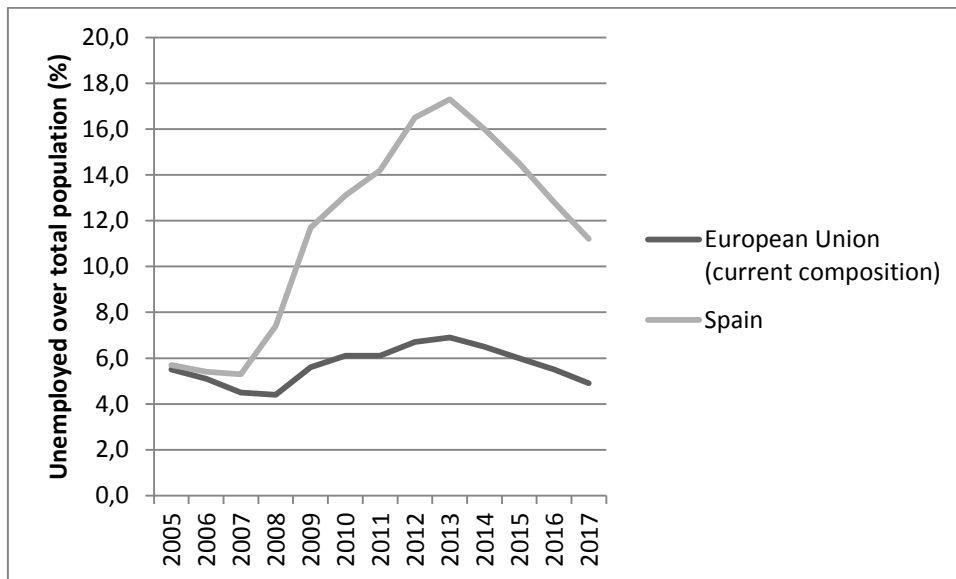
⁵⁷ I calculated the mean costs, parting from the costs per credit published each year for the following academic course in the official diary of the Catalan Government - Diari Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya (DOGC). All DOGCs are available online at: <http://dogc.gencat.cat/es> [last access: 05.08.2018].

⁵⁸ An analysis of the causes and consequences of the financial crisis lies surely beyond the scope of this thesis. For a journalistic analysis see, for example: <https://www.economist.com/schools-brief/2013/09/07/crash-course> [last access: 05.08.2018].

⁵⁹ An analysis focusing on the European crisis and Spain in comparison to Greece and Italy can be found, for example, here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-17549970> [last access: 05.08.2018].

⁶⁰ For an early timeline on the Spanish crisis see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-cuts-economy/timeline-spains-economic-crisis-idUSTRE7BT0RL20111230> [last access: 05.08.2018].

educational attainment are likely to face labour precariousness, difficult working conditions and unemployment on the Spanish labour market (Bogino, 2016).



Source: Elaborated by TS with data from Eurostat (2018b): Unemployment by sex and age - annual average [une_rt_a].

Figure 4: Unemployment over total population, Spain and EU (%).

Spain was over years especially notorious for its high youth unemployment rate (Table 4). As young people are usually the first and most affected by changes in the economic cycle (Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017), this tendency was expectable, though maybe not in the observed extent. Recent evaluations of the effects of the crisis claim that it led to more social inequality through an increased impoverishment of the poorest, leaving them without chances to progress, while hardly altering the situation of the middle and upper classes (Salido, 2018).

Table 4: Youth unemployment rate (20-24 year-olds), Spain and EU-28 (%).

GEO/TIME	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
EU (current composition)	15,5	17,4	19,1	20,9	22,4	21,6	20,0	19,5	18,3	14,0	14,0	16,1	17,8
Spain	35,2	41,4	44,6	50,3	51,8	48,8	42,3	36,9	33,3	20,2	15,0	14,7	17,0
Cataluña	26,9	30,9	37,0	44,0	45,0	45,5	39,3	33,0	32,1	15,9	10,0	11,5	13,1

Source: Eurostat (2018c): Youth unemployment rate by sex and NUTS 2 regions [yth_empl_110].

According to Rahona (2009), high youth unemployment correlates with higher HE participation, while high general unemployment correlates with a decrease in HE participation. In this sense, the exceptional high University participation in Spain, may be in part caused by the rather slow labour market entrance visible in rather high youth unemployment rates even before the extreme figures achieved in the wake of the economic crisis (Serracant, 2012; Walther, Moerch Hejl, Bechmann Jensen, & Hayes, 2002).

Another aspect to consider in this regard is the access to a parent-independent residence. Spain, together with other Southern-European countries, has been characterised before the crisis by a late residential emancipation and a predominance of privately owned homes

(Moreno, 2017). Though the access to home ownership has worsened in the wake of the economic crisis, the Spanish residential emancipation rate did hardly change, while parent-dependent living increased in several other EU countries (Moreno, 2017). This may be, in part, explainable through the consideration that young people in Spain were already before the crisis the last to achieve residential emancipation and continued in this position in spite of the closing-up of other countries. Another explanation may lay in the substitution of home owning by the rental sector and of family homes by shared flats (Moreno, 2017), in particular, fostered by a public rent subsidy offered to young people aged 22 to 29 for a maximal duration of 4 years that was effective in Spain from 2008 to 2011 (Aparicio Fenoll & Crespo Ballesteros, 2017). Considering the end of the subsidy in the year the participants in this project began their University studies, together with the age and other requirements, this subsidy did however not influence in the residential emancipation of the participants in this project.

3. Theoretic Background

In this chapter main theoretical concepts are introduced and related to each other. Some of the presented concepts form the very foundation of the thesis, others came to strengthen its walls later in the process, some were helpful to close remaining holes in the roof and others served to refurbish the interior radically. While social inequality is the key point of my research interest and hence thesis, youth research especially on transitions and Higher Education as the field in which I study social inequality play an important role in the theoretic foundation of this work and influenced the design of my project thoroughly.

3. 1. Youth Research and Transitions

Just as my own training as an undergraduate student was in pedagogy with a specialisation in youth, I begin this theoretical part with an introduction to youth research and theoretical considerations that have influenced my approach to studying social inequality and Higher Education.

"*Quan ets gran saps com has de fer les coses, el que passa és que ja no pots fer-les.*"

Josep Maria Ainaud de Lasarte (Barcelona 1925-2012)

Roda Mots 11.03.2016

3.1.1. The invention of youth and development tasks

While the so-called "invention" of childhood in the 16th and 17th century was marked by an emotional perception of children and institutionalized through the implementation and expansion of obligatory schooling (Ariès, 1975), youth appeared much later, in the 19th century, as a transition between childhood and adulthood that expanded rapidly ever since 1900 (Hurrelmann, 2007). With the gradual expansion of the obligatory education and the increased participation in Higher Education (HE), the extension of youth allowed for its consideration as a phase of life of its own with distinguishing characteristics (Hurrelmann, 2007). As Feixa (1998) argues, two conditions have to be given to allow for the existence of "youth": a special social condition and a cultural image related to this age group. This definition combines two tendencies that existed in youth research for decades in parallel with few links, though recently some attempts have been made to reconcile both: transitions and cultures (Ecarius, 2009; Furlong et al., 2011).

'Youth' is then a social construct and appeared as a delimited phase between childhood and adulthood, when it was assumed that young people had to complete certain development tasks in order to achieve a full adult status, though they were no longer children either. In many senses, their situation was characterised through a "not yet" and "no longer", highlighting the transitional idea behind the concept. Its concrete definition depends on the respective historical context and is influenced by older generations and institutions (Andresen, 2005). Furthermore, different disciplines and theoretical approaches understand and define 'youth' in varied ways, focusing e.g. in psychology on biological maturity and in sociology on the position within society. In agitated times youth is considered a risk factor for society, while in other moments young people are the motor of social change and progress (Andresen, 2005; Ecarius, 2008).

For decades, the scientific community studying youth assumed a 'normal biography' in which the completion of education and formation was followed by economic independence due to a smooth labour market insertion. Economic independence did then allow for full participation in consumption and was a requirement to be allowed to marry. The first completely parent-independent housing was usually the marital residence and marriage was synonym to generativity, in the sense of parenthood and child rearing. As all this used to happen in a matter of few years and the majority of age was achieved in parallel, allowing for full political participation, the transition to adulthood was rather short. Though things have obviously changed by now, this 'normal biography' was actually never this 'normal' as diverse critics have highlighted that it only considered the transition of a rather small part of the youth population: white, middle-class males (Andresen, 2005). As economic autonomy continues to be a main indicator to delimit youth and adulthood, Andresen (2005, p. 133) speaks of an ongoing fixation on the "male normal biography" in youth research. Further limitations of the economical criteria and disregard of certain parts of the youth population can be anticipated regarding different cultural backgrounds or mentally challenged adults. As my co-authors and I

have argued elsewhere (Strecker, Ballesté, & Feixa, 2018), the use of the plural "youths" rather than the unifying singular highlights the immense heterogeneity among young people.

Other criticism, apart from the neglect of certain social groups within youth, has been mentioned by Duarte (2015, p. 89, translated by TS) who speaks of 'adultocentrism', that refers to a disregard of age as a structural dimension in our society, leading to "the absence of these subjects in the analysis of diverse human groupings throughout history, their roles, their life conditions, their possible contributions and other analytical concerns". In other words, adultocentrism refers to an automatic and not reflected perception of young people through an adult lens, as if this perspective was the natural, the only possible and correct way to see things. Adultocentrism is, furthermore, strongly related to another historical shortcoming of youth research: its deficit perspective.

Hurrelmann (2007) argues that the exclusion of young people from the society, in the course of their confinement in educational institutions, favoured the development of a negative image of young people, who were perceived by the older members of society as immature, experiencing their youth as a moratorium without obligations and responsibilities and strongly oriented towards consume and leisure. This deficit perspective was constitutive for youth research, as funding for youth studies was usually ascribed or increased, when young people were identified as a potential problem that needed solving (Andresen, 2005; París et al., 2006). In consequence, both youth transition- and youth culture- researchers came to study risk factors for failed transitions and their effects on society's progress and social conflicts or risk behaviours like drug use, non-protected sexual relations or criminality (Andresen, 2005; París et al., 2006). Simplifying matters, we could claim that whenever society discovered a new youth-related problem, researchers were paid to identify the causes of this problem and to propose solutions, which were then applied – or not – in the corresponding youth, education and employment policies.

This tendency still holds true nowadays, as financial resources are usually not allocated following careful coordination between the different sides of the so-called 'magic triangle' of youth - researchers, social workers, policy makers, with young people at its centre - (Chisholm et al., 2011), but are often granted by policy makers in reaction to a mediatic shock of some kind of problem concerning young people (París et al., 2006; Strecker et al., 2018). A recent example is the European initiative of a youth guarantee, colloquially known as the EUs "anti-NEET" plan, as it appeared in reaction to a mediatic outcry about young people who were neither in education, nor employment, nor training (Cabasés Piqué, Pardell Veà, & Strecker, 2016; Strecker et al., 2018). However, in these processes the young generation is often treated as a homogeneous collective, negative stigmas are ascribed, proliferated and used to hold young individuals responsible for the structural problems they are facing.

Strongly related to the 'normal' transition but conceptually more open and hence allowing for an application to diverse social groupings and in changing times, Hurrelmann (2007) developed a list of development tasks young people have to complete in order to gain adult status. In concrete, he differentiated 4 central development tasks: 1) "*Development of an intellectual and social competence* in order to meet academic and later on occupational demands having sole responsibility, with the aim to take up a gainful employment and to ensure like this the own economic basis for an autonomous existence as adults", 2) "*Development of the internal*

image of the gender identity, accepting of the changed physical appearance, construction of a social relation to peers of the same and the other sex, development of a heterosexual (or homosexual) partner relationship, which forms the potential basis for starting a family and the birth and education of own children", 3) "*Development of independent patterns of action for the use of the consumer-goods market* including the media and the ability to handle money with the aim, of developing an own lifestyle and to come to a controlled and needs-oriented treatment of leisure activities" and 4) "*Development of a system of values and norms and an ethical and political awareness* that is consistent with one's own behavior and action, so that the responsible assumption of social participation roles as citizens in the cultural and political space becomes possible" (Hurrelmann, 2007, p. 27f. translated by TS).

Apart from the obvious flaws of these tasks, e.g. regarding the consideration of social divisions and their intersections, the inclusion of further sexual orientations and the limitations of biological parenthood this may entail, we can observe that in all these tasks the idea of a basis is formulated, while the completion of the final aim lies in adulthood, so the concrete passage from youth to adulthood is somewhat blurred, as Hurrelmann (2007, p. 29) himself cautions, referring to "fluid boundaries" between childhood, youth and adulthood. All four tasks relate, moreover, to internal changes that are not directly observable from the outside, as a competence, an image, a system of values and norms and an ethical and political awareness are achieved. Even the "patterns of action" mentioned in task 3 relate indirectly to an internal ability, as an ability to handle consumption is implied. In this sense, we can say that youth is the phase of life when young people complete an internal change that allows them to achieve an adult status in adulthood. The completed transition to adulthood becomes visible in the public sphere with the end of the formation and the labour market insertion and in the private sphere with family emancipation, a new residence, a steady partnership and a first child, though regarding children a growing optionality is assumed (Hurrelmann, 2007, p. 36).

The 4 tasks represent the four main spheres of life, in which adults occupy a significantly different position compared to children: economy, partnership, consumption and political participation. On a timeline, Hurrelmann (2007, p. 39) indicates that the consumer role is achieved with little more than 10 years, while political participation begins for him basically with the legal voting age, the adoption of a professional role happens in the 20s and family creation takes place in the second half of the 20s, as the last of the four tasks. Though all these age indications are more than discussible, the important point is the rather long time that passes between the first and the last accomplished task, leading Hurrelmann to speak of a 'successive transition' - a main difference to the rather compact transition implicit in the 'normal biography' (Andresen, 2005).

3.1.2. Changing transitions

Nowadays, education and formation are considered lifelong (Chisholm, 2006) and labour market entrance is marked by increasingly long phases of labour precariousness that do not allow for complete economic autonomy (Bessant, Farthing, & Watts, 2017; MacDonald, 2011), whereat some social groups may never achieve it, as especially early school leavers are

deviated into careers of public measures⁶¹ and unemployment and never enter the regular labour market (Diefenbach, 2008; Solga & Wagner, 2008; Walther & Stauber, 2007). Consume and love relationships, including sexual activity, are achieved long before economic independence is gained, but especially love relationships are no longer expected to last until death (Pais, 2007); marriage has ceased to be a social norm or requirement for parenthood, which has, in turn, become facultative (Hurrelmann, 2007), though childless couples may still face a certain social pressure.

Such fundamental changes affecting the transition to adulthood make it even more difficult to delimit youth and question the adaptability of Hurrelmann's development tasks to the current situation. Additionally, digitalisation (Andresen, 2005; París et al., 2006) and individualisation (Atkinson, 2010) are said to have changed society and in particular youth, as a societal avant-garde (Hurrelmann, 2007). On the one hand, young people are often said to be more experienced and therefore apt in the handling of digital devices and the internet than previous generations and this is considered to influence their relative power position towards older generations (Andresen, 2005) and in political participation e.g. the 'new new social movements' (Feixa, Pereira, & Juris, 2009). On the other, individualisation, in the sense of a diversification of routes and an individual ascription of responsibilities for the chosen pathway (Atkinson, 2010), is most influential when social positioning is still under progress, that is to say, in particular in youth, where educational itineraries diversify and choices accumulate. The institutionalisation of the life course, in the sense of an unification especially of the educational pathway, helped to reduce insecurity and ambiguity in the past and some authors claim that institutions continue to transmit the idea of the normal biography to young people, causing them to orient their plans in this direction and to experience contradictions and tensions, when things do not work out (Walther & Stauber, 2007). Others believe that young people have internalised the new requirements facing them, embracing them as something they actually want and value (Chisholm, 2006). Either way, individualisation also implies that young people have to handle these contradictions alone, receiving institutionalized support only along with the ascription as 'disadvantaged' (Walther & Stauber, 2007). Young people's vulnerability is, in this context, even more severe as they constitute a successively smaller proportion of the population due to demographic changes, leading to a situation in which political parties can gain more votes among elderly voters, neglecting young people's interests and forging an adultocentric perspective on them (Hurrelmann, 2007; Pais, 2007).

Hurrelmann (2007) considered these changes as a prolongation of the youth phase - an assumption that is still influential if we consider how youth surveys (e.g. Feixa, Cabasés, & Ballesté, 2017) and youth policies have repeatedly widened the included age cohorts (e.g. the EU Youth Guarantee does currently include young people until 29 (Cabasés, Pardell Veà, & Feixa-Pàmpols, 2018)). Vieira and Miret (2010, p. 84) showed through the index of entropy, "a measure of heterogeneity constructed from the combinations of status at a certain age (being a student, worker, principal person or main reference in the household, member of a couple or parent)", that a significant change between youth and adulthood is (or was at that point) measurable, but occurred in 2001 6 years later than in 1981, whereat the end of youth was

⁶¹ Important differences between countries exist, as some countries started much earlier to create such a parallel track of public measures than others. Spain can be seen in this sense as a latecomer.

supposed to lie at 28 years for women and 30 years for men in 2001 (Vieira, Miret, 2010). While this corroborates, at first glance, the thesis of an extension of the youth phase, increasing heterogeneity in adulthood and all life phases would turn this measure useless, unless it would be considered an indicator of the end of youth as a separate life phase. According to Hurrelmann (2007), the opposite is the case, as the increased life expectancy leads to a growing differentiation of life phases. Some authors have acknowledged important differences between the lives of teenagers and people in their mid thirties by speaking of "young adults" (Walther & Stauber, 2007). Others have used terms like 'emerging adulthood', or stated that transitions were 'extended', 'arrested', 'on hold', 'non-linear' or 'reversible' (Woodman, 2011, p. 111). Serracant (2012) identifies 'de-linearisation', 'extension', 'reversibility' and 'diversification' as the main trends in current European youth-transition research.

Walther and Stauber (2007, p. 31) embrace the new heterogeneity among individualised and diversified life paths by speaking of "multiple status passages", in the sense of different combinations of accomplished, partly accomplished and not (yet) fulfilled developmental tasks - allowing for sheer innumerable combinations of intermediate statuses. They are furthermore representatives of the concept of 'yoyoisation' that has tried to capture changes in transitions, by highlighting their repeated back and forth, the loss of continuity, linearity, homogeneity and rites of passage (DuBois-Reymond & Stauber, 2005; Pais, 2007; Walther & Stauber, 2007).

Pais (2007, p. 23, translated by TS), another representative of the yoyoisation concept, understands recent western societies as "labyrinths of lives". While the lost expect "to leave the labyrinth thanks to the cunning of reason (or sense)", its principal components are "want" (expectations and illusions), "can" (material and social conditions; structures) and "should" (values and social standards/constraints) (Pais, 2007, p. 23;208f.). Considering like this the levels of the individual, social representations and norms and structural conditions (Winker & Degele, 2009), Pais (2007, p. 32 translated by TS) highlights that especially the paths of 'disadvantaged' young people are difficult and "full of obstacles", precisely because their "can" is limited. Transitions to adulthood follow, within this labyrinth, yo-yo moves, in the sense of "oscillatory and reversible movements", a "see-saw" affecting all spheres of live (26, translated by TS): precarious and inconsistent labour market positions, reciprocal socialization of the parents, partnerships embracing permanent options of separation, consumption following constantly changing trends, and a glorification of youth and youth cultures by society.

Especially a change in the relation to the future is, furthermore, crucial, as future and an orientation towards it are key characteristics of a transitory phase, so the loss of the outlook to achieve permanent adult status within a reasonable time frame questions the whole transition and may mean the end of 'youth' in the sense of a transitional phase (Leccardi, 2006).

The end of transitions does not imply, however, that young people do not continue to aspire them and relate to their future in ways similar to the ones outlined by Walther and Stauber (2007). As Woodman (2011, p. 125) argues "the contemporary world does not facilitate planning, but this does not mean that young people no longer care about the future or actively try to shape it, but that they shape it in new ways, primarily by keeping options open". They develop, in consequence, mixtures of temporal strategies and orientations, which are shaped

in interaction with others (parents, friends, others), so "people can be both present centred and future oriented concurrently" (Woodman, 2011, p. 126).

For Pais (2007, p. 32), future continues to be an inevitable topic for young adults, but a rising tension between their past experiences and their future expectations forces them to react with defensive strategies. Differentiating between "the ethic of the ant" and "the ethic of the grasshopper", Pais (2007, p. 209, translated by TS), argues that one way consists in the commitment to work and future orientation, while the other focuses on attempts of self-fulfilment in one's profession and to enjoy the present, though most young people show combinations of both ethics in their daily life. The higher the precariousness young people face, the bigger is their tendency to "defuturize" the future, trivializing it, considering it absent in their lives or fantasising ideal futures or an open future, while postponing decisions (Pais, 2007, p. 217, translated by TS). Present orientation and consumption are then seen as a compensation for a lack of a clear transition (Furlong et al., 2011), allowing young people to 'escape', for instance into virtual worlds, though they may also turn into "drifting", especially if the access to consume is additionally difficult to negotiate (Pais, 2007, p. 31). A Swedish study on future approaches in youth has shown that indifference or worries are both related to social problems in the family of origin and economic problems and low educational attainment in adulthood (Alm, 2011). Apart from reconciling again cultural and transitional perspectives, this approach embraces, therefore, social inequality.

While Pais (2007) uses the yo-yo allegory on a rather descriptive level, observing young adults from the outside, Walther and Stauber (2007, p. 37 translated by TS) highlight that the self-concepts of young adults "anywhere between youth and adulthood" blur and that they avoid to describe themselves either way and on occasion to become adult at all. These changes in young people's inner perspectives on their youth are seen as "a result of prolonged, ambiguous and switching trajectories" (DuBois-Reymond & Stauber, 2005, p. 63). Considering the four tasks developed by Hurrelmann (2007), this would then indicate that not only the achievement of the indicators of an adult status are missing nowadays, but that young people do no longer complete the internal changes necessary to achieve them - or if they do so, they do not consider them enough to be adults.

Another, at times opposed at times complementary approach to recent youth transitions has conceptualised these as 'pathways' (Casal, García, Merino, & Quesada, 2006a). Parting from almost complete unpredictability, Casal et al. (2006a, p. 29, translated by TS) conceptualize pathways as "constructed by elections and decisions of the individual, but subject to determinations of the family or the near environment, structural determinations of the wider context and determinations of a cultural and symbolic class". Each present moment includes then a vast number of more or less probable future pathways or trajectories, which depend on the one hand of structural conditions and on the other hand on individual decisions, which are at the same time marked by the past pathway or "singladura"⁶² (Casal et al., 2006a, p. 30). The importance of this past voyage with all the included previous decisions is highlighted as little reversible, leading the authors to claim that "errors are paid and at elevated costs" (Casal et al., 2006a, p. 31). For these authors, trajectories are in this sense a better metaphor as

⁶² This nautical term sometimes translated with "voyage", describes the distance covered with a ship in 24 hours (see dict.leo.org; Casal, et al., 2006).

yoyoisation, as they embrace more adequately the range of decisions and highlight the inequality of opportunities. Though reversibility is not completely impossible in their framework either, Casal et al. (2006a, p. 31, translated by TS) consider that yoyoisation conceals "many realities regarding 'social crystallization'".

Though this may hold true on the level of metaphors, yoyoisation authors do also offer reflections on social inequality. Pais (2007) introduces social structures and inequalities with the "can" centreline into his labyrinthine structures and reflects moreover on racism. Walther and Stauber (2007) argue that young adults from higher classes live optional yo-yo transitions, as they have the resources to return to the normal biography, whereat young adults from less favoured backgrounds are forced into yo-yo movements when their attempts to follow the normal biography fail. Moreover, they claim that young people have to "manage the balancing act to profit from existing options on the one hand, since these are the only available approved resources of social integration, but, on the other hand, to keep options open, to take no decisions that cannot be reversed when better options arise suddenly" (Walther & Stauber, 2007, p. 38, translated by TS). Social inequality is considered in the metaphor of a white-water passage, as young people in the past could pass it on a liner, while current youths are forced to take it individually, some better equipped and prepared than others, and listening to more or less feasible advices shouted by spectators at the shore (Walther & Stauber, 2007, p. 38). Yo-yo movements are then strategic rather than erratic, but require the ability to predict several possible futures at once, keeping the way open to all of them by advancing in several directions in parallel. Predictability depends, however, indirectly on the resources available to advance, so young people with more resources are more able to cope and show strategic movements than those who lack resources to start with - reproducing social inequality. Casal et al. (2006a, p. 39f., translated by TS) embrace this difference in their typology of basic transition modes, constructed along the dimensions velocity and complexity: highlighting for knowledge societies in particular the importance of "trajectories of successive approximation" and "of precarity". The prolonged transitions of university students belong to the first case. This does, however, overlook complex intersections of inequality within the group of university students, as we will see further below (see *Social Inequality*).

Considering the increasing velocity of change, Hurrelmann (2007) spoke of the necessary development of specific skills in self-organization. A lack of such skills may lead to overload and may affect social integration, as well as physical and mental health negatively (Hurrelmann, 2007). Young adults have to handle the unpredictability of school-to-work transitions, the lack of feasibility of their professional prospects, the reversible, prolonged and sometimes mutual dependencies in their family relations, the contradictions between the myth of equality and existing gender ascriptions, just as culture/ethnicity, ensuring at all times the acceptance of their decisions in their peer group (Walther & Stauber, 2007). This leads to a need to reconcile - at least narratively - contradictions between different requirements that follow, furthermore, diverse logics, in order to justify their decisions to themselves and their surroundings (Walther & Stauber, 2007).

While this highlights the increasing incapacity of some young people to navigate their way to adulthood, some authors have focussed on the opposite extreme: young people who adapt and cope quicker with new demands than their educators. Such an overreaching questions the

sense of the educational system as future preparation (Pais, 2007) and schools and even universities turn into waiting rooms for young people, who attend to avoid unemployment and accumulate certificates rather than to learn new knowledge and abilities. Young people are confined in education and formation, supplying some of them with the highest cultural capital in history, but at the same time excluded from real participation in society and held in a position of dependence that is hardly compatible with their expectations and life-plans. Feixa et al. (2009, p. 423) call this, alluding to the movie "Blade Runner" with Harrison Ford, the 'Replicant-syndrome' and my co-authors and I have related such processes lately to the concept of 'moral juvenicide' (Strecker et al., 2018).

It lies not within the scope of this thesis to analyse the changes in the societal perceptions and representations of youth to the extent Aries (1975) analysed in his moment how the concept of childhood changed over the centuries. However, we can appreciate a certain change from the concepts of moratorium and experimentation that allowed – and forced – certain young people to step outside society temporarily (Reinders, 2003), to a time of preparation that, ideally used, serves as an investment into the individual future, allowing a better positioning through better preparation (Casal et al., 2006a). This idea is closely related to social inequality and its reproduction, as the possibilities for preparation depend on diverse social divisions, improving the chances of those who start with more resources into the competition, while still leaving a margin for upward mobility thanks to effort - an idea we will discuss in more detail further below (see *Social Inequality*).

Growing precariousness in youth is moreover an interesting topic for social sciences in general, as Hurrelmann (2007) argues that young people are seismographs of societal change, so it is well conceivable that rather than a temporal fate for young people when they first enter the labour market, precariousness might soon become a general labour paradigm, affecting all generations similarly (Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016). As long as especially young people are affected and given that the individualisation of social inequality makes it more difficult to appreciate discrimination affecting some groups more than others, young people are stigmatised as a homogenous collective that does not do better on the labour market because they do not show the necessary effort - NEET or NiNi in the Spanish context (Strecker et al., 2018). As my co-authors and I have argued elsewhere, the combination of economic precariousness and a negative mediatic image can be read as a moral juvenicide, forcing young people to live a precarious present without a possibility to develop clear plans for the future and under constant bombardment by the adscription of responsibility to their own doing (Strecker et al., 2018).

3.1.3. Youth as a social generation

The "lack of synchrony of transitions" leads Furlong et al. (2011, p. 361) to claim that "the notion of transition has become relatively meaningless as a conceptual tool". Similarly, Wyn et al. (2010, p. 6) consider the notion of 'pathways' as limiting in the study of current youth, due to its implication of a "linear progression". Rather than attempting to 'fix' the blurred "boundaries of childhood, youth and adulthood" in a definition of youth, Furlong et al. (2011, p. 361) refer to the concept of 'social generation' that delimits different generations through their "distinctive generational consciousness", which is in turn shaped by "socio-historical

conditions". This reconciliation of the "'twin tracks' of youth studies" (Furlong et al., 2011, p. 359) - cultural and transition research - can be read as another example of the structure-agency dualism of social sciences, Bourdieu's concepts are said to overcome (Pfeilstetter, 2012) (see *Capitals, field and habitus*). According to Furlong et al. (2011, p. 357), a combined approach is best able to study social inequality as: "Looking at young people's everyday lives and cultures can help researchers trace changes in how patterns of class, gender, race and ethnic inequality reconfigure over time", while a structural perspective is key to identifying and understanding inequalities.

Considering significant changes in the field of education and the youth labour market, Furlong et al. (2011, p. 363) argue that "[i]n late modernity a key skill is the ability to navigate uncertainty and drive, resourcefulness and life-management skills (which are not necessarily class-based resources) assume an increased importance". "The need to coordinate varying 'non-standard' work hours, and also, for many, the timetables set by educational institutions, with the wish and need to regularly spend time with significant others marks out the kind of change that both structurally defines the lives of this generation while concurrently demanding more active life management from them" (Furlong et al., 2011, p. 364). However, the ability to manage one's time depends on social conditions, so some young people experience much more 'control over time' than others, for instance because their economic resources allow them to do without precarious work or to be more selective with their jobs. This leads to the reproduction of social inequality and affects well-being and mental health, as those with less control over time experience more stress (Furlong et al., 2011).

In this sense, it is important to highlight that the social generation approach does not attempt to homogenise generations into one defining characteristic (Ecarius, 2008; Feixa, 2006; Leccardi & Feixa, 2011), but embraces intra-generational differences, following Mannheim's ideas of generational units. A generation was for Mannheim (1928, p. 171, translated by TS) a "destiny-related position of certain individuals within the economic and power structure of the respective society". For Mannheim (1928), the indicator to delimit generations was the shared social condition, but this did not lead to a generational community or identity as differences within generations were embraced with the concept of generational units (Ecarius, 2008; Jureit, n.d.). In this sense, we can understand the "*Generationenlage*" (position of a generation), as the historical context influencing on all members of certain age cohorts in their formative years, leading to similar perspectives. Similar to class structures, individuals are born into their generation and cannot just quit, but while class highlights the differences between people regarding their socio-economic positioning, generation highlights the differences provoked by changing historical contexts. Dimensions of social difference, especially regarding social class, are reflected in the constitution of 'generational units' (Ecarius, 2008; Jureit, n.d.), groupings that "react in different ways due to their different social position" in spite of belonging to the same generation (Furlong et al., 2011, p. 367). Employing terms that will be introduced further below (see *Social Inequality*), we can say that this is in the end an attempt to consider intersections of social divisions within a historical approach to youth generations. This approach was not always taken up in the same way and following von Friedeburg's (1989) analyses of how reform and restoration alternated in the development of the German educational system, we can say that a special focus on heterogeneity, social inequality and marginalized youth appears in times of reform, while the restoration tends to treat young

people like a homogenous collective, a generation that can be described through a main characteristic (Feixa, 2006) and treated following a single prescription.

In times of reform, policy intervention focused on broadening access of the underrepresented groups in education, considering especially after the Sputnik-shock that modern societies had to make better use of their "human capital" if they wanted to progress and remain competitive (Friedeburg, 1989). At the moment of the sputnik-shock, youth meant for some young persons – mainly white men from the middle and upper classes (Andresen, 2005) – a moratorium and experimental room (Reinders, 2003), while it meant for others – especially working-class young men – a dry spell of high labour precariousness before achieving the economic stability necessary to build an adult life. While the first were enrolled in educational institutions and spent their time surrounded by their peers, the second were confined in factories or penal institutions (Willis, 1981) and most young women passed directly from parental to conjugal control without achieving autonomy (Andresen, 2005). In Germany, for example, young woman born into Catholic working-class families in a rural surrounding were identified as the educationally most disadvantaged (Bertram & Hennig, 1995), so especially young women, but also young people from working-class families, became a focus of intervention. However, reform and restoration continued their eternal interplay so social stratification was reproduced and opened doors were soon after closed again (Friedeburg, 1989).

Even if social inequality within a generation is embraced, a main difficulty of generation remains: tracing the line between one generation and another. As this is often only possible from the retrospective, it may explain why Furlong et al. (2011) do not offer a delimitation of the current generation they are describing, arguing as if they were assuming that all currently young people belong to the same generation, no matter when this generation began. In spite of this obvious logic, this refers in the end back to the concept of youth and the difficulty to define up to which point a person may be considered young. Though different authors use different terms and many avoid setting clear delimiting lines, there is a certain consensus on the generation of the Babyboomers (born in the 1940s-1960s), the generation x (born in the 1960s- 1980s) and the generation y (born in the 1980s-early 2000s), also called "Millennial" and Furlong et al. (2011) reproduce these terms. The current generation is called by some "precarious generation" (Bessant et al., 2017), so - maybe in the first time ever since generational branding - the conditions of the disadvantaged determine the tag. However, a vast number of alternative names and delimitations exists especially in the press⁶³, as generation tags receive a high visibility in the press and catch the attention of the population (Jureit, n.d.).

⁶³ See for example: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/fabulous/5505402/millennials-baby-boomers-generation-groups-z-y-x-explained/>; <http://socialmarketing.org/archives/generations-xy-z-and-the-others/>; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03l8npg/episodes/guide>; <http://www.bain.de/press/press-archive/generation-hashtag-setzt-auf-neue-medienformate.aspx> [last access in all cases: 21.07.2018], this article on the 'smartphone generation': <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/experte-peter-vorderer-ueber-die-generation-smartphone-die-kommunikation-hoert-nie-mehr-auf/400010190> [last access: 05.08.2018] or this on the 'generation crisis': <https://www.elmanana.com/asi-millennials-generacion-crisis-millennials-crisis-generacion/3655807> [last access: 20.06.2018].

3.1.4. *The precarious generation in Catalonia*

Despite these general trends and an undisputable use of research conducted in different geographic contexts to understand or, at least, compare local findings, differences within and between European countries exist and have to be considered. In the following, we will therefore briefly focus on Catalonia, where the data construction of this study took place.

Differences appear already regarding the delimitation of the youth phase, as certain indicators are considered as more important in some contexts than in others. Casal et al. (2006a, p. 28 translated by TS) define youth as a social process “of autonomy and complete family emancipation, concluding with the access to an own and independent domicile”. In a later publication, Casal et al. (2011, p. 1150 translated by TS) add to the same definition: “and from the departure from the school system until the insertion in the labour market”. Like this, youth is delimited by professional and family transitions, whereat the focus is laid on defining its ending and family emancipation is defined by a parent independent domicile. The authors justify their focus on residence with the “neolocal structure” of advanced capitalism, which encompasses that “the complete family emancipation has a concretion in the access to a new residence” (Casal et al., 2006a, p. 32 translated by TS). In the case of young people who never change residences and continue to live in the parents' residence, taking it over so to speak, Casal et al. (2006a, p. 32f. translated by TS) speak of “deferred emancipations” or transitions to adulthood *sui generis*, assuming that the transition to adulthood is completed for these young people, when the majority of their age group has completed their transition.

Apart from a clear focus on transitions and disregard of a cultural perspective in this definition, the focus on independent residence comes with a difficulty to compare youth in different countries, as diverse research has shown that young people in Southern Europe tend to live longer with their parents, as underdeveloped welfare regimes force them into prolonged family dependence (Domingo & Bayona, 2009; Moreno, 2017; Serracant, 2012; Walther et al., 2002); in particular in Spain many young people continue to live with their parents during their HE studies and beyond (Jurado Guerrero, 2001; Moreno, 2017). Transitions may then appear artificially longer in Spain, if residential emancipation is used as the main indicator - though this may actually reflect a reality, as the later residential emancipation has been related to later economic autonomy and family creation (Aparicio Fenoll & Crespo Ballesteros, 2017; Moreno, 2017).

Serracant (2012) argues, building on the concept of welfare regimes developed by Esping-Andersen (1990), that in the context of Mediterranean welfare regimes, marked by a weak welfare state, high unemployment and structural precariousness as well as an important black economy, youth transitions were always ‘longer’ than in other European countries. The expansion of the youth phase experienced in other countries can then be read as another element of the ‘Mediterraneanisation’ (Serracant, 2012, p. 174) or ‘Southern Europeanisation’ (Brooks, 2017, p. 7) of European youth transitions, terms that refer to decreasing state support and, hence, a prolonged family dependence. The longer tradition of long youth transitions may lead in Catalonia to a higher acceptance of prolonged family dependence which enables young Catalans to await their independence (Serracant, 2012), instead of diversifying and delinearising their transitions for the sake of temporal autonomy. Catalan youth transitions

should then be marked by extension, so Hurrelmann's (2007) development tasks might continue to be especially useful in this context.

From a southern theory perspective (Connell, 2007), we can furthermore criticise that this residential approach to a definition of youth focuses on transitions in the metropolis, marginalising the periphery, as especially young people in rural zones are more likely to never leave their parents' residence or have to move out much earlier than their urban peers, if they wish to attend post-secondary education, so their residential behaviour is bound to be highly different. Similarly, young people who follow the advice to add international experiences to their CV (see *Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation*), may move out and back to their parents repeatedly, making it additionally difficult to determine the end of youth through this indicator.

The Spanish graduate labour market is especially competitive, as HE participation is much higher than in the EU-mean (Eurostat, 2016) and unemployment, labour precariousness, overeducation and underemployment (Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016) are the rule. Women continue to be in a disadvantaged position on the Spanish labour market and especially those from lower social classes face important difficulties in the wake of the crisis, whereat the "occupational structure [...] offers unequal opportunities to different collectives of women" (Sánchez Mira, 2016, p. 502). Overeducation is said to occur "when they [graduates] hold jobs that (in their view) do not require those key competencies that must be acquired in HE" (Barone & Ortiz, 2011, p. 331). University fees increased dramatically in the last years (Sacristán & França, 2013) (see *Education and degree course organisation*), graduate wages are, however, low (Koskinen, 2007). Public discourse often represents young Spaniards as passive 'NiNis' – the Spanish equivalent to NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) (Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016; Strecker et al., 2018) – or as educated young people 'flooding' the European labour market in search of better opportunities (Rubio & Strecker, 2016). Both images have been refuted by the cited authors, but are highly relevant for understanding the context in which young Catalans move. In summary, investing in HE is very risky in Spain as the costs are increasing while the expectable outcomes decrease, but as prolonged family dependence is more acceptable than in other contexts, young people may be more able and willing to keep pursuing HE under the changed conditions. The individualisation discourse on youth unemployment and precariousness is especially pervert in the Spanish context in which the structural effects of unemployment are particularly obvious (Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017).

Public policies affecting young people have focused on a flexibilisation of the labour market and in particular the EU Youth Guarantee has been used to implement measures to improve the 'employability' of young NiNis, in particular through education (Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016). In this, public policies contribute to "the deregulation of employment and its deconstruction as a collective issue", "changing the accepted and acceptable standards of what is considered a decent job", contributing, hence, to precarization (Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017, p. 800). Pechtelidis (2018, p. 319) argues, drawing on Foucault that: "From this point of view, the Youth Guarantee is bio-power technology of governance that aims directly at the precarious young people's body and mind. By this process, young individuals are invited to change through practices of 'improvement' in the name of individual success, happiness and well-

being. This specific biopower technology of governmentality aims to make young social actors capable of monitoring and controlling their own behavior according to the specific requirements of the global market.” That policies aim to adapt young people to the labour market (Lahusen, Schulz, & Graziano, 2013), rather than changing the labour market itself by creating quality employment, determines furthermore the limited use of such policies: As long as there are less vacancies than job seekers, some of these job seekers will remain unemployed, no matter how well-educated, mobile and prepared they are (Bessant & Watts, 2014). The explanation why policies are still designed and implemented in the described ways may lie in Furlong's (2013, p. 95) observation that: “Policies that involve enhanced opportunities for education and training are popular with many governments because they reduce the pool of people active in the labour market and can lower politically sensitive headline unemployment rates without the need to create jobs”. Úbeda and Sánchez (2018) argue that the idea of 'employability' leads to incoherent formation programmes that are little related to the occupational practice, favouring furthermore the development of a 'formation industry'. In this sense, we can assume an interplay of political and market interests that favour the implementation of policies that attempt to change the young unemployed, rather than creating quality employment. As underemployment, temporal unemployment and labour precariousness (Bessant & Watts, 2014; Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016; Lahusen et al., 2013; MacDonald, 2011; Strecker et al., 2018) become the rule for labour market entrants, leading to the consideration of this characteristic as crucial for describing the current generation (Bessant et al., 2017), social inequality is directly reproduced in the ways some young people are more or less affected by precariousness than others - and employment policies contribute to this rather than overcoming the negative dynamics (Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017).

3.2. Social Inequality

In this section, an introduction into main theoretical concepts informing this study and an overlook over previous research in this field is given. In concrete, I part from Bourdieu's theories on social reproduction, comment on further social divisions and their intersections and delve into approaches combining Bourdieu's theories with intersectionality.

"I don't have a financial cushion. Or a famous daddy to give me a career. (...) You're so fucking entitled. Both of you.' I spread my arms wide, encompassing Alex. 'Do you know what? Do you have any idea, any sense of-' I break off and give a little odd-sounding laugh. 'Of course you don't. OK. Well, I'm leaving now. So. Enjoy your perfect lives'".
Sophie Kinsella, *My not so perfect life* (2017) p.161f.

Social inequality, understood as the unequal distribution of resources and hence power and life-chances between different social groups (Koller, 2008), is a longstanding topic in social research. From a historical perspective, we can simplify processes by relating the undesirable character of social inequality to the rise of meritocracy. Von Friedeburg (1989) argues that the substitution of the system of three estates through a rising bourgeoisie required a new justification of social positionings, as these were no longer granted by God and compensated in the life after death in paradise. Such a justification was found in meritocracy, especially in educational credentials. The population considers it "just" that people earn more or less or receive more attention and prestige according to their educational titles and that success in education is mediated by personal characteristics like effort or intelligence (Bessant, Emslie, & Watts, 2011). In other words, in a meritocratic society, social positioning because of 'the accident of birth' (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008, p. 289) is not acceptable, but differences justified through educational attainment are considered 'fair' (Bessant, Emslie, & Watts, 2011; Brennan & Naidoo, 2008), as long as the access to these credentials is mediated by intelligence and effort and not dimensions of difference as social class, gender, ethnicity etc. Differences in the access or success in education for certain social groups - social inequalities - are therefore perceived as "unfair" (Bessant et al., 2011), so an "illusion of equal opportunities" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007 [1964]) is necessary to maintain the current functioning of the social reproduction system. A belief in equal opportunities and upward mobility through education fosters the motivation to hang on and work hard to achieve it; such hopes and the belief that efforts will be repaid in the long run are crucial to avoid upheavals against the 'unfair' system and maintain it in consequence further (Friedeburg, 1989).

Education is then a main field of future social positioning and in particular Universities are interesting contexts to study social reproduction, ever since the 'massification' of Higher Education (HE) (Trow, 1999) (see *Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation*). Social inequality in the access and success in HE persists, despite discourses on an opening-up and broadened access to HE, all over the world (Bogino, 2016; Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Martín Criado & Gómez Bueno, 2017; O'Shea, 2016; Torrents, 2017) and in some contexts even a decrease of social upward mobility has been observed (Collins, Collins, & Butt, 2015; Reay, 2013). In Spain, the already underrepresented profile of students from lower social classes of origin, seems to have lost further weight among the student population in the wake of the economic crisis (Torrents, 2017), so a decrease in social mobility is expectable for the current young generation. As Bourdieu argues, families reproduce their social positioning by "bequeathing" their capitals directly or indirectly to their children (see *Capitals, field and habitus*). In this way, HE masks 'unfair' social inequality as 'fair' inequality based on educational attainment levels (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). HE is then an ideal field to study the reproduction of social inequality and to tackle its persistence. Before entering into more detail

into the field of HE (see *Higher Education*), we will take a closer look at theories and research on social inequality.

3.2.1. Capitals, field and habitus

Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) initiated with their book published in French in the 1960s an important line of research on social class differences in University and denounced the illusion of equality, showing that social positioning is not a sole matter of intelligence and effort, but inherited from one generation to the next. They argued that working-class students were not only much less likely to achieve high educational attainment, but furthermore bound to feel out of place and to experience failure if they tried to achieve it. In order to theorise the complex processes at work in this reproduction of a social system, Bourdieu developed key concepts like habitus, field and different capitals, namely economic, cultural and social capital.

Economic capital includes all monetary or directly into money transferable resources of a person, including property rights (Koller, 2008) and is 'readily convertible' (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 194). Social capital means profitable social contacts, colloquially known as connections, but, as Edgerton and Roberts (2014) highlight, also social obligations, probably appreciating like this that social capital requires a special maintenance work and that favours need to be returned.

Cultural capital is understood similarly to the term "human capital", though it goes beyond financial investments into persons, including non-monetary resources, e.g. time (Koller, 2008, p. 141). Cultural capital is key to social reproduction due to its direct relation to education and hence the justification of a superior access to power and economic capital. Three forms of cultural capital are differentiated: incorporated/embodied, objectified and institutionalized. The incorporated cultural capital refers to capacities and knowledge, but also the ways the social positioning inscribes into bodies and becomes a part of the person itself through acquired characteristics, e.g. the way to talk, to dress, to move. In this definition, it is highly related to habitus and lifestyle and some scholars interpret incorporated cultural capital as synonymous to habitus (e.g. O'Shea, 2016, p. 63). Reay (2004, p. 435) identifies difficulties to delimit cultural capital from other Bourdieusian⁶⁴ concepts, arguing herself that "habitus lies beneath cultural capital generating its myriad manifestations". Edgerton and Roberts (2014, p. 207) ask if embodied cultural capital and habitus are the same, answering that "the accumulation of embodied cultural capital and the formation of habitus are in actuality two sides of the same socialization process". Hereby they show that dispositions are both inherent to habitus and embodied cultural capital, but the latter highlights the exchange value of these dispositions in a concrete field, where they are turned into an advantage, while habitus embraces any disposition independently of its exchange value in concrete fields. In this sense, both concepts are essentially the same, though embodied cultural capital can be read as a "price signal" of the dispositions and as both concepts focus on different aspects of the process

⁶⁴ In this thesis, I opt to follow Reay (2011, p. 3) in her use of the term "Bourdiesian" (see also Archer et al., 2014; Bathmaker, 2015; Bathmaker et al., 2013; Wacquant, 2013), though some scholars employ the term "Bourdieuian" (e.g. Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 194; O'Shea, 2016, p. 63) instead.

behind dispositions, they complement each other in useful ways (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 209).

The objectified cultural capital refers to cultural objects, e.g. books, artworks, musical instruments, etc. and other exposure to culture, e.g. through visits to the museum or theatre. Though these objects are as easily transferrable as economic capital, their use or symbolic acquisition depends on the incorporated cultural capital (Koller, 2008, p. 144). Incorporated cultural capital is not directly transferable as it requires the process of inscribing the capital into the body. Nevertheless, dedicating more effort, time and money to education and formation facilitates the acquisition of incorporated capital, so economic capital may be transformed into incorporated cultural capital and as this in turn allows for a social positioning with superior access to economic capital, families may transmit their social positioning through capital acquisition from one generation to the next (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007).

The institutionalized cultural capital consists basically of educational titles, which certify, in the end, the individual's possession of incorporated cultural capital (Koller, 2008). Especially rare educational titles may acquire a signalling function on the labour market, indicating that the candidate possesses cultural capital that is worth hiring, explaining why HE titles 'guaranteed' in the past an almost direct access to certain social positions that has been lost with the massification of HE (Jacob, Klein, & Iannelli, 2015). However, the signalling function of HE titles is, in the end, the flip side of the described justification of social positioning through educational attainment and is, hence, logically lost at the moment when individuals achieve these titles without accessing the upper social positionings. As power and prestige are then no longer explainable with HE titles, further explanations are necessary, e.g. postgraduate studies (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999; Wakeling & Laurison, 2017), 'soft skills' (Groppe, 2006), language skills, international experiences or work experience (Bathmaker, Ingram, & Waller, 2013; Puntaney, 2012; Wiers-Jenssen, 2011) or having studied in especially 'good' institutions (Koskinen, 2007; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005). According to Avram and Cantó (2017), social origin is more determining for the labour market entrance, risk of precariousness and salaries than educational achievements, indicating that educational titles were never the 'cause' of a better social positioning, but a correlate of it, precisely because these titles were used to 'justify' superior positions. In this sense, the loss of signalling function of HE titles may hint at a change in the justification mechanism of social positioning described by von Friedeburg (1989). This may be read as an example of how the mechanisms of reproduction adapt to changing times, ensuring that social inequality persists even in times of broadened access to HE.

Some scholars have expanded on Bourdieu's concepts by coining further capitals - e.g. 'physiognomic capital' (Mecheril & Rigelsky, 2007, p. 79), 'resistant', 'aspirational', 'familial', 'linguistic' and 'navigational' capital (Yosso, 2005). Though Reay (2000) developed 'emotional capital' (see also O'Brien, 2008), she came to consider it at a later point of her career unnecessary to speak of a different capital (Reay, 2015). In this work, Bourdieu's original concepts only are employed to build an approach to determine social class positionings (see *Measuring Social Class*), as many of the 'new' capitals are contested topics and have not been completely integrated into his theory of how capitals relate to the social positioning and

habitus of a person⁶⁵. While Yosso (2005), for example, considers 'aspirational capital', Edgerton and Roberts (2014) argue that ambitions form part of the habitus rather than of capitals and diverse scholars have criticised other researchers for not applying Bourdieu's concepts adequately (Bathmaker, 2015; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Reay, 2004; Webb et al., 2017).

For Bourdieu, the amount of cultural and economic capital possessed by a person, determine the position in the social space - the "overarching field of power" (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 195), while social capital increases as a side-effect of the social positioning, as a network with more or less influential integrants is developed (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Though every position is individual, Bourdieusian analyses of societies and fields allow the delimitation of different social classes or *milieus*, in the sense of clusters of persons with similar positionings who display similar lifestyles and tastes and develop similar practices (see for example the study of the French HE field: Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; or this of student *milieus* in Germany: Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006). These group similarities are embraced in the concept of habitus. Reay (2004) highlights that habitus is a complex concept that appears in different shapes in Bourdieu's own works and criticises that many researchers reproduce simplified versions of his concepts rather than using them as research tools. In her reading, habitus is a system of dispositions embodied within the person, so persons with a similar habitus are likely to behave and react similarly, though there is still space for vagueness, indeterminacy and agency. Habitus dispositions are "the products of opportunities and constraints framing the individual's earlier life experiences" (Reay, 2004, p. 433) and these are in turn determined by the field and the position within it. As Edgerton and Roberts (2014, p. 199) put it "structures produce dispositions, which produce practices, which reproduce structures", but at the same time "the dispositions of habitus are enduring but not unchanging" - leaving room for agency and social change.

The concept of field focuses on the objective conditions within which the - subjective - habitus is formed, but at the same time, field is as well dynamic and receives its meaning, sense and value through the persons that move in it, so it also depends on their habitus and contributes to its own reproduction by influencing the habitus formation of the next generation (Reay, 2004). "[F]ield refers to the formal and informal norms governing a particular social sphere of activity (e.g. family, public school, higher education, art, politics, and economics)" (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 195); in consequence, every field shows its own "logic of practice" and different agents struggle - mobilising their capitals - to control the field. In spite of the importance of early childhood for habitus formation, habituses change through encounters with the outside world, especially the educational system, and develop, achieving different layers over the years (Reay, 2004). "[H]abitus is not immutable, but open to evolving incremental change in the face of new experience, and (...) operates not only at an unconscious, pre-reflective level but also at a conscious, deliberative level" (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 201). Especially when a habitus enters into a different field disjunctures appear and can favour change and transformation. In this sense, habitus offers a mouldable scope for practices and behaviours while others are excluded as unthinkable, but agency is

⁶⁵ This does not mean, however, that I do not occasionally quote authors who developed such further concepts, and mention them, when they show a relation to my own findings.

possible within this scope (Reay, 2004) and even beyond as habitus may be transformed over time and reflexivity may allow individuals to act differently than their habitus suggests (Laughland-Booÿ, Mayall, & Skrbiš, 2015; Woodman, 2011), though reflexivity can also be read as a practice that reproduces given social structures (Bottero, 2010) and may be more common in certain social groups whose habitus may then be called a 'reflexive habitus' (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 200). As we will see further below, these considerations have important impacts for the understanding of choices (see *Study choice*) and social change (see *The Reproduction of Social Inequality in the University Transition*). Bourdieu (1984, p. 101) summarised these complex interplays in the equation: "(Habitus x Capital) + Field = Practice". However, several authors only refer to cultural capital when considering this equation (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Reay, 2004), possibly because cultural capital has to be acquired by every new generation who at the same time has to be taught to value the upper-class manifestations of cultural capital as these would otherwise lose their significance. Some authors consider this ascribed value as a part of cultural capital, arguing that "cultural capital entails appreciation of 'highbrow' cultural tastes" (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 195)⁶⁶, though it is not clear why a value system is here considered a capital and not a characteristic of the field, in the sense of a 'logic of practice'.

A shared value system that enforces the power of the upper class by ascribing special value to their manifestations of cultural capital and lifestyle is therefore key to reproduce an unequal society. As the habitus is formed especially through family socialization and the educational system, these institutions play a special role in the transmission of values. While habitus, capitals, fields and, in consequence, practices differ according to the social positioning, especially the educational system ensures that the whole population values the manifestations of cultural capital typical for the upper classes, even though or precisely because they do not form part of it. While the middle classes tend to focus on - what they perceive as - upper-class manifestations of cultural capital, trying to copy them without ever developing the natural grace of the upper classes when showing these manifestations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007), more recent research has argued that upper classes have turned 'culturally omnivorous', in the sense of a "possession of a diverse cultural repertoire", not limited to 'highbrow culture' and it is this diversity and a sense which kind of culture to use when that turns into an advantage other social classes are missing (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 198).

Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) describe an orientation towards the upper-class culture within the educational system, in the sense that especially manifestations of cultural capital - knowledge, skills and attitudes - typical for upper-class families are valued and knowledge that is naturally transmitted in such families forms part of the school curricula. Though some authors have highlighted that not all knowledge transmitted in school is arbitrary but may be considered "fundamental knowledge forms" (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 205), the difficulty

⁶⁶ Edgerton and Roberts (2014, p. 195) actually report criticism on this conception of cultural capital, but as they say that "cultural capital entails more than being conversant with highbrow cultural preferences", they seem to substitute the general appreciation of certain capital manifestations displayed in the above cited quote with concrete familiarity with these manifestations, an element that I would also consider part of the embodied cultural capital, but that is not required to appreciate such manifestations. In other words, it is not necessary to form part of the upper class to recognise its culture as superior.

lies not merely in the concrete knowledge and skills transmitted but also in *how* these are transmitted. Though some scholars assume that the lower social classes do not stimulate their children adequately to foster brain development, so the lower-class habitus manifests in 'deficient' neuronal connections that are formed before the child enters school, making it impossible for schools to compensate these deficiencies completely (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014), others show that intelligence is similarly distributed among all social classes, though a social class difference exists regarding academic performance (Choi, 2009; Collins et al., 2015).

Diverse research has shown that a hidden curriculum disadvantages subordinated groups - girls, ethnic minorities etc. - as their different backgrounds are marginalised or devalued (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006) and research on LGBTBI shows that heteronormativity dominates school cultures (Platero Méndez, 2010), indicating that the same may be true for any social division. This may mean that any child would achieve better academic results if it was taught the contents in a way that relates to its everyday life outside school and acknowledged, so the key criticism in Bourdieu's observation of the upper-class orientation of the educational system is that it fosters experiences of misfit and difference rather than connection and belonging for those who do not belong to the dominant group, sacrificing optimal learning outcomes. This means that the educational system does not merely work to transmit knowledge and skills to new generations, but certifies the possession of such knowledge and skills in certain social groups, while teaching others to value them rather than questioning the dominant culture's superiority. Moreover, the school culture, e.g. the language code used, tacit rules for interaction and work organisation etc., mimics upper-class culture in the sense of habitus and incorporated cultural capital and is therefore familiar to higher class students, allowing them to feel like a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007). This process achieves its peak in university education, especially in elite universities or faculties (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009b). However, lower class students are at double disadvantage as they do not only have to put up with much more new information than their upper-class peers and adapt to a surrounding that follows different rules than their *milieus* of origin, but face furthermore a devaluation of their successful acculturation - if they achieve it - as their results are ascribed to effort and indirectly devalued as a pure repetition without reflection, whereat higher class students show a (school) critical attitude (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007, p. 37). Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) coin the term 'ideology of talent' to describe this devaluation of effort and acknowledgement of natural and effortless success. In the end, this ideology is another example of a transmitted value as all pupils, teachers and parents of a school tend to look down on "swots" and admire the "talented", independently of their own academic performance. This is in line with Bottero's (2010, p. 15) emphasis on intersubjectivity as any "encounter between habitus and field is also an encounter between agents"; this approach highlights that different actors negotiate, coordinate, approve and disapprove their practices mutually, turning social reproduction into a collective activity under constant construction. 'Practice' is then defined as "the negotiated outcome of intersubjective coordination" (Bottero, 2010, p. 20), whereat the concrete context leads to patterns in this negotiation.

Willis (1981) began a line of research on the forms of resistance young people develop in the face of this direct and indirect devaluation of their practices, but encountered that their resistance contributes, in the end, to the reproduction of the system, as the young rebels end up in the same working-class jobs their parents had and remain excluded from the dominant

culture. Yosso (2005) has considered 'resistance' as a type of cultural capital, arguing that subordinated individuals develop special skills and knowledge to resist their subordination and O'Shea (2016) has expanded this concept, originally developed regarding racist subordination, to other social divisions, mainly social class and gender. Especially in O'Shea's (2016) research resistance is turned into an asset as individuals seem to gain a special motivation out of the idea to show others that they were wrong about them. Bogino (2016, p. 254) mentions 'resistance' as a strategy to cope with a low return of academic credentials on the Spanish labour markets and relates it to a 'habitus of effort'. However, she seems to understand 'resistance' in a sense of pure perseverance, enduring "chaotic" professional trajectories, in contrast to strategies of "resituation" and "reconversion", displayed by graduates from more privileged backgrounds, who are ready to move abroad or to strategically improve their 'employability', respectively, to achieve a better labour-market positioning with the time (Bogino, 2016, pp. 254, 251, translated by TS). In this sense, we can observe that the concept of resistance may still be used to reproduce deficit perspectives, rather than to represent an asset. Reay (2013) conceptualises resistance in her autobiographical analysis as a permanent struggle that haunts her and even causes health issues.

Both O'Shea and Reay form, furthermore, part of a line of research that focuses on the few successful individuals that achieve social upward mobility. These studies do often highlight how the continuous habitus misfit provokes ill-being, as individuals' acculturation and habitus transformation lead to their exclusion from their *milieu* of origin, while they never come to completely fit in in their new surroundings either (Friedman, 2014; Grundmann, Bittlingmayer, Dravenau, & Groh-Samberg, 2008; Lehmann, 2014; Reay, 2013). However, Reay (2009b) has relativized this negative image in another publication, showing that for some it may be easier after having left their *milieu* of origin, as they are likely to have been the victims of bullying and especially family bonds may be able to last in spite of habitus transformation, turning into a positive feature in the confrontation of habitus misfit in the new surroundings. The perspective on difference as an asset is still relatively seldom in research on social inequality (consider these exceptions: O'Shea, 2016; Welton & Martinez, 2014), but shows a certain analogy with the overcoming of the deficit perspective on young people in youth research (Andresen, 2005) (see *Youth Research and Transitions*) and on immigrants in intercultural pedagogy (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006). As O'Shea (2016) argues "students can be either framed as deficit or replete in capitals depending on how their particular background and capabilities are perceived", indicating that such perceptions are anything but objective. In my reading, the deficit perspective is in many ways a mirror of the researchers' limited perceptions of the subjects they study, their inability to see the advantages of the obvious difference to their own backgrounds so - unsurprisingly - the researchers denouncing and attempting to overcome this deficit perspective are often insiders in the sense of having something in common with the researched, be it a similar class background, a migration background, a LGBTBI sexual orientation etc. (see *Insider / Outsider Status @ Unconditional Love*). This shows, in the end, how researchers' thinking is, in spite of all reflexivity, just as limited by their habitus as the thinking of the researched. In this sense, the diversification of researcher profiles may lead to an

'appreciatory turn' in social research, as deficit perspectives are overcome and difference⁶⁷ is recognised as a resource and especially research teams mixing researchers from different backgrounds may be able to achieve new insights by combining their different horizons of thought.

3.2.2. Social divisions

After the rise of meritocracy and a first concern with social inequality in education regarding different social classes, further social dimensions of difference gained successively importance over the years: Gender in the wake of the Sputnik-Shock that encouraged Western societies to make the best possible use of their human capital (Bertram & Hennig, 1995); and ethnicity or 'race' with the rise of postcolonial research in the ex-colonies (Riegel & Geisen, 2009; Winker & Degele, 2009) and with new migration movements after world war II in Europe that led to an increasing incorporation of children and young people from different backgrounds in the educational system (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006; Gomolla & Radtke, 2007).

Especially in the social division 'race' contextual influences on research become evident, as 'race' appeared in the US where social inequalities between white and non-white residents were observed, acknowledging that their physiognomic difference regarding skin colour, body shapes etc. marked a difference in their lives even if they were born in the same country. In many European countries, such physiognomic difference is less pronounced in the population and most inhabitants would be considered - by a US analyst - as "Caucasian", though important social inequalities exist regarding the country/culture of origin as not all cultures are valued similarly in all contexts (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006). The term 'race' did furthermore challenge German scholars, considering the history of the holocaust (Winker & Degele, 2009, p. 10, footnote 2), so both reasons favoured that other social divisions - namely 'ethnicity', 'migration', 'culture' or 'nationality' were more popular in these contexts than 'race' (consider for instance the examples of social divisions affecting intercultural pedagogy mentioned by Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006). However, the struggle to name social divisions appropriately continues as each term comes with its own inherent difficulties of delimitation or problematic connotations (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006) and displays how researchers' own thinking is limited by their preconceptions on social inequality. 'Citizenship' is hereby an especially arbitrary term, as it may change and certain legislation may facilitate access to a double citizenship, so for instance in Spain many persons who were born in Latin America and moved later in life to Spain were never considered as different in this dimension, as they already possessed the Spanish citizenship before moving there, while other parts of the Spanish population do not possess this citizenship, even if they were born and lived their whole life in Spain (Strecker & Fondevilla, 2017). The label 'migrant', on the other side, has been criticised for turning a punctual experience into a permanent determiner, reflecting the importance ascribed to the artificial boundaries of nation states and assumed homogeneity within these boundaries, rather than the realities of persons with a migration history (Gogolin & Krüger-

⁶⁷ Here I am using the term "difference" and not "diversity", to avoid similarities to pedagogical approaches 'valuing diversity' that have been shown to simply employ an euphemism to describe difference, rather than overcoming implicit hierarchies of superiority and inferiority and tackling social inequality in the educational system (de la Vega, 2014).

Potratz, 2006). Speaking of a 'migration history' or 'migration background' may sound less determinant, but continues arbitrary as second- and third-generation 'migrants' may still be influenced by the origins of their parents or grandparents, though they were born in the country of residence, and national boundaries continue to be the point of reference. Repeated migrations or transnational living arrangements may differ broadly from other cases and especially the age at the moment of the migration experience may be crucial. Intersections with other social divisions, e.g. social class and gender, but also locality, in the sense of rural and urban environments, may intervene. Furthermore, factors like the language proficiency in one or several official languages of the receiving country or in other generally renowned languages, the reasons of the migration and the associated legal statuses, etc. may lead to important differences between cases, as it is by no means the same to be a refugee or the child of a diplomatic agent. The change in terminology may hereby be read as a reflection of social change and public discourse as 'mobility' is becoming a buzzword in a 'globalised' world, though social inequality persists as well in this dimension and migration is by no means a new phenomena, having accompanied the history of humanity over centuries (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006).

Regarding social class, a main problem resides in the delimitation of different classes or *milieus*. As the Bourdieusian approach to the study of *milieus* is rather complex and moreover bound to expire quickly in times of rapid social change (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007), it is not systematically applied to different contexts and I could not encounter any such description of the Spanish class system, for instance. Researchers are then forced to find their own ways to study class differences, without a clear overview or map to lean on. Moreover, even speaking of social classes is on occasion difficult, as terms like "upper" and "lower" classes imply a connotation of superiority/inferiority and a hierarchical structure many researchers do not want to reproduce. The avoidance of such terms has led to a rather wide range of different terminologies that attempt to circumscribe social class in one way or another. Some researchers speak of 'working-class' (e.g. Stahl & Habib, 2017) to avoid the term lower, though the hierarchy remains similarly implicit if the terms 'middle' and 'upper' are maintained. In some research, a binary between 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged' or 'privileged' and 'underprivileged' is constructed, a terminology Jünger (2008) has disassembled to show that it makes rather little sense to use terms that imply a certain baseline of privilege, if the core idea of privilege is that there is no baseline to it, so these terms are in the end euphemisms that attempt to say in a politically correct way that lower social classes are considered. Others turn the measured variable into the determiner, speaking of 'low-income' or 'lower-income' (Jack, 2016; McKay & Devlin, 2016), though this measure of the current socio-economic status (SES) is not equivalent to social class in the sense of a generation-overarching "sociocultural background" (Rubin et al., 2014, p. 196) (see *Measuring Social Class*). Especially in the case of HE, terms like 'non-traditional' (Brändle & Lengfeld, 2017; Donnelly & Evans, 2016), 'first-in-family' (O'Shea, 2016; Southgate, Douglas, Scevak, Macqueen, & Rubin, 2014) or 'first-in-generation' (O'Shea, 2016) are used, though these imply all different meanings - and each of these terms is defined in varying ways by different researchers (O'Shea, 2016) - and refer to different sections of the student population, though a certain overlap is given: As a main aspect of the social inequality in HE is that certain social groups are underrepresented, first-in-family and non-traditional students are likely to belong to such groups, though non-class related

constellations are conceivable, especially regarding other social divisions, e.g. migration background or ethnicity, but also age and different access routes (e.g. access through vocational trainings, see: Torrents, 2017 who, moreover, uses the term “fragile” for these students, p.369). Regarding the first-in-family students, the definition of family is crucial, as a focus on the nuclear family only, is in many ways equivalent to the dilemma of focussing the current socio-economic status, missing out on the overarching sociocultural background social class refers to. Some first-in-family students may belong to a higher social class with many HE graduates among their relatives but happen to have parents who 'broke' with the family tradition to access HE, e.g. because of health issues or by choosing an alternative path that does not require HE, for example in the field of arts etc. Other students, on the contrary, may be 'second'-in-family in the sense of following an older sibling or even parent into HE, but still come from a lower class background, especially if the parent disappeared early on from their lives or did not achieve to translate the achieved educational attainment into a better socio-economic position. All these profiles do furthermore include many mature-aged students (e.g. Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009a), who are 'non-traditional' precisely because of their late access to HE and experience HE quite differently (Rubin & Wright, 2017) than the young college freshmen who have not yet established their own position in the social field. In a way, all these different terms treat different sections of the student population that intersect more or less broadly and it is in this intersection, where we can usually find students from lower social classes, as they are often first-in-family and non-traditional. Regarding students from the lower classes who achieve, against all odds, high educational attainment, some researchers employ the term 'educational climber' (e.g. Brändle & Lengfeld, 2017), though there is again a connotation of lower and upper implicit, as climbing is usually a vertical activity. 'Social mobility' (Bessant & Watts, 2014; Budgeon, 2014; Reay, 2012; Thiele, Singleton, Pope, & Stanistreet, 2016) is opener in this sense, but as authors often differentiate between 'downward' and 'upward' mobility (Bathmaker et al., 2016; Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Friedman, 2014; Reay, 2013; Wacquant, 2013), the hierarchical structure of the class system remains implicit.

Social movements played an important role in visibilising social divisions that had been previously marginalised, namely gender and race and, somewhat later, sexual orientation through the LGBTI movement. Currently, it almost seems that these "new"⁶⁸ dimensions of social inequality have substituted the "old", as most people are little aware of their social class positioning (Rubin & Wright, 2017) or consider gender inequality a matter of the past (Furlong et al., 2011; Kelan, 2014). Research and statistics show, however, that social inequalities do not only persist as well regarding social class (Choi, 2009; Jünger, 2008; Rahona Lopez, 2009; Torrents, 2017) and gender (Connell, 2009; Furlong et al., 2011; Kelan, 2014; Rentería, Scandurra, Souto, & Patxot, 2017), but do furthermore intersect with each other and with other dimensions of social difference, requiring researchers to find a way to study these intersections (Winker & Degele, 2009).

Connell defines in her introduction to gender the key concepts 'gender', 'reproductive arena' and 'gender order'. While gender is often defined as the "cultural difference of women from

⁶⁸ I write "new" and "old" with quotation marks as I wish to highlight that these may be rather "new" to public discourse and research agendas but did of course exist already in the past.

men, based on the biological division between male and female", Connell (2009, p. 9) offers a more complex definition, arguing that gender is a social structure, in the sense of an "enduring or widespread pattern among social relations" (10), and that rather than on difference between men and women, the focus has to be laid on relations. 'Gender order' refers to the overall patterns in gender arrangements of contemporary societies, for instance a socialisation of boys and men into violence and aggressiveness, while girls and women are pushed into the sphere of caring and professions that focus on treating the consequences of male violence (Connell, 2009, p. 4). The relation to bodies is thereby complex as social arrangements not merely 'express' biological difference, but may deny, exaggerate, mythologize or complicate them. Connell (2009, p. 11) calls the sphere "in which bodies are brought into social processes, in which our social conduct does something with reproductive difference" 'reproductive arena' and, consequently, defines 'gender' as "the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes". This is especially crucial when reproductive difference is used to limit the life chances, e.g. by constructing a hierarchy between men and women or by highly restrictive images of masculinity and femininity. This multi-dimensional definition highlights the constructedness of gender in a cultural context and, hence, allows us to recognise that in spite of the long history of gender difference, it requires constant reproduction and may be changed or - as Connell argues - even overcome; so gender may theoretically stop to be a social division at some point, in the sense of ceasing to determine the life chances of individuals.

In spite of this much more optimistic approach than Bourdieu's thoughts on the reproduction of class-specific inequalities, we can also observe similarities in how Connell describes the reproduction of gender inequality to Bourdieu's concepts. According to Connell (2009), gender is not a fixed state but a "becoming" under continuous construction and the gender order is clue to reproduce what is understood as "manly" or "womanly". The public "displays of exemplary masculinities and femininities" (Connell, 2009, p. 5), for example in the mass media, ensure that the population knows which behaviour is appropriate for which gender. This difference is incorporated in the construction of gender identities, understood as the "sense of belonging to a gender category" (Connell, 2009, p. 6), reproducing like this gender difference. Nevertheless, gender is not merely an imposed category, but also a self-construction, a "choice" in the sense that we claim our place in the gender order through our everyday behaviour. In this sense, the construction and reproduction of gender difference is strongly analogue to the reproduction of values we have described above and can therefore be seen as a 'logic of a field' (see *Capitals, field and habitus*), ensuring that different members of the population know and reproduce - on occasion through resistance - this logic, even if it disadvantages them.

With Bottero (2010, p. 6) we can theorise the relation between habitus and identity, highlighting that "[s]ocial position, via habitus, constrains aspirations and tastes and so remains an important element shaping social 'identity', albeit an 'identity' embedded in (differentiated) practice". Which aspects of identity are more or less important depends on the situation, as for example religion may be relevant for the integration within a community and for leisure activities, but not play a role at all regarding an issue in the work environment, for which an identification with other professionals in the same field may be more helpful

(Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006, p. 131). Just as habitus, identity is in this reading multi-faceted, influenced by structures but offering a scope for agency and may change over the years. Webb et al. (2017, p. 15) highlight, referring to Stuart Hall (1996), that identities and positionalities are processes of 'becoming' rather than 'being', 'routes' as opposed to 'roots', though certain aspects of identity are less likely to change and their display is situational. In this sense, Bourdieu's concepts allow the overcoming of a dualism between agency and structures as well in the conceptualisation of identity. Some authors have criticised Bourdieu's writing on habitus as overly deterministic, though a less deterministic employment of the concept is in line with its foundations and may allow us to embrace a broader potential for social change (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014).

Psychological research has shown that most people combine masculine and feminine characteristics. However, in a male-dominated world, female traits are devalued (Bourdieu, 2000) and a 'gender binary' is constructed to legitimate the hierarchical order of masculinities and femininities (Budgeon, 2014). In HE, an 'ideology of talent' serves to justify such a hierarchy as 'male' effortlessness is ennobled, while 'female' eagerness and compliance are devalued. Connell (2005, p. 71) defines 'masculinity' as "simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture". Connell differentiates Hegemony, Subordination, Complicity and Marginalization. Highly relational, these types depict societies' dispositions in which 'hegemonic masculinity' is "the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 2005, 77). Schippers (2007) elaborates on this approach, identifying 'manly' and 'womanly' traits, distinguishing between hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic femininity, male hegemonic femininity and pariah femininities, which are all constructed in local contexts and in intersection with other social divisions. According to Budgeon (2014), hegemonic femininity is now characterized by a balance of traditionally feminine – emotionality, caring – and traditionally masculine – independence, autonomy – traits and the new 'pariah femininities' lack this hybridity. As existing inequalities are ascribed to individuals' interests, decisions and efforts, hybrid femininities do not question hegemonic masculinity. The feminization of the school and work culture requires men to show traditionally female traits – communication skills, emotionality – so social change also favours the development of hybrid masculinities, which may turn – theoretically – hegemonic depending on the local context. As I have argued elsewhere (Strecker & Feixa, 2018), such contexts include further social divisions, so an intersectional approach is necessary to study how social identities are constructed and how social inequality is reproduced.

A difference between Bourdieu's approach to class and Connell's to gender may be that gender identities are usually acquired at a very young age (Connell, 2009), while class identities are - at least in current western societies - rather under-developed as most people have a tendency to consider themselves middle class (Rubin et al., 2014)(see *Measuring Social Class*). Nevertheless, as Bottero (2010, p. 6) highlights, even in this exists a certain similarity as people tend to be unaware of how notions of femininity and masculinity limit their possibilities and only come to challenge "conventional notions of femininity" because of increasingly conflictive female roles, but not because more and different femininities have become imaginable. In

other words, people are unaware of the negative or positive effects of their social class, because they are not aware of their class, and though they are aware of their sex, they are also unaware of how it influences in their lives on a structural level. In a way, social inequalities related to gender and social class have become 'unspeakable' (Kelan, 2014) or invisible, as nobody feels affected by them, but continue to shape identities. Similarly tacit identities exist regarding dominant ethnicities (Bottero, 2010), indicating that any social division has an analogy in the individuals' implicit or explicit identity constructions, explaining - once again - the persistence of social inequalities. All these identities include tacit and reflexive elements and do furthermore combine - intersect - in the sense that any individual holds identities for any social division even if it only explicitly and reflexively relates to one (Bottero, 2010). Winker and Degele (2009) argue that any identification includes a delimitation, as by identifying or differentiating yourself from someone, you mark different groups. Identity constructions offer therefore a direct view on social divisions and their intersections, as individuals are likely to construct their identity considering their concrete case, e.g. highlighting that they are overweight but healthy - delimiting their profile from unhealthy overweight - or immigrants with a German passport - in contrast to immigrants without a local passport etc. Some identity constructions may be made explicit - for example by using the "I"-form in the narrative - or appear implicitly, by speaking of another group one obviously does not belong to (Winker & Degele, 2009); moreover, some social divisions and hence facets of identity may not be mentioned at all (Kelan, 2014) or may be turned into a key topic and treated reflexively (see for example the strategies of hypervisibility or dissimulation described by Platero Méndez, 2010). The question is then which identities become explicit and reflexive under which circumstances.

Bottero (2010, p. 11; 12) argues that according to diverse scholars reflexivity does not only occur under conditions of "habitus/field disjunctures" as Bourdieu suggested, but may form part of the usual practices of a habitus and not necessarily challenge the existing rules in the sense of a transforming force, so rather than a result and remedy to crisis it can also be read as an "everyday reflexivity" "acting to perpetuate norms". In this sense, it holds no longer true that the "privileged do not broach the issue of privileges" (Winker & Degele, 2009, p. 82, translated by TS), as those in advantage may be aware of their advantage, while those at disadvantage may not be aware of it and vice versa, even if only the first experience habitus-field fit. Intersubjectivity is, in Bottero's (2010, p. 16; 17) reading, key to understanding the emergence of reflexivity even in contexts of habitus fit, as the constant collective negotiation of practices constitutes a "space for ambivalence or irony", for reproduction and challenge and highlights, furthermore, the importance of narratives as a mean to "locate and provide plausible justifications of their activities - to themselves and others". Narratives are in this sense key for the negotiation of what is acceptable or not, as a good justification may help individuals to get away with less conformist behaviours, while others may face important sanctions.

Before entering in more detail in intersectionality, I would like to highlight that the deliberations considered so far do not only affect people directly in their practices, but also indirectly through the practices of the people surrounding them, especially their parents and further significant others, like teachers, friends etc. Reay's (2000, p. 569) research on mothers and their 'emotional capital' is highly interesting here, though she came to argue in a posterior

publication that rather than another capital, the "emotional resources passed on from mother to child through processes of parental involvement" (Reay 2000, 569; Reay 2015) can be read as a matter of habitus. While all mothers 'suffer' to best support their children (O'Brien 2008), working-class mothers who put educational success above all else jeopardize their own and their children's well-being without necessarily gaining educational success (Reay 2000). In a study with Latinos and Latinas in the US, this pressure was centred on Latinas, who were expected to be academically successful and to support their families of origin economically, while Latinos were less expected to show economic support and academic success (Ovink, 2014). Similarly, in research with Chinese women in Canada, structural restraints in the recognition of their university degrees favoured their changing from engineering and medical careers to pathways 'typically associated with women and care work' (Soong, Stahl, and Shan 2017, 8) and some decided to work part-time, focusing on their children and household management while their husbands pursued their careers. Women's well-being is, hence, repeatedly subordinated to educational success and family matters, first regarding their own education and the demands of their family of origin and later on their own families and their children's education. Ironically, their engagement in education and the transmission of cultural capital contributes to the reproduction of a social system that marginalises them, as it is more difficult for them than for their male peers to turn their own capitals into a corresponding labour-market position and hence economic capital.

3.2.3. Intersectionality

Research on social inequality usually picks only one social dimension of difference or a concrete combination of dimensions - for example 'Students of Colour' and of low-income families (Welton & Martinez, 2014), working-class Latinos in the US (Ovink, 2014), Chinese middle-class women in Canada (Soong et al., 2017) or white working-class boys in London (Stahl, 2016) - and focuses on people with a concrete profile of disadvantage. Such separation may lead to deeper insights by concentrating resources, but risks ascribing different meanings to similar actions, as in an example suggested by Ladson-Billings (2007) where arriving at school just-in-time was interpreted as having little interest in education when shown by black working-class parents.

Such a focus on the disadvantaged reproduces, on the one hand, the deficit perspective we have criticised above regarding youth research (see *Youth Research and Transitions*), as even when successful cases are considered - see for example this study by Reay (2009b) - these are implicitly picked because of being exceptional and contrasted to those who are less successful. On the other hand, and in line with Connell (2009), we can argue that a research comparing two groups from the start, is likely to encounter differences between these two groups in the results, exaggerating these differences automatically while invisibilising in-group differences that might have turned out to be related to another system of categorisation, that is to say another social dimension or combination of social dimensions of difference, that had not been contemplated in the initial research design. In this sense, it is necessary to include intersectionality theoretically and methodologically in research in order to overcome such limitations, allowing dimensions of social division to manifest themselves as more or less important in the concrete cases. Further below, I describe how I designed a research project

that aimed to include young people from different profiles in order to not impose any as more important than others (see *The Project*) and the methodology I developed following, in part, the intersectional approach proposed by Winker and Degele (2009) (see *Analyses*).

The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Crenshaw (1989) in an analysis of different US- court decisions that stuck out for their ignorance of special disadvantages affecting black women in enterprises, as they argued that if black men were not disadvantaged, no racial discrimination was given and if white women were not disadvantaged no sex discrimination was given, so black women were not disadvantaged either, no matter what they reported to be experiencing. As further social divisions gained visibility in society and research, an additive approach was applied in both qualitative and quantitative research on black women and other combinations of dimensions of disadvantage, as if a person who was on the disadvantaged end in two or three dimensions of social division was automatically doubly or triply disadvantaged, respectively (Bowleg, 2008). Rather than simply summing inequalities, intersectionality aims to consider how these 'intersect' (Bowleg, 2008; Gordon, 2016; Kerner, 2012), that is to say, interplay and interact reciprocally in conjunction, at times worsening the disadvantage and at others attenuating it (Winker & Degele, 2009) or sometimes creating a complete new disadvantage as in the example of the black women in enterprises (Crenshaw, 1989). Though differences between countries and disciplines persist (Kerner, 2012), initially the triad of race, gender and class stood in the foreground, but over time different studies have come to include a growing number of social divisions and their intersections on different levels - though often without tackling the increasing complexity systematically (Winker & Degele, 2009).

From a southern theory perspective (Connell, 2007), the applicability and reception of intersectionality in other parts of the world may be questioned (Choo, 2012). It has to be cautioned that a person discriminated in one country for his or her colour of skin or religious beliefs, can form in another context part of the majority group in exactly the same dimension and can be therefore privileged and that some persons live in several contexts or use virtual spaces, so combinations of hegemonic and marginal positions are possible for the same person and regarding the same dimensions (Purkayastha, 2012). Considering significant differences between the importance of social divisions and their intersections in the one or several contexts an individual is moving in, may, however, lead to such uniqueness that value as a social theory is lost, unless a systematic comparison of cases that allows to discover patterns of commonality beyond all uniqueness is conducted.

Faced with the difficulty to consider an increasing number of social divisions - Winker and Degele (2009, p. 16 (translated by TS)) count in their literature review up to 13 different dimensions, in concrete: "gender", "sexuality", "'race'/skin colour", "ethnicity", "nation/state", "class", "culture", "health", "age", "settledness/origin", "property", "North-South/East-West" and "societal development status" - and, furthermore, on different levels, these authors develop an analytical approach that differentiates between social structures, social representations and identity constructions. The first are thereby understood as societal social structures, including organisations and institutions, while representations refer to 'cultural symbols' (Winker & Degele, 2009, p. 18 (translated by TS)). The authors seem to consider that identity may be translatable with "agency" as they translate the English reference to "structure" and "agency" with "*Struktur- und Identitätsebene*" (Winker & Degele, 2009, p. 23)

and argue that Bourdieu's habitus-theory considers these two levels, but does not analyse the interplay of different social divisions. Further below, we will look at some scholars who have tried to narrow this gap by combining Bourdieu's concepts with intersectionality.

To avoid imposing some social divisions as more important than others, Winker and Degele (2009) maintain a complete openness regarding the dimensions that may arise as significant from the gathered material on the first two levels of their analyses: identity constructions and social representations. As this is more difficult regarding social structures, they decide to complete the traditional triad of gender, class and race by 'body', arguing that this dimension gained special importance in recent years, as body-related standards are being denaturalised and ascribed to the individuals' decisions to care for their bodies, so health, obesity, attractiveness, age, etc. are seen as in one's personal responsibility. Considering the importance of body in Connell's definition of gender (see *Social divisions*), just as other studies that have taken age and health as social divisions on their own (Winker & Degele, 2009), while some authors speak of physiognomic capital when referring to bodily visible matters of ethnicity (Mecheril & Rigelsky, 2007, p. 79) and diverse research has shown how social inequalities become inscribed into bodies, e.g. through the development of muscles or health conditions through certain employments (Nussbaum, 2008), 'body' may rather appear as an umbrella-dimension, including most other dimensions somehow. Rather than seeing 'body' as a social dimension of difference of its own, it may therefore make sense to pay special attention to bodies and their relation to dimensions of social difference and how these become 'embodied' within the other social divisions. A more detailed description of Winker and Degele's (2009) methodological suggestions is given in the methodological part of this thesis, where I develop an analysis procedure that includes steps of their intersectional approach within the documentary method (Bohnsack, Pfaff, & Weller, 2010) (see *Analyses*).

From a theoretic perspective, it has to be discussed up to which point and how a Bourdieusian approach and intersectionality can inform each other. Regarding HE, Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) describe how the share of female students rose since the turn of the century from virtually 0 to almost 50% in the 1960s, but do not differentiate by social class of origin, disregarding possible intersections or further social divisions. Though Bourdieu (2000) considers in his later publication *Masculine Domination* how female (auto-)submission affects all spheres of life, intersections remain marginal. Connell (2007) criticises this work, furthermore, for ignoring previous feminist research. Reay (2004) argues that gender and ethnicity influence the habitus in ways similar to social class and can therefore be studied through Bourdieu's concepts. However, she relinquishes the study of intersections to other scholars, focusing in her analyses on social class and only calling for further research to consider "gendered aspects of the habitus" (Reay, 2015, p. 22).

Bathmaker (2015, p. 68) reviews feminist readings of Bourdieu with a focus on the notion of 'field', arguing that though his concepts of positioning were criticised for turning subjects into mere bearers of social positions, the consideration of social conditions may 'counteract an overemphasis of 'politics of the performative'', so 'a positive engagement between Bourdieu and feminist theory is mutually profitable' and 'provide[s] a means of exploring' the subjects' abilities to 'exert greater or lesser degrees of agency and autonomy in different fields of action' (68f.). Considering Reay's (2004) remarks on wrong readings of Bourdieu's concepts

mentioned above (see *Capitals, field and habitus*), we can say that the impression that Bourdieu turns subjects into mere bearers of social positions simplifies his approach wrongly, as he still left space for agency in spite of his focus on dispositions, offering according to Pfeilstetter (2012) even a solution for the dualism of structure and agency.

Webb et al. (2017, p. 6) analyse the use of Bourdieu's tools in widening-participation research, arguing that current research suffers a Bourdieusian 'hangover', limiting its ability to theorise and overcome inequalities due to applying Bourdieu's concepts either in a light way or through a pick-and-mix approach that neglects 'the interconnections and interdependencies between concepts in a field of inter-subjective practices' (10). Apart from a deepening of the original concepts – thinking with Bourdieu – these authors propose that certain other theories, namely actor network theory (ANT) and theories of intersectionality, can help to overcome the limitations of Bourdieu's concepts – thinking beyond Bourdieu. Regarding intersectionality the authors argue that: 'considering intersectionality as both a social theory of knowledge and an approach to analysis that provides an inductive account of routine practices and struggles and reveals the complexities, provisionality and becomingness of social positioning, subjectivities and change might be a fruitful way to explore how inequalities have been reproduced (or not) in contexts where social class groupings are not considered the sole locale for struggles for power and resources' (Webb et al., 2017, p. 17).

We can, in conclusion, argue that Bourdieu gave more importance to gender in the course of his career and that he considered in his analyses the influences of social structures and representations on individual choices, although less systematically than the multi-layered approach by Winker and Degele (2009). In spite of their limitations, Bourdieu's concepts may be useful for feminist research and approaches like intersectionality may adequately overcome shortcomings in the consideration of social divisions other than social class and improve the comprehension of reproduction mechanisms. I will describe how I tackle this challenge methodologically in the corresponding section of this thesis (see *Analysis*). In the next section (see *Higher Education*), we will furthermore continue with this theoretical reflections by taking a closer look at the field of HE.

3.3. Higher Education

In this section, we will focus on recent trends in Higher Education (HE), how these manifest in Spain and relate to the thoughts on social inequality that were presented in the previous part of the thesis. Afterwards, a closer look to study choice and student life once in University will be taken, as these two topics are of special importance for the context of the thesis and have not appeared in such detail before.

“University's like this little world, a bubble of time separate from everything before and everything after.”

Mhairi McFarlane, *You Had Me At Hello* (2014)

International statistics like Eurostat build on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCE) that differentiates between post-secondary non-tertiary education (level 4), short-cycle tertiary education (level 5), bachelor or equivalent level (level 6), master or equivalent level (level 7) and doctoral or equivalent level (level 8). Rather than Higher Education, the terms "tertiary" and "non-tertiary" education are differentiated, whereat the first includes the levels 5 and 6 and the latter the level 4, but is combined in several tables with upper-secondary education (level 3)⁶⁹. However, in some countries certain professions are taught in Universities and in others in vocational training institutions, so the delimitation line between vocational training and university studies is different in every country. In Spain exist, for example, university degrees for early childhood education and medical and health care that are in Germany studied as vocational trainings, combining schooling and the dual system. An alternative approach that avoids the delimitation problem partly and may therefore facilitate international comparisons is to speak of Higher Education.

Higher Education (HE) as a term connotes an education that goes beyond the "normally implied by the term 'education'", not simply adding more as the term "further" education might imply, but taking the individual to a higher "level of individual development" (Barnett, 1997, p. 6). As the border between education, further education and higher education is not drawn according to the institutional level of attainment, different countries include different educations within the concept of Higher Education. In Catalonia, some authors employ the term '*educació superior*' (higher education) synonymous to University education (e.g. Rodríguez et al., 2003), while others seem to include all vocational trainings, those of an intermediate and those of a superior level, into this classification⁷⁰. The *Generalitat de Catalunya* differentiates in their overlook of the educational system between intermediate and superior vocational trainings, considering the first 'secondary' and the latter 'superior' education⁷¹, though superior vocational trainings are physically clearly separated from University degrees and usually offered in institutions that also impart other vocational trainings and on occasion even secondary schooling. In the following, I build on international HE research but relate mainly to University studies when considering the Spanish case.

3.3.1. Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation

In Europe and beyond, we can identify three relatively recent changes in the HE field: 'Massification' (Trow, 1999), Neoliberalisation (Brooks, 2017; Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999)

⁶⁹ See the list of main tables available at the Eurostat website regarding education and training: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/data/main-tables> [last access: 04.07.2018].

⁷⁰ See for example: <http://www.unportal.net/> [last access: 05.08.2018].

⁷¹ See: http://queestudiar.gencat.cat/web/.content/home/portada/imatges/destacats84/sistema_educatiu_pdf/sistema_educatiu.pdf [last access: 05.08.2018].

and Internationalisation (Knight, 2003; Puntaney, 2012). In the following, we will discuss these concepts coming from a perspective on social inequality.

'Massification of HE', as opposed to 'Elite HE', refers to the change and creation of HE institutions for the general public once the growing elite institutions encountered limits in their expansion in order to include the increasing number of HE students per age group, in the sense of increasing proportions of graduates in age cohorts (Trow, 1973, 1999). The references to 'masses' may thereby add a negative connotation to this process of 'widening participation' (Pickard, 2014), and some public discourse has directly related to more students physically present in lecture theatres, sitting on the stairs and blocking evacuation routes⁷². However, the idea of physical flooding has disappeared with the unification of study plans in the course of the Bologna process, ensuring that all students of a year attend the same lectures together rather than allowing students, as in the previous German system, to pick (and quit) subjects independently of their year of study. Massification, with all its negative connotations, continues to be used, however, as the dominant term to describe the increase in HE participation, contributing, together with criticism of the negative effects of the Bologna process regarding the quality of studies (J. C. Müller, 2011), to the impression that University studies are losing quality. A main drive behind widening participation policies was thereby the idea that the labour markets required more highly skilled employees in the context of the knowledge society, so that HE turned from a personal good or "cultural betterment" into a requirement for economic competitiveness (Pickard, 2014, p. 114). In this sense, the 'massification of HE' was from its beginning on closely related to its 'Neoliberalisation', though democratising ideas may have been stronger at its onset and were successively eclipsed, though not completely eliminated (Pickard, 2014).

The 'massification' of HE brought, despite a continuous political interest in social inequality (Bathmaker et al., 2013) and 'widening participation' (Bathmaker et al., 2016; Pickard, 2014), only 'rather limited improvements' in equal participation (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008, p. 292; Pickard, 2014). While only few non-traditional students were gained in the UK, these were concentrated in the less prestigious post-1992⁷³ Universities and were, moreover, especially likely to dropout in their first year, so selection is deferred from access to the first year (Pickard, 2014). As well in Spain, the 'new' students came mainly from the middle classes (Rahona Lopez, 2009), who are said to make the best possible use of widening-participation programmes (Collins et al., 2015), apart from the vast expansion of female HE participation (Connell, 2009). While this indicates that the 'massification' did not contribute to an

⁷² This discourse has been quite popular in my own days as a University student in Germany and was expressed quite clearly, in text and photos, on some websites and in press articles:

<https://bestebildung.wordpress.com/2013/01/26/gegen-uberfullte-horsale/>;

<https://ghgbochum.wordpress.com/category/ghg/page/4/>; [https://www.badische-](https://www.badische-zeitung.de/freiburg/anwesenheitspflicht-und-ueberfuellte-hoersaele-semesterstart-in-freiburg--51065287.html)

[zeitung.de/freiburg/anwesenheitspflicht-und-ueberfuellte-hoersaele-semesterstart-in-freiburg--](https://www.badische-zeitung.de/freiburg/anwesenheitspflicht-und-ueberfuellte-hoersaele-semesterstart-in-freiburg--51065287.html)

[51065287.html](https://www.badische-zeitung.de/freiburg/anwesenheitspflicht-und-ueberfuellte-hoersaele-semesterstart-in-freiburg--51065287.html) [last access in all cases: 19.07.2018]. Note that all entries are several years old,

indicating, possibly, that the phenomena of overflowing lecture theatres has disappeared with the implementation of Bologna.

⁷³ In 1992, politechnical schools were recognised as Universities in the UK (Pickard, 2014; Reay et al., 2009a), so currently the differentiation between Russell Group and post-1992 Universities is, in my reading, very similar to the distinction between 'elite universities' and 'mass universities' suggested by Trow (Trow, 1973, 1999).

improvement of social equality, its negative connotations and the criticism of recent reforms like the Bologna process, have facilitated the justification of a decrease in the signalling function of HE titles, as it is indirectly assumed that HE studies have lost quality due to these processes. As I have argued above (see *Social Inequality*), social inequality is reproduced on the labour market in the competition for graduate jobs (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Bessant & Watts, 2014; Brennan & Naidoo, 2008), as educational certificates alone are no longer enough to justify social positions. While some scholars speak in this context of a "declassification" of academic credentials (Bogino, 2016), others have highlighted how other aspects of the CV achieve a signalling function, in concrete post-graduate certificates (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999; Wakeling & Laurison, 2017), 'soft skills' (Groppe, 2006), work experiences (Koskinen, 2007), language skills and international experiences (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011), just as the reputation of the visited institutions (Koskinen, 2007; Reay et al., 2005) are considered increasingly important signals of 'employability'. The high acceptance of these new indicators of 'employability' becomes obvious in studies with Spanish graduates who narrate their attempts to improve their 'employability' and feel to be the victims of the economic crisis (Bogino, 2016).

The 'new' graduates and especially students from lower social classes are not as able to acquire and mobilise capitals for their CV construction than their peers (Bathmaker et al., 2013), and certain strategies like temporary mobility remain a middle-class domain (Rubio & Strecker, 2016). Similarly, private universities may retain a signalling function precisely because they continue highly selective in their student population (Martin, 2010). In a nutshell, the 'massification' of HE led to a false upward mobility and a middle-class struggle for social positioning with negative effects for the young persons' well-being (Reay, 2015), while the overall social inequality persisted and the few students from lower social *milieus*, together with women and those born in foreign countries, who achieve HE certificates encounter increasing difficulties to translate these certificates into corresponding labour market positions (Bogino, 2016).

Processes of 'Neoliberalisation' refer to a growing market orientation in HE, affecting not only the study plans and taught contents, but also the organisation of HE institutions and their dependence on private funding (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999; J. C. Müller, 2011; Tavares & Cardoso, 2013). The Neoliberalisation of HE led, despite important differences between and within countries (Brooks, 2017), to resource allocation according to criteria of 'efficiency' (Brennan, 2008); Universities are imagined as service providers and students as consumers or clients (Tavares & Cardoso, 2013). Though the difference remains in reality rather discursive as HE institutions are far from functioning like businesses according to Watts (2017), students are considered responsible to take the most adequate choices and have to stand for their educational outcomes and their 'employability' (Lahusen et al., 2013; Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017) (see *The precarious generation in Catalonia*). As especially drop-out and prolonged studies are considered signs of little efficiency (Tavares & Cardoso, 2013), HE institutions are interested to avoid them either by improving student support (Gibney, Moore, Murphy, & O'Sullivan, 2011) or by selecting the most-promising students (see also *The University Transition and Student Support*). As especially non-traditional students are more likely to prolong their studies, drop-out and/or score worse results (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Donnelly, 2015a; Rubin et

al., 2014; Southgate et al., 2014), HE institutions may be tempted to exclude them in order to improve the institutions' overall results and hence funding (e.g. Lassibille & Gomez, 2009).

In the highly neoliberalised and diversified British HE field, this leads, particularly, to 'vertical differentiation' (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008), with non-traditional students segregated in less prestigious institutions (Reay et al., 2009a). 'Horizontal differentiation' on the contrary consists in offering massified undergraduate studies and elitist master degrees for a selected group only (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999; Wakeling & Laurison, 2017)⁷⁴. In Spain, the first may apply to private universities, while public institutions are more likely to show horizontal differentiation as the HE field is less diversified and hierarchies are still flatter, but some institutions might focus on master degrees and become like this 'elitist' anyway. Access to master degrees is controlled through significantly higher enrolment fees and higher academic requirements to achieve a financial aid (see *Scholarship programmes*), apart from fewer offered places. Either way certain HE credentials regain part of the selective function they lost with the broadening of HE participation and this may mean for the wealthier sectors of the middle classes who can afford post-graduate studies or private HE institutions that their economic capital will be again more directly convertible into educational credentials with a certain signalling function.

According to Barnett (1997, pp. xi, x), the growing orientation towards the private sector in research and teaching implies that the idea of "liberal HE with genuine emancipatory potential", "standing for intrinsically worthwhile ends (...) is being lost from sight" but it can be recovered and implemented, if four strategies are employed: "critical self-reflection by the student; open learning including group activities; elements of interdisciplinarity being introduced to open up the student's programme of studies; and a particular place being given to philosophical and sociological perspectives, in casting light on the student's core curriculum" (Barnett, 1997, p. x). He explains the difficulty of liberal HE to stand its ground partly with relativism, critical theory and post-structuralism putting in doubt the "assumption that objective knowledge and truth are attainable". However, the idea of critical thinking in HE is by no means new and according to Müller (2011) it is, among others, the critical spirit that is said to be going lost through the Bologna process that is furthermore identified as a decisive element turning "Bildung" (education) into mere "Ausbildung" (formation) by increasing the market orientation. Müller (2011) adopts a critical perspective to such ideas, showing that many references to the "founding fathers" of German Universities - namely Humboldt and Kant, among others - idealise their perspectives, assuming for example an egalitarian educational concept that was not given in the original works of these intellectuals. However, she also shows that pre- and post-Bologna students from the social sciences continue to favour critical thinking, in spite of a certain orientation towards employability and the labour market, which was, moreover, already given among the pre-Bologna students. Lange-Vester and

⁷⁴ Wakeling and Laurison (2017) use a different terminology, speaking of 'Maximally Maintained Inequality' in the case of broadened access to a certain level of education, which has already achieved saturation in the upper classes, so that new entrants are necessarily from lower classes, reducing the social inequality in the participation on this level and derivating it to the next higher level of education (horizontal differentiation). Their concept of 'Effectively Maintained Inequality' highlights that even under such a situation, inequality may persist in the access to certain subjects, qualifications and institutions (vertical differentiation).

Teiwes-Kügler (2004, pp. 170, 172, 173, 183, translated by TS) state that in their study of student *milieus* in the social sciences a type of students coming from "older educational elites" called "critical intellectuals" was still dominant, imposing a humanistic concept of education and related cultural model. However, their dominance was contested by a type called "the exclusive ones", including students from "older educational elites" and from "possession and power elites", who confronted the humanistic ideal with a more materialistic approach. Moreover, *milieus* from the middle classes showed tendencies to resist the imposed cultural model, supporting a more labour-market oriented approach. That Müller (2011) observed an increased importance of labour-market outcomes, may then indicate yet another change in the power balances of the field, leading more materialistic and labour-market oriented types to more power. This may also indicate a cultural change towards neoliberalism in social elites or society in general. Her findings put, in every case, the negative impact on critical thinking and sudden labour-market orientation of the Bologna reforms in doubt. However, the negative discourse claiming a deterioration of University education may play a role in the current devaluation of HE titles, as it helps to justify why employers tend to require more and more other credentials and signals of employability of their candidates, who are furthermore succumbed to increasing labour precariousness with the argument that they first have to prove their value. As educational climbers are, nevertheless, less likely to ever achieve powerful positions and more probable to suffer precariousness over prolonged periods of time (Groppe, 2006), such discourses contribute to the reproduction of social inequality by justifying a change in the justification system from educational credentials to further merits and soft skills (see *Social Inequality*) and can therefore be read as an example of how reproduction mechanisms adapt to changing times (Hillmert, 2008).

'Internationalisation' (Gallego Balsà, 2014; Knight, 2003; Puntney, 2012) is yet another buzzword in HE. "Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2003, p. 2). Internationality and interculturality are used, according to Knight (2003, p. 2), to embrace not only cross-border differences, but also "the diversity of cultures that exist within countries, communities, and institutions". Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz (2006) highlight that these concepts have long been a reality in education, but are now increasingly pursued as an aim especially in HE, adding new value to difference and possibly contributing to the overcoming of the previously dominant deficit perspective especially on learners with a migration background and linguistic difficulties in the dominant language. Similarly to Knight, these authors argue that "intrastate linguistic-cultural, ethnic and national heterogeneity" tended to be ignored as a focus was laid on cross-border differences, but believe that the attention for intrastate heterogeneity is increasing (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz, 2006, p. 74).

However, Gallego (2014) describes in her analysis of a Catalan HE institution a certain conflict between promoting the local language, which can be read as an example of intrastate heterogeneity, and attending international students who prefer to be taught in Spanish. Though Gallego's suggestion to employ strategies of 'translanguaging' to solve this conflict can be read as a good example of how the internationalisation of HE embraces as well local differences, the mere existence of the conflict indicates that the way to achieving this is still long. Puntney (2012), on the other hand, turns internationalisation in her publication into a

way to improve students' 'employability' and 'utility' on a global market, by providing them with international 'soft skills', in concrete 'intercultural knowledge' and information on international career opportunities. This shows how ideas of Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation mix and as especially language skills and international experiences acquire a signalling function on the labour market (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011), while students underrepresented in HE are even further underrepresented in exchange programmes (Ballatore & Ferede, 2013; Wiers-Jenssen, 2011) and less able to fill gaps in their curricula through stays abroad (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Rubio & Strecker, 2016), this discourse contributes as well to the reproduction of social inequality by justifying the new importance ascribed to the Internationalisation of CVs and careers.

3.3.2. Justifying social inequality

As social inequality was observed to exist and persist in the underrepresentation of certain social groups in HE, different attempts to explain this persistence have been made. Some ascribed it to different abilities (Martín Criado & Gómez Bueno, 2017) or even a genetic heredity of intelligence, leading to a situation where the most intelligent people occupy the most important positions and have the most intelligent children who then come to occupy similar positions due to pure intelligence and not 'unfair' social inequality. Others have highlighted the relation of intelligence to stimulation in the early years of life and hence socialisation, arguing that the lower social classes stimulate their offspring less or in the wrong ways, so they do not develop the same levels of intelligence as their peers from other social backgrounds (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Research has shown, however, that intelligence and abilities exist in all social classes and are not inherited (Choi, 2009, pp. 81, 240) and that students from lower social classes tend to choose 'easier' degrees even if their previous academic performance is high (Torrents, 2017) (see also *Capitals, field and habitus*).

The next attempt of explaining away unfair inequality as 'fair' that still resonates in current political discourse (Archer, DeWitt, & Wong, 2014; Reay, 2012) was that lower social classes and immigrants achieve less because they aspire to less (Martín Criado & Gómez Bueno, 2017). A version of this approach is frequently used to explain why women are less likely to work in certain sectors or to occupy powerful positions, though they achieved the necessary educational attainment (Connell, 2009). Though in line with Bourdieu's and Passeron's (2007) assumptions that the 'objective chances' to achieve a certain position influence the ability to pursue it, this thesis has been proven wrong in different geographic contexts and for different social groups (Archer et al., 2014; Dávila, Ghiardo, & Medrano, 2008; Diefenbach, 2008; Martín Criado & Gómez Bueno, 2017). As both family and individual aspirations tend to be similarly high in all social groups, researchers have then explained the smaller success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds with their decision making processes. Study choice and other life decisions are therefore currently the core of explaining the reproduction of social inequality.

According to Lauterbach and Becker (2008) especially early decisions over the educational pathway favour a reproduction of social inequality and Gogolin and Krüger-Potratz (2006, p. 130) indicate that economic hardship throughout childhood lowers the readiness to take risks and, hence, the chances to receive the related higher earnings even later in life when the economic hardship has been overcome, arguing that it is inscribed into the individuals' habituses

limiting them in their life decisions. This is in line with findings by Koskinen (2007), indicating that university graduates from a lower social background are less attractive on the labour market due to educational decisions they took throughout their studies, namely regarding the choice of institution, previous work experience, the field of studies and postgraduate studies. As she assumes that upper-class students receive better advice in their families of origin, it almost seems that the more choices students have to take on their way to the labour market, the bigger gets the social class gap between graduate CVs. Bathmaker et al. (2013) add further dimensions, apart from family advice, arguing that different capitals have to be acquired and mobilised to achieve the experiences that look good on the CV, so Bourdieu's concept of capitals is used to explain why some students are bound to fare worse.

In line with theories highlighting that youth has lost its moratorium character and is predominantly a time for investments in cultural capital (see *Youth Research and Transitions*), diverse studies have described differences between middle and working-class parents, showing that the first tend to intervene directly, enabling their children early on to build a curriculum into a professional direction they fancy, while the latter are said to show a 'laissez-faire' or 'hands off' approach in their support (Archer et al., 2014; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Woodman (2011) has highlighted furthermore the importance of significant others in young people's future orientations, including study choices, giving examples of how parents influence their children's choices by offering them additional experiences in a field, conveying a family tradition, highlighting their children's skills and aptitude for a certain career or disadvising risky paths. The focus on choice is, hence, often a focus on the individual level, indirectly ascribing differences to parents and though these assumptions are theoretically related to structures, as Bourdieu's concepts of capitals and habitus are employed and said to determine the different parental support, a direct study of these structures is necessary in order to understand how to change them.

Other scholars have focused on structural factors influencing the chances of individuals to attend HE. In Spain, the region and the pupil-teacher ratio in schools have been shown to influence on the chances to visit higher education (Rahona Lopez, 2009). According to a study by Gomolla and Radtke (2007) families with migration histories are institutionally discriminated in Germany as their offspring is much less likely to receive a recommendation for an A-level imparting school by primary school teachers. Furthermore, the dual system is considered to deviate potential future students from HE, as those who do not take their path through HE for granted - that is to say, non-traditional students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) - feel attracted by the possibility to earn money directly instead of staying economically dependent or even accumulate debts (W. Müller & Pollak, 2008). However, even in Spain, where attempts to create a dual system are rather recent, working-class students are said to feel more attracted to vocational trainings as the short-term option over A-levels and HE (Bernardi & Requena, 2010) and Abbot-Chapmann (2011) describes a tendency to choose the 'safe' option for Australia, so that we can assume a certain applicability of the 'diversion thesis' worldwide. However, rather than assuming that for upper-class offspring their transition to University is so natural that they do not even consider other options (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) and are therefore not distracted by vocational trainings, explanations do often focus on the working-class students who are, once again, considered from a deficit perspective by claiming that they are less apt with 'deferred gratification' (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014).

In consequence, measures to overcome these inequalities do usually focus on the disadvantaged students, offering them some kind of compensation - either in their education towards delayed gratification or monetary, through additional financial helps - but do not actually target a change in social structures (for a same tendency regarding student support see *The University Transition and Student Support*).

Continuing the reading of social inequality developed above (see *Social Inequality*), we can, however, argue that it is not in the power of the disadvantaged to turn the class system around by following its rules, as concealed mechanisms reproduce social inequality, impeding their attempts. Social upward mobility is then directly disabled and only used as a bait to induce high aspirations in less privileged families that keeps them busy with their attempts to improve their social position, rather than to protest against a system that keeps them down. Groppe (2006, p. 110f.) argues that the term 'elite' conceals such reproduction mechanisms and that after the broadened access - of the middle class - to HE, 'soft skills' are used to legitimate the selection of upper-class offspring for the best positions, e.g. better communication skills in personal interviews. Hillmert (2008, p. 98) speaks of the relocation of the mechanisms of social reproduction and criticises the importance ascribed to educational decisions, arguing that rational choices are not necessarily possible in the structural context of high uncertainty, so that young people are bound to follow their class-specific strategies.

3.3.3. Study choice

'Choice' evokes ideas of agency, freewill and equal opportunities, but can be understood, in line with Bourdieu, as a social practice individuals perform within the boundaries of their habitus. As we have seen above (see *Capitals, field and habitus*), the habitus is influenced by the field and the different capitals of the individual; it embraces the interaction of structural constraints and agency in decision-making processes (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Davey, 2009). In academia, rational-choice theories and theories focusing on socio-cultural determination in choice are often developed as two opposed poles (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006). For some, decisions are rational if they follow a cost-benefits equation considering the probability of success and irrational if they do not do so (Brynin, 2012; Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006); for some strategies depend on perceived risks and benefits (Torrents, 2017), so social divisions and structures are contemplated as an influence on the individual perceptions, and for others decisions may appear strategic from the outside, but are the result of unconscious logics of practice (Davey 2009), expressions of the habitus (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006) and legitimated retrospectively in order to create a coherent life story (Pais 2007). Choices are, in this reading, secondary effects of social origin, while different abilities and possibilities are primary effects of social origin (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006). As we have seen above (see *Capitals, field and habitus*), the dualism between agency and structural determinism that lies at the core of this opposition may be overcome by employing Bourdieu's concepts, acknowledging the influence of agency and structures and their reciprocal relations (Pfeilstetter, 2012).

For Hillmert (2008), the decisions of non-traditional students are considered irrational because they do not follow the same logics as the rationalisations of the higher class researchers, but may make perfect sense in their social context of origin - just as the strategies of higher class

students do in their contexts. As Lange-Vester and Teiwes-Kügler (2006) argue, rational choice happens within the rationalities of the habitus, so the result is often the same with or without complex calculation, making it impossible to distinguish if it took place or not. Walther and Stauber (2007, p. 37f.) describe how processes of individualisation foster more individualized impacts of social inequality, indicating that this increases the difficulties for individuals to organise and recognise group disadvantages or privileges. The more decisions young people have to take on their path to and through HE, the more important appear these decisions for their future (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006), so that high diversification in educational systems make it especially easy to ascribe individual difficulties to wrong choices. In this sense, current tendencies of profiling of educational institutions, the growing diversity of degree course denominations and offered itineraries etc. facilitate on a structural level the ascription of social inequality to individual decisions, individualising and concealing like this the reproduction mechanisms of social inequality.

In the following, we will deepen this issue further by reviewing previous research on study choice. Study choice can be understood as: 1) The decision to go to university or not, 2) the selection of a degree course, and 3) the selection of an institution. Research on study choice tends to consider different fractions of the population according to the aspect in question.

The decision to go to university or not has been described as only affecting some of the young population, as young people from the lower classes have few possibilities to enter HE and those from the upper classes take HE for granted so access turns into a non-decision (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Cooper, 2013; O'Shea, 2016; Reay, 2012). Students of underrepresented groups who decide to go for HE, on the contrary, often do so resisting the opinions of significant others who made it clear that this path was not for them; Uboldi (2017) mentions for example how several of her 'disadvantaged' participants in art school said they wanted to show their teachers that they had been wrong about them and O'Shea (2016) comments on participants considering it a motivation to get into HE that nobody thought that they would actually make it. Rather than into an obstacle, the lack of support is then turned into an asset, as it pushes the affected to achieve their aim and O'Shea (2016) considers it a manifestation of the 'resistant capital' - a subform of cultural capital developed by Yosso (2005) (see *Capitals, field and habitus*). The research focus considering access to HE is then, usually, on social groups that are underrepresented in HE, e.g. 'Students of Colour' and of low-income families (Welton and Martinez 2014), though exceptions confirm the rule (Davey, 2009).

As female students have come to outstrip young men as regards access to university, gender is not usually a topic when considering access to HE in general, but remains central in research on gender-specific degree-course selection (Connell, 2009). Examples are females' aversion to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) degrees (Yazilitas, Svensson, de Vries, & Saharso, 2013), but also gender-atypical occupations in general (Alm, 2015) or male students in female-dominated institutions (Isacco & Morse, 2015). However, "the level of sex segregation in fields of study" (Reimer & Steinmetz, 2007, p. 2) was already in the past observed as lower than in certain other countries, e.g. Germany, and, as we have seen above (see *Demographics and University participation*), the only study field currently maintaining a male domination in the student population is Engineering and Architecture (EDUCAbase, 2017). This difference was already given in 2011-12, the course when the participants of this project

began their studies, but women have strengthened their advance ever since in sciences (EDUCAbase, 2012). Rather than a female study choice in STEM (Yazilitas et al., 2013), the gendered study choice is in Spain reduced to E (engineering and architecture), unless the focus is laid on male aversions (see *Demographics and University participation*). A possible explanation lies in a lower diversion of females to vocational trainings, especially as several typically female professions are in Spain achieved through University degrees⁷⁵, while other countries offer them as vocational trainings, e.g. early childhood education, nursing. This does not explain, however, why young women do also outrun young men in fields other than health sciences and education. Gendered study choice has to be studied, in this sense, differently in Spain and Catalonia, as a sole comparison of study fields may not be enough to disclose existing differences. Especially the long-term effects of HE are moreover interesting, as the increased female participation in HE has led many to believe in a "new gender era", though "traditional gender patterns are strongly represented in the post-study years" (Furlong et al., 2011, p. 366). If young men are less likely to access HE than young women, it is moreover important to see how gender intersects with other dimensions, as social class and ethnicity, as it is conceivable that broadened access for subordinated social groups is reduced to females, possibly influenced by gender-equality programmes. As women are less likely to translate their high educational attainments into corresponding labour market positions (Connell, 2009; Furlong et al., 2011), reproduction mechanisms may furthermore work differently for men and women, as working-class men might be diverted from HE, while women are diverted from powerful positions after completing HE.

Bourdieu and Passeron (2007, p. 84) described study choice as influenced by 'objective chances' of succeeding in obtaining a certain occupation. Working-class and female students were considered to face lower objective chances to achieve the professional future HE should prepare for and therefore exempt from the 'game of free intelligence' that disconnected university studies from their professional future. In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu (2000, p. 53) argues that 'objective dependence' reproduces female submission. Despite new 'gendered opportunities' in a context of gender-equality discourses, social change towards a 'public gender regime', a 'feminization' of school and work cultures and the increased female participation in the labour market (Budgeon, 2014), gender differences persist and the objective chances of women remain worse than those of their male peers, favouring their 'objective dependence' especially in times of economic crisis (Álvarez, 2015; Bourdieu, 2000; Connell, 2009)⁷⁶. Gender segregation and the devaluation of female work persist (Alm, 2015) and while several well-paid and highly recognized male-dominated professions do not require

⁷⁵ For a complete list of university degrees offered in Catalan public universities see:

http://universitats.gencat.cat/ca/cercador/?tipusOferta=grau&addForm_branca_0=Arts+i+humanitats&addForm_branca_1=Ci%C3%A8ncies&addForm_branca_2=Ci%C3%A8ncies+de+la+salut&addForm_branca_3=Ci%C3%A8ncies+socials+i+jur%C3%ADdiques&addForm_branca_4=Enginyeria+i+arquitectura&addForm_preuPublic_1=true&accion=cercar&branca=%28%22Arts+i+humanitats%22+OR+%22Ci%C3%A8ncies%22+OR+%22Ci%C3%A8ncies+de+la+salut%22+OR+%22Ci%C3%A8ncies+socials+i+jur%C3%ADdiques%22+OR+%22Enginyeria+i+arquitectura%22%29&preuPublic=%28%22true%22%29 [last access: 19.07.2018].

⁷⁶ Regarding the press article by Álvarez see:

https://elpais.com/economia/2015/12/23/actualidad/1450902280_587939.html [last access: 18.08.2018].

university studies (Ovink, 2014), girls have to either pick – and succeed – in male-dominated professions or invest into HE to gain independence.

In Spain, much of the masculinised non-graduate labour market eroded with the bursting of the real estate bubble, but a certain recovery in this field and additional alternatives in other masculinised sectors, like informatics, suggest that the situation has stabilised. The diverse public cutbacks in the wake of the economic crisis did furthermore effect especially feminised labour, e.g. in the fields of caring and culture, while government intervention to lower unemployment focused on the highly-masculinised construction sector⁷⁷. This may indicate that girls are more 'pushed' into HE than boys are. Ovink (2014, p. 267) mentions, moreover, that 'focusing on school raises questions about Latinos' masculinity', among young working-class Latinos and Latinas living in the US. So in the intersection with working-class, hybrid masculinities may continue marginalized, influencing e.g. academic performance negatively. This may also explain why her male participants showed random decision-making in their accounts, while the female participants rather resembled the 'strategic & ambitious'-type developed in a study about middle-class study choice by Davey (2009).

Institutional choice is of interest in highly-segregated HE fields, e.g. in the UK, where elite universities exist next to 'post-1992' universities (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2009; Davey 2009). In Catalonia, only few degree courses are offered by different universities in the same geographic area. According to another PhD thesis on the Universitat de Lleida (UdL) students are especially likely to choose the UdL if their habitual residence is close by and well communicated (Solsona Solé, 2015). As argued above, private universities may be different and function, similarly to private schools in the UK, as "instruments of social reproduction" (Collins et al., 2015, p. 6). As we will see further below, none of my participants came to study in a private university, so this institutional difference cannot be considered in this thesis.

Apart from the preselection of certain participant profiles depending on the considered aspect of study choice, research considering different aspects of study choice and participants from diverse profiles at once is rare.

3.3.4. Student life

Diverse studies have shown that, in spite of age similarities and the commonality to be full-time students Bourdieu and Passeron (2007, p. 21) considered a special "student condition", social inequalities mark important differences in the lives of students from different backgrounds. Working-class students are less socially integrated than middle-class students (Rubin, 2012a), they are more likely to work more hours (Davey, 2009), not to live on the campus and to generally spend less hours on campus (Gibney et al., 2011), they participate less in student clubs (Rubin, 2012b) and other extra-curricular activities (Bathmaker et al.,

⁷⁷ Consider the example of the so-called "Plan E" (2008). For further information see:

<http://www.minhafp.gob.es/es->

[ES/Areas%20Tematicas/Presupuestos%20Generales%20del%20Estado/Paginas/FondoparaelEstimulodelaEconomiayelEmpleo.aspx](http://www.minhafp.gob.es/es-Areas%20Tematicas/Presupuestos%20Generales%20del%20Estado/Paginas/FondoparaelEstimulodelaEconomiayelEmpleo.aspx). A summary of criticism of this plan that officially included diverse sectors but mainly designated public money to the construction sector can be found in this press article, published on the 19th of May 2013 in the ABC: <http://www.abc.es/espana/20130519/abci-acuerdan-plan-millones-euros-201305181953.html>. [last access in both cases: 20.07.2018]

2013) or student exchange programmes (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). The 'student condition' acquires then a symbolical character, in the sense of a social representation of how students are and live, that makes it even more easy for 'different' students to feel out of place (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007).

Previous research on HE has granted visibility to student voices (Hughes & Smail, 2015; Maunder, Cunliffe, Galvin, Mjali, & Rogers, 2012), focused on the experiences of minority students in the transition to HE (Reay et al., 2009a, 2009b; Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001) or showed how official rules obstacle 'vocational and alternative routes' into and through HE (Bathmaker, 2015:61). Some researchers conducted longitudinal projects (Ashwin, Abbas, & McLean, 2016; Bathmaker et al., 2013), which are said to overcome certain difficulties of research, for instance an exaggeration of rather situational findings as overly determinant (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Most research was, however, conducted in Anglo-Saxon contexts and especially longitudinal projects focusing on social inequality in HE are missing in Southern European countries.

The students of the Universitat de Lleida, in particular, have been studied by Feixa and his co-authors in 2001 and 2010 (Feixa & Campanera Reig, 2010a, 2010b; Feixa & Pallarés, 2001). In 2010, the high heterogeneity among the lives of students from the UdL is highlighted (Feixa & Campanera Reig, 2010a). Drawing a comparison to the study from 2001 and focusing on time and space, Feixa and Campanera (2010b) argue that especially the generations before the Bologna process lived a 'floating time', as they were freer in the use of their time than other social groups and able to escape the rhythms of a global society. Though this special condition in comparison to other collectives persists, the authors argue that the Bologna process led to an increase in the workload per credit that limits the floating time. Moreover, they consider that the number of students who reconcile work and studies is rising, so the proportion of students whose time is marked by working hours and in consequence less floating increases and their time management follows different rhythms than that of their peers.

Pais (2007) argues that the prolongation of the time spend in education has provoked a change of the student population who should no longer be described as inactive on the labour market. However, students are more likely to face marginalization and precariousness on the labour market (Pais, 2007), leading again to a different condition than that of other collectives who do not attempt to reconcile work and studies. This is probably especially true for Spain where labour market legislation discourages employers to offer jobs that are considered typical for students in other countries (López Blasco, Bascuñán Cortés, Gil Rodríguez, Jesús Viscarret, & Errea Rodríguez, 2004; Walther et al., 2002), fostering informal employment. According to the *Observatori Català de la Joventut* (2006), labour market participation increases in Catalonia especially for students older than 20 years. This indicates furthermore a certain age difference among the living realities of University students.

Regarding space, Feixa and Campanera (2010b) compare the different campuses of the UdL that are scattered over the city and argue that the campus in Cappont offers a unified space to the students studying there, with many facilities and services. However, the combination of a unified space and floating time does not necessarily lead to a general pattern in their use, neither do they lead to a feeling of identity, turning the campus into "mythic spaces" (Feixa & Campanera Reig, 2010b, p. 14). As traditions and rituals are losing their integrating character,

considering that students increasingly refuse to take part in them (e.g. demonstrations), they do not lead to a more unified use either. The same participants criticised this lack of identity and shared an image of an ideal student, an archetype, who did live a shared student condition. The authors understand the way the students talked about this past student character and the lack of a student condition as a wish for a symbolic student identity.

Lange-Vester and Teiwes-Kügler (2004, 2006) develop a typology of student *milieus* in the social sciences in a German University, considering the students' social *milieu* of origin and the practices and attitudes towards their studies they expressed in group workshops and interviews. As they consider the educational attainment of parents and grandparents in these descriptions, a very clear image of the broadened access to HE is given. In the earlier publication, the authors introduce furthermore previous research on students from different faculties, highlighting a certain gap regarding the social sciences, mentioning that students of this field had been described as more "alternative-critical", "idealistic" and "solidary" than students from other faculties (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004, p. 160). This hints at important differences between faculties, but not necessary a faculty-specific student condition, as their own typology of student *milieus* within the social sciences showed. From the developed typology, only 2 types come predominantly from "older educational elites" (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004, p. 173, translated by TS), understood as families with parents and grandparents with HE titles, showing that even among the students considered upper-class, a certain expansion in the HE participation was achieved in the parent generation. Especially in the middle and lower-class *milieus*, many students were first-in-generation students. In their utterances, the students with longest HE traditions in their family showed a tendency to speak of a lack of *niveau* among their fellow students, claiming for example that these did not understand the classes and did not read the texts and were then unable to do group works or to discuss, making them lose their time. The middle-class students commented, on the other hand, on feeling intimidated when the "typical" social science student came to class prepared with an additional publication to quote from, preferably in Latin. This may indicate a certain class-clash that was not given in the past, when only few students accessed HE and the heterogeneity among them was rather small. This may explain, on the one hand, why the participants in Feixa's and Campanera's (2010b) felt that the now missing unity among students was given in the past. On the other hand, it might hint at an important change ever since Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) studied French HE institutions in the 1960s, as the proportions of social classes may have changed and the student *milieus* in general may have diversified importantly, leading to new complexities. That the middle-class participants in Lange-Vester and Teiwes-Kügler's (2006) study used the term 'typical' to describe the Latin-quoting student, shows, however, that they still felt to be the ones who were different, not following the norm. The lower-class participants were, eyecatchingly, concentrated in one single type, called the "educationally uncertain" (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006, p. 86) and their description resembles the upper-class students' criticism of fellow students, who were unable to follow in class. They were therefore exempt of the power struggles between the other *milieus* (see also *Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation*), concentrating basically on their own survival in HE and were more likely to eliminate themselves through self-imposed dropout (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004).

While Feixa and Campanera discard the existence of a student condition, considering the participants' tendency to distinguish themselves from their classmates, these authors confirm the existence of an overall youth condition within the university, as it offers spaces to meet peers and to achieve autonomy (Feixa & Campanera Reig, 2010b). However, a difference to younger young people who still go to school is observed and especially students who moved out of their parents residence, escape the "watched liberty" (*libertad vigilada*) (Feixa & Campanera Reig, 2010b, p. 26 translated by TS) that characterises the live with the parents. This escape is, nevertheless, more common among young professionals as many students continue to live with their parents (Jurado Guerrero, 2001) and those who do not do so, tend to return on the weekends, living in consequence in two places (Feixa & Campanera Reig, 2010b). In this sense, the student situation is different from the overall youth condition, as it offers a much broader network of new contacts and more liberty, combined with a parent independent residence and the offers of the city for those who come from a village.

Considering the discourse on a loss of signalling function of HE titles (see *Social Inequality and Higher Education*), the students in Feixa's and Campanera's study seem to be aware of it, but value their university education as a 'global formative experience', considering its multifunctionality (Feixa & Campanera Reig, 2010b). University studies are considered necessary, but an excessive specialisation and lack of practice orientation are criticised and a lack of school support in the decision making process is denounced (Observatori Català de la Joventut, 2006).

3.4. The Reproduction of Social Inequality in the University Transition

In this final section of the theoretical part of the thesis, we will focus on combining the previously presented theoretic parts into one puzzle. In concrete, we will see how HE can be read as a certain type of transition - the University transition - and consider which differences appear within this transition. Moreover, we will focus on previous research on social inequality and HE and analyse recommendations for improved student support from this perspective. This allows us to specify the concrete field of study of this thesis, combining all three theoretical foundation walls (youth studies, social inequalities and higher education). A focus on the reproduction mechanisms behind the persistence of social inequality is especially crucial in relation to the developed research question.

We have seen above (see *Capitals, field and habitus*) that habitus and field are dynamic concepts that allow for change and transformations. Though this may give hope for social change and an overcoming of social inequality, the persistence of social inequalities in spite of diverse social changes in the last decades displays clearly that the mechanisms reproducing social inequality adapt aptly to changes (Hillmert, 2008), making it necessary to understand them more profoundly in order to achieve a possible overcoming.

According to Uboldi (2017, p. 3), we can consider "the educational field as a privileged site to observe those class dynamics intervening in the construction of individual subjectivities". Her "those" refers thereby to Skeggs (2005, p. 969) explication that "class is made through cultural values premised on morality, embodied in personhood and realised (or not) as a property value in symbolic systems of exchange. The processes I describe work simultaneously across different sites and are solidified, concretised, condensed into bodies and personhood at different moments, generating different compositions and volumes of exchange-value", that is to say the different capitals - economic, cultural and social - and their transference, inheritance and exchangeability intervene in complex ways in the reproduction of social inequality. This is in line with Ludwig von Friedeburg's (1989) argument that different social positions have been justified and, in consequence, reproduced through access to and success in education. With a general prolongation of the mean time spent in education and a broadened access to HE, in particular to Universities, these educational titles are nowadays those that make the difference (Hurrelmann, 2007; Trow, 1999), though even they are no longer enough to justify superior positions, as more people possess them than superior positions exist. HE remains, however, an especially interesting field for the study of the reproduction of social inequality, as we can argue with Bathmaker et al. (2013) that, among others, the abilities to acquire and mobilise capitals and to achieve further lines for one's résumé that are now decisive for social positioning are best achieved in parallel to HE studies.

3.4.1. The University Transition and Student Support

Bathmaker (2015, p. 61,62) differentiates between traditional 'smooth' trajectories into HE and 'alternative 'access' routes to HE', whereat the first mainly refer to young people who enter HE right after school, while the second type includes all other access routes to HE, for example mature aged students. Especially working-class students in HE seem to be more likely to be mature aged (Rubin & Wright, 2017), indicating that the working classes may encounter or consider more possibilities to achieve educational credentials later in life (see for example the backgrounds of the first-in-family students in this study: O'Shea, 2016). A later graduation comes, however, with higher difficulties to encounter a suitable employment (Jackson, 2013) and the expectable economic return is lower, so that prolonging studies, studying later in life or even taking only one gap year, lower the benefits of HE in the sense of economic returns (Holmlund, Liu, & Skans, 2008). Though HE may still offer them interesting possibilities even if they remain working class for the rest of their lives (Reay, 2012), from a perspective on changing social positionings, we can argue that HE has to be achieved early in life, as directly as possible after school. Apart from justifying like this the focus on young people in this thesis,

this argument implies that highlighting the 'high' or 'increased' numbers of students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should not be sold as increased social mobility, if these students are predominantly mature aged⁷⁸.

In this thesis, I focus on young people who pass from school to university before establishing themselves with a full-time employment on the labour market, though these transitions may still be anything else than smooth. As University appears as the main element intervening between school and labour market, I call this transition the 'University transition' and understand it as the whole process from the end of school until the insertion into the labour market. We can divide this process into various steps: the transition from school/vocational training etc. to university, that is to say, the time before access and the first time in HE; the time in University and the transition from university to the labour market in the sense of a first full-time employment, though this may be achieved significantly after graduation.

Previous research on student dropout and support has highlighted the crucial importance of the first year in university for the whole academic career, whereat dropout, low academic performance, subject changes etc. are especially likely to happen in the course of this year (Gibney et al., 2011). As all these are indicators of low efficiency, the academic interest in 'improving' the first-year experience has increased (Tavares & Cardoso, 2013). Interestingly, the same indicators appears in Lange-Vester's and Teiwes-Kügler's (2004, p. 162, translated by TS) study on student *milieus* in the social sciences as results of class-specific "mechanisms of uncertainty and dissipation", assuming, hence, that the HE institutions "push" lower-class students away, leading them to either dropout or prolong their studies. Especially the Spanish HE system has been criticised for its low performance in these indicators (Lassibille & Navarro Gomez, 2009). Different scholars suggest pedagogical (Gibney et al., 2011) and administrative measures or even develop computational models to detect students at risk of dropout and/or low academic performance potentially even before inscription (Araque, Roldan, & Salguero, 2009; Nelson, Quinn, Marrington, & Clarke, 2012). In the following, we analyse these different measures from a perspective on social inequality.

An Irish study identified the following causes of difficulties in the first-year in University: the misconception of what constitutes "full-time study", problems with time management, a high parental influence in the selection of a study field, anxieties related to social isolation and the fear not to meet all requirements (Gibney et al., 2011). Problems with time management were especially high in study programmes with a "less rigorous timetable and more [...] emphasis on independent learning" (Gibney et al., 2011, p. 364). Regarding social isolation, it was observed that students who do not live on the campus were less probable to engage in university life and therefore at a greater risk of dropout. Suggested measures included: information sessions about the risk of parental pressure on the study decision, encouraging students to move on the campus, the implementation of a virtual space, "free meet-and-greet lunches" where freshmen could get to know each other and form a social network before the beginning of the

⁷⁸ Here I am in concrete thinking of the 'image' of an Australian University I had occasion to visit and discuss with colleagues. While this University was founded with the idea to broaden access to HE and proudly claims a rather high share of first-in-family students, statistics relating the social class to age are not made public, but it seems possible that rather many of their working-class graduates are mature-aged.

university course, courses on time management and basic norms of being a university student, e.g. the expected workload. In a similar line, Jansen and van der Meer (2012) request pedagogical practices in the first year of studies in order to develop academic skills instead of delegating this task to schools and Fisher et al. (2011) showed that academic performance of university freshmen can be improved through early assessments.

Other authors have focused on the roles of schools in the preparation for University. Shankland et al. (2010) found for the French educational system that students from alternative schools as Steiner, Montessori or new schools were more likely to possess the abilities necessary to be successful in HE. As such schools are likely to concentrate atypical samples of age cohorts, this must not necessarily indicate that an orientation of public schools towards these schools could improve HE-preparedness, as it is just as well possible, that the best prepared families tend to choose these type of schools. Similarly, the study from Gibney et al. (2011) shows an important flaw when scrutinised from a Bourdieusian approach, as the researchers used student ratings as indicators for academic performance and the time spent with studies. Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) found, however, that upper-class students tend to reproduce the ideology of talent by describing their performance as very good and saying to spend less time with studying, whereas under class students tend to underestimate their success even when they achieve better grades. In this sense, it would not be surprising if the upper-class students in Gibney's study showed an academically better performance than their lower-class peers precisely because of this way to measure their performance, so a direct consideration of their actual scores could have been used to contrast this. If social inequality is not theoretically and methodologically considered in the design and realisation of research, findings may easily miss such effects of social class and other social divisions and this may lead to recommendations that reproduce, in the end, social inequality, e.g. by stigmatising first-in-family students as at risk of dropout and lower academic performance and, hence, 'endangering' HE institution's results in performance measures.

Considering the importance of educational decisions (see *Justifying social inequality*), Abbott-Chapman (2011) demands an education that teaches young people to take critically reflected decisions. Santana et al. (2010) present a program for guidance in Spanish secondary education institutions (POES) that is interesting in this sense, though it did not focus on the transition to HE in particular. Its curricula starts with the individual students' abilities and interests, followed by information over educational and vocational possibilities after compulsory secondary school, as well as the actual labour market situation (we will discuss further below the sense of offering such information in school, see *Job opportunities*). However, neither Abbott-Chapman (2011) nor Santana et al. (2010) explain how to teach critical decision taking. With Pais (2007), we can ask if this is not an attempt to claim that the educational system has still something to teach, though it is impossible to take the right decisions in the face of an unknown future. In this sense, we can also read these suggestions as attempts to overcome the legitimation crisis of the educational system (see *Changing transitions*).

On the side of administrative measures, Lassibille and Navarro (2009) stand out for their request of more selectivity in the access to HE, requesting in particular the exclusion of students who enter through vocational training courses. Moreover, they advocate the increase of enrolment fees, arguing that higher costs 'motivate' students and their families to take their

educational choices more considerately, avoiding subject changes and low academic performance. The main idea is here, hence, to exclude students who decrease HE performance, ascribing the difficulties with the performance to the students, rather than the system (see the remarks on a deficit perspective *The invention of youth and development tasks*). As diverse studies show that the socio-economic background of the family of origin is related to the probability of dropout (Araque et al., 2009; Gibney et al., 2011; Lassibille & Navarro Gomez, 2009), this represents, in the end, a closing of the doors that had been (partly) opened through broadening participation policies. Other authors continue to argue, however, in the line of broadened participation. Abbott-Chapman (2011), for example, is in favour of opening an access route from vocational trainings to Australian universities and encourages collaborations between institutions to inform students about this possibility and encourage them to take it.

Administrative measures to broaden the access to HE, e.g. by giving financial aids, can only facilitate the access of few disadvantaged students, as other aspects continue to impede their access to HE anyway, namely the misfit of the upper-class oriented university culture and the lower-class students' habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007). Moreover, especially financial aids include often an important bureaucratic effort and require a certain dedication and hot knowledge to best complete the application process, so especially students with effective family support in applications are more likely to achieve financial aids - and these are usually not working-class students (Cooper, 2013). If good or even 'excellent' academic results are required to be eligible for a scholarship, the ideology of talent is furthermore reproduced, while lower social classes are indirectly excluded from the aids as they are less likely to belong to the best in their class (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007).

A main problem is then that neither pedagogical nor administrative measures are aimed at changing the system (see also *Justifying social inequality*), but at helping the students with difficulties to adapt and Abbott-Chapman (2011, p. 67) even speaks of 'transformative education'. Apart from reproducing a deficit perspective on the students, who are once again responsible for their difficulties and have to change to overcome them (see remarks on a deficit perspective in *The invention of youth and development tasks* and *Social divisions*), this is closely related to the original motivation behind the broadening access policies: Participation in HE was not initially pursued as a means to more social justice⁷⁹, but appeared on the political agenda in the context of a fear to be globally competitive that led Western societies to study how to best mobilise their unused human capital (Bertram & Hennig, 1995; Friedeburg, 1989). The difference is decisive as an approach to more social justice would require a deep-going change of the HE system, to avoid the reproduction of social inequality. If global competitiveness is the aim, rather than a complete change, some additional support is sufficient in order to guide as many non-traditional students through HE as necessary to meet the labour-market demands. In other

⁷⁹ Here I am referring to the motivation behind the political initiative to open up the doors of HE after the Sputnik-shock (Friedeburg, 1989). Authors like Tawney defended a socially just educational system as a means to true liberty (Reay, 2012). However, as a main argument is that injustice in the educational system leads to resentments, while universal access to university education leads to liberty, even if the graduates continue to complete working-class occupations (Reay, 2012), the idea here is not necessarily to change the class structure of society, as the class structure is even maintained, as resentments against it are - theoretically - avoided. In this sense, education is uncoupled from social positioning, without necessarily changing the stratification and reproduction of social positioning itself.

words, the broadening of HE participation was never meant to overcome social inequality and in the current context where the labour market already disposes of more than sufficient highly educated workers, a certain closure in the access is the logical next step - the next restoration after the reform, as von Friedeburg (1989) would put it.

Regarding the computational detection of students at risk of dropout (Araque et al., 2009; Nelson et al., 2012), it has to be said that the employed variables - previous academic performance and household indicators - could easily be required in the pre-registration process, so that institutions could use such programmes to decide which students to admit and which to exclude. Though especially Nelson et al. (2012) describe a highly personalised support programme offered to the students detected as at risk, tagging them as such could also influence their academic performance negatively, in the sense of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2008), so these models might easily be employed in a rather opposite way to the expressed good intentions, reproducing social inequality further. The claim that these models are designed to 'improve' student support may then be seen as an euphemism, as saying that ways to best improve the performance of HE institutions in the relevant indicators without actually employing more resources to improve learning processes etc. would not be accepted as politically correct.

3.4.2. An ethical dilemma or another reproduction mechanism?

The persistence of social inequality in HE confronts researchers with an ethical dilemma: should they promote broadened access to HE as a way to improve individual life chances and society (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Reay, 2012, 2013; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009b) or should they advise non-traditional students to invest in HE as upward mobility is an exception and debt-accumulation could worsen their life chances without the prospective of a 'graduate premium' (Brynin, 2012), while 'successful' social mobility may provoke psychological distress and dissatisfaction (Friedman, 2014; Grundmann et al., 2008; Lehmann, 2014; Reay, 2013)?

The discourse that anyone may improve their social position through education has been criticized by different authors for promoting the 'myth' of social mobility (Reay, 2013), tricking young people into financial losses (Brynin, 2012) and failing to provide real solutions to structural unemployment (Bessant & Watts, 2014). Social mobility is furthermore said to be 'always painful' (Reay, 2013, p. 667) for the individuals, who are like a frog on the shore that has to witness how the ones it left behind drown. Grundmann et al. (2008) argue that the acculturation necessary for educational climbers to be successful in the educational system leads to an alienation from their family and *milieu* of origin without being substituted by social success in the new surroundings. While difficulties to translate the achieved educational attainment into corresponding labour-market positions lead to frustration, educational climbers are more likely to feel socially isolated, experiencing a continuous habitus clash with their new peers, because their habituses cannot transform that profoundly as to fit in completely (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Krahl & Wahl, 2006; Reay, 2013).

Are these social difficulties limited to educational climbers only? Most of the studies cited in this regard only draw on educational climbers or do not specify their points of comparison further, so it is possible that the authors assumed that difficulties they observed among educational climbers were typical for this group and not given in others, invisibilising inner-group heterogeneity (Connell, 2009).

Brennan and Naidoo (2008) explain that upward mobility is not possible without downward mobility if other factors of the labour market and the social structure remain the same. Though they ascertain at one point that 'getting more people into higher education does not of itself ensure enhanced life chances thereafter' (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008, p. 293), they comment at another that 'this should not hide the fact that entry to any form of higher education is likely to maintain or improve a person's life chances and that this is especially the case for people from disadvantaged social groups' (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008, p. 291). We can read this apparent contradiction as a differentiation between the structural and the individual level: While on the structural level, broadened access to HE is little likely to alter structures of social inequality in society, on an individual level HE offers at least a certain chance for improvement of life chances and with the massification of HE (Trow, 1999) and non-graduate work becoming increasingly graduate work (Brynin, 2012) not investing into HE lowers individual life chances significantly. Torrents (2015) argues in a similar line for the Catalan context, highlighting that the risk of precariousness and difficult working conditions is much lower among University graduates and Bogino (2016) suggests an inverse signalling function in the sense that the non-achievement of HE credentials has become a negative signal for employers on the Spanish labour market. On the other extreme of the educational pyramid, it is moreover observed that early school leavers are increasingly excluded from the regular labour market and forced into careers of public measures and long-term unemployment (Diefenbach, 2008; Solga & Wagner, 2008; Walther & Stauber, 2007). This shows that the risks of low educational attainment are much higher than those of high educational attainment. Some research suggests, furthermore, that the key to success of non-traditional students lies in their ability to turn their difference into an asset, rather than considering it a disadvantage (Reay et al., 2009b; Welton & Martinez, 2014), insinuating that upward mobility may not be such a terrible destiny after all. In other words, no HE is not a solution either.

When analysing this research from a meta-perspective, we can ask, however, which practical effects are caused by such recommendations or ethical discussions and which (hidden) interests may motivate them. Highlighting that early school leavers experience terrible situations of social exclusion, while educational climbers 'pay' for their ascension with decreased well-being and social integration, sets, in this sense, the limits of 'good' educational attainment for certain social groups, indicating what would be 'too little' and what 'too much'. The interest behind such a reproduction of social stratification is structural - the economy needs more workers with middle qualifications than highly qualified workers to tell them what to do; minimum levels of education are necessary to serve the economy in this sense and to avoid to decrease public spending by turning into a welfare case - and individual - the dominant classes need 'good' and 'happy' workers, but not more competition for social positioning for their offspring.

In times of crisis and high unemployment rates, the economy's need for highly qualified workers decreases, leading to a higher competition. Upper-class candidates are bound to gain the best positions not only with impressive CVs, but also convincing in job interviews thanks to their habitus fit with the interviewers, who are likely to (subconsciously) recognise themselves in these candidates and hence expect them to be best suited (Groppe, 2006). If other graduates are then pushed to apply for positions for which they are actually overqualified (Barone & Ortiz, 2011; Brynin, 2012), the economy wins even better prepared professionals on all levels, while individuals with lower educational attainments are more likely to not find a job according to their level of studies, as these jobs are already occupied by candidates with higher attainments. In other words, investing into HE may not guarantee a job that corresponds the achieved level of studies, but it may increase the possibilities to obtain a relatively good job at all, while not investing into HE turns then into a guarantee of high job insecurity (Ovink, 2014; Welton & Martinez, 2014) and worse general life opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Discouraging potential educational climbers to pursue HE is then not in the interest of the individual. However, if it is recognised that broadened access to HE is currently used to supply the economy with more highly prepared workers who do not earn more, the injustice of burdening the additional costs of this training solely onto the individual becomes obvious. By advising against HE rather than fighting for a more just system, academics become accomplices of the system and contribute their share to the reproduction of inequalities.

We can differentiate two tendencies that do both, indirectly, favour the reproduction of social inequality: While some authors directly promote the closure of doors by discouraging or rendering access to HE impossible for certain social groups (Brynin, 2012; Lassibille & Navarro Gomez, 2009), others advocate broadened access and 'compensatory measures', e.g. the improving of existing financial aids and guidance through the application process (Cooper, 2013). Though the latter allows some individuals to escape their origin, especially in times of economic boom, no structural equality is achieved, the deficit perspective on these individuals is reproduced and individuals are used to serve market interests, introducing additional graduates when these are needed, while excluding them again - either in HE or on the labour market - when the number of vacancies decreases.

In this sense, individualisation and a continued deficit perspective on potential educational climbers - highlighting their deficits and difficulties rather than their virtues and successes - are tools that contribute to the reproduction of social inequality. The whole idea to advise against educational climbing is furthermore highly paternalistic, as researchers turn their own ideas of how life should be and what is 'good' and 'bad' into guidelines for the disadvantaged, rather than analysing if and how their own perspective is marked by their own socio-economic background (compare Duarte Quapper, 2015 regarding adultocentrism) and likely 'wrong' or at least romanticised perceptions of how the lower social classes live⁸⁰.

⁸⁰ Here I am remembering a speech by Diane Reay, delivered on the 11th of July 2018 in the course of the 2nd Biennial International Conference of the Bourdieu Study Group of the British Sociological Association, celebrated in Lancaster (UK). Though she mainly reproduced the autobiographical reflections she had published previously (Reay, 2013), Reay also added additional anecdotes, in concrete, one of a sociologist lecturer who claimed that he would rather be a farmer, as farmers live in much more relation to nature. The rather obvious exaggeration of a romantic image of the daily labour of farmers made Reay rise and abandon the lecture. I would like to suggest that less striking but similarly

The logical consequence of this way to identify the problem, is that its solution lies in: 1) actually setting social equality⁸¹ as the aim of a reform of the educational system, rather than considering market or other interests, e.g. institutional performance on 'quality' indicators; 2) overcoming a deficit perspective and paternalistic approaches regarding the 'disadvantaged'; remaining alert and reflexive regarding the limitations of our own thinking and seeking ways - e.g. teamwork with researchers from different backgrounds, participatory research techniques and repeated experiences beyond our own comfort zone - to broaden the scope of our thinking 3) critically reflecting our own role, as researchers, in the process of social reproduction, starting to change the world by changing our own behaviour first, 4) activating ourselves to fight 'with' rather than 'for' the disadvantaged, joining ranks for instance in political and social movements.

However, as the requirement of such a profound analysis and internal changes of researchers previous to intervention could easily turn into another reason to postpone social equality yet again, it is also possible to derivate certain practical implications that may already be applied in reforms and support programmes now, considering all sides of the so-called "magic triangle" of youth research (Chisholm, 2006; for a critical analysis see Feixa & Strecker, 2016; Strecker et al., 2018): 1) *Student support*: In order to avoid a stigmatisation of social groups with traditionally lower success in HE, better support should be offered to all students similarly. 2) *Research*: With an aim to avoid the imposition of any social division, studies should include participants from diverse backgrounds, rather than focusing on one profile only and should not directly compare the utterances of those from one profile with those of another, allowing differences to develop on a content level first. Moreover, a focus on successful cases could help to overcome deficit perspectives, though an implicit comparison with the unsuccessful may be unavoidable, within the scope of current thinking. 3) *Society*: As Reay (2013, p. 667) argues that "there is nothing ennobling about poverty", joining ranks with those affected in a fight against poverty and precarization is possible and useful, even while class-specific perceptions continue to limit the scope of our thinking. 4) *Policies*: Though it is difficult to offer useful recommendations for policy makers, institutions and society as a whole to achieve social equality without first changing our ways to think social inequality, it is possible to identify first recommendations already throughout this process, counterchecking if they have a hidden potential to reproduce social inequality and, in particular, to clearly disavise measures that would reproduce social inequality. As previous research has shown, for instance, that a low pupil-teacher ratio favours the participation and satisfaction of students from less privileged backgrounds (Gibney et al., 2011; Rahona Lopez, 2009), school reforms that increase this ratio are obviously inadvisable⁸².

idealised ideas about the lives of other people exist in all of us, especially regarding people who live in surroundings that are absolutely foreign to us, understanding 'foreign' as any kind of difference, within and beyond national borders, and hence embracing class difference.

⁸¹ Note that I have not written "*more* social equality", as I did in other parts of this thesis.

⁸² That Spain considered in times of economic crisis and austerity to increase these ratios (see for example: https://www.ara.cat/societat/societat-educacio_0_685731504.html, last access: 27.07.2018), may then be read as yet another example of how social inequality is reproduced especially in times of crisis.

4. Methods &

Ethics

In this section on methodological reflections, the project procedures will be described in detail and for issues that imply additional difficulties, like the measuring of social class, the adopted strategies will be discussed. Furthermore, I introduce the methods used for data construction and analyses, presenting a combined version of the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2010) and a multi-level intersectional approach (Winker & Degele, 2009). Given that this thesis led me to reflect repeatedly on diverse ethical questions, possibly due to the longitudinal character of the data construction process, a special section is dedicated to these issues.

"Es esencial dedicar media hora al día a la meditación, salvo cuando uno está muy ocupado; entonces hace falta una hora entera."

San Francisco de Sales (quoted by Víctor Küppers

http://www.kuppers.com/1/frases_que_me_gustan_1134784.html)

4.1. *The Project*

Once I had achieved a first formulation of my research interest (see *Afreg's tale, Participant O* and *The Reproduction of Social Inequality in the University Transition*), I had to define how to select and approach participants. Kerner (2012) argues that intersectional research - as any research, I would say - is necessarily structured by the researcher's interests in certain dimensions of social difference and their intersections, but suggests that a focus on specific issues or processes instead of on groups of people may help avoid imposing these dimensions already in the research design and, hence, influencing the expectable results. Considering Purkayastha's (2012) argument regarding the different meaning of the same social division depending on the context (see *Intersectionality*), I would expand this advise by recommending to pay special attention to the contexts participants are moving in, limiting the project to one local context they all share, even though some may move through further (virtual) contexts. In line with these suggestions, I decided to focus on the reproduction mechanisms of social inequality in Catalan Universities, delimiting my approach by focusing on the transition from school to university and through university to the labour market. Such a longitudinal approach to studying social inequality in HE is rare, though a certain change in the students in their time in University is assumed (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004). In consequence, I was able to delimit my sample without 'choosing' some social divisions over others, though it has to be said that I excluded mature-aged students through my focus on the transition from school to university, considering that educational climbing later in life is less likely to influence one's socio-economic positioning (Holmlund et al., 2008) and comes, in this sense, too late for a study on the reproduction of social positions.

The first round of data construction⁸³ for this qualitative research project took place in Spring 2011, when I invited senior-year High school students to participate in focus groups. In order to establish a first contact, I prepared a written project presentation and printed a list of all High Schools in the city of Lleida, made available on the internet⁸⁴. I visited all semi-public⁸⁵ and private schools and almost all of the public schools personally to drop my presentation letter (Annex 1) and to directly talk to someone in charge if this was possible. I only discarded two of the public schools for their location in zones of the outer city and found out that one of the listed public schools had just started to offer secondary schooling and its first promotion had not yet arrived to High School. Additionally, I used a personal contact to achieve access to

⁸³ I prefer to speak of "construction", rather than "collection", acknowledging the influence of researcher, method and situation, among others, on the recorded data.

⁸⁴ See: http://ime.paeria.cat/aplicacions/centres_educatius.asp [last access: 10.01.2011].

⁸⁵ As explained in the context section about Catalonia, I refer with "semi-public" to private schools that receive public funding and do hence obey to similar norms as public schools, while the families pay varying matriculation fees.

a public school in a rural area of the province of Lleida, as I supposed that the remote rural location could influence in the students' study choices. Though I attempted to meet all schools in similar conditions, the responses varied widely, in some cases several visits were necessary – sometimes without leading to a focus group in the end – and so did the focus groups they enabled me to conduct. The following table (Table 5) summarises the characteristics of the 12 focus groups that I was able to conduct in the end in 7 different High Schools. The 123 participating senior-year students were asked to comment on their plans for the future and to give recommendations to peers regarding how to choose if and what to study in university. Additionally, the participants' socio-economic backgrounds were assessed with a questionnaire (Annex 2), in which they were asked to indicate their contact data if they were interested in participating in the follow-up. These questionnaires came with a short letter of presentation the participants were invited to keep, so they could contact me if they liked and had a short reminder of the project. At the moment of elaboration of these letters, I mentioned the intention to realize 3 annual follow-up interviews, but in the course of the follow-up I took advantage of the opportunity to add additional interview rounds when I was granted a FPU-scholarship at the beginning of the year 2013. As the participants were able to withdraw at every stage, this did not propose a major ethical difficulty and several of the participants actually expressed their liking the idea to meet again after Int⁸⁶, considering the annual reflections useful for their development.

⁸⁶ In the remainder of this thesis, I employ the abbreviation "Int" whenever an Interview is quoted followed by its number.

Table 5: Characteristics of the Focus Groups.

FG ⁸⁷	School Characteristics	Nº participants	Additional comments
1	1 Public school, very good reputation ⁸⁸	7	Class representatives
2	2 Semi-public school, (day 1, group 1)	9	Class with tutor (not present throughout the discussion)
3	2 Semi-public school (day 1, group 2)	8	Class with tutor (not present throughout the discussion)
4	2 Semi-public school (day 2, group 1)	8	Class with tutor (not present throughout the discussion)
5	2 Semi-public school (day 2, group 2)	8	Class with tutor (not present throughout the discussion)
6	3 Public school, rather marginalized area/bad reputation	2	Short presentation of the project in the class room, meeting with volunteers outside the school hours
7	4 Public school, considered as of maximum complexity (group 1)	12	Class with tutor (not present throughout the discussion)
8	4 Public school, considered as of maximum complexity (group 2)	13	Class with tutor (not present throughout the discussion)
9	5 Public school, area with high migration rate, considered as of maximum complexity	23	As the class was taking graduation pictures at the same day, the discussion had to start later, with all students at once, the teacher refused to leave
10	6 Public school, rural area (group 1)	11	Class with tutor (not present throughout the discussion)
11	6 Public school rural area (group 2)	10	Class with tutor (not present throughout the discussion)
12	7 Private school (secondary education was semi-public)	12	The school selected the participants by lot, as too many had shown interest when asked to participate
		123 (total)	

All 83 focus-group participants who had indicated contact data were contacted in autumn 2011 and invited to a first interview. Though I assessed their socio-economic backgrounds with

⁸⁷ FG = Focus Group. The date of completion is not indicated as it could give away the identities of the participants, but all focus groups took place between January and March 2011 and are presented in the order of their completion. Only FG1, 9, 10 and 12 were analysed in depth. The other FGs were used as comparative context.

⁸⁸ The Catalan system ascribes to some schools the tag "of maximum complexity" (*centres educatius de complexitat màxima*), considering criteria that are strongly related to social class and migration histories: 1) Low level of instruction of parents or legal guardians; 2) Occupations of jobs with low professional qualification of parents or guardians; 3) Significant number of parents or guardians of students receiving the minimum insertion income; 4) High percentage of parents or guardians in unemployment; 5) High percentage of students with specific educational needs, 6) and high percentage of newcomers (*nouvinguts* - a term used to name non-Catalan incoming pupils) (Catalunya, 2017). As schools with an especially good reputation do not receive any official tag, I capture this difference by indicating my own impressions regarding their public representation.

the provided details (see *Measuring Social Class*), I did not mean to reduce the project to a certain profile of participants only, considering that this would have imposed this profile on the results (Winker & Degele, 2009) and if I had focused working-class students only, I would have reproduced the deficit perspective typical for youth research rather than overcoming it (Andresen, 2005) (see also *Youth Research and Transitions*) and would have limited the possible findings as the tendency to "study down" always does (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015).

I decided to combine different methods, coming from a triangulation approach rather than a pure sequential research design, as the different methods were treated as equals in the sense that both give access to important but qualitatively different aspects of the transition experience and none was only used to inform the other (Caillaud & Flick, 2017). While I expected the focus groups to generate shared consensus and to allow me to observe direct interactions and the processes of consent generation, I decided to use interviews for the longitudinal follow-up, in order to focus on the individual case and the concrete participant's experiences, practices, difficulties etc. As we will see in the findings' section, this mixed-method approach did not lead to rich data, but enabled me furthermore to compare the employed methods regarding the concrete research questions and procedures (see *Intersections of social class and gender*).

Only few participants reacted to my contact messages and with some it was never possible to actually meet, so the high number of participants who initially indicated their contact data (67,5% of the focus-group participants) may have been the result of a social desirability bias, in the sense of wishing to leave a good impression on the researcher on the day of the focus group, in combination with a relative low concern for the protection of personal data in Spain, while many of these participants may have never planned to actually take part in the follow-up project. None of the 13 participants who eventually agreed to meet me came from a family of origin with low economic and cultural capital and only one had a migration background⁸⁹. As this endangered the objectives of my work, I decided to employ a socio-economic survey (Annex 3) with first-year University students of the University of Lleida (UdL) to identify students with the missing profiles and invite them to participate in the project. The aim of this survey was by no means representativeness, so I chose degrees based on the assumptions made by Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) that students from lower social classes were more likely to choose highly technical or social degrees, preferring especially degrees with a clear job description like teacher training courses. Moreover, practical issues like the schedules of the obligatory first-year classes and the accessibility of the teaching staff influenced the selection. In concrete, I visited the degrees of Primary Education, Tourism, Social Work and Food Science and Technology.

In total 183 students participated in this survey, one of whom turned out to have been a focus-group participant who had not reacted to my contact messages and could now be included

⁸⁹ As explained in the section on intersectionality, I use the term "migration background" to refer to people who were born in a country different to the country of residence. As only few of my participants showed such a background, I opted to only indicate the approximate region (e.g. Latin America or Eastern Europe) rather than mentioning the concrete nation of origin, in order to protect the participants anonymity as best as possible.

into the sample (Xenia)⁹⁰. 141 of the survey participants indicated their contact data, 77,0%, showing again a surprisingly high willingness to share their personal data, though I encountered again some difficulties when I attempted to actually contact the participants. Rather than contacting again all participants who had indicated their contact data, I determined the social class of origin according to the information regarding parental education and work (see *Measuring Social Class*) whenever this was possible and contacted the participants in an order of preference, starting with those who had appeared to have the lowest capital accumulations. As I did not mean to limit myself to social class and gender, I also contacted participants with migration backgrounds. Though I was especially interested in cases where a migration background coincided with low capital accumulations, my analyses of the data provided by the survey participants who had indicated their contact data did not show any result, that is to say, there were no students with a migration background who were additionally identified as from social class A among the potential participants. This may already hint at an intersection between lower social class and migration backgrounds that prevents the access to HE, but as the study was not representative at all, I can only encourage further research to shed light on this hypothesis.

Once I considered to have achieved a sufficient number of first-year interviews with participants from different backgrounds, I stopped to contact further participants. In the academic course 2011-2012, it was possible to conduct a total of 21 semi-structured interviews – 14 with participants from the focus groups (including the participant that reappeared in the socio-economic survey) and 7 with participants gained through the socio-economic survey – 4 of which had a migration background. The occasion of the interview was used to ask all participants to complete a more detailed socio-economic questionnaire (Annex 4), including questions about their study choice and significant others⁹¹ and indicators that could give additional clues regarding their social class, for example information on their grandparents, the monthly income of their families etc. (see *Measuring Social Class*). In the case of the participants gained through the amplification of the sample, I elaborated specific first-year questionnaires for each of them, repeating the questions they had left without reply when answering the socio-economic survey, in order to get another chance to complete the data or at least hear their comments why they did not feel able to complete these questions.

After five years of in-depth interviews, the project concluded in 2016 with 17 students, 9 from the original focus-groups, 7 who were incorporated into the sample in the first interview round and 1 who asked to partake in the project in the third interview round. That none of the participants who were gained through the amplification of the sample dropped out in the course of the follow-up, might be a sign of a higher interest to participate in the project. However, as several of these participants asked me why they had been selected for participation while friends of them had not been contacted, their higher participation rate may also be a result of the approach to only contact very few participants from each degree course,

⁹⁰ It is possible that further focus-group participants completed the survey but did not indicate their contact data in one or both socio-economic questionnaires, so I could not detect the concordance.

⁹¹ In one question, I asked the participants to indicate the three persons, dead or alive but actual contacts of them, they would take with themselves to a desert island, as I hoped to identify significant others like this. For more information on the concept and its relation to choices like attending HE see (Falk, 1980).

so maybe these participants felt special and selected. However, drop-out cannot be considered a major problem of this longitudinal project, as only 5 of the initial 21 interview participants decided to drop-out. I had actually chosen to start with a rather big group for a qualitative study of these dimensions, expecting higher dropout rates. Further below, I will reflect in more detail on possible explanations of this great success of the project. Another interesting and rather rare phenomenon in this sense is the experienced drop-in. Two participants were gained in the course of the follow-up: One of the socio-economic survey participants (Dylan) contacted me towards the beginning of the third-interview round to meet me for an interview and talk about his decision to abandon his degree course. This participant turned out to be of a family of origin with especially low cultural and economic capitals, but I had not been able to detect this with the socio-economic survey as he had not indicated any information on his father and his mother received a payment due to a recognized disability and had neither formal education nor a profession, so he left all these indicators unanswered. So I considered it at first an opportunity to include him into the sample and he came to participate in three annual interviews (year 3 to 5). However, I decided not to consider his case for the longitudinal in-depth analyses that I present in this thesis, because his itinerary was completely different from those of the other participants: being already significantly older than the others, he entered HE after achieving his High School certificate in evening school, worked full-time and abandoned university after his second year – just before the first interview with him. The second drop-in participant (Margarita) was a friend of another participant (Cara) who came to contact me and ask if she could take part in the project in year 3. As her itinerary was more similar to the other participants and she remained a HE student in the whole course of the follow-up, I decided to include her into the analyses. Similarly I decided to include Ariel in the final analyses, though it had not been possible to hold a fifth and last interview with her, as she had left the country. The 17 participants who were included into the longitudinal analyses are described in more detail below (see *The Participants*).

The guidelines I elaborated for the semi-structured interviews are made available in the annex (Annex 6). I followed in their elaboration the idea to be as best as possible prepared for different interview constellations, preparing my questions in Catalan as well as in Spanish in order to avoid rushed translation to difficult the interviews and preparing for a growing number of different settings, as the participants' itineraries started to drift apart in the course of the follow-up. Especially in the last interview I prepared for participants who were still missing several years to finish their degree (N. and Nadia), who were in their last year (Maduixa, Nic, Margarita, Peter, Xenia), who had already finished the degree and were studying a master (Piruleta, Cara, Koala, Willy), were not studying a formal master at the moment (Sara, Skone, Andrés) or who were living abroad (Floreta, Irina, Ariel). On several occasions I was able to conduct additional interviews, for example when Maduixa informed me in year 1 about her upcoming degree course change, so I was able to conduct 2 second-year interviews with her, one before and one after the change, but also when I knew that participants planned a stay abroad. Nevertheless, I often encountered surprises in the interviews, for example when Mabe and Estanteria (two participants who did not complete the follow-up), turned up together for Mabe's second year interview, when Willy had abandoned his master and started to work full-time in Int5 or when Nic returned from his stay in Japan

after only one month. Each interview developed its own dynamics and went in its own direction – the ideal result of the used interview technique.

In the third interview round, the first I conducted as a FPU-scholar, I invited my participants to furthermore complete a paper & pencil Activity Diary⁹² (Annex 7). It was this Activity Diary that Margarita saw completing her friend and flatmate Cara that sparked her interest in becoming a part of the project and provoked her "drop-in". Throughout a 3-month stay as a visiting scholar at the Youth Research Centre of the University of Melbourne (Australia) in 2014, I invited students from the University of Melbourne and from Victoria University to complete a digital version of this diary, so I am able to draw certain comparisons between the online and offline application of this method. These reflections are not included into this thesis, just as the in-depth analyses of the 6 semi-structured interviews I was able to conduct at the end of my stay in Australia and the 8 semi-structured interviews I held in Argentina in 2016, in the course of a one-month stay as a visiting scholar at the *Universidad Nacional de Cordoba*, were not included, as such an extent would go far beyond the scope of this PhD thesis.

In a nutshell, I completed in the course of this PhD project 96 semi-structured interviews, without counting the interviews from Australia and Argentina. The total duration of these interviews was 6195 minutes, or 103,25 hours (Annex 5). After each interview I noted down main impressions and significant topics as well as information regarding the interview location, date and duration in a word document. 92⁹³ of these interviews were transcribed⁹⁴, 49 by paid transcribers and the rest by myself. All first and fifth-year interviews, all except 1 fourth-year interview and 11 of the second-year interviews were transcribed applying a modified version of the transcription rules proposed by Reinders (2005, p. 256) (Table 6). The remaining interviews were transcribed in a simplified way, only applying the transcription rule to mark longer pauses, as an in-depth analysis considering intonations and other non-verbal communication was neither considered necessary nor feasible for each interview.

Table 6: Annotation system (modified and translated from Reinders, 2005, p. 256)

<u>Underlined</u>	stressed word, part of a word or a sentence
;, ::, :::,	vocal prolongation, the longer the more colons (no:::,)
‘ (glottal stop)	not finished word or an interruption
(.)	short break (intonation goes down)
(-), (--)	longer break with a length of approx. 1 (-) or 2 (--) seconds
(3)	longer break with the approx. length of seconds indicated in parentheses
<p>, </p>	marker for low/hushed utterance (<p> =

⁹² In the elaboration of this thesis, I have decided to exclude the activity diary for its quite different approach and theoretical background. Nevertheless, I have been working on an article on the Activity Diaries only and hope to publish it soon.

⁹³ I decided not to transcribe the interviews realized with participants who dropped out before their last interview had been transcribed and did not transcribe the interviews with Dylan, the drop-in participant who was not considered in the analyses of this thesis due to his very different itinerary (see above).

⁹⁴ In order to protect my participants' anonymity, the interview transcripts and analyses are only included in copies for the external evaluators and the members of the academic tribunal, while the public version of this thesis does not include the complete annex.

	beginning, </p> = end)
<f>, </f>	loud utterance (<f> = beginning, </f> = end)
(sniffs)	non- verbal elements of communication and interpreting comments made by the transcriber (e.g. ironic), information on interruptions etc. (mobile phone rings, teacher comes in, etc.)
[Interviewer: but]	short utterance of the moderator or another participant within the longer utterance of another
[[alias]]	changes made by the transcriber as to make anonymous participants (e.g. names of persons, towns etc.)
((2sec.))	length of an incomprehensible utterance
((blahblah))	words the transcriber is not completely sure to have understood correctly
"you don't go there"	citation of a third person made by a speaker
?	Question-typical rising in the accentuation
...	fading out of an unfinished sentence/word

4.2. *Measuring Social Class*

As commented in the introduction, my interest in social class and derived inequalities was a main drive for me to develop and unfold this PhD project. Throughout my undergraduate studies I got to know different measures to assess social class or socio-economic status (SES), considering both usually from the perspective of how they would categorise myself, so, in other words, I used my own background as a test to see up to which extent these measures worked, developing an awareness that no empirical measure ideally portrayed class differences. Following the distinction offered by Rubin et al. (2014:196, accentuation in the original), I understand SES as "one's *current* social and economic situation" and social class as "one's socio-cultural *background* [...] more stable, typically remaining static across generations". This definition is in line with Bourdieu's ideas of social reproduction over generations (see *Capitals, field and habitus*), though the word 'static' does not embrace the adaptation of reproduction mechanisms most adequately and would certainly disturb Thompson (1978). For Thompson (1978, p. 147) "the alternative notion of class as a static, either sociological or heuristic, category" is false and "expelled" "class as a historical category - the observation of behaviour over time". The focus with this approach to observable behaviour is laid on "class-struggle", as "classes" only become observable in these struggles and acquire their "class-consciousness" through them (Thompson, 1978, p. 149). Considering that social inequalities have turned unspeakable (Kelan, 2014), possibly due to increased individualisation (Walther & Stauber, 2007), and that most people lack a class-consciousness in the sense of not identifying with a certain social class or *milieu* (Rubin et al., 2014), one might wonder if class-struggle and, in consequence, classes ceased to exist nowadays or lost at least their explanatory character (Beck, 2013). Beck (2013, p. 66) argues in concrete against "the

epistemological monopoly of the category of class over social inequality", considering that "class theorists and researchers normally miss the cosmopolitization of the poor (but also the middle classes and, of course, the elites), their multi-ethnic, multi-religious, transnational life forms and identities" in their claims that class continues to be important because an empirical connection between class position, income and educational difference persists. Rather than the end of class as an explanatory category, this may be read as a call for more intersectionality in the research of social inequality (see *Intersectionality*). On a practical level, this does not solve the issue how to 'measure' social class and a 'historical' observation of class behaviours in the sense of Thompson would be a topic for yet another PhD thesis, so a return to empirical indicators, though recognising their limitations and historical transformation and not focusing on economic aspects only, appear to be a reasonable compromise.

When developing this project, I had to find a way how to assess the social classes of my participants, considering an infinite number of possible constellations different to my own that could potentially show up the measures that worked for my own case, while measures that did not seem to fit for me could do them right. Moreover, I had to do so in a – for me at that point – foreign country, rather shortly after having arrived myself. Despite these difficulties, my longitudinal approach allowed me a certain process of trial and error, as I started with a short socio-economic questionnaire with open-ended questions about parent education and occupation that accompanied the focus groups (Annex 2), then developed a questionnaire with closed questions in the socio-economic survey used to amplify the sample (Annex 3), asked for additional measurements in the questionnaire accompanying the first-year interviews (Annex 4) and required a self-definition of their social class in the activity diaries (Annex 7) my participants completed in the third year of the follow-up. Additionally, social class became a topic in several of the interviews, giving me further insights into how my participants understood this concept and positioned themselves in this regard. As this is a crucial point setting the starting point of my whole thesis, I would like to give some more insights here into the measurements I used and why and how I came to revise my questions.

In order to assess the social classes of my participants, I meant to approach their positioning through their parents' positioning; an usual approach (Rubin, 2012a) given that the students' own indicators regarding occupation, income, final education level etc. are not yet stable (Rubin et al., 2014). I developed a Bourdieusian approach, combining indicators for the parental levels of economic and cultural capital. To my knowledge, neither in youth research nor in HE research exists a common approach how to assess social classes from such a capital approach, and "international conventions for measuring social class or SES" (M. Rubin et al., 2014:197) do not exist either. The 'usual suspects' – annual household income, occupation and educational levels – are, apart from their known limitations (Rubin et al., 2014), especially biased if we want to assess the social classes of young people based on their answers regarding their parents, as they are less likely to know how much their parents earn, what professional status they can be considered and what education they completed, especially if their parents did not undergo Higher Education but followed the much more diverse and complex pathways of non-tertiary vocational trainings⁹⁵. "Population-based standards [...] can

⁹⁵ This PhD thesis does not offer the space to analyse the complex labyrinth of current educational itineraries and if we talk of the parent generation of the participants, we would have to pay additional

be difficult and controversial to establish” (Rubin et al., 2014:197) and especially international measures, like ISCED, ISEI or EGP (Ehmke & Siegle, 2005), are despite their utility controversial in this sense, as they can be understood as the lowest common denominator and hence little context-sensitive and meaningful. Moreover, all these measures are more related to SES than to social class, as they attempt to assess the current social and economic situation.

Many researchers rely on local convenience measures, like the reception of a family-income based grant (Donnelly, 2015) or postcodes (Thiele et al., 2016). We can deduct from the comments in Bathmaker et al. (2013) that these authors struggled to include further aspects, apart from parent occupation, in their class division, but did not achieve a feasible way to do so. A differentiation between ambiguous and unambiguous classes in the description of their study is not applied in the presentation of their findings. The lack of a standardised approach leads researchers to 'collect' different indicators, only few of which are later on translated into highly simplified social class categories. Other researchers avoid sharing their concrete approach to determine social class, stating for example: "We amalgamated participant information previously collected via survey data (i.e. parental occupation, school 'type', residential location) with interview data obtained from the participants' personal stories and descriptions of their economic and social circumstances" (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015). Family-income based grants may work in the UK, but in this study in Spain the participants with least economic capital were often not eligible for scholarships, while participants from families with much higher incomes received enrolment scholarships (see *Scholarship programmes*). Cooper's (2013) findings on important knowledge gaps regarding existing scholarship programmes, corroborated by the findings of this study, put into doubt if a more direct relation between economic capital and grant receipt exists in other contexts, showing that this measure is likely not very adequate. Similarly, postcode approaches show a rather limited applicability (Thiele et al., 2016).

As we have seen above (see *Social divisions*), speaking of social class requires terminological reflections and decisions. Any research is bound to reproduce, at least partly, the terminological diversity in the field, as precisely the awareness of different connotations makes it necessary to remain true to the exact terminology applied by quoted authors. For my own data, I employ the terms 'lower', 'middle' and 'upper' classes, though I also come to speak of advantages and privileges. In the socio-economic questionnaire used for the follow-up participants, I included indirectly approaches like 'first-in-family', by asking for other family members or friends with HE titles or who were currently studying in HE. Moreover, I considered income levels, asking for the approximate household income (see Annex 4) - though this question turned out to be of rather limited use, as the participants seemed to have no clear idea of their parents' incomes.

attention to the different norms, terminologies and laws that applied when the differently-aged parents received their training, in Spain and abroad. To give the reader an idea of why I consider the term "labyrinth" adequate in this context, I add two slides from a Power Point Presentation, hold by representatives of "*Noves Oportunitats*", an initiative to offer young people without a secondary education title formation courses that are eligible to receive subventions in the framework of the EU Youth Guarantee, in a meeting about the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Lleida on the 16th of June 2016 in Lleida (see Annex 8.1).

The main approach to determine social class positionings focused, however, on Bourdieu's concepts of economic and cultural capital. In this project, I worked in the focus-group round with open-ended questions about parent education and occupation (Annex 2) and noticed that many participants had severe problems to answer these questions or indicated answers that did not give insights into their parents' capitals. In particular participants whose parents had not been through HE were here in disadvantage, as it is common sense that a doctor or a lawyer possesses HE, while the children of employees may know the names of the enterprises they are working for, but not what they are actually doing and what educational level they achieved. I did, hence, discover that my questionnaire disadvantaged first-in-family students in their answering.

For the first round of interviews I developed an improved version of the questionnaire that worked with closed items for different levels of occupation and educational attainment (Annex 4). Though the longer socio-economic questionnaire (Annex 4) also included questions regarding educational levels and occupations of grandparents and siblings and an estimate of the monthly household income, these questions turned out to have only a highly orientational function, as knowledge about the grandparents was often low and most participants commented openly to be completely guessing their answers or left the spaces in blank. The household-income question showed the additional difficulty to define the household, as participants of single parents, three-generation households or living in a parent-independent residence commented on difficulties how to establish whom to consider. As they had little idea how much the different members of their households were earning, the question was however rather hypothetical anyway. An additional question for how much they spend per month on different concepts was helpful here, as I could observe participants gaining a certain consciousness for money with this question and revising their answer to the previous question, but this is only a further sign that they did not really know how to answer and that their intuitive guesses were little accurate.

A question regarding the number of family members who achieved HE titles proved of a certain use to establish whether a participant belonged to the "most privileged among the least privileged" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) in the sense of having direct role models within the own family who made it to HE, but also showed the difficulty that the number of family members considered when answering this question differed widely. Though it was positive that I had required the participants to also indicate the approximate number of family members they considered when answering this question, this estimate was for some a matter of guessing while others actually started to count, leading to differences that did not give me many clues how to compare someone who indicated 1 family member out of 5 to someone who marked 2 family members out of 15 who had achieved HE titles. Moreover, it is difficult to evaluate the importance of the members with HE titles the participants remembered when counting and proved much more significant to consider participants' family members with HE titles or currently in HE the participants mentioned in the interviews. Thanks to having asked the question in the questionnaire, we can consider however the hypothetical importance of family members with HE titles for the horizon of opportunities and possibilities of the participants, while their own comments in the interviews may lead us to identify significant others among these family members and see how these have an additional impact on the study choice, for example as direct models or counsellors.

Although first-in-family students did still encounter more severe difficulties to answer and certain mistakes due to a lack of knowledge are possible, this simplification allowed me to situate all follow-up participants in a social field according to their parental economic and cultural capital (Figure 5), maintaining hence a certain level of complexity. In concrete, the parents' educational level was employed as a measure for the cultural capital and their current or – in the case of current inactivity – last occupation as a measure for the economic capital. If data for both parents were provided, a mean⁹⁶ was calculated; if data were only provided for one parent, the position was determined with the given data. I then separated the field into 4 quadrants, labelled from A to D (A= both capitals low; B= low cultural, higher economic capital, C= low economic, higher cultural capital, D= both capitals high), and the participants were assigned the label of their field. The participants who came to join the study later on were added to the same figure, so that it now shows the approximate social positioning of all participants who completed at least one interview. Although these social classes are highly simplified and tentative, they allow for a comparison of students from different backgrounds as the one intended in this project.

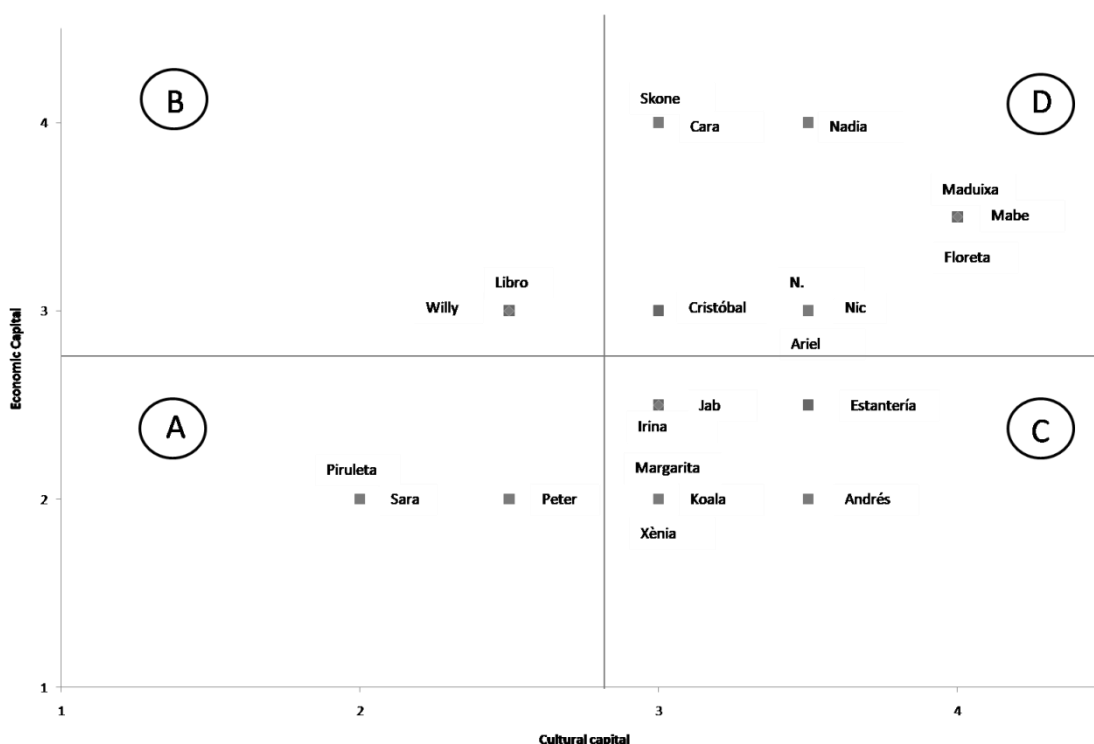


Figure 5: Positioning of the follow-up participants in the social field*.⁹⁷

*The cultural and economic capital were calculated using the mean of mother and father for education (indicator for cultural capital) and current or previous work in case of current unemployment (indicator for economic capital),

⁹⁶ Of course, I am aware that it is not usual to calculate means of qualitative categories, but as the aim was here to visualize different social positions as best as possible in a continuum, calculating means of both parents seemed to be a feasible way to acknowledge differences between the parents in the participants' positioning, though it does not make sense, mathematically.

⁹⁷ In this figure appear the aliases of several participants who took part in this project at the beginning of the follow-up but dropped out in the course of the annual interviews. As their first-year interviews were analysed in depth, quotations from their interviews may appear in the findings regarding the first-year in university presented below.

whereat the numbers 1 to 4 were used to code 1 'no studies', 2 'elementary studies', 3 'A-levels and equivalent', 4 'further and higher education' and 1 'no work', 2 'employed worker', 3 'functionary C⁹⁸ or freelancer', 4 'functionary A/B, entrepreneur/contractor', respectively). Whenever several participants achieved the same positioning, their aliases were organised around the position marker. Additionally to the participants who completed the follow-up, all participants from the first-year interviews are included.

This visualization of the social positioning of the participants allows us to observe, among others, that the participants with migration histories – Xenia, Koala, Andrés, Irina and Ariel – were all except Ariel situated in quadrant C, as their cultural capital was higher than their economical capital. Even regarding Ariel it has to be said that though her mother worked as a medical doctor and was therefore ascribed a high economic capital, this adscription turned out to be rather relative in the course of the follow-up, as Ariel commented repeatedly on the high precariousness her mother was facing in her job and received an income-based scholarship (see also *Scholarship programmes*). This may indicate that though Ariel's mother was able to work in her field of studies in a foreign country, she still was not able to achieve a position as stable and well-paid as a Catalan colleague might have, corroborating the observation from other studies that immigrants are often among the first affected of the increasing labour precariousness as they are pushed into highly precarious sectors when their educational titles are not recognized or their language proficiency is limited, but are furthermore the first to sign highly precarious contracts within traditionally well-situated sectors (Diefenbach, 2008; Soong et al., 2017; Strecker et al., 2018). In this sense, the social positioning of the participants with a migration history might have been distorted, as their parents' economic capital may have "suffered" indirectly from their immigration, as education from another country tends to give "poorer labour market outcomes" (Wiers-Jensen, 2011). Though the first generation of immigrants, our participants' parents, might never completely overcome this disadvantage on the labour market, the social class habitus they transmit to their children might remain stable in spite of the change in socio-economic status (Rubin et al., 2014), facilitating additionally that their children achieve high levels of cultural capital themselves and translate these into a corresponding labour market position and hence higher economic capital when they enter the labour market. Here it is therefore appropriate to reflect additionally about the social class positioning of the participants with a migration history, when tendencies seem to differ according to the social class (see *Findings*).

Rubin et al. (2014, p. 197) describe the evaluation of social class through indicators concerning students' parents as limited, as "this relatively indirect approach tells us more about students' parents than about students themselves." These authors recommend the additional use of subjective self-definitions, arguing that "subjective measures assess an important aspect of social class (...) that is relatively distinct from objective aspects" (Rubin et al., 2014, p. 198). In this project, I required the participants of the follow-up to indicate a subjective identification of their social class in the course of the Activity Diary (Annex 7) they were invited to complete in their third year. When comparing the self-indicated social class of the participants to my own calculations, I encountered the problem that all of the 15 participants answering the

⁹⁸The Spanish system differences positions in civil service in categories. The higher the category (A is the highest), the more education is required to access the position and the higher is the annual salary. For more information see: <http://www.educaweb.com/contenidos/laborales/oposiciones/tipos-empleado-publico/>

question described themselves as middle-class. Rubin et al. (2014, p. 198) suggest that the use of “meaningful response categories” and, in the case of the middle class, “meaningful subcategories can enhance the discriminatory power of such measures”, indicating that this should solve the problem that people tend to identify as middle class. The authors (2014, p. 198) mention categories as “‘upper-middle-class,’ ‘middle-class,’ or ‘lower middle-class’” as options, showing that artistic scientific categories, for example highly precise definitions of social *milieus*, may be meaningless to participants, while commonplace wordings like “lower” and “upper” are appropriate. My differentiation between “low”, “middle-low”, “middle”, “middle-high” and “high⁹⁹” worked in the sense that only 2 of the 17 participants left the question unanswered, possibly indicating that the others were able to categorize themselves with these possibilities. However, in our results all the 15 remaining participants indicated middle-class, 10 marking directly “middle”, 4 “middle-high” and 1 participant “middle-low”. If we compare the 5 participants who indicated these differentiated categories, we see that the participant indicating middle-low is Skone, who was categorised into the social class D according to his parental capitals, as his parents possess superior education, though not university studies and enter into the highest labour position offered (high-rank civil servant or entrepreneur). The 4 participants indicating middle-high are Maduixa (D), Floreta (D), Cara (D) and Margarita (C). That Margarita chose “middle-high” in her self-definition is again surprising if we consider that several other participants with higher calculated capital accumulations indicated “middle” or, in the case of Skone, “middle-low”. Though we can expect a common tendency to situate oneself in the middle of the class spectrum, as there is always the case of others to consider who are either much better or much worse off and one automatically attempts to illustrate this perception of difference by situating oneself in the middle, the way how the participants chose out of the 3 middle-class subcategories indicates that either their perception of social class positioning has nothing to do with the employed objective measures or they avoided categorisation by choosing the middle. This finding fits anyway the theory of Rubin et al. (2014, p. 198) –as any finding actually would in my reading – as “positive correlations between subjective and objective measures of social class (...) indicate that subjective measures assess an important aspect of social class” while difference between the objective and subjective measures shows for these authors that “subjective measures assess an important aspect of social class but one that is relatively distinct from objective aspects”. Another possible explanation could be a significant difference in the social capital that influences the perception of the class spectrum: participants with lower economic and cultural capital may know more social contacts with low capital accumulations themselves and position themselves higher in comparison to these, while participants with high cultural and economic capital may only know social contacts who possess high capital accumulations themselves, exaggerating their own humble origins in comparison to these.

As the participants completed the diaries on their own, an additional difficulty is that we cannot know how much thought they give to their own categorization. In an interview study I was able to conduct in 2016 in Argentina, I included the question for the subjective perception of social class within the socio-economic questionnaire the Argentinean participants

⁹⁹ These are translations from the Catalan “baixa”, “mitja-baixa”, “mitja”, “mitja-alta” and “alta” and may therefore sound strange in English, where the use of “upper middle” and “lower middle” is probably more usual.

completed in my presence, this time without offering the option "middle" so the participants had to choose between "middle-low"¹⁰⁰ and "middle-high" if they wanted to indicate their belonging to the middle class. This gave me occasion to witness how some of these participants just directly indicated their class without giving it much thought, while the two participants I myself categorized as lower class according to their parents' economic and cultural capital, struggled with the question, asked me back how to answer it and, in the case of the girl, started to rack her memory to remember what she had been told about social class categories in a university class. When I encouraged them to just indicate their impressions, they both indicated "middle-lower" at the end, so maybe my decision to eliminate the option "middle" was useful here to actually "force them" to categorise themselves further. In this sense, the slight correction of the meaningful subcategories proposed by Rubin et al. (2014) may be enough to make the difference here, but should not substitute other measures of social positioning completely.

With my participants from this PhD project I can also rely on the comments some of them made regarding social class in their interviews. In the last interview round, several participants asked me to remind them of my actual research interest when I invited them to propose further questions, so I mentioned social inequalities. It was interesting to see which dimensions of social difference came to their minds when they heard this, as nobody mentioned gender. This is in line with ideas of post-feminism that construct feminism as an outdated concept and previous research with young professionals that found that these ascribed their professional experiences to age, in particular in the sense of their lack of experience, while gender differences were completely silenced and omitted, highlighting the "unspeakability of inequalities" (Kelan, 2014, p. 802). Xenia commented on sexual orientation and religion and Willy, who studied political sciences and is hence likely to have treated the topic of social class in his lectures, argued that there were no differences as only people from certain social backgrounds achieve access to university. That he categorised himself as middle-class, while I ascribed class B due to his parents low educational levels can hence be understood as an effect of his perception of homogeneity among university students. Several other participants indirectly reduced social class to economic capital in their comments, arguing that they never noticed any differences until the issue of a graduation trip came up and it suddenly became obvious who was able to pay more and who less (Andrés). Skone already entered into the topic of social class in his third-year interview and constructed his class identity as lower regarding some of his fellow students, arguing that he cared much more for his studies and the money his family spent on them. This is hence in line with his self-categorization of middle-low and shows that he related differently to social class and his fellow students than Willy, for example, highlighting difference rather than commonality. Though it could have been useful to control the context-sensitivity by instructing the participants which context to consider (e.g. their country, their university, their degree course...) (Rubin et al., 2014), many more factors seem to influence here, as Willy likely treated the topic in University and was probably told about the underrepresentation of certain social classes in HE, while Skone had probably never treated the topic of social class in his Degree Animal Health and

¹⁰⁰ Here I translate from the Spanish "media-baja". The offered categories were "baja", "media-baja", "media-alta" and "alta", as I eliminated the option "media" after the experience with the participants in my PhD project.

Science. Moreover, Willy came from a rural community where his parents might not have been able to achieve HE with ease despite their higher economic capital, though that his perception of social class is legitimately higher in the rural context than the Bourdieusian approach could show. And as one of the central axes in Willy's case proved to be his change in social success once in HE, after having been an outsider in his school, this might also explain why he unconsciously tended to highlight the similarity between him and his fellow students, while Skone distinguished himself by glorifying his supposedly humbler origins – though these did not materialise in his capitals at all.

In summary, the employed procedure allowed me to confirm several of the already known difficulties in measuring social class, mainly a lack of knowledge of the parents' variables regarding income, occupational status and educational level and a tendency to situate oneself in the middle of the class-spectrum when asked for a self-definition. However, we also see that there is more to social class and class identity than context-sensitivity and an ability to rank perceived differences, as the sense of belonging or the tendency to profiling may directly influence the perception of difference. Though it is interesting to consider subjective measures of social class, it is necessary to study these phenomena in much more detail to actually reconstruct how participants construct their own social class positioning and turning social class into a topic of the interviews did not seem appropriate in this project, as it could have led to an imposition of social class as the most important dimension of difference by "teaching" the participants to focus on class differences rather than identifying the dimensions of difference that appeared most important in their accounts (Winker & Degele, 2009). In this PhD project it was therefore not possible to explore this topic further and, given the lack of difference in the subjective class perception, the objective measures used at the end to determine the participants' social class of origin, were their parents' occupation and educational level as described above.

The following figure (Figure 6) summarizes the main aspects of the participants' profiles –sex, social class of origin, year of birth, migration background if given– and shows the development of their participation in the different interview rounds. The aliases were chosen by the participants, although in some cases changes were necessary in order to minimize the risk of recognition.

		Alias, Year of birth	Focus Group 2011	Int1 2011-2012	Int2 2012-2013	Int3 2013-2014	Int4 2014-2015	Int5 2016
D	Social Class of Origin	Ariel, 1992, M						
		Cara, 1993	FG10					
		Cristóbal, 1993	FG4					
		Floreta, 1993	FG8					
		Mabe, 1993	FG12					
		Maduixa, 1993	FG6					
		N., 1993	FG1					
		Nadia, 1993	FG12					
		Nic, 1993	FG3					
		Skone, 1993	FG5					
C	Social Class of Origin	Andrés, 1990, M						
		Estanteria, 1993	FG12					
		Irina, 1993, M						
		Jab, 1993	FG10					
		Koala, 1993	FG1					
		Margarita, 1991						
		Xenia, 1993, M	FG9					
B	Social Class of Origin	Libro, 1992						
		Willy, 1993	FG11					
A	Social Class of Origin	Peter, 1993						
		Piruleta, 1993						
		Sara, 1993						
		Focus Group 2011	Int1 2011-2012	Int2 2012-2013	Int3 2013-2014	Int4 2014-2015	Int5 2016	

Figure 6 Summary of Participants' profiles and participation over the course of the follow-up*.

*The social class of origin was determined as described in (Figure 5). The lines indicate the participation in the different waves of data generation, whereat the straight lines indicate females and the sinuous lines males. In the case of the focus-group participants, the focus-group number was added to the line. The letter "M" behind the alias and year of birth indicates a migration background.

4.3. Analyses

The documentary method, as described by Bohnsack (2010) proved suitable for the analysis as the reconstruction of 'implicit patterns of meaning' (109) gives access to the habitus (106) and the method was successfully applied to focus groups (Bohnsack, 2010) and interviews (Nohl, 2009). Although the documentary method is 'multidimensional' (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 112), social divisions and their intersections are considered only in the last step. Rather than

constructing the most important divisions from the participants' narratives, these are chosen by the researcher, risking their imposition (Winker & Degele, 2009).

My approach to study social inequalities was strongly influenced by the theoretic and methodological ideas on intersectionality, so I did not wish to impose any social division in the sense of comparing different groups of students and identifying the difficulties or advantages of these groups (Winker & Degele, 2009). Most of the research on gendered study choice, for example, directly compares the answers given by males and females (Connell, 2009), so that gender differences are indirectly exaggerated while other possible dimensions of difference are invisibilised (Connell, 2009; Winker & Degele, 2009), as the researchers may no longer notice that all participants from origin x showed a similar argumentation regarding y, if y did not appear to make a difference when comparing boys and girls and was therefore not considered further. Moreover, academia has a tendency to only publish results that confirm hypotheses of difference, so that studies encountering high similarities between boys and girls are less likely to publish their findings in prestigious journals, unless they highlight the aspects where a gender difference appeared (Connell, 2009). Like this gender is repeatedly imposed and other dimensions of difference and their intersections are disregarded.

Similarly, researchers focusing on social class, do usually impose this dimension in their analyses, though their definitions and approximations to "measure" social class vary significantly (see *Measuring Social Class*). Uboldi (2017, p. 4,5), for example, argues with Bourdieu that researchers need to avoid scholastic *doxa*, saying for her own research: "I tried to put into practice, in a pragmatic and simple dimension, the principles of Bourdieu's 'structuralist constructivism' (1997), combining theory and practice in the creation of an interactive dialectic theoretically based and guided but open to empirical reality". However, she only applied this approach to the data construction, choosing a "low level of structuring" for her interviews, but then differentiated between "more or less privileged" pupils in her sample rather than applying the same openness to the analyses as well. This may indicate a certain struggle to apply such methodological considerations in the analyses of material.

Intersectional analysis offers interesting alternatives to approaches that simply sum disadvantages (Bowleg, 2008; Gordon, 2016). A pure intersectional analysis is, however, often reduced to narrow interpretations or based on essentialist assumptions (Gordon, 2016) and remains highly ambiguous, vague and open-ended (Davis, 2008).

In order to avoid this methodological dilemma, I wished to analyse the students' narratives independently of their backgrounds, see which social divisions arose as central from their own accounts and only in a last step compare if there was a coincidence between certain difficulties and advantages and student profiles. For this aim I developed a combination of the documentary method according to Bohnsack (2010) and the intersectional approach according to Winker and Degele (2009). The documentary method analyses interview transcripts in three main steps: the 'formulating interpretation' that summarises the content of the interview in the researchers' own words, answering the question 'what'; the 'reflective interpretation' that analyses the interviewees' orientation frames - the framework in which 'the topic is dealt with' (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 110) - answering the question 'how'; and the type construction. In the latter step, types are first constructed considering only the shown orientation frames.

Afterwards, the resulting types are contrasted with socio-economic dimensions in order to ascertain if a type is, for example, predominantly female or male etc.

Yazilitas et al. (2013) require researchers to develop a framework that considers three levels of explanation: micro, macro and institutional (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*). In my reading, the multi-level intersectional approach (Winker & Degele, 2009) may be an adequate frame to do so, as the types of explanations display a direct relation to the three levels this approach considers: identity constructions, social representations and social structures. While macro-level explanations regarding culture and socialization may be accessible through social representations, institutional explanations relate to structures and these do furthermore include the 'external circumstances' Reay (2004) referred to, while Reay's 'internal framework' would appear to be the identity constructions that are directly influenced by social representations and (the not necessarily accurate perception of) social structures.

In order to combine the advantages of the intersectional approach (Winker & Degele, 2009) with the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2010), the identification of references to identity constructions, structures and social representations in the participants' accounts were included into the 'formulating interpretation' and used to identify orientation frames in the 'reflective interpretation'. Apart from meeting Yazilitas et al.'s (2013) demand, the described method of analysis seems to be highly complete and able to embrace the variety of intervening aspects in a systematic way and without imposing any social dimensions as predominant.

Given the immense amount of material, I decided to add an additional step and identify main axes of longitudinal analysis to guide my analyses of the individual cases in this line and facilitate the comparisons. This enabled me, furthermore, to construct sense-genetic types within each axis, allowing me to capture the richness of the material and the diversity of considered facets in much more detail as one single typology would have permitted. On the other hand, I decided to refrain from the text-type and semantic interpretations, as these did appear to be less central to my objectives. As the end-result of types appeared highly adequate, I decided against the additional elaboration of a description of the intersections in an overall view and regarding all levels of analysis at once. The following table (Table 7) displays the resulting scheme of analysis steps, highlighting the steps originating from the intersectional approach with a grey shade and the new steps I decided to include myself with a blue shade. The steps of the documentary method are displayed without any shading, but the excluded steps are marked with a special frame and crossing lines.

Table 7: Steps of analysis

Formulating Interpretation	Thematic development and transcription	
	Formulating detailed interpretation of the passages	
	Description of identity constructions	
	Identification of symbolic representations	
	Identification of references to social structures	
	Data on structures and representations	
Reflecting Interpretation	Most relevant identity constructions	
	Intersections of central categories on the three levels	
	Formal interpretation and text type differentiation	
	Semantic interpretation with comparative sequence analysis	
Longitudinal Analyses	Development of central axes for a longitudinal analysis and analyses of all individual cases regarding these axes.	
Construction of Types	Sense- genetic type construction	Identification of different types within the orientation frames (only most central axes of longitudinal analyses)
	Socio- genetic type construction	Systematic comparison of types along several dimensions of social inequality
		Description of intersections in the overall view
		Consideration of possible interactions on three levels at once

Sources: Steps of the Documentary Method (Nohl, 2009, p. 45) and of the intersectional multi-level approach (Winker & Degele, 2009, p. 80) (shaded in light grey). A special frame and crossing lines indicate excluded steps. Additional steps (shaded in dark grey) and formatting: elaboration by the author.

The following table (Table 8), is an example of how individual interviews were analysed in practice, separating the columns 'keyword', 'transcript', references to identity constructions (I), structures (S) or social representations (R), formulating interpretation and reflective interpretation.

Table 8: Example of the individual analysis of an interview (Cara, Int1), in Spanish*.

Tema	Transcrito	I,R,S	Qué?	Cómo?
Nota de corte y entrar en la carrera (INEF)	<p>I. 1-31 [TS explica algo sobre cómo quitar el ruido luego mientras que pone las grabadoras] <u>00:00:25-6</u> TS: bueno (.) puedes contar un poco que ha pasado en tu vida desde nuestro grupo de discusión' <u>00:00:29-5</u> Cara: sí qué era' el año pasado' (.) era el año pasado <u>00:00:33-5</u> TS: bueno el curso pasado <u>00:00:34-5</u> Cara: el curso pasado y qué era por mitad del curso o así <u>00:00:37-1</u> TS: sí abril más o menos <u>00:00:38-1</u> Cara: ah valevale (.) bueno (.) acabamos a preparamos para la selectividad (-) la selectividad bien (.) (-) porque no sé nuestro insti nos prepararon bien todo el curso para que nos fuera bien y a todos nos fue bastante bien (.) (-) y:, entonces pues bueno esperar a que: (-) [Interrupción:</p>	S: fin de bachillerato (nosotros, I) S: selectividad R: buena preparación por parte del instituto	<p>TS pregunta que pasó en la vida de Cara desde el grupo de discusión. Cara se asegura primero cuando fue el grupo de discusión (abril 2011). <u>T1. Selectividad</u> Cara cuenta como acabaron las clases, se prepararon para la selectividad y les iba a todos bastante bien, porque les habían preparado bien en su instituto. <u>T1.1. Esperar la nota</u> Después tuvo que esperar la nota y cuando la recibió vio que era bastante justo para entrar en su carrera deseada, si la nota de corte sería más o menos como el año pasado. <u>T1.2. Esperar la nota de corte</u> Además no le ponderaron las asignaturas de bachillerato, porque había hecho la rama del bachillerato social y quiso entrar en INEF. Un mes antes de la selectividad lo cambiaron y aun le</p>	<p>Cara sigue el transcurso cronológico a partir del grupo de discusión, hasta el punto de ser aceptada en la carrera. Da mucho énfasis a las fases de espera, ya que después de la fase de preparación para la selectividad, le toca dos veces esperar: primero por su resultado en la selectividad y segundo para la nota de corte de su carrera este año. Aunque, orientándose por la nota de corte del año pasado su nota le es muy justa para poder entrar en su carrera deseada, está contenta con su selectividad, explicando que su instituto les había preparado muy bien. Hasta este punto de la selectividad, habla en la primera persona plural (nosotros), presentando todo desde la perspectiva del grupo. A partir de entonces habla más en la primera persona singular, ya que ella es la que tiene que esperar si entra o no. Como se verá al final de la entrevista no participó en la búsqueda de piso en Lleida que emprendieron unas amigas, porque no sabía aún si entraría o no. Por lo tanto se separa en esta fase de su grupo y se espera a solas. En la fase de espera influyen especulaciones sobre sus posibilidades de poder entrar, que están basados en la nota de corte del año pasado, de cómo bajó la nota el año pasado en</p>

*The columns, starting from the left, treat: topic (keywords identifying main topics), transcript, I,R,S (references to identity constructions (I), social representations (R) or social structures (S)), “what?” (the formulating interpretation of the transcript; structuring the text in topics and sub-topics) and “how?” (the reflective interpretation). Red colour (here displayed as a lighter shade of black) is used to mark especially important words in the transcript. As the analyses were not conducted in English, I include an example of an interview conducted and analysed in Spanish. Though a reader who is not proficient in Spanish may not be able to understand the content, the aim of this table is to exemplify the practical procedures of analysis. Apart from the used structure, abbreviations and colour, the distinction of topics (for example T1) and subtopics (for example T1.1.) in the formulating interpretation is apparent.

I analysed all first-year and last-year and four¹⁰¹ of the second-year interviews like this. All other interviews were included into the longitudinal analyses, but not analysed in depth. Regarding the type construction, I encountered severe difficulties at first. Whenever I compared my participants, I found elements in which they resembled each other, but others that seemed completely opposed and the more interviews I had to consider per participant, the more complexity gained the orientation frames identified in different interviews. To solve this issue, I developed axes of comparison, using directly my impressions and reflections on the aspects in which the participants were opposed or resembled each other, arising both from theoretical considerations and the interview contents and tenors. In concrete, I described 8 axes (see *Axes of longitudinal analysis*) – and applied these axes to all 17 participants. Regarding the

¹⁰¹ This included the two second-year interviews with Maduixa and the second-year interview with Nic, as Nic and Maduixa changed their degree courses, so their second year was their first-year in the new degree.

most central axes¹⁰², I developed sense-genetic typologies and, afterwards, socio-genetic typologies as the documentary method requires.

Though I read Latour (2005) after developing this method of analysis, I believe that it meets several of the requirements he formulates for the 'sociology of the social': In the documentary method neither the actors nor the researchers have a superior wisdom or are more reflexive and associations are not translated into a master vocabulary, but summarized. The addition of intersectional steps, allows furthermore developing groupings parting from the identity constructions constructed by the actors, rather than imposing them by the analyst. Moreover, my rather democratic approach to research, leads me to give full consideration to the 'subjective' theories and recommendations presented by the participants and I attempt to give them visibility within this thesis, even when they do not appear crucial for my own research interest. My difficulty to develop types is closely related to the idea that the research focus should lie on how reference frames are constructed and modified, so rather than simplifying and reducing them into a single typology, my adaptation to develop central axes and develop different typologies for each axis is much closer to Actor Network Theory (ANT). Like this, I am able to reflect the high complexity and richness of the participants' cases in the final typologies, as I did not attempt to fit the participants in one global typology only, but allowed the different facets of their stories to appear in different types within each axe. This approach is furthermore in concordance with my premises for qualitative research and the attitude I developed towards my participants (see *Insider / Outsider Status & Unconditional Love*).

4.4. Ethics

In this section, I wish to comment on ethical issues that appeared in the course of my PhD project as relevant and controversial and formed a basic element of my "becoming a researcher", as they forced me to think beyond the training I had received so far. This is in part true in any qualitative research, but the longitudinal character of this project came with additional challenges as we will see further below. First, I would like to insert a reflection about the different approaches to treat ethics I encountered in Spain, Australia, Argentina and Germany – though I have to caution that my experience in Germany is limited to my undergraduate studies and hence very incomplete. Moreover, it is possible that extensive difference exist within countries, as regional legislation or the statutes and practices of the concrete HE institutions may intervene here.

While applications for EU-funding usually include a section about ethics the researchers have to complete, in my personal experience in Spain and Argentina, I never had to achieve an ethics approval for my research, though the umbrella project in which I conducted my research

¹⁰² In practice, each axe comes automatically with two implicit types: the participants for who the axe appeared as central and those for who it did not. As several axes were considered central for participants who presented the biggest achievements and those who presented the biggest difficulties with is (see in particular *Academic success* and *Social success*), these types do, however, mix opposed cases rather than clustering participants with more resemblances and are therefore not very useful in the analysis.

in Argentina had received such an approval. Just as in Germany, as an undergraduate student, all ethical supervision for my PhD project in Spain was included within the work of my director and I was able to begin my fieldwork before formally inscribing my project at the university. Once I won a scholarship, I had to complete annual reports about the development of my thesis, but neither did ethical issues appear as a category in these reports, nor did I ever receive a feedback or was asked to make any amendments. When I was able to contract a transcriber, I composed my own non-disclosure agreement and needed the help of a secretary to get it checked by the legal advisers of the University as no official models for such agreements existed. In Australia, I had to undergo a rather long and formalized application process to receive the approval of an ethics commission that took several months to decide on my proposal, so my stay was already almost over when I finally received the OK to start my field work. In Argentina, I received all imaginable support to find participants and accepted my colleagues' offer to take a look at some of the documents I was preparing, e.g. my interview guideline and a socio-economic questionnaire to accompany the interviews, but there was no official supervision enforced, maybe because the project in the frame of which I was completing my stay received EU-funding and had received the EU ethics approval included in the project application.

My experience with ethics commissions is rather small, but most researchers I know who had to deal with ethics commissions in the course of their career, grimace at the memory and are more likely to speak of their inconveniences than to encounter any sense in their existence. As Zimmer (2010) showed in his analysis of the ethical complications of a research project that had been approved by an ethics commission, the pure existence of such a commission does not necessarily ensure high ethical standards. In a way, it seems to me that ethics commissions come with a double bind: on the one hand they burden researchers with paper work and force them to fix their research project in detail months before actually starting it, limiting the possibilities to adapt to changing conditions in the course of the project. On the other hand, they bring ethical considerations forward in the research process, avoiding certain mistakes before the actual fieldwork, but handicapping a development of an ethical awareness wired up with the concrete case of study and, possibly, "excusing" researchers from reconsidering their practices once in the field, as they already gained ethics approval. Though this must not be the rule, in some cases the pure existence of ethics commissions might lead researchers to take up the part of the natural opponent, searching for ways to avoid or trick ethics commissions, for example by relocating research projects to countries with less restrictive ethical controls, as Marzano (2007) suggests stating differences between research ethics in different countries. To avoid a geographical divide in research, common international guidelines, as advocated for example by Battles (2010), could be useful. However, universal guidelines may, on the one hand, limit research possibilities by disabling certain approaches completely while, on the other hand, not achieve to protect, for example, participants' anonymity in a concrete context or in a new, ethically-unexplored field (Zimmer, 2010). Whiteman (2010) argues that a contextualized approach in the sense of "localized ethics" can be more helpful for ethical decision making in a research project, than a pure following of general principles. Personally, I believe that ticking a box claiming that your project is of minimal risk does not substitute the researchers to develop and employ an ethical competence that enables them to detect ethical dilemmas in the concrete context and solve them adequately. In the end, researchers have to

review their own proposals more critically, thoroughly and repeatedly than any formal ethics commission could.

In this sense, I became in the course of my project my own ethics commission, building on the guidelines I had learned in my basic training in Germany and the practical experiences with ethics commissions I gained in Australia. This did probably happen, because I had to do a big deal of the ethical reflections regarding my project by myself, searching for feasible ways to solve upcoming issues and drafting related documents, like plain language statements and consent forms, on my own. This additional work enabled me to recognize the advantages of an ethics commission, that does not only offer sample documents and checks your amendments legally, but also helps you to ask relevant questions about your project before you actually start the fieldwork, avoiding rushed solutions to avoidable ethical issues that appear in the field work. The following comments regarding concrete ethical issues I came to deal with in the course of my project may give the readers an idea how my self-commission worked. In concrete, I will comment on the topics of Anonymity, Comparability & Reciprocity, insider vs. outsider researchers, the use of Facebook, language issues and how all these were influenced by the longitudinal character of my project.

4.4.1. Anonymity

"We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file from any data that you supply. This will only be able to be linked to your responses by the researchers, for example, in order to know where to send your interview transcript for checking. In the final report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. We will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity, however, you should note that as the number of people we seek to interview is very small, it is possible that someone may still be able to identify you."

SAMPLE PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT: letter model. University of Melbourne
(Australia) [received: 10.04.2014]

"El seu talent es manifesta en la selecció de paraules que no utilitza."

Stanislaw Jerzy Lec, Polish writer (1909-1966)
Roda Mots 10.05.2016

As commented in the last sentence of this quotation from the sample plain language statement facilitated to me in preparation for my stay in Australia, a certain risk of recognition is almost unavoidable in qualitative research. The task of the researcher is, in my reading, to not just inform potential participants about this risk, but to assume the responsibility for avoiding recognition in the best possible way, even if the participants do not mind to be recognizable. As Zimmer (2010) pointed out, it is not enough to omit a participant's name or substitute it with a pseudonym, as detailed information, for example on the sex, citizenship, degree programme, university course and attended college of a participant may narrow down the number of possible matches to an extent, that even unrelated persons could identify participants through a simple internet search. Similarly, rich qualitative data on participants' habits and itineraries may make them recognizable, as we can easily imagine them to be just

as unique as their social networks Zimmer (2010) compared to finger prints. Omitting too detailed descriptions may, on the other hand, end the research, as the pivot of qualitative research is to access such a level of detail that new insights become possible regarding the research questions. The researchers are then in the tricky position to find a balance between protecting their participants' anonymity and offering the level of detail required to not only answer their research questions, but to also allow other researchers to "validate" their analyses and interpretations at least with the given quotations of the raw material¹⁰³.

In this project, I decided to take the following preventive measures: After inviting my participants to choose pseudonyms for themselves, I revised these pseudonyms and changed them whenever I encountered that they could give away the participants' identities, for example because of including the birthdates, the initials or because they used the same alias as on Facebook. While maintaining information of their year of birth, university and degree programme, I only describe main characteristics of the places of birth and residence, summarising for example in the case of participants with migration backgrounds their birth places in very extensive regions, e.g. Latin America or Eastern Europe. I am aware that this comes with inconveniences as important differences exist between and within the different countries and regions I summarise in this way, but as migration histories were not the main focus of this thesis, but "only" a social division I wanted to include and the number of participants with migration histories was very small, I consider this as an acceptable limitation in order to protect my participants' identities. In order to avoid recognition through unique qualitative data on the participants' itineraries, habits, social networks etc. I decided to structure this thesis in a way that I only give a short presentation of each participant to situate the readers, but then write about topics rather than individual participants. As this information is extractable from the interview transcripts, the transcripts and analyses are only provided to the external evaluators and the thesis tribunal and not included in this thesis. Further below (see *Facebook*), I comment on further risks for participants' anonymity and how I handled them.

4.4.2. Comparability & Reciprocity

I chose a longitudinal project, as one of the important conclusions I had drawn out of several of the lectures I had coursed as an undergraduate student back in Germany was that longitudinal research is rare and could give important insights that are still missing. However, I had never been trained regarding ethical issues in longitudinal research and encountered an important contradiction between two guidelines I had in mind: Comparability and Reciprocity. From my training, I conceived the plan to avoid giving additional details that could influence the participants and was willing to treat them all as similar as possible, giving them the same information before and throughout the interviews, in order to favour comparability. So I prepared universal contact messages and sent them to all participants on the same day, documenting the messages, dates, answers and my responses to their answers etc. However, once in the interview situation I noticed that many of the participants had a certain interest in

¹⁰³ A similar issue occurred to me in the analyses of the Activity Diaries and I came to discard the option to retrace the participants' movements on real maps, worrying that these could give their identities away.

my person and asked me, usually after the interview, questions about myself. Especially the "new" participants I had gained through the socio-economic questionnaire were furthermore interested to know how they had been selected. In a usual project, this would not have been a problem as the interview was already over, but as I planned on conducting further interviews, I felt that I should not tell them too much about me as my comments could influence in the follow-up. Similarly, I was afraid to tell my participants about my approach to determine their social class and the selection criteria, as such an explanation could have caused – apart from attrition – a new class consciousness that could have led them to turn social class into a main topic in the future interviews, imposing this social dimension though I had wished to conduct my research from an intersectional approach, without imposing any social dimension but analysing which dimensions turned out to be important in the participants' own narrations. So I opted to tell them that I had been looking for people from profiles that were still underrepresented in my sample, considering a number of different aspects and that I would have to check in order to tell which had been the determinant aspect in each case. I have to admit that I did indirectly build on common misconceptions that tend to accept certain popular characteristics of quantitative research (samples, representativeness, variables...) as general aspects of any research project, though qualitative research works quite differently. As the participants were at this point just beginning their university studies, they were more than likely to have these wrong conceptions of qualitative research and, effectively, none of them insisted that I should look the aspects determining their selection up. Though my strategy worked, I still felt terrible afterwards, not only because I was indirectly helping to spread wrong mental concepts on research, but also because I was lying to them, saying that I would have to look up why they had been selected, though I knew this perfectly well. Similarly, I attempted to avoid answering the participants' questions about myself, giving short answers, answering with back questions or with meaningless comments in the line of "oh, I had never thought of this question before". Again, I thought that this was what I was supposed to do, if I wanted to keep my participants as "clean" as possible of my influences for the next round of interviews. It did not take me long to determine that this was not going to work. My sickness after each avoided question made me choke on my own questions for which I needed to receive answers, if I wanted this project to work.

Jones and Wolley (2015) argue that the participants' motivation to participate may range from the interest to receive something in turn, to the wish to be helpful, to do something useful or to a general interest in the topic of study. I would like to add that their interest in receiving something in turn could be the contact with the researchers and the possibility to get to know them better. I figured that I was an interesting interlocutor for many of my participants, at least at the beginning of the project, as they were just finishing school/beginning university and had many ideas of doing Erasmus stays abroad and similar things and for all they knew about me, I had just finished a degree, was just "slightly" older – many did probably underestimate the age difference, considering that students finish school younger in Spain and their degree courses were shorter than my 5-year undergraduate degree in German – and had first come to Spain as an Erasmus student, coming from another European country. I came to think of their interest in my person as a matter of reciprocity, feeling that it was only fair to answer their questions if I wanted them to answer mine. As I was convinced that my otherwise cold and reserved behaviour was likely to provoke attrition if I kept it up, I considered that I

had to sacrifice the ideals of a very equal treatment and least researcher influence if I wanted this project to work. In the retrospective, I even wonder if the little drop-out after the first interview round might not have been a result of an acceptance that “Germans” are distanced and cold, so my participants might have excused my rather strange behaviour when they asked me a question with a stereotype based on my nationality. We will consider my status as an insider or outsider further in the next section (see *Insider / Outsider Status @ Unconditional Love*).

Once I had decided to change my strategy, I always answered all questions and openly informed my participants about news regarding my PhD and personal life, for example when I won a scholarship or when I returned from a maternity leave. In many cases, a certain dynamic appeared in the interviews, as we would first have a little chit-chat about the most important news in our lives while searching for the adequate place to conduct the interview. Often, the transition from this conversation to the actual interview would be quite natural, as the participants would begin to tell me the news in their lives in turn for mine and I would just have to say: "oh wait, shall we start the recording right away?" and occasionally, the interviewees themselves would point out to me, that I should turn the recorder on to avoid having to repeat themselves. Then the interview in the narrow sense of the word would take place and after stopping the recording, in many cases the participants would start again to ask me questions about my past, my family, my studies, my current situation, my opinions on certain topics, my PhD and my life in general. So usually, there seemed to be a tacit agreement that throughout the recording I was the one to ask the questions, though exceptions prove the rule. In the course of the interviews, I even came to intervene with bits of information about myself throughout the recording, when I considered that this could help the participant to overcome a negative dynamic of short answers, establishing a more conversation-like situation, as this is desirable in qualitative interviews (Ferrándiz, 2011).

After my decision, things got suddenly very easy, as I felt comfortable even when the participants asked me questions back – I have to say that they never came up with questions as tricky as mine regarding their self-perception or anything like this – and even considered that their questions gave me additional interesting insights into what they were thinking and considering important. Thanks to my answers, I was able to observe an amazing tendency: many participants remembered the bits of information I had given them about my life in previous interviews and asked me for things I did not even remember that I had told them about. This showed me, that the interest I felt for them and for their stories was in many senses mutual and that I, as a person, was a motivation for their participation. In a certain way, they were studying me why I was studying them.

However, I was aware that there is more to reciprocity than just answering your participants' questions and so I came to think of myself as an add-on to their social capital and offered myself at the end of every interview as ready to help with anything they could need help with. In the course of this follow-up, I helped with English translations, participated in a focus group and searched for information on websites in foreign languages, among others. However, all in all, I noticed that my participants did not usually take me up on my offer and seemed to be reluctant to contact me with a request for help. So I started to send them information on language courses, scholarships or job offers I happened to encounter – and in some cases I actually came to influence directly in my participants' lives, for example, informing Sara about

a job vacancy at a private language school she applied and got accepted for. Especially after my stay in Australia, where I had spent several weeks translating interview transcripts for an Activity Diary participant who did not have any troubles to accept my offer to help, I told my participants even more keenly that they could always contact me and ask for help, even after the end of the project. The responses were here especially interesting, as several participants returned the offer directly, claiming that I should do the same whenever I needed them and some actually came to question my "I pay for the coffee"-policy, wishing to invite me back. Here it became quite obvious that what I considered reciprocity for their participation, was for them offering favours as they did not consider it necessary to receive anything in turn for their participation or actually understood their participation as something positive for themselves they should give me something back for. Skone compared his participation after Interview 4 with blood donations, but also joked that I could get him a job in university once I had an important position myself – as jokes are said to always contain a bit of truth, this reference to nepotism may also tell us something about the participant's perception of the Catalan HE system and might indicate that no matter how altruistic the participants constructed their participation, the indirect supposition that participating could have advantages in the long run could also have influenced here. Especially in the last interview round, several participants commented that their participation in the project had been very useful for them, as it had trained them in a habit to think about their lives and their decisions and one even said that it had been like doing a therapy. This finding was for me completely amazing – and also relieving as it confirmed my supposition that I would have influenced in their lives anyway, even if I had decided not to answer their questions and not to send them any information I encountered and considered useful for them. Moreover, I believe that this mutual appreciation was clue to the little attrition I experienced from the first interview on, as I will comment in the following section.

4.4.3. *Insider / Outsider Status*

Unconditional Love

'The relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee determines the way the interviewee constructs his/her discourse and both actors contribute (of course, in different ways) to the construction of meaning (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Haas & Masson, 2006; Kvale, 2007). Thus the analysis should consider how the specific context of the interview (place, time, etc.) and the relationship between both actors have contributed to the data obtained.' (Caillaud & Flick, 2017, p. 4)

"En certes ocasions ben escollides cal caure en l'exageració per donar to elevat i grandesa a l'existència."

Xavier Baladia (Barcelona 1965)

Roda Mots 21.09.2016

While a growing number of researchers defines themselves as insider researchers (Labaree, 2002), for example when they study queer culture identifying as queer themselves (Taylor, 2011), I supposed, in line with Stahl (2016), to be an outsider researcher at the beginning of

this project, as I came from another country. Unlike Taylor (2011), I did not know any of my participants prior to the fieldwork, neither did I know their friends or families, though I came to meet some of them in the course of the follow-up as we happened to coincide on the streets, in bars or at their workplace. With Stahl (2016, p. 148), I may still consider myself an insider in the sense that I possessed certain 'knowledge of the locale' even at the beginning of the project and this did of course grow immensely in the course of the follow-up, in part thanks to my participants. However, I also remained an outsider and could repeatedly ask questions on delicate topics, like the Catalan independence movement, or ask the participants to explain a social structure to me without causing any suspicion or having to position myself. Moreover, I believe that especially at the beginning of the project, my relation to HE might have been crucial, as I was an experienced insider in the world the participants were wishing to enter or had just entered, so I could have triggered their interest as a positive role model, especially if we consider that I had taken part in the Erasmus programme, an exchange programme that appeared as highly attractive among the participants in the first-year interviews (see *Mobility*).

Though my being an insider of a world the participants were just joining – HE – could have sparked their interest in my person and hence encouraged their participation, this initial curiosity does not explain why they did not drop out after a while. The incredible success of my project in terms of ongoing participation became especially obvious to me in 2016 when I was able to attend the NYRIS conference, celebrated in Trollhättan (Sweden). Among others, I participated in a session about research methods and got involved in a discussion about longitudinal projects, triggered by the presentation of a research group from Finland that was just beginning an ambitious longitudinal project and worried how to avoid drop-out. At this point, I was already finishing my last interview round and well aware that drop-out had been rather low ever since Int1. Actually, I had started in 2011-2012 with 21 participants, hoping that 4 or 5 of them might make it until Int3, but now I am writing this thesis based on 17 cases, most of which completed 5 interviews, some even more. Though one was not among the 21 participants of the initial round, joining the project in year 3, this is a very good result in terms of drop-out, as the researchers from the Finnish Youth Research Society pointed out to me. They asked me, what my secret for success was and I started to wonder myself. I have come up with a theory differentiating three different phases and a number of dynamics that combined in varying ways in the course of the follow-up, explaining why the participants did begin and continue their participation.

Phase 1) 0 interest: The first contact with the potential follow-up participants happened either in their school classes or university lectures, in both cases through a presentation of the project and an invitation to realize a first participation; in the case of the schools through a focus group and socio-economic questionnaire and in the case of the university lectures through a socio-economic survey. I believe that the draw to participate in this first step was quite strong; participation was easy as I was already there and the respective teachers or lecturers had planned some time for the participation¹⁰⁴. Not participating, on the contrary,

¹⁰⁴ An exception was focus group 6 at school 3, as I was only allowed to give a short presentation of my project and pass a list where interested students could leave their contact data to meet with them outside the precious school hours for the focus group.

would have called the attention of the researcher and possibly the teacher or lecturer and fellow students, so the participants could have felt that a decision against their participation would have been an affront, especially in the schools where the groups were smaller and they would have had to leave the room. Though I highlighted that the participation was voluntary, it was obvious that the alternative to participating in the focus groups was to return to class, so between these two choices, participation was likely easier and more attractive, while non-participation represented a much higher threshold. In the university lectures, the students could have just waited for me to leave again and return their questionnaire empty, but as this would have provoked them a certain waiting time, they might have thought that they could just as well complete the questionnaire, especially if we consider that smartphones and WhatsApp had not yet achieved the distribution they enjoy nowadays and were hence not among the usual options to fill the waiting time. Though we could expect that the participants who indicated their contact data felt a certain interest to keep participating, it is also possible that they did not read the instructions and just filled every form in, without feeling concerned for their personal data. The rather low response rate I obtained when I sent my invitations for a first interview round to the focus-group participants who had indicated their contact data may, hence, still be a result of a general lack of interest in participating or the loss of the initial interest that had made them indicate the contact data (see as well footnote 105).

Phase 2) Initial interest: The participants who continued to form part of the project in the follow-up might have had a special reason to participate, e.g. the wish to be altruistic and helpful, an interest in my person or the hope to achieve some advantage through the participation in the project – different motivations that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There is no reason to believe that altruism and an interest in advantages should have been stronger among the participants in this study than in any other study population, so these do not explain the low drop-out rate in this project ever since Int1. As commented before, I believe that I was for the follow-up participants an attractive interlocutor, as they could identify with me as a more experienced version of themselves, a HE student that had undergone an Erasmus term and finished the degree successfully. However, this interest was likely to decrease rather quickly, as the participants entered HE and made new contacts themselves, starting to live the ideal I might have represented to them at first. Others might have been curious about me because of my outsider status and might have wanted to get to know more about this German that approached them. Once again, such a curiosity could explain an initial interest but should disappear over time, as the participants were able to get to know me better or made new and more interesting friends once in University, so I should have lost the special position among their acquaintances I might have had before if I was the only German they knew. This may explain a certain drop-out after Int1 and maybe even after Int2, as in some cases it may have taken longer than in others to "overcome" this initial interest in me. However, many participants continued to participate, so other interests or new boosts to the initial interest might have come to intervene.

Phase 3) Continuous Interest: When considering what made the participants continue once I had lost my initial attraction, one possibility is that I did not completely lose this attraction for some of them or that the news about my life came to constitute new attractions, substituting the first. While N. might have never lost her interest in me as a German, because she planned

on realizing an Erasmus in Germany, several others might have developed a new interest in me, when I told them about my upcoming stay in Australia in 2014, as this rather distant destination also seemed to enjoy special popularity among the participants (see *Mobility*). Skone seemed to never completely lose his interest in me as a German, as he kept asking me about Germany and my opinion “as a German” in several interviews. Stahl (2016) argues that negative life moments may provoke drop-out from longitudinal research and this may explain why Piruleta did never find a moment to meet me for a fourth-year interview, but told me in her fifth-year that she had had a very hard time in the previous year. Similarly, Koala directly told me that he was passing difficult times and would prefer to take the interview later, when I invited him to the second-year interview, telling me about the end of his relationship with N., when we finally met. That Piruleta came to participate again after the interruption in the fourth year, may have been related to my announcement that this would finally be the last interview, so she and several other participants might have thought that after all these years they could just as well participate one last time, minimizing drop-out at this point. However, it is also possible that at least some of the participants came to consider their participation a way to share their criticism and ideas for improvement, as they arrived at the interviews with a certain agenda of things they wanted to tell me and – as we will see in the findings section (see *Lack of control*) – the Catalan HE system did not seem to offer them many possibilities to share their ideas and complaints in a different way. Apart from all this, I also came to observe two interrelated dynamics that might have been related to the participants continuous interest and readiness to keep participating: On the one side, I noticed that the participants – except, to a certain point, Skone – seemed to highlight the things they had in common with me, showing a tendency to identify with me and to consider me as a part of their in-group, rather than highlighting my outsider status. On the other side, my own reflections and development led me to a new attitude towards them, an attitude I would like to describe as “unconditional love”. This term is surely an exaggeration, but as Xavier Baladia put it in his quotation cited at the beginning of this section, exaggeration is on occasion necessary. What is certainly true is that I liked all my participants – and those who I had more difficulties to like were usually the ones who dropped out first –, I felt grateful for their participation, worried for their worries and was excited about their dreams and illusions. Like the older sibling who protects the younger in a playground conflict with the kids from the neighbourhood, I chose my participants' side – and I think this is also one of the reasons why they kept participating, because somehow I transmitted this acceptance, true interest and support to them. Both dynamics are, furthermore, interrelated as my positive attitude likely favoured their identification with me and the more we seemed alike, the more we liked each other, fostering in turn my positive attitude towards them. Several participants expressed positive thoughts regarding the project (Floreta, Skone, N., Nic, Sara) in its course, told me that they had been grateful for the experience, wished to reciprocate or wanted to continue to meet me to talk about their lives after the follow-up. Several came to contact me ever since on Facebook to wish me a happy birthday and to ask me for my son and my life in general. All this may indicate that the good relation was mutual and they really came to appreciate me and my project. In the following, I will explain the development of these two tendencies and their ethical consequences in more detail.

The tendency to identify with me appeared, to a certain extent, from the beginning on, as many of the participants' questions about my person, were neither related to HE nor my nationality and allowed them to draw direct comparisons between mine and their lives. Their questions about my parents, siblings, boyfriend and – towards the end of the follow-up – son, appeared already after the first-year interview but gained importance once I had changed my policy and actually answered these questions properly (see *Comparability & Reciprocity*). Peter believed that I had studied something similar to his sister – and as he had chosen the same degree as she did, this actually meant that he believed that I had studied his degree course, though I did not. Furthermore, we commented on our fathers' profession as they were both carpenters. Sara might have kept her participation up once she got a job I had told her about, as she might have felt a certain 'debt' to me because of this. However, as I had previously worked in a similar field, her new job did also allow us to share experiences in this regard, so we spent parts of our encounters dwelling on pedagogical questions and English lessons. Several of the participants with migration backgrounds came to refer to me as someone from abroad just as themselves, for example when asking me about my coping with Catalan language and people. Nic used in several interviews expressions like "of our age"¹⁰⁵, that show that he considered the existing age difference rather minimal and identified with me. Moreover, we commented repeatedly on foreign languages, mainly English but also Japanese, as he studied translation with Japanese as his chosen second language and I had a rather good level in English and visited Japan in the course of the project. Especially Japan became a highly important topic in Int4, as we had both been to Japan in the months preceding the interview and he even told me after the interview, how nice it was to speak to someone who knew Japan and how nostalgic it made him feel. In all these cases, the participants seemed to focus on the things we had in common, rather than considering me an outsider – and as the participants were different, they highlighted different aspects of my person, giving our interactions and interviews a different tone and direction.

Several participants commented at different points of the follow-up on the possibility to pursue a PhD themselves – another clue that they might somehow identify with me and that I indirectly influenced their perception of their 'opportunity structure' (Reay, 2004), privileging them in the sense Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) consider that students who have an older sibling who has entered university, are more likely to attend university themselves even if the economic and cultural capital of their parents is rather low. Though my maternity did likely play a role when I decided to label my attitude towards the participants as "unconditional

¹⁰⁵ Nic used this expression in concrete when talking about a lecturer of his, so he would have probably considered me as of his age anyway if he knew my age. And once we became friends on Facebook, the participants could see my year of birth and hence correct any wrong impression they had gained of my age. Nevertheless, at the moment of first contact, the participants might have easily underestimated our age difference, if they based their calculations on their age when finishing school and the duration of a degree course. Most students start university in Spain with 17 or 18 years and most degree courses only last 4, while there had been 3-year degrees existing shortly before the beginning of my project, so the participants might have even thought that I did a 3-year degree directly after school. If the age difference had been bigger or more obvious at our first encounter, things might have been different and participation and drop-out might have changed. It is even possible that some of the focus-group participants who accepted my friendship invitation on Facebook and then never answered to my contact messages had checked my profile, so the information they saw there could have influenced their readiness to participate in the project.

love”, the idea of an older sibling is an even better metaphor as it does not only encompass this love, but also my special status of a “slightly” older role model. Moreover, in the course of 5 years of interviews, I became in a certain way an insider of my participants’ stories, as I knew what they had been up to and going through in previous interviews. Apart from repeated references to previous interviews that showed that the participants remembered what we had been talking about, I believe that my previous knowledge about certain topics, enabled them to enter into more detail, comparing what they had said in the past and what they said now and closing the gaps between what they had thought in the last interview and what they thought now rather than presenting their current thinking as if it had always been this way and adding further complexity to the data, as it often turned out that elements of their previous thinking were still existent, though less dominant (see *Change and Continuity*). In other words, the annual interviews did not only allow me to access processes, they turned me in a certain way into a part of the process, a catalyst that promoted comparisons between their current and previous thoughts and hence reflections about whatever processes had happened in between. N. mentioned after our last interview that I had gotten to know her when she was still a kid and that I had accompanied her in all these years, almost like a therapist. Similarly, Floreta compared the project to an intervention, arguing that all students should take part in something like this, as it trains the ability to reflect on your life, your decisions and your future.

However, achieving such a positive relationship to my participants did also confront me with additional ethical dilemmas. Several participants told me details of their private lives “off the record”, asking me to turn the recorder off or directly saying that they would tell me after the interview and then doing so. This shows that they wished to tell me the story, feeling that I really cared and trusting that I would not use any of their “secrets” for my project. I did of course respect these wishes and even came to exclude parts of the recordings in the findings sections below, whenever I thought that these might still hint too much to the secrets they did not want to appear. However, once I knew the secret, I could not just forget about it again and it is more than likely that this additional knowledge did influence in my ways to analyse and interpret the details that I was allowed to use. And even if we only consider the data from the recordings a problem arises: Many participants told me an impressive amount of details about the ups and downs of their lives and so many turns and bends appeared in their itineraries that I started to wonder if a detailed retracing of these itineraries alone would not endanger their anonymity, functioning like a unique fingerprint (see also *Anonymity*). The participants obviously chose what to tell me and what not during the interviews and were aware of the recording, but as the researcher it is still my job to worry how the publication of the things they told me could influence in their lives, especially, if it enabled others to identify them (Zimmer, 2010). As their researcher I was responsible to save their anonymity, seeing risks they themselves could not or would not consider – and as their metaphorical older sibling, I was bound to be especially critical with this researcher.

In a project based on a single data construction, fieldwork, analyses and publication are separate phases that happen one after another, as moving back from the publication to the analyses or from the analyses to the fieldwork is rather an exception in the process and not the rule, no matter how recommendable it is considered (Ferrándiz, 2011). In my longitudinal project, I first accumulated data, limiting myself to realizing and transcribing interviews without being able to analyse them right away, given that I combined the fieldwork with a

master degree and a part-time job but had prospects to receive a scholarship and believed that I would then be able to dedicate myself completely to the analyses and advance in this sense. In 2013, when I received the scholarship, I analysed the first-year interviews and after completing this analysis, started to work on an article to publish my results. From this moment on, I was at all times analysing, writing and doing fieldwork in parallel, so the synergy of these different stages of the research process was much more pronounced. And while I was able to assert in my analyses negative aspects in my participants' answers, like contradictions, lack of structure, inappropriate language or a lack of reflection etc., I started to feel that I would not be able to publish certain negative things about my participants' personalities and habits I came up with.

Here, I partly draw on my own experience as a participant in a research project back in my times as an undergraduate student. The researcher, an older student who did the fieldwork for the final thesis of her degree, had promised to all participants to share her results after finishing the project but at least I never received another message by her. As things go when you study in a relatively small city, I happened to meet her several times after her fieldwork. The first time, I directly asked her for the results and could see how she felt uncomfortable and became twitchy, though she just told me that she had not finished the analyses yet and would send the results through as soon as she got them. After the conversation, I thought to myself that it was rather odd that she had not finished the analyses as she probably had to hand the final thesis in rather soon. Then I and several of my friends started to do our fieldworks for our final theses and one of my friends told me about how she developed from within her participants' narrations about their migration histories, that they were racists themselves. I asked her if she told them so and she claimed that of course not and that she did not do the mistake to offer them any feedback on their participation anyway, so she did not have any problem here. I believe that negative findings about participants' messed up personalities must have been rather common by then in the final theses of my degree course, as it seemed that at least among the people I knew the common belief was that we had to find some deep contradiction in our analyses in order to call them analyses. At this point, I was already convinced that the girl in whose study I had participated did something similar with me and was now avoiding to tell me what dark spots she had "discovered". Around this time, I happened to meet "my researcher" again and thought of having a conversation with her about her analyses. When I mentioned them, she quickly claimed that she had not finished the analyses yet and fled the scene. Apart from being convinced that the girl was suffering because of our encounters, I started to wonder if I actually wanted to know what she had written about me in her thesis, coming to the conclusion that I did not. If the findings were so disturbing for herself that she could not see me in the eye and say them out loud, what would they do to me? At best, I would have laughed about how wrong she got everything, but as there was no possible way to make any amendments at this point, independently from how I would feel about the results, why risk a negative impact at all? In order to learn something about myself? The question was of course in every case hypothetical, as I had no means to ever force my researcher to pass her thesis on to me even if I had met her again, so maybe this way of thinking was just a coping strategy to live with the unsolved mystery, but it helped me to reflect about research practices and respect for participants.

The power imbalance between researcher and researched weighted hard on my shoulders. I felt and still feel that I should not publish anything that I would not dare to tell my participants into the face. In classical anthropology the researchers have always the argument that they were "there" (Ferrándiz, 2011, p. 25) and that their analyses had given them access to knowledge the participants themselves had not been aware of (Bohnsack, 2010), so it is relatively easy to justify findings the participants themselves would be outraged to hear. However, such an approach could not work at all with the attitude I had developed and devoted to my participants throughout the whole research process and that I felt necessary to keep up as well in the process of writing, as it was by no means a "false" attitude I had only displayed to gain my participants' trust, but truly the only way of treating them I conceived as correct and justified. My participants trusted me and had participated – over five years – hoping to help me and to, indirectly, help the world become a better place as my thesis would help to improve the University transitions of the following student generations. Telling the world, that they had gotten their study choice from the beginning on wrong, that they seemed to have fallen into the hands of a sect, that they were socially incompetent and therefore friendless or that they were standing in their own way, did not seem to be right. It felt like unnecessary betrayal; unnecessary because there is so much more in my fieldwork, that there are many things to say without entering into the darker details of my analyses.

Ethical guidelines usually recommend that the researchers should avoid by all means any harm they could inflict on their participants and to not "burn the field", in the sense that a participant who was ready to participate would participate again in another project afterwards (Ferrándiz, 2011, p. 168). As most participants never get to read what their researchers actually write about them, publications are not usually taken into consideration in this regard, though newer lines of more equal research include sending publications first to the participants to achieve their approval. This is a controversial approach as a certain power imbalance in the favour of the researchers is justified through their training and leaving important decisions to the participants could make the results lose reliability and validity – apart from burdening the participants with additional work they are neither trained nor paid for. So the final decision should, in my eyes, remain with the researcher, but sharing the drafts with participants and facilitating a discussion with them about the points they disagree with could be a good way to achieve more equality without sacrificing main research principles. Considering the tedious processes of publication and that it may take years until a first draft turns into a published article – especially in the case of a PhD student who is still "learning" how to write articles while doing so – I did not consider it feasible to send my drafts to the participants, but promised to share my publications, including this thesis. So it is still possible that some participants may not be completely happy with what I come to say about them in the remainder of this thesis and I will not be able to change it or take it back. However, I feel that their trust in my criteria is justified, as long as I follow the guidelines to focus on topics that are directly relevant to answer the research questions at hand, to protect their anonymity and to not write things about them, I would not want to read about myself, especially, without having the opportunity to amend anything. The consequences of this approach are findings that are in many ways the essence of what this PhD project achieved – and what I would defend as such in any discussion I could have had with my participants if they had seen them before publication. I believe to have encountered a good compromise between sharing

relevant research findings without treating my participants disrespectfully. So my guideline is not to leave the field as I found it – this is completely impossible, not only but especially in longitudinal projects. I leave the field with the same attitude I developed while I was in it and consciously apply this attitude as well during the writing process.

In summary, I believe that my positive attitude towards the participants was clue and encouraged their tendencies to focus on the things we had in common or to even perceive me as an equal and identify with me, despite the obvious power imbalance in the interview situation. While capitalising on my outsider status when this appeared useful, I moreover developed an insider status that I can only describe as becoming an insider of my participants' worlds, to the extent they invited me in.

A.A.A. Facebook

„Ich habe 44 Freunde, alles ist in Butter, / darunter auch mein Kumpel und ein Nachbar meiner Mutter, / und heut' ist wieder einer dieser wundervollen Tage: / Ich bekomme ne brandneue Freundschaftsanfrage! / Ich glaub, das ist das Mädchel von der Supermarktkasse. / Klar, dass ich mir die nicht entgehen lasse... / Ist doch super, wenn man in der großen Stadt /möglichst viele Freunde hat.“

“Facebook“ (2011) by Wise Guys

In my socio-economic questionnaires (see Annex 2 and 3), I asked for diverse contact data, including the participants' names, postal and e-mail addresses and phone numbers in order to increase the possibility that all participants with an interest to continue in the follow-up could indicate something, even if they were about to change their residence, did not have an e-mail address on their own etc. However, I wanted to use written messages and a virtual medium whenever this was possible – and it was in all cases – to lower the threshold for the participants to respond and the costs the contact supposed for any of us. Written contact messages had the additional advantage that I could send universal messages to all participants on the same day, facilitating a similarity of conditions oral communications, for example through phone calls, would not have ensured. Many focus-group participants had indicated landlines number, so I suspected that these might be their parents' residences and it might be difficult to localise them there, once they began their university studies, giving me an additional reason to refrain from phone calls.

When I began this longitudinal project, WhatsApp was not yet a common tool of communication, but social network sites (SNS) like Facebook were (Ahn, 2011; Judd, 2010). Facebook was especially popular among young people in Spain, since the local SNS *Tuenti* had been bought by *telefonica* in 2010 and started to lose users. Apart from e-mails, Facebook appeared to me as an attractive contact medium, as it provided the possibility to quickly and easily contact potential¹⁰⁶ participants with a low threshold and no direct costs. Furthermore, it enabled me to search participants whose e-mail addresses were difficult to decipher, as a simple search for their names could be enough to recognize them. Though I used e-mails and Facebook messages in parallel at the beginning, I only used the contact medium through which

¹⁰⁶ In the following, I use the term “potential participants” to refer to the participants who had indicated their contact data at our first contact, though not all of them came to take part in the follow-up.

the participants had answered so soon all contact activity was limited to Facebook, indicating that the participants preferred this contact medium to e-mail contact and that it had been a good idea to use it. Throughout the whole follow-up and beyond, Facebook offered me ideal conditions to contact my participants with a low threshold, no extra costs and under highly comparable conditions, but there were of course as well ethical issues and possible inconveniences I had to consider.

I employed Facebook as a contact medium and not as a data source on its own, so I did not encounter the typical ethical problems described in the literature when using SNS as a data source (Battles, 2010; Zimmer, 2010) and did not have to worry how the information displayed on Facebook might be biased (Awan & Gauntlett, 2013; Boyd, 2007; Siibak, 2010). However, I considered it necessary to befriend my participants, as Facebook profile settings allow you to block the receipt of messages from people who are not on your friend list, so I could not have known if my messages actually reached them without this first step. Moreover, I wanted to give my participants to contact me whenever they needed me, so I did not only keep the same mobile phone number throughout the whole follow-up, but also considered that they would contact me easier on Facebook if I was on their friend list. So I first sent friendship invitations to all potential participants I could encounter on Facebook. Interestingly, most of them befriended me virtually even if they never came to answer my messages, indicating again that they did not worry too much about protecting their personal data. However, it is also possible that they accepted my friendship invitation to see my profile and then decided against participating (see as well footnote 105) or that they accepted it without even caring who I was.

Though I never intended a structured analysis of my participants' Facebook profiles, I was aware that befriending them on Facebook came with certain risks, especially regarding their anonymity. If the participants appeared in my friend list, anybody who had access to my friend list – the default setting of Facebook was in these days a public friend list that did not even require that you befriended someone to see his friends – could potentially search it for participants. Moreover, the participants could leave messages on my timeline, giving away their participation. Especially at the beginning of the project, I was still attempting to keep my influence on the participants as small as possible and wanted to treat them all as equally as possible, so I was worried about the information we could – accidentally or not – perceive about one another and how this could influence the project. As the participants could have easily encountered my personal Facebook profile through a simple search of my name or e-mail address just as I found theirs, I did not consider it useful to create a separate Facebook account for the project, thinking that if I used my personal account I knew at least for sure that all participants had the same access to it and avoided ethical dilemmas that might have appeared if a participant sent me a friendship invitation for my personal account anyway. I cleared my profile from most personal information, e.g. albums I had uploaded and pictures I was tagged in, in order to minimize the effects of the information the participants could encounter on my profile and stopped to post anything. Moreover, I never entered the participants' profiles, searching for them directly from the message inbox when I wanted to write to them, to avoid seeing their posts. However, the posts of your Facebook friends appear in your News Feed and as the latest news appear whenever you log-in, I had to eliminate my participants from my News Feed if I wanted to avoid seeing any of their posts. After dedicating

some time to a study of the possible Facebook settings¹⁰⁷, I decided to create a group of “acquaintances” for my participants that I excluded from my News Feed and disabled to post on my timeline. Moreover, I hid my friend list even for my friends, in order to avoid that anybody could use it as a way to search my participants.

In the course of the follow-up, I had to find out that some of my participants were still able to see others, as even with this Facebook setting mutual friends are still displayed when you enter into a profile. As I never entered my participants’ profiles, I had not noticed this inconvenience myself and only found out when one of my participants told me about it in one of the follow-up interviews. As many participants came from the same schools or studied the same degrees, they were also likely to know each other and to be friends on Facebook even if they were not too close offline. However, as many potential participants accepted my Facebook-friendship though they never actually participated in the follow-up and the participants who decided to drop out did not usually end our Facebook friendship – though two did – the list of common friends was much more extensive and this could indirectly protect the participants’ anonymity, as the pure fact to be a common friend did not necessarily indicate participation in the follow-up. However, as the participants did not know about these processes, they could also mistakenly assume that a common friend was another participant and then relate differently to this person than they would have without this false assumption, for example disclosing their participation. None of my participants ever mentioned such an accidental disclosure, though several knew who of their friends was also a participant, telling me that my project was a topic in their friend groups. Especially the participants I gained through the amplification of the sample asked their fellow students if they had also been selected for the project and came to the first interview intrigued to know why they had been chosen and others not. As any participant in any research project has the possibility to disclose his or her participation publically, this is, however, not a Facebook-related problem. I believe that my decision to present the findings in this thesis topic-oriented rather than centring on the participating individuals, I additionally protect the participants who disclosed their participation forthrightly, as their risk to be recognized is of course especially high.

In the course of the follow-up and with my changing attitude towards the participants, I came to consider Facebook additionally as a possibility for reciprocity. Whenever I found something that I considered especially interested for a concrete participant, I sent a personal message with the information. However, many things seemed to me to be of a certain interest to all participants, e.g. calls for scholarship programmes, language courses etc., and as I did not mean to flood them with personal messages, I rather started to share these as posts on my timeline, selecting that they should be visible for my “friends and acquaintances”¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁷ Facebook changed its privacy settings and other functions several times in the course of the project. This is why I do not explain in detail how to choose your settings to achieve the described advantages. For a more detailed description on how I chose the settings at the beginning of the project, take a look at the paper on using Facebook in youth research I presented at the PhD summer school of the NYRIS conference held in Tallinn in 2013 (Strecker, 2013).

¹⁰⁸ Whenever you publish a new Facebook post, you can choose if you want it to be “public”, visible for “friends only” or for “friends and acquaintances” and according to your choice the post appears as well in the selected groupings News Feed.

As the relationship with my participants changed, some of them referred to Facebook, wondering if I did not see the photos they published about a certain event they were telling me about. Nic mentioned that he had supposed that I was little active on Facebook, as he had noticed that I never appeared in his News Feed, and it is likely that other participants thought something similar and did not expect any Facebook settings to intervene or a conscious decision behind it. When I told Nic about the Facebook settings I used, he highlighted that he would not mind me to see his pictures and invited me to have a look at them to better picture his experiences in Japan. This may indicate that the participants' actually expected me to see what they posted and some might have even changed their Facebook use because of this or might have wondered why I never liked any of their posts. The – false – belief that I was not very active on Facebook because I did not post anything, could have caused the participants to not expect my seeing their profiles anyway and if they really worried about my access to their data, they could set their Facebook settings in a similar way as I did with them to limit my access without my knowledge. The impression of me as a rather sporadic Facebook user could have caused them to perceive me differently, as they might have expected a certain ideology regarding virtual environments rather than a researcher decision. Moreover, it could have caused them to believe that I would not see a Facebook message quickly enough to help them when they needed me, refraining to contact me at all, though I actually connected over years on a daily basis in case a participant wrote to me. The assumption that I was only a sporadic user was of course proven wrong whenever I contacted the participants and answered to their responses immediately. Moreover, even if the participants had thought that I would not see a message in time on Facebook, they still had my mobile phone number, e-mail address and even knew where I was living, so this should not have influenced their perception of my accessibility negatively and is not the explanation for their rather little interest in receiving my help for anything. The few times participants came to contact me to ask for help they either mentioned it directly in an interview or sent me a Facebook message, indicating again that Facebook was the contact medium with the lowest threshold throughout the most part of the follow-up, until it was substituted by WhatsApp.

In the third interview round (2013-2014), I asked the participants for their use of Facebook and WhatsApp and encountered that all of them had by then started to use WhatsApp, some earlier and some just months before the interview. However, it was not until the fifth and last interview round that I myself had made the change for a smartphone and installed WhatsApp, so I could only use this means of contact for the last interview round. As I did not mean to pressure the participants additionally to not withdraw through this change of contact media, I still opted to contact them via Facebook for the last interview. However, once we had agreed on a date for an interview and this date was closing in, I remembered that they had told me about their decreasing activity on Facebook and technical issues to open it from their smartphones, so I decided to now use WhatsApp for the reminder messages I had always sent them whenever we had agreed on interview dates with several days of advance. However, the participants only used WhatsApp to answer to my messages and only one came to contact me once without a previous message by myself. Here it seems that the immediate contact through WhatsApp did increase the threshold to contact me regarding Facebook, but the difference was too small and the time I used WhatsApp was too short to allow for such conclusions.

In summary, I believe that my adaptation of Facebook settings worked quite well to protect the participants' anonymity and to avoid both their and my profile data to influence in the project. Certain limitations, e.g. the visibility of common friends but also the rather laborious search through Facebook settings and their modification for each participant, could be overcome if the research community negotiated with Facebook. A detailed feedback might lead to more research-friendly privacy settings, allowing Facebook users, for example, to publish their posts visibly for researchers, but not the general public, as this could also solve issues with consent researchers who wish to use Facebook as a data source itself encounter at present (Strecker, 2013; Zimmer, 2010).

Finally, I have to relativise that despite all my efforts, the pure access to the profile pictures whenever sending the participants a message was at times enough to notice that something had happened in their lives, for example when the picture of a happy couple was substituted by a portrait of the participant alone or by a new couple picture, just with another partner. We can argue that this influence is of little ethical importance as the profile pictures are publically visible to anybody, but they could come to have a crucial influence on the project as the following example shows: One of my male participants had such a couple-profile picture displaying him with his male life partner, when I contacted him for our second-year interview. As he had consistently spoken of his "*pareja*"¹⁰⁹ in our first interview, avoiding terms that specify the person's sex, I had automatically pictured a female life partner in my head instead of embracing the vast number of alternatives – an obvious example of how my thinking was still limited by hetero-normative stereotypes despite all my readings on LGBTBI and intersectionality. In the following interviews, I never brought the topic of sexual orientation up as I did not mean to impose this social division on him and he never broached the issue either, not even when I directly mentioned my interest in social inequalities in the last interview. Though we never talked about sexual orientations, we both occasionally used masculine possessive determiners and pronouns in the following interviews, referring to "him" and "his", when speaking of the life partner. As I did not come to display my heteronormative stereotype that his "partner" had to be a woman in the interviews, he never had to correct me in this sense, avoiding him a "coming out" in the interviews and allowing us, in a certain way, to act as if heteronormativity did not exist and had not affected my thinking first, so his sexual orientation was just as little important as the sexual orientation of any other participant. The sole visualization of his Facebook profile picture had therefore enabled me to treat him more equally, to reflect on my own heteronormative thinking and to pay closer attention to the participant's wording whenever he referred to his life partner in the interviews.

¹⁰⁹ We may translate "*pareja*" with "partner", though I am not convinced that the use of the terms is completely analogical. In my impression, it is much more common to use "*pareja*" in Spanish and the reference to a love attachment is clear, while in German a "partner" could just as well be a business partner and is, at least in my impression, less commonly used to relate to a lover, especially among young people. Moreover, in German you would differ between "*Partner*" and "*Partnerin*", so the translation is more than flawed as it does not allow for the same universal application without specifying the sex of the other person. In English, I am not sure at all how someone would refer to a lover without determining the sex as the use of personal pronouns like "his" or "her" would easily indicate the sex of the partner in the context of the sentence, while this does not happen with the Spanish "*pareja*" as this is always feminine, even if the partner is male.

4.4.5. *Language Issues*

"Si parleu a un home en una llengua que entengui, el missatge li arribarà al cap. Si li parleu en la seva llengua, li arribarà al cor."

Nelson Mandela, South African politician (1918-2013)

Roda Mots 15.04.2015

"La major part de les idees fonamentals de la ciència són essencialment senzilles i poden ser expressades en un llenguatge comprensible a tothom."

Albert Einstein, German physicist (1879-1955)

Roda Mots 14/03/2018

In the following, I would like to comment on issues related to language and ethics that appeared in different parts of this project, first regarding my fieldwork, then the analyses and finally publications.

When I first began this research project, my proficiency in Catalan was rather low. As an Erasmus student I had had the opportunity to study Catalan courses and achieve the A2¹¹⁰ level, but I was by no means fluent in Catalan after my return. So at first, I prepared all documents to contact with schools and to conduct the focus groups in Spanish and addressed my focus-group participants in this language. However, already throughout the focus groups I witnessed that for some participants it was rather difficult to discuss with their peers in Spanish, as they were used to speaking in Catalan. Though I felt that I was imposing a setting on them that did not favour their free expression as qualitative research should, I believed that it could be easier for them to speak to me in Spanish in the first-year interviews, as no other interlocutors would be present that could favour the use of Catalan. However, several participants mentioned that Catalan would have been easier for them and one of the participants asked me if he could answer my questions in Catalan. Though I had not noticed any additional difficulties in the speaking of the others when answering in Spanish, I noticed in the transcription of the first-year interviews that many participants used repeatedly Catalanisms, in the sense of wrong translation from Catalan expressions to Spanish¹¹¹. This made me think that the use of Spanish limited them even further than they would be admit, as many had claimed that they did not mind to hold the interview in Spanish if this was easier for me. In line with the above mentioned quotation from Mandela, I then thought that it was better to conduct the interviews in Catalan to reach the participants' hearts, no matter how bilingual they were, so I offered them to hold the interviews in Catalan in Int2. After

¹¹⁰ According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which you may find explained on many websites, for instance here: <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/cefr/> [last access: 02.01.2018].

¹¹¹ The most common example here was the term "*más grande*". While the expression "*més gran*" in Catalan refers to age, so a person who is "*més gran*" is older than the speaker, the translation to Spanish as "*más grande*" is false, as "*grande*" refers in Spanish to size, not age, so the correct translation would be "*mayor*". However, it has to be said that the same mistake appears in official translations from Catalan to Spanish, ironically for example on the Spanish website of the DOUBLE BACHELOR'S DEGREE: APPLIED LANGUAGES AND TRANSLATION - ENGLISH STUDIES of the UdL, where a table summarising the N.C. required for the different profiles of incoming students, mentions "*más grandes de 25 años*" and "*más grandes de 40 y 45 años*". See: <http://www.llenguesaplicadesitraduccio-ea.udl.cat/es/futurs-estudiants/acces-admissio.html> [last access: 03.06.2018].

encountering severe difficulties in transcribing the second-year interviews, I opted again to hold the interviews in Spanish in Interview round 3, whenever this was possible, but finally managed to achieve the necessary level of proficiency to actually not mind if the interview happened in Catalan or in Spanish in interview round 4 and 5. Once I had achieved this point, I noticed to my surprise that some participants would actually prefer to give their interviews in Spanish for their own sake and not because of me, though they had caused me this impression at the beginning of the follow-up. Skone, for example, gave all his interviews in Spanish and directly identified as a Spanish-speaker when I insisted that we could have the interview in Catalan as well. Floreta kept insisting in every interview that it was absolutely no problem for her to give the interview in Spanish if this was easier for me, but when I started the fifth interview in Catalan, her answers were much slower than usual, she used many words and expressions in Spanish and completely switched to Spanish after a while. So in a certain way, my increasing proficiency in Catalan allowed me to learn another bit of information about my participants, their language "preferences", if this is the accurate term.

In the case of the participants with migration histories, my ability to offer them to conduct the interview in the language of their country of origin was limited. As Andrés and Irina came from Latin America, in their cases we can argue that conducting the interviews in Spanish was close to offering their mother tongue, though important differences between the Spanish spoken in their birth countries and in Catalonia limit this impression. However, Irina told me that she usually only talked to her family in Spanish and to everybody else in Catalan and that it was like talking to a family member when she talked to me, indicating that she did not mind that my Spanish differed from the Spanish of her family of origin. From the moment on she mentioned this impression, we conducted all further interviews in Spanish, but had conducted Int2 in Catalan as Irina argued that she would not mind to do so when I offered the option. Xenia, on the other hand, directly opposed to holding the interviews in Catalan, favouring the Spanish language though she came from a Eastern-European country and neither Spanish nor Catalan were her mother tongue. Ariel gained more proficiency in Spanish and Catalan herself in the course of the interviews, so we were in a certain way learning the languages in parallel and Koala seemed to be perfectly proficient in both and in several others, though I did not understand a word when his grandmother interrupted one of our interviews to talk to him.

So in the end the employed language varied from participant to participant and from interview to interview and changed sometimes in the course of the same interview. Apart from the interesting insights my reflections on language use might have for linguists, the ethical issue here is on the one hand that my lack of language proficiency lowered my qualification as a researcher at the beginning of the project, as I did not have the same possibilities to make my participants feel comfortable in the interview situation as a native speaker would have had. However, thanks to my being a non-native, I was able to switch between Spanish and Catalan like no native speaker could have done without being asked for an explanation for such a behaviour, so I was able to gain interesting insights into the language use of my participants without making them feel that I could be testing their language proficiency or preferences. Though I did of course not mean to test these anyway, I have to admit that I felt curious about their language use and their ways to express themselves, but if I had mentioned this to justify the use of another language, this would have likely made my participants feel self-conscious and would have altered their language use.

My acquisition of Catalan became, moreover, repeatedly a topic in the interviews, for example in Int2 with Maduixa who was delighted to see my progress and commented on friends of hers and especially the parents of friends who had never learned Catalan despite their living in Catalonia for decades. In Int4, Ariel compared her mother's difficulties to learn Catalan with her own and mine and asked me about the exams I had taken and tricks I could tell them to pass them as well. In both cases, the comments the interviewees made told me a lot about their perception of Catalonia and the Catalan society, as Maduixa considered language difficulties in Catalan a sign for a non-willingness to integrate, while Ariel expressed the belief that Catalans did what they could to difficult the lives of foreigners by requiring them a high proficiency in Catalan and then testing for expressions non-native speakers have important difficulties to learn.

Regarding the analyses of the interviews the language issues were of a different nature. I have already mentioned the difficulties transcribing the second-year interviews in Catalan and how I overcame these difficulties in the course of improving my language proficiency. Another aspect to consider here is the employed language in the written analyses. When analysing the focus groups, I actually wrote a big part of the analyses in German, as this was the language I used to think about the data and in which I was able to express myself with more accuracy and speed. However, writing my analyses in German disabled my thesis supervisor to ever take a look at them, so I changed for Spanish, Catalan or English when I began the analyses of the interview rounds and kept this language policy up until the end of the project. Employing the same language for the analysis as for the transcript, had the additional advantage that the linguistic correction of the word document was able to handle it and offered me corrections that made it easier for me to actually write correctly. Such pragmatic issues were also influential in the language I used to take my interview notes, after an interview. When I started to use the computer I got assigned to in university when I achieved my scholarship, I found that this computer did not only not correct my German spelling, but moreover had a tendency to return to the Catalan spelling corrector, sometimes without an apparent reason. This had the effect that the corrector "corrected" my writings, making them hardly readable, even for myself. This made it quite annoying to write in German and slowed my writing down, so I started to take even the interview notes in Spanish or Catalan, though I only took them for myself, as this was much easier on the office computer.

Apart from the practical challenges of conducting fieldwork in two languages you are not a native speaker in and then writing about your findings in yet another language you are not a native speaker in either and having to translate continuously without any training in translation¹¹², this practice comes with some ethical difficulties. First of all, I might have to explain why I decided to write this thesis in English at all. As Tully et al. (Tully, Krug, & Sander, 2008) showed there is a language divide in youth research, as authors who publish in English do not cite authors who publish in Spanish and authors who publish in Spanish do not cite authors who publish in English. Though I consider myself and several other researchers I know as exceptions to this rule, I am aware of two important implications: If I want my findings to

¹¹² Though I took a course on translation at the Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo (UIMP), I am by no means a translator and even if I was, this would not erase the fact that I am continuously translating from one foreign language to another rather than translating from one foreign language to my mother tongue as most translators are trained for.

make a change in Spain, I need to write them in Spanish; if I want them to make a change beyond Spain I need to write them in English. So, independently of the choice of the right journal or publishing house to gain the most visibility, the choice of language is crucial in itself. Translating publications from one language to another is not considered ethical, so the trick lies in combining summaries of the most important findings in both languages with a detailed description of certain findings in the language that is most strategic to provoke the intended changes on the intended level. Though my ambitions regarding the world-changing quality of my thesis did decrease in the course of its development (see *A frog's tale, Participant A*), I am still convinced that my findings are of a certain applicability for any HE system, so writing them in English seems to be the best way to contribute to the academic work on social inequality in HE all over the world, while a summarising article in Spanish or Catalan, focusing especially on the practical recommendations for the Catalan HE system, might be enough to build a bridge over the English divide in youth research.

An additional reason to publish in English is that the most important journals in the sense of indexation and impact factors are published in English. While you may still publish in English in less important journals, publishing in Spanish limits your possibilities to publish in important journals significantly, leaving you little alternatives and virtually 0 if you consider publishing in Catalan. Catalan may be the direct way to the heart of the Catalan readers, but certainly not to success in the highly competitive world of academic research. Publishing in journals indexed on the JCR and within the first quartiles of this listing is highly important for a researcher's career; for example, the AQU, an agency commissioned with the "pre-selection assessment of academic staff contracted for posts of collaborating staff, tenure-track staff, associate professorial and professorial staff at the public universities in Catalonia"¹¹³ requires researchers to have published a certain number of articles in such journals, depending on the field of studies and the researcher category they apply for. In this sense, it might be "better" – though little ethical – for a researcher's career to publish all findings in English, even if this lowers their chances to be implemented in Spain severely, due to the language divide. Here it is the system itself that presents the researcher with an ethical dilemma, a double bind that is even more paradox than we have seen so far.

At the moment of writing this thesis, I have already published several articles in international journals written in English language. Two common requests I encountered repeatedly in referees' comments were that I should mention Spain in the title of my article and that I should get my article checked by a Native speaker. Now, I am aware that a high language proficiency is important for writing and transmitting results, but the fact that Native speakers were directly required still surprised me. At the end, only a fraction of the research community are native English-speaker, meaning that most authors and readers are not natives but using English as a *lingua franca* to convey their findings. If I have a point here, we should ask if it makes sense to require such a high level for any publication in English. If a level of a native speaker is required to get an article published, this condemns furthermore many authors to paying native correctors, though these are probably not experts in their topic and might be unable to convey certain language sensitivities a researcher who happens to be native in the

¹¹³ For more information and the direct quote see:
http://www.aqu.cat/professorat/index_en.html#.Wkv1P1XibiU. [last access: 02.01.2018]

language he uses for his fieldwork and publications employs with ease. The costs for non-native researchers to publish their articles is then immense, as they have to employ additional time and money to first write their manuscripts in a foreign language, facing issues of translating quotations from their interview materials without having received a training in translation and being the target language the one they are not natives in, waiting for a native English corrector to go their manuscript through and of course paying for this. Mentioning Spain or Catalonia in the title may furthermore increase the risk of losing potential readers as other scholars might doubt the applicability of my findings in their geographic contexts without even considering the abstract.

To give the described ethical dilemma a theoretical foundation, I would like to refer to the Southern Theory developed by Connell (2007). Connell distinguishes between the global, theory-building North and the global South, which is usually restricted to case studies applying the theory imported from the North to the two hemispheres. She mentions her own publications on masculinity (Connell, 2005) as an exceptional example of how an author from the global South came to take part in theory building. In her reading, Spain lies in the global North, just as Germany does and I am hence a researcher from the global North with all the privileges this entails. If I came to publish some theory-building article about my fieldwork in Australia or Argentina, I would probably be yet another example of a researcher from the global North who travelled to the global South to impose a Northern theory to the different context.

Though I agree with her theory in many much more important point than this, I have to say that this geographic divide does not quite convince me. I would say that Australia has much more in common with the USA, the UK and Canada than with Indonesia or South Africa: Apart from the language – despite important differences between British, American and Australian English – there are economic differences to consider. Though Australia is the last of the mentioned English-speaking nations to appear on the List of Countries by Projected GDP published by the International Monetary Fund (2017), it makes it to place 13 (out of 191), while Spain is ranked as number 14 just one line below¹¹⁴. Now I do not want to argue that economy and English-language are the most important indicators to explain the participation in theory-building, but I do believe that taking them additionally into consideration allows for a more accurate geographic differentiation than the two hemispheres. In every case, Connell herself goes beyond this geographic level, arguing that the difference between metropolis and periphery applies within regions just as well as between regions, so Spain is disadvantaged in the sense of being situated in the – Southern – periphery of the EU and the University of Lleida faces the additional problem of not-being situated in a metropolis within Spain either. As Bessant and Watts (2014, p. 8) cautioned from a Southern-theory perspective: "theorists from the south or the periphery are rarely cited or [...] their ideas are simply not considered a legitimate part of theoretical dialogue." This equal listing of global South and periphery could, in my reading, still be broadened by reflections on issues of English-language requirements and resources needed to publish research findings, just as well as the indirect treatment as an exotic case that requires a clear geographic location in its title. Nevertheless, it is already now

¹¹⁴ For online access to the ranking see: <http://statisticstimes.com/economy/countries-by-projected-gdp.php>. [Last access: 02.01.2018]

useful to help me not to forget about my privileges either, as my geographical location in the EU did certainly play a role in my upbringing, my education and training as a researcher, the facilities and scholarship I received to conduct my fieldwork etc. Many other researchers – be it in the global South or the periphery – are certainly much more disadvantaged than I am and my whole discussion about whether I should publish my findings in one language or another, is in the end the result of a certain snobbery only someone who actually has the chance to conduct research and publish it in more than one language may worry about.

5. The Participants

The time has come: After all this preparation it is high time to introduce the people who made this PhD thesis, this research, this project and every single of these lines possible. I have decided to dedicate a chapter to the introduction of my participants – a chapter I consider located conveniently at the heart of this thesis – in order to kill two birds with one stone: As commented in the section about ethics, I would not want to enter in too much detail into the individual cases in order to avoid both the recognition of participants, but also a too detailed presentation of their flaws and mistakes, as I consider this an abuse of my superior power in this researcher-participant relationship. However, the reader does surely need to "know" – as far as one person is ever able to know another – the participants in order to understand their narratives. So I opted to introduce the main facts of each participant in a short text, written after the completion of the project and focusing on their situation at the moment of the last interview. Before introducing my "stars", I would like to express, once again, my profound gratitude for their participation in this project.

5.1. *Andrés*

Andrés (1990) is male and was born in a South American country. He came to Spain with 14 years and was integrated within the sample after the additional socio-economic survey in 2012. Both his parents work as employees, although his father has studies equivalent to A-levels and his mother studied at a university. His maternal grandfather studied law, the other three grandparents achieved elementary studies only. At the beginning of the follow-up, both grandfathers had already died, but his grandmothers were still alive, living in the South American country where he was born. Andrés has no direct siblings and his parents separated when he was a child, so he lived with his mother. In spite of the separation, his father helped his mother to establish herself in Lleida when she first moved there and Andrés lived for a while with his grandmother, before his mother came to bring him to Lleida as well. He first entered university after his A-levels, enrolling for the then existing 5-year degree in English at the University of Lleida. However, in the second year he interrupted his studies when his mother lost her work and began to work himself. He returned to the same degree after an interruption, but found that the reforms had changed it to an extent that it was no longer to his liking. So he abandoned his studies a second time. In the academic course 2011/2012 he decides to return to University and enrolls in the 4-year degree of tourism. Throughout the follow-up he lives with his mother and spends the most time working several hours per week in different low-paid employments, for example as a parking-lot attendant, or receiving unemployment subsidies. In year 2, his mother is again unemployed for a time and they pass a hard time with many restrictions, but Andrés doesn't interrupt his studies this time. Throughout the whole follow-up Andrés is in a relationship with a law graduate from Lleida and claims in Int3 that they've already been a couple for 7 years. At the moment of the last interview, in May 2016, Andrés finished his degree and moved to Barcelona. After 6 months of unpaid internship in a hotel, the same hotel employed him as a community manager and he is about to finish a 6-month probation time with prospects for an indefinite contract after another 6 months. He lives with his boyfriend and his boyfriend's grandmother in her residence in Barcelona. A recurrent topic in all his interviews is the plan to travel to his home country and he finally bought the tickets for a trip with his boyfriend in summer 2016. Moreover, he mentions several times his wish to marry and to become a father, commenting on the options to adopt or to employ a surrogate mother. His plans for the future are to continue working and saving money to get in the further future both a better-paid position and the opportunity to move with his boyfriend into a flat without the grandmother.

5.2. *Ariel*

Ariel (1992) is female and was born in an Eastern European country that does not form part of the European Union. She came to Spain with 16 years and was integrated within the sample after the additional socio-economic survey in 2012. Ariel's father has superior studies and works at the beginning of the follow-up as an employee in Russia. After separating from Ariel's mother, he married again and had another daughter. Ariel lived with her mother, who studied

medicine and came to Spain to work in a hospital. Three of her grandparents had died before she was born. Her maternal grandmother was still alive at the beginning of the follow-up and still in work as an employee. After taking her A-levels in Spain, Ariel matriculates in the degree of tourism in the University of Lleida in the academic course 2011-2012. At the beginning of the follow-up, she lives as a subtenant with an older women, but moves into a shared flat with other students in the next year and changes her flat again at some point, as she keeps experiencing difficulties with her changing flatmates. In the fifth year, it is not possible to meet for another interview as Ariel moved back to her country of origin where she is studying medicine. She completed her four-year degree in tourism in the required time and then decided to study her mother's profession as she had already wanted to do years before, but had not been able to do as her language proficiency after only 2 years in Spain didn't allow her to score a result good enough to enter medicine right away in the PAU¹¹⁵.

5.3. Cara

Cara (1993) is female and from a rural zone in the province of Lleida. She participated in the focus group in the public school in the rural town. None of her parents went to University, but they both did vocational trainings in different fields and own a butchery with employees so that her social class was calculated as 4,1. She's got a younger brother who decides to take a vocational training instead of going to High School in the course of the follow-up. In the focus group, she explained her plan to study Sports at the University of Lleida and to take later on the master for secondary school teachers. In the academic course 2011-2012 she enters into her aspired degree course and moves to Lleida, where she lives one year in a student residence, one year in a shared flat with friends from her home town and afterwards throughout several years in shared flats with friends from her degree course and friends of these friends. Throughout the interviews she comments repeatedly that it is not yet decided whether she will study the master or not, because it lies in the far future. In the fourth year she represents to be sure about the master, but not about the place where to study it. In the fifth and last year, she represents however that she decided at the very end of the degree course to try this master, although she was not sure whether she would like to work with adolescents. Doing the master and the required school-internships she discovered that she would have preferred primary school and the work with younger students. This shows how she changes the representation of her study choice throughout the follow-up.

In the first year of University she becomes the girlfriend of a fellow student and they remain a couple until the end of the follow-up. They never share their student flat, but practically live together on the weekends and in summer, as he comes with her to her village or they work together as skiing instructors sharing a residence with other friends and she stays with him in summer when working in summer camps. However, Cara repeatedly mentions the possibility of a rupture, considers herself too young to move in with a boyfriend in the second interview, describes her relationship as monotone in the 5th year and seems to actively construct her

¹¹⁵ The *Proves d'accés a la universitat* (PAU) were explained in more detail above (see *Education and degree course organisation*).

plans as independent from her boyfriend, although they actually do very similar things (same master, same internships, same work, same plan to keep working as skiing instructors). From the second-year interview onwards Cara has different student jobs: extracurricular classes for school children throughout the course, summer-camps, her parents' butchery and a weekend-job as a skiing instructor throughout the skiing season in her last year. Several of these jobs (summer camps, skiing instructor) required her to first take preparatory courses, investing in both cases time and money first.

Although she mentioned in several interviews that she wanted to do an Erasmus, she did not do so at the end. At first, she postponed the Erasmus to her 3rd year, but then she starts to inform herself too late to apply for the third year and her lecturers tell her that the 4th year is not a good moment for an Erasmus as it is likely to fail subjects and to not be able to course exactly the same subjects, prolonging the studies. However, she also mentions certain insecurity about leaving all alone, although she believes that it's the way to really learn the language. In the fourth year, she considers studying a master in a foreign country, but decides against this idea with the argument that only the Spanish secondary-school master assures her access to this field of work in Spain. After finishing the master, she plans to go on a trip to Nepal with a couple of friends (not including her boyfriend) and does not discard further stays abroad to improve her English and to work, but the basis for her plans is still Spain, as she wants to continue as a skiing instructor. She represents that her chances to get into work as a teacher directly are rather bad; however, she also embraces this insecurity as an opportunity to do different things before the beginning of the rest of her life and does neither plan to inscribe directly for the substitution-teacher list, nor to prepare for oppositions at the moment. For the moment, she plans to work the next year in Summer camps and as a skiing instructor, both quite intensive jobs, and does not really know yet how to fill the gap in between. In Int4 she mentioned that none of these jobs are a long-term alternative, as they are really unstable and in Int5 she says that very few people are able to live from a job as a skiing instructor only.

5.4. Floreta

Floreta (1993) is female and from Lleida (capital). She participated in a focus group in her public High School in Lleida and began in the academic course 2011-2012 to study the Bachelor's Degree in Speech Therapy at the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* (UAB). She's got an older sister who studies teacher training at the beginning of the follow-up and works as an English teacher in a primary school in the metropolitan area of Barcelona at the end of the follow-up. Floreta's parents do both studied teacher training and are working as public servants, although her mother is not working in a school. At the beginning of the follow-up, Floreta moved into a shared flat in a small town close to the university's location. Throughout the follow-up she changes several times the flat and the flat mates, moving after two years to another small town, similarly close to the UAB. She's active in voluntary work and sports and starts to work after the first interview in different student jobs, for the university gym and later on as a student collaborator in university. She finishes her degree after the designated 4 years, passes her driving test and moves to Mallorca in October 2015 for a job offer as a speech

therapist. The one-year contract is prolonged until July 2017, so at the moment of the last interview, in December 2016, she is still in Mallorca, living in a shared flat with another speech therapist. Her plan for the future is to search for a job in Barcelona and to return to Catalonia to work and study a postgraduate course, but she would also like to live for a period of time in the Netherlands. Although she had a boyfriend in 2013, the relationship did not last and at the moment of the last interview she is a single.

5.5. *Irina*

Irina (1993) is female and was born in a South American country. She came to Catalonia when she was 8 years old and is the youngest of 5 children. Her oldest sister, born in 1980, studied a vocational training and lives in Mallorca at the beginning of the follow-up. She's not currently working, but had been an employee before and is a student. She came with the family to Spain but moved out when Irina was 12 years old, when she herself was 25. Another sister, born in 1983, lives in the same small town as their parents. She was 18 years old when the family left stayed in their country of origin, starting university studies there, which were not recognized after her arrival in Spain with 22 years. At the beginning of the follow-up she's working as an employee. The only brother was born in 1987 and stayed in the country of origin, when the family left. He studied at university and came to Spain when he was 21 years old. Irina mentions that he lived with her parents and herself, until she herself left to begin university studies. At the beginning of the follow-up, her brother lives in their country of origin again and isn't working, but had worked as an employee before and is studying again. The youngest of her sisters, born in 1989, moved and lived with the family until she was 19 years old. At the beginning of the follow-up she lives and studies in Barcelona and Irina describes her as especially important for herself. In the course of the follow-up, Irina mentions the children of two of her older sisters and lived for a while with her youngest older sister in Barcelona, when she worked there after finishing her degree. Both her parents have intermediate levels of education, A-levels or equivalents, but did not go to University. Her father was unemployed at the beginning of the follow-up, having worked as an employee before. Her mother is working as a free-lancer. Throughout the follow-up her family opens a small business selling *churros* in their town of residence and Irina spends much time helping in this family business.

Irina begins her University studies in the academic year 2011-2012, directly after school, studying social work at the University of Lleida and is included into the sample after the additional survey in spring 2012. At the beginning of her studies, she keeps living with her parents in a nearby town and commutes every day to attend her classes and to train athletic sports. Later on she moves into a shared flat and starts to work in a bar in Lleida. She trains children in athletics but drops her own training due to a lack of time. Throughout the follow-up she changes several times the shared flat. In the academic course 2014-2015 she spends the year studying in Mexico through an international exchange program. Although she had initially wished to go to another South American country on exchange and only opted for Mexico as the exchange program was already established, she is delighted with Mexico and returns after her graduation. After the exchange year, she only has to come to Lleida to do paperwork for her graduation, so that she does not move there again. After graduation, she works for 6

months in a Mexican Restaurant in Barcelona, living with her older sister, to save money before she returns to Mexico. At the moment of the last interview, she still lives in Mexico with her boyfriend and has plans to study a specialization that will give her access to a master in Human Rights or Anthropology. She earns some money selling self-created bikinis and works as a dog-walker in Mexico. After her stay in Spain, she plans to spend several months in Canada, earning money as a fruit-worker and travelling. Her plans for the future are to leave Mexico after the specialization and the master and to travel the world with her boyfriend, a Mexican with the same mission. She would like to work in an international organization that enabled her to travel, but could also imagine to work only periodically to save money for her travels or to earn some money while travelling. She would also like to study indigenous cultures throughout her travels, with or without funding. At the moment of the last interview she does not set any temporal limitation to this life style, but argues that she would do something else if she would ever feel tired by it. She's not yet decided whether to have children or not, but could imagine to take children on her trips.

5.6. *Koala*

Koala (1993) is male and from an Eastern European country that does not form part of the European Union. He came to live in Spain with 11 years, lived in Lleida (capital) and attended a public High School with a very good reputation, and participated in a focus group in this High School in 2011. Both his parents possess superior but not University studies and work as employees, so that their economic capital can be described as significantly lower than their cultural capital – a situation quite common among migrants. He's got a younger sister who was born when he was already 14 years old. In the focus group he commented that he did not want to assess university right away and planned to first do a vocational training in electronic engineering. In the first year interview, he comments however that he gave in to his parents, friends and teachers who all insisted on his going to university and started to study an engineering degree in electronics instead. After completing his degree at the University of Lleida in the stipulated time, he studies a master in the UPC in the same sector. At the beginning of the project he and the participant N. were a couple, but break up after the first year interview. The end of their relation and a second try as a couple are topics in their second and third year interviews. Koala begins a relationship with another girl in his fourth year, but hardly remembers the girl in the fifth-year interview, commenting that he would like to find a partner for life and create a family on his own in the future. Koala lives throughout most of the follow-up with his parents and his younger sister, but moves into a shared flat in a different town when beginning the master. At the moment of the last interview he works part-time in an enterprise that offers him a full-time employment for after his master and is additionally in the selection process for a different position in another enterprise. He is about to obtain the Spanish citizenship in the last-year interview and considers the options this offers for him within Spain (for example becoming a fire-fighter) and the EU. Moving to another country, especially Switzerland or Canada, appears repeatedly as an option or dream in his interviews.

5.7. *Maduixa*

Maduixa (1993) is female and from Lleida (capital). She participated in a focus group in her public school, situated in a zone of Lleida with a rather high migration rate. Both parents have university studies, her father is a doctor and her mother a public servant, and her social class of origin was calculated as 4,2. She's got a younger sister, born in 2000. In the focus group she explained that her wish was to become a movie director and to move to London. In the academic course 2011-2012 she studied the Degree Audiovisual Communication and Journalism at the UdL. At the end of the course, she contacted the researcher to inform her about an upcoming University change and an additional interview took place. Maduixa felt out of place in the UdL as most of her fellow students wished to become journalists and the lecturers continuously referred to their professional future as journalists. She attempted to transfer to the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) but her application was declined. So she took the application process for the Universitat de Barcelona (UB) and entered in the academic course 2012-2013 as a new first-year student in audiovisual communication. She moved to Barcelona and lived for the duration of her degree in a shared flat. In the second year at the UB (2013-2014) she becomes the girlfriend of a fellow student but after a while they decide to break up and remain friends, becoming a couple again in the 3rd year and staying together until the end of the follow-up. Maduixa's plan to study a master in London disappears bit after bit from her narration and in the last interview she explains that she decided not to do a master at the moment, because she is not yet 100% in what to specialize and the cinema sector is quite different in England, so she prefers to first get to know the Spanish sector well before moving anywhere else. Her plan is to stay in Barcelona, where she hopes to finally get a paid job, after several unpaid internships, and gain economic autonomy from her parents. She's got two relatives working in the cinema & TV sector and refers repeatedly to their comments and advice throughout the interviews and is hoping to get a job thanks to one of them.

5.8. *Margarita*

Margarita (1991) is female and from a small town in Catalonia. She is a friend of Cara, another participant, and contacts the researcher in 2013 to participate with an Activity Diary as she saw Cara's and got interested in the project. After the Activity Diary she is interested to become a participant of the follow-up and participates from then on in the annual interviews. At the moment of her first interview (2013) she studies sports in her third year and lives in a shared flat with Cara and several others. She is 2 years older than her fellow students as she first did a vocational training course in sports before entering into the university degree. Both her parents have studies equivalent to A-levels, her mother did a vocational training, and work as employees. She has two younger brothers and the older one moves to Lleida and starts to study sports, just like her, throughout the follow-up. Margarita worked at the beginning of her studies in Decathlon, but quit this job before she entered the project as she had noted that she needed more time to study. She works throughout the whole follow-up in different jobs, as a trainer in the faculty gym, as a sports instructor in summer camps for children and teens etc. In

the fourth year she realizes an internship in Andorra about lesions and is forced to quit her job in the gym due to the 3-week interruption. She chooses a related topic for her degree thesis and plans at one point to study the master for secondary education and to move to France with a special internship for teachers that would allow her to study a master about lesions in the meantime. When she fails her degree thesis and is forced to re-matriculate for another year, she decides against the master in secondary education and plans to move to France anyway, arguing that she never really set her heart to the plan to become a teacher. In the last year, she works again in the faculty gym and plans to apply for a master about disability at the University of Grenoble. She chose Grenoble for its size and location, as she plans to ski throughout her stay and declares that she is confident to find a job to finance her studies. She just started to study French at the Official Language School in Lleida (EOI) and plans a trip with Cara and another friend to Nepal before starting the master in France.

5.9. N.

N. (1993) is female and from Lleida (capital). She participated in a focus group in a public high school with a very good reputation. Her mother is a primary school teacher and her father's studies are equivalent to A-levels and he works as an employee. She's got an older sister, born in 1987, who studied Business Administration and Management and lived in Barcelona at the beginning of the project, where she worked in an enterprise while studying a master. Her sister had been an Erasmus student in France, where she became the girlfriend of a German Erasmus student. Throughout the follow-up the sister moves to Germany and lives with her German boyfriend. N. describes her as highly important and repeatedly visits her and follows her steps. She enters the same degree course as her sister in the academic course 2011-2012, although she had mentioned architecture as her aspired degree course in the focus group. She faces severe academic difficulties in her studies and considers repeatedly changing her degree, for example for primary school teaching, but is not able to do so as her PAU score is not high enough to enter it. At the beginning of the follow-up she takes several language courses (German, French) in the EOI and dance classes in a private dancing school. Throughout the follow-up she drops her language courses and one of her dancing classes, but starts to work as a teacher in the dancing school and to participate in the school's *ensemble*. In the fourth year of the follow-up she spends the whole year as an Erasmus student in Germany, but not in her sister's city of residence. In the last interview, approx. a half year after her return from Germany, she courses second- and third-year subjects of her degree and is convinced that her Erasmus changed her life. She describes herself as more motivated and centred in her studies and is finally passing her exams, although she is still convinced that her degree course is not for her. Throughout the whole follow-up, apart from the year in Germany, she lived with her parents. At the beginning she was in a relationship with Koala and tells us in the last interview that she's again in a relationship that started just before her Erasmus and works well so far. Her new boyfriend is from Lleida, but lives in Barcelona and works there on his PhD. N.'s plans for the future are to finish her degree course and to study Dance Teaching afterwards. She's eager to move to another place again, but is afraid that she might not enter Dance Teaching as many places require auditions and considers a distance course at the Royal Academy of Dance

(London). Afterwards she would like to study a Master in Marketing and/or Event Management and plans to find a way to combine her passion for dance with a job in the field of Economics in order to earn enough money to maintain her living. In 10 years she would wish to have finished her studies and have a family of her own.

5.10. Nadia

Nadia (1993) is female and from Lleida (capital). She participated in a focus group in her private high school. Her father is an engineer and has his own enterprise at the beginning of the follow-up. However, in the last interview wave, Nadia comments that her father does not work currently, so that the family is experiencing economical restraints. Her mother possesses superior but not university education and works as a piano teacher. Nadia's got a younger brother, born in 1996. She knew already in the focus group that she wanted to study Veterinary medicine, but did not know for sure if she would achieve the required score. In the first-year interview, in 2011-2012 she managed to enter into Veterinarian Medicine in the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB). In the second year, she comments how she failed almost all her first-year subjects and sought help by a coach throughout the summer. She only attends first-year subjects in her second year and one first-year subject in particular takes her until the third year to get passed, so that it even comes to threaten her ability to ever finish her degree. From the third year on she courses all the predetermined subjects plus possible repetitions and comes to pass everything until the last interview wave. As veterinarian medicine is a five year degree course, she is in the fourth year at the end of the follow-up. In the first year, she lived in the student residence on the campus, but then moved into the flat of a relative who moved to her parents instead in order to receive their care. After the death of the relative, the flat becomes her mother's property. Nadia shares the flat with a friend and searches at the end of the follow-up for a new flat mate, so that the costs for water, gas and electricity are paid by her flat mate and she lives for free. She usually works in summer in a kiosk in Barcelona owned by her parents, but is unable to combine her studies with a job and cannot work in summer when she's got unpaid internships. In the 3rd year, she becomes the girlfriend of a student from Lleida and starts a distance relationship, meeting him on the weekends. Her plans for after the degree course are not yet completely clear. Her boyfriend wants to leave Spain and the specializations that most interest her are not offered in Spain, but in the UK, Australia or the United States. Especially the UK seems interesting, but her boyfriend has to finish his engineering degree first and they will have to see what they will do.

5.11. Nic

Nic (1993) is male and from Lleida (capital). He participated in a focus group in his semi-public high school. His father is a doctor and his mother is a civil servant with A-levels. He has got an older brother, born in 1989 who studies at university at the beginning of the follow-up, but returns to live with his parents and a daughter throughout the follow-up after quitting his studies. Nic had wanted to study translation but did not achieve the required score in the PAU

in spring 2011, so he matriculated for the Degree English Studies at the University of Lleida in the academic course 2011-2012 and presented for the PAU again in September 2011. His new score was high enough to enter translation right away, but as the academic course had already started, he preferred to finish the year in Lleida and then matriculate in the UAB for the Bachelor's Degree in Translation and Interpreting. While studying the year in Lleida he lived with his parents. In the academic course 2012-2013 he began the Bachelor Degree in the UAB and moved to the student residence. He lived until the end of the follow-up in the student residence but changed several times the shared flat and the flat mates, encountering diverse problems. In summer 2013 he travelled to the USA to visit friends he made on the internet. In the academic course 2013-2014 he spent a month in Japan with a scholarship for internships but returned in time for the beginning of the academic course in the University as the internship did not hold what he expected and he quit early. At the end of the follow-up, he is about to finish the degree course and started to earn occasional money with translations and selling digital drawings. He created a website to promote his drawings and is thinking to take a course at a drawing school in Barcelona after finishing the degree. However, his economic independence has priority and he doesn't want to pay such a course with his parents' money, nor would he wish to have them pay him a master. He applied for a scholarship to do a master in the USA, but is still waiting for the resolution. Moreover, he begun to search for a job in the USA through internet websites and is starting to get in touch with possible employers. Other options he considers are international internships and voluntary work. His main aims are to gain economic independence and to move away from Spain, if possible to the USA. He doesn't have a partner at any point of the follow-up and commented on several occasions that he would like to find someone, male or female, and that he feels lonely.

5.12. Peter

Peter (1993) is male and from Lleida (capital). He was included into the sample after the socio-economic survey in spring 2012. At the moment of the survey, both his parents were employees, but his father, who had been a free-lancing carpenter before, got an offer to become the partner of another carpenter he knows, so he becomes a free-lancer again just after Peter's first year in university. His mother only completed secondary education. Peter has an older sister, born in 1990, who studied teacher training and a master in psychology and education, the same degree course he began in the academic year 2011-2012. At the end of the follow-up, his sister returned to live with their parents after a first work experience in Barcelona as a teacher. Peter chooses the specialization in Sports for the last year of studies. Peter lives throughout the whole follow-up with his parents, works as a football trainer for children and, from his second year in university onwards, he receives a certain payment for playing in an adult amateur football team himself, changing several times the team. At the end of the follow-up, in the academic course 2015-2016, he is about to finish his degree by presenting his bachelor thesis and works additionally in a school's cafeteria. Throughout the whole follow-up, he is together with a girl from Lleida who studies Medicine in a different Spanish city. After an intermediate change of the university –and town of studies – his girlfriend changes to the UdL at the end of the follow-up, prolonging her studies significantly.

Peter's hopes for the future are to find an employment as a teacher and he considers the option to move, temporary, to another country as he believes that it will take him several years to start to get work as a teacher. As he says in the last interview, he decided to decide in August what he would do after the summer and tries not to think about it too much for now.

5.13. Piruleta

Piruleta (1993) is female and from a small town in Central Catalonia. She was included into the sample after the socio-economic survey in Spring 2012. Both her parents have only basic studies, her father works as an employed worker and her mother is unemployed at the beginning of the follow-up, having worked as an employed worker before. Towards the end of the follow-up her mother works as a free-lancer cleaning houses. Piruleta has got two sisters, the older born in 1990 and the younger born in 2006 and a tight relation with her grandparents who live in her home town. Her older sister studied Environmental sciences and her younger sister is still in school at the end of the follow-up. 3 of Piruleta's grandparents and a friend die in the course of the follow-up, leaving her marked by the losses. She begins to study teacher training in the academic course 2011-2012 and chooses the specialization in Special Education. After the completion of her degree course, she starts to work as a babysitter for an autistic boy and in a residence for mentally challenged adults and studies a master online about Learning Difficulties and Language Disorders (UOC). It's a one year master, but after the first term she decides to do the Master thesis another year, in order to reconcile her studies with her jobs. From the beginning of the follow-up she lives in a shared flat with changing flat mates but moves in the last year into a flat with her boyfriend, a young man from Lleida. Before, she had been a couple with a boy from her home town studying in Barcelona, but decided to break up with him at the end of her fourth year, finding the new boyfriend some time later. Throughout the whole follow-up she worked in different weekend and summer jobs with children and was active in different Castells¹¹⁶ groups, but throughout the last year of the follow-up she decides to end these activities in order to have more time for herself, her boyfriend and her family and be less stressed. At the end of the follow-up she just got a full-time contract in the residence for one year and plans to keep working in the residence and living in Lleida until she gets called by the Catalan Ministry of Education, as she signed in for the list of substitutes. She limited her regional scope to Central Catalonia, as she wishes to return to her village and to raise her future children in the circle of the extended family, as she herself was raised. On the question of TS that she will have to take her Lleidatan boyfriend with her, she answers that he will have to come with her if they stay a couple.

5.14. Sara

Sara (1993) is female and from Lleida. She was included into the sample after the socio-economic survey in Spring 2012. Both parents only achieved primary studies and the father

¹¹⁶ Castells is a Catalan tradition that consists in the construction of human towers. For more information see, for example: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castell>

worked in a car repair shop until his early death, leaving his wife pregnant and with their four-year old daughter. Sara's mother quit school early and started to care for her ill mother, who died in the same year as Sara's father and the family shop at the age of 16. She married with Throughout her marriage she helped in the husbands' repair shop and dedicated herself after his death to the care of her children and her father who moves in with the family in 2000 and dies in 2010. The paternal grandfather died in 2006 and so only the paternal grandmother is alive at the beginning of the follow-up. After her father's death, Sara's mother begins to search for a job and finally becomes an employee in a residence after Sara's second-year interview, in 2013. Until this point, the family depended on public pensions for widowhood, orphans and special aids for single parents with more than one child, that were cancelled throughout the course of the project. Sara mentions furthermore money the family had put aside as a basis for their living. Sara's brother, born in 1997, is still in school at the end of the follow-up.

Sara scores a very good result in the PAU and inscribes in teacher training at the UdL, choosing the specialty in English in her last year. She lives with her mother and younger brother until the last year of the follow-up. In the last year she lives with her boyfriend, a boy from her parents' village who moved to Lleida to do a vocational training and is in the process of applying for a stable employment at the moment of the last interview. They became a couple in her third year of studies. Sara started to work as an English teacher in a private language school for children thanks to a contact of the researcher in her third year of studies and works in this place until the end of the follow-up, when she already knows for sure that she won't renew her contract. At the end of the follow-up, she is looking for a job to maintain herself until she might get a job as a teacher, but considers it more important to stay in Lleida and live with her boyfriend who is about to get a stable employment nearby than to work in her field. That's why she sent her curriculum to shops and other places that do not require any type of studies. She argues that her boyfriend would have understood her, if she had decided to leave, but that she considered him her priority at the moment and wanted to stay with him. In the course of the follow-up she thought of doing a master, but already in her last year of studies, she argues that she is tired of being a student and wants to have an adult life, with all the responsibilities and privileges this includes. From the third-year interview on, she repeatedly comments her wish to have children and to be a young mother and even considers the possibility to become a single mother through artificial insemination in her third-year interview, as she did not yet find the right father. In the following interviews, she speaks of wanting children with her boyfriend, but hopes to get a stable employment first.

5.15. Skone

Skone (1993) is male and from Lleida (capital). He participated in a focus group in his semi-public high school. His parents are separated; he has no siblings and lived his whole life with his mother. Both his parents have studies equivalent to A-levels but did not attend university. His mother was born in France, but her parents were both from Spain, and is a civil servant of the highest category and his father, born in Spain, has an enterprise, so Skone is considered to be from a higher social class, despite being a first-in family HE student. He enters in the academic year 2011-2012 into the Degree Animal Health and Science of the UdL and plans to

enter after his graduation into Veterinarian Medicine in the UAB, as an official agreement regarding the access from AHS graduates into the advanced years of Veterinary Medicine existed at this point. In the last year of the follow-up, 2016, he explains, however, that he finally changed his mind and decided to not move to Barcelona after his graduation. He argues that he discovered his real interests to lie in the stock market and plans to study a master in economics. In April 2016, he is not yet decided which master to study and where and self-educates himself in stock market exchange. He considers that his life underwent a complete and positive change, that he is mature and ready to take important decisions and knows what he wants in his life. Moreover, he describes his autonomous learning as a serious activity consuming 6 to 8 hours per day. He never worked throughout the follow-up and does not work at the moment of the last interview, but plans to search a job for his summer holiday. At the beginning of the follow-up he has a girlfriend and identifies her as one of his reasons for studying in Lleida in the first place. Later on they break up and in later interviews he mentions a new girlfriend, living with her parents in Lleida. His plans for the future are, at the moment of the last interview, to invest on the stock market and to live for at least a few years in the USA. His dream is to become one of the richest persons in the world and to use his money to help other people who were born in worse conditions.

5.16. Willy

Willy (1993) is male and from a rural zone in the province of Lleida. He participated in the focus group in the public school in the rural town nearest to his village. His parents have a farm and rural tourism and his father works as an "*agente rural*", being hence a civil servant. His mother has studies equivalent to A-levels, his father has only primary school studies. Willy's got a younger brother, born in 1997, who begins University studies in the last year of the follow-up. Willy plans to study political sciences in the focus group and in fact begins to study this degree in the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) in the academic course 2011-2012. In his first year he lives in two different flats as a subtenant. Later on he moves into a shared flat with other students. He begins to be active in a student organization and becomes a member of a political party. After his degree he begins a two-year master (UAB) and shares the flat with his younger brother, who just starts the university degree of Nanotechnology. After the first year, Willy would have had to spend a semester in Italy, but applies for a full-time job as a temporal substitute in a Catalan government delegation situated in a small town. He gets the job and starts working in June 2016. As the substitution is probable to last longer than the announced 2 months, he arranges everything to interrupt his master studies and does not plan to return to university in September. He moves back to his parents' home and commutes every day to his new work place. His plans for the future are to keep working in this or similar jobs and to finish the master, should he come to be out of work again. He wishes to find a woman to share his life and have children, but did not have any relationship throughout the follow-up. He is convinced that he will have to leave his village at some point, either for work or to find a partner to share his life.

5.17. Xenia

Xenia (1993) is female and was born in an Eastern-European country, member of the European Union. She moved to Spain at the age of 10 and participated in 2011 in a focus group in her public school in Lleida in a zone with a high immigration rate. Her study choice in the focus group was medicine, but she doesn't achieve the required score and plans to retake the PAU and attempt again to enter medicine in the first-year interview. She spends the academic course 2011-2012 studying the Degree in Food Science and Technology and changes for the Degree in Biotechnology in the academic course 2012-2013, after failing a again to achieve the score required for medicine. Throughout the whole follow-up she studies at the University of Lleida, but realizes her internship in 2015 in Barcelona. Her parents do both possess studies equivalent to A-levels and work as employees and she has no siblings. Both her grandmothers were born in European countries, different from Xenia's country of birth and different from Spain. From Int1 on she mentions a boyfriend from her country of origin who lived for several years in Lleida, moved back to his country of origin and studies medicine. They maintain a distance relationship until the last year of the follow-up, when she decides to break-up and describes how he tries to make up and her parents push her into this direction. Her plans for the future are to study a master in Barcelona and to work to gain a certain financial independence from her parents. She plans to move into a shared flat with fellow students from her degree who also plan to do a master in Barcelona, but everything depends on their acceptance to the masters. She inscribed in three very different masters and considers the option to do a master at the UOC, should she not enter any. Her preferred master is, in every case, about international markets. She argues that the professional profile combining a science degree with economic and/or legal knowledge is highly demanded on the current labour market.

6. Findings

The findings section of this thesis consists of five main parts: the transition from school to university, study choices under construction, the transition from university to the labour market, the axes of longitudinal analyses and, finally, criticism and ideas from improvement. In all sections and sub-sections appear direct quotes from the interviews and focus groups in order to exemplify the described findings. To facilitate the reading, transcription codes apart from marks for significantly long pauses were eliminated from the quotes, which were selected in order to best exemplify the described tendencies.

6.1. The Transition from School to University

In this first findings-section we will focus on the transition from school to university, granting visibility to the topics that appeared in the participants' narratives as especially important, but also considering social inequality, in particular possible intersections between gender and social class. In this, we will mainly draw on the focus groups and first-year interviews, though on occasion later interviews and results from the longitudinal analyses are included, as they serve to enlighten certain topics further.

“Si no et pressionen, és que no existeixes.”

Mònica Terribas (Barcelona 1968)

Roda Mots, 31/01/2018

6.1.1. Main topics

Previous research has granted visibility to topics students consider especially important in their transition to HE and throughout HE (Hughes & Smail, 2015; Maunder et al., 2012). For the UK, it has been shown, for example, that students about to enter HE cared for their well-being, social integration and student lifestyle while academic concerns did not appear as significant (Hughes & Smail, 2015); once in university, the formation of groups was crucial for adjusting in the new environment and participants considered to have changed personally in the course of their transition (Maunder et al., 2012). As this project took place in a different geographical context and worked furthermore with a follow-up so the same students were able to share their opinions before and after entering University, it is interesting to see which topics appeared as important in their accounts. In the following, we will consider these topics and observe differences in how the same topics were treated in the focus groups and interviews, commenting on possible explanations for these changes – the different data-construction methods and the moments of data construction – considering as well dimensions of social difference and their intersections.

High School

In the focus groups as well as the first-year interviews, the participants associated the second year of High School with high levels of stress and pressure. Although none of the discussion-triggering questions directly asked for preoccupations, most focus groups started to dwell at some point on how difficult life was in High School, the pressure they experienced and their worries. Main preoccupations were: the ‘right’ study choice, the entry to preferred studies, academic failure and worries regarding future job opportunities in a crisis-shaken country. This finding confirms Reay’s (2015) supposition that choices are nowadays burdened with fears and anxieties and shows, furthermore, a certain awareness that wrong moves are not completely reversible (Casal, García, Merino, & Quesada, 2006b). The participants repeated their impression of a stressful end of school in the first-year interviews and even participants who did not contribute to this part of the discussion in the focus groups, affirmed in the first-year interview that the second year of High School had been demanding and stressful.

Xenia: it’s [High School] the worst part of life (laughs) (FG9, l.285)

For me well the second year of high school was like very stressful and the truth is that hm looking back I felt quite bad (laughs) (Int1 N., l.3f.)

A clear difference between focus groups and interviews was visible in the participants’ representation of High School: Most focus groups criticised their schools - here understood as the educational institutions they visited before entering HE - or specific teachers for not preparing them well enough for university, especially regarding information on the weighting of certain school subjects for the entrance into related degree courses. Several focus-group participants complained that they had not known how their chosen High-School stream would

limit their study choice, an example of how decisions influence the future 'itinerary' (Casal et al., 2006b) and how the Spanish and Catalan HE systems apply changes in the rules immediately, without leaving a certain moratorium for those promotions that had already chosen their High-School branch before the new rule was approved (see also *Organisational problems*). In previous research a clear class difference has appeared in the accuracy of knowledge regarding school-intern rules without such sudden changes (Jünger, 2008), so the observed differences may not depend on this only. As the participants of the private school seemed to be better informed than their public-school peers (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*), tendencies of different school-support regimes (Davey, 2009) may apply in the Catalan contexts too, in the sense that private-school pupils are better prepared and directly engaged for HE and related choices.

Additionally, inner-school processes, in concrete 'hidden messages' about HE and HE institutions the schools transmit differ between public and private schools, as especially private schools tend to transmit HE as the only logical next step after school, increasing like this the chances that young people follow this path and feel entitled to do so (Donnelly, 2015b; Donnelly & Evans, 2016). As "interactions with teachers" are considered part of the "routine aspects of school life" that convey "hidden messages" regarding progression to HE (Donnelly, 2015b, p. 85), these are especially important - a finding that was corroborated by the participants' preference for personal information sources (see *Information preferences and silence*). As senses of entitlement have been shown to be class specific (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014), the school character may rather be a correlate of the sense of entitlement among the families it attracts rather than its cause. Attending a private school might therefore improve young people's chances to attend HE – and as the access to private schools is influenced by social class (Dávila et al., 2008), social inequality is quite directly reproduced through these processes. Here it has to be said that the sandglass-shaped distribution of educational titles in Spain (Perez Garcia et al., 2015; Strecker & Fondevilla, 2017) (see *Higher Education*) has led to public policies that attempted to inform and encourage students for vocational trainings rather than university studies. Such policies may divert especially potential first-in-family-students from HE, as these are more likely to attend public schools, while private schools do likely complement information sessions about vocational trainings with a wide variety of activities favouring university studies, if they comply with the requirements to inform about vocational trainings at all. This indicates that mechanisms of social reproduction are deeply integrated within the structures of the Spanish education system and that profound changes, in particular regarding the potent private school sector, might be necessary.

Carol: we would have been grateful if they knew from the beginning, if they knew that the things were going to change

Interviewer: hmhm

Carol: well if they had informed us how we should choose the subjects and how to do the things well

Interviewer: hmhm

Jab: but we were kids and we didn't notice what decision we were taking

Carol: but that's because they didn't explain the situation to us

Several others at once: no

Jab: no but as well the teachers well it's the same, why should they lose time explaining a

thing that they know we won't care a straw about anyway
 Carol: no no but no that's not correctly done (FG10, I.416-426)

Dori: but I think for example that there is information missing because for example, in, when you finish secondary education in the last year of secondary education already, they make you choose more elective subjects. OK? Depending on what what you would like to study. But of course they come to you, one day, and say "choose between Sciences Humanities or Arts" (FG1, I.105-108)

Though previous research has also encountered a tendency of HE students to criticise their schools for not supporting them well in their educational decisions (Observatori Català de la Joventut, 2006), the findings in this study show an important attenuation of school criticism once in HE. In the first-year interviews school criticism was no longer crucial, complaints about the legal limitations of the study choice disappeared as a topic and the tone when speaking about High School became much more positive or even nostalgic. This change in perspective shows that the moment of data construction is important for the tendency to show criticism or not.

I talked for example with' with teachers the former teachers from High School with those who I got along with fabulously with my tutor, chemistry teacher. I never had chemistry, but unbelievable the teacher eh? And he tells me (...) (Int1 Jab, I.377-380)

The university entrance exam good, because I don't know our High School prepared us well throughout the whole course so that we would succeed [in the exam] and it went quite well for all of us (Int1 Cara, I.10-12)

From some of the classes I take [in university], I see the High school out of the window. And I feel very' a bit of of nostalgia, because (...) in reality tz I lived very good moments there with' with the people I met and, I made friends who ehm I don't know. I appreciate them a lot don't I? (Int1 N., I.515-520)

High School did, furthermore, appear as a reference point for many participants when attempting to describe their experiences in University. Others referred to their expectations or to the experiences of people they knew who had studied the same degree before. Though this corroborates previous research that had described "expectations of university" as "borne out of prior educational experiences, or information provided by friends and family" (Maunder et al., 2012, p. 140), it provides furthermore additional insights as a social-class difference in the main point of reference seems to exist: High School appeared especially a point of reference for those who did not have previous experiences with HE and did not know what to expect. As schools have been identified in previous research to be transmitting "hidden messages" regarding HE towards their students (Donnelly, 2015a, 2015b), this highlights the special importance school has for the transitions of first-in-family HE students, while its influence on other students may be much more limited (see for example Maduixa in *Professional profiles and the labour market*), so that erroneous support programmes are much more likely to affect, for example, students from lower social classes or with a migration background negatively, reproducing like this social inequality further.

Change and Locality

A verb the participants used repeatedly to describe the change HE entrance encompasses in a student's life was '*espavilar*' (to wake up/to hurry up). This wording depicts very well how the

participants imagined to enter into a new, potentially hostile world, where they would be on their own and would have to fend for themselves, especially regarding new forms of more autonomous learning and independent housing.

I've noticed that it's quite an important change. It's an outstanding change in the life of a student isn't it? Because in reality you have to wake up a bit it's no longer, you don't have any longer those books in which you if you don't listen in class you've got the books, no, you have to listen take notes. (Int1 Skone, l.42-46)

Jab: we'll notice that life there is completely different to what we had before

Cara?: but it's a bit scary it's a bit scary isn't it?

Interviewer: hmhm

Cara?: to face this' because it's a change. At least, at least for us it's very big, because you pass from being with your parents, peacefully, to having to fend for yourself alone in a big city (FG10, l.470-474)

In the first-year interviews, although the participants experienced a change when entering HE, many felt that it was not as big as they had expected. Several participants explained this with references to their living conditions, arguing that those moving out experience a bigger change. Of the 21 first-year participants, only 7 did not continue to live with their parents, but in the following years, 3 more participants moved out, 2 because of a change of study programme and university to another city and 1 who had been commuting from a village in her first year. Among the 7 participants who did not live with their parents in year 1, 3 came from the rural zone where two focus groups had been celebrated and 2 more were from other rural zones and had come to study in Lleida, joining the project through the amplification of the sample. So only 2 participants who were from Lleida had come to study in a different city in their first year, Nadia and Floreta, both female and from social class D.

The participants from the rural zone had already anticipated a big change when moving to the city in their focus group (see previous quote). However, Cara, one of the participants from the rural school, expressed in her first-year interview that even this change was not as hard as she had imagined.

Cara: the fact that you leave your home that you leave your family

Interviewer: hmhm

Cara: maybe I thought that it would be harder for me but, as I visit on the weekends it's not. No. (Int1 Cara, l.457-459)

The expectation of a dramatic change, especially if leaving the parents' house, was mentioned by some of the female participants in the construction of their study choices, commenting that they were daunted by the need to move out or came to discard degree courses because of the location.

And I said "I, I don't move to Tarragona." (laughing) No, I won't leave my home, what would I do in Tarragona? (laughing) To hell with this degree course. (Int1 Xenia, l.40f.).

I started to be more interested and to even search some information about the degree course and I saw that, well, that it was only offered in Sa' in, in *The Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*. And I thought "fuck", well, that' that I would have to go away having everything here, my family and everything. But well at the end well I decided to take this decision [to study in the UAB] and I don't regret it. (Int1 Floreta, l.25-29).

Though we could argue here, in line with Reay (2015), that any change is always a bit scary and may turn out to have been nothing in the retrospective, it is noteworthy how fears and illusions mixed in the participants' imaginaries of HE, as this could indicate that with purposeful aid programmes, young people might be able to manage their fears much better and experience their transition to university much more positive, possibly facilitating some to give it a try who currently shy away from the option because of their fears.

Jab: It will be fun. It will be a new experience and I suppose that it'll be probably among the best years that we're going to spend in our lives, especially the moment when you say "I leave my home for the first time for four years, if you're lucky, and no more parents just focus on the studies". It's a very big change but necessary now (smiling). (FG10, I.487-490)

Previous studies in the UK have shown that living with the parents leads to qualitatively different HE experiences (Gibney et al., 2011) and that especially working-class students are likely to study near their parents' home to avoid additional financial costs (Reay et al., 2001). In Spain, the rental sector was rather under-developed in the past (Jurado Guerrero, 2001; López Blasco et al., 2004; Moreno, 2017) and started a slow expansion ever since the bursting of the construction bubble, allowing young people to maintain their already late residential emancipation rather stable by substituting home ownership by the renting of shared flats (Moreno, 2017) (see *Crisis and social change*). However, the rental sector continued to be rather small in 2016, the last year of data construction, with 22% of the total of households (efecom, 2018)¹¹⁷. According to the *Encuesta Continua de Hogares* (Continuous Household Survey, translated by TS), the figures are even lower, as 18% of the Spanish households had been rented in 2017 and 17.3% in 2016 (INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística), 2018). The consequence of this situation was, especially at the beginning of the follow-up, that many students kept living with their parents even if this made them depend on public transport or on owning a car and only those for who commuting was not an option, moved out.

The class divide is, hence, not that clear, but we can assume anyway that the students who have the choice to move out are those with relatively high levels of economic capital. Among the follow-up participants, only one student from social class A, Piruleta, moved out of her parents' home to enter HE; in social class D six of the participants moved out in the first or second year. Especially the combination of lower economic capital and living too far apart from a university city to keep living with the parents could lead young people to discard HE completely. But even students from University cities, as Lleida, may limit their study choice to the degree courses offered in their city to avoid leaving the nest. Similarly, others might limit their study choice to the degree courses offered in Lleida, even though they would have to move out anyway, because living costs are much lower in Lleida than for example in Barcelona (see Irina's argumentations in this line in: *What I was born for - or not*). In this sense, the locality of the parents' residence is highly important for University entrance, even beyond the finding of a previous quantitative study about the *Universitat de Lleida* that had found that the main reason to study in Lleida was the proximity to the parents' residence, though the rather low numerus clausus also played a role for some (Solsona Solé, 2015). Due to the numerus clausus some degrees do furthermore fill with students from further away, while students from Lleida

¹¹⁷ See: <http://www.eleconomista.es/economia/noticias/9013061/03/18/Espana-tiende-hacia-el-alquiler-de-viviendas-frente-a-la-compra.html> [last access: 30.07.2018].

may not be able to enter their aspired degree in their city – as happened to Peter's girlfriend who had to move abroad to study medicine and took the whole follow-up to achieve a change of university to return to Lleida. In this sense, economic capital is additionally important as students with lower marks may move to other cities to study their aspired degrees, while those who cannot afford parent-independent living may have to refrain from degrees because they are not offered in their city or the numerus clausus is too high for them. Regarding remote villages, it has to be added that school choices are often limited or non-existent as often only one public and no private schools exist, so that any advantages that have been discovered by previous research regarding private schools (see *High School*) are not available to students from such villages, unless their parents send them already for their schooling to the city. This shows how economic capital, location and the social representation of HE to be a very different and potentially hostile world intersect in the study choice.

Workload

The participants in this project did, in line with previous research (Maunder et al., 2012), expect university to be much more difficult than school. Once in HE, changes regarding learning and materials were recognised and some participants talked about the need to take notes in class, to study autonomously and without books etc. However, as we have seen in the previous section (see *Change and Locality*), the participants did not encounter the change as dramatic as they had expected and some articulated their surprise to encounter school-like learning approaches, like homework control in class, as they had expected more autonomous learning.

The ways to give class' they are very different, you have to take notes you don't have books, you have to fend for yourself, you go to class if you want to. [Interviewer: hm] But, you have to be more responsible (Int1 Maduixa, l.31-35)

It surprised me, that the thing with the homework, that in some classes hm they go around and look at what you've done. That's I thought that's only, (...) that's in High School (...) I believe that at university we' at university we're already, adults aren't we? [Interviewer: hmhm] and already (at the same time) (-) if you do your homework it's your problem, if you do it or if you don't, isn't it? (Int1 N., l.416-421)

Here it is interesting to compare this anticipation of autonomous learning to a "typical" lecturer complaint that students are not prepared for autonomous learning. Expecting to find something must not mean, of course, that it will be easier to adapt to it, but may indicate that pupils might be receptive to learn more autonomously at the end of High School, recognizing its preparatory effects for HE. Moreover, transversal courses on learning techniques and academic work could be especially interesting for first-year HE students and improve their adaptation process a lot.

The impression that University was in the end easier as expected might have been wrong, as students might mistake the level of difficulty with the amount of continuous evaluation activities. Previous studies have shown that first-year students were likely to underestimate the amount of autonomous learning required, leading to lower grades and failure (Gibney et al., 2011). More school-like learning could then favour the realistic perception of the workload and hence academic success. N., the female participant who was surprised by the school-like learning in her degree course (business management), also evaluated the workload to be

lower than expected and came to fail one of her first-year subjects and several of her second-year subjects in the course of the follow-up, appearing in the end as the least successful participant regarding academic performance (see *Academic success*). In her case, the more school-like learning did not seem to favour her academic success, although it is of course impossible to know what she would have performed like in a different setting (see also *Family affairs* and *Academic success*).

At the beginning it surprised me because the last year [in High School] was that I went super stressed and and, and I was very nervous because it' it was difficult for me, wasn't it? And I started the degree course and I found it super easy (Int1 N., l.88-90)

However, just as in Maunder et al.'s study (2012), we can also observe the opposite approach to complain about the immense workload the participants encountered in University, highlighting that they had to learn much more material and in less time than in school. Maunder et al. (2012, p. 146) called this "an inherent contradiction between reporting university to be easier than expected, but harder than people think". These authors relate this contradiction to "conflicting cultural messages about the image of university", especially the representation of "university as a leisurely lifestyle" and an anticipation of being "extra extra difficult" (Maunder et al., 2012, p. 146). Drawing on Bourdieu and Passeron (2007), we can relate this contradiction to the "game of free intelligence" and the "ideology of talent", as young people may perceive Universities as temples of wisdom, but expect "apt" students to move through them with ease and a minimum time dedication, leaving them much time for social engagement instead. Fearing that university might be very difficult, may then be related to self-efficacy beliefs that make students doubt if they will be among these talented elite or will have to work hard to be able to keep up (see also *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*).

The longitudinal character of this project, allows us furthermore to observe that several participants argued in later interviews that the first-year had still been easy and clearly arranged in comparison to what was coming later. This may indicate that many study plans allow for a certain adaptation in the first year, increasing the workload over time. Especially the second year appeared in several degree courses as the worst year, while the two last years included in many degree courses internships and elective subjects the students expected to be easier again – an impression they usually confirmed after coursing them. The representation of the second year as the worst was, on the contrary, transmitted from one promotion to the next, so that the first-year students already knew at the end of their first year, that the next year was going to be worse. Nevertheless, fewer participants came to fail subjects in their second than in their first-year, indicating that in spite of the observed increase in workload and difficulty, the students had more chances to be successful once the first adaptation to HE had been achieved. This may be related to a certain moderation of their social life (see *Social success*), an effect of the very representation that they would have to work harder, leading them to effectively work harder or, as Irina argued, a result of a better time management when time was perceived as scarce, while students might organise their time less effectively when they do not perceive it as limited, thinking that they will have time to do certain things later. Students who faced many academic difficulties in their first year, may, however, expect to have even more difficulties in the second year when they hear these warnings, so this may lead to increasing worries, low self-efficacy beliefs and attrition – especially among students who

already had doubts if HE was meant for them (see *Academic success*). This indicates that though a study plan with a rather "soft" first year may facilitate HE adaptation, a tough second-year may increase attrition and reproduce social inequality, so that a more equal distribution of workload between the second, third and fourth years might be a better solution.

Lecturers

When asked for the relationship with their lecturers in their first-year interviews, most participants answered independently of each other with the phrase 'typical lecturer-student relationship'. Their answers then related to a reserved relationship and lecturers who did not really know their students, but this was immediately justified as completely normal and acceptable given the number of students per class or explained with an identity construction as some participants argued that they did not have a closer relationship to their lecturers because they were shy.

Interviewer: and well the lecturers? (-) what is the relation with the lecturers?
Mabe: well now it is (-) a bit cold (.) because they' neither do they know me nor do I know them yet (...) I don't have a relation yet (-) I hope that [the relations] will become a bit closer (.) because they told me that yes that the relations student-lecturer become a bit closer but for now they are still a bit cold (-) but well (Mabe, Int1¹¹⁸)

I'm not a person (-) who goes a lot to talk to the lecturers I'm rather shy (.) and well (-) my relation doesn't go beyond (-) beyond being in class' if I need something (-) if I have a problem (-) then I go to' to (-) to ask help from the tutor or (-) but if not if (-) I'm not one of those who' who go and speak with them [the lecturers] and to see how they are doing nononono (.) I'm shy and no it's not what I do (smiling) [Interviewer: but there are others who do it?] yes [Interviewer: ah OK (.)] people with ((culture)) (laughs) [Interviewer: what?] no (.) there are some people who enter the classroom and (1sec) speak (.) but as I tell you I'm more' I'm shy and no (-) I don't do that (.) (Peter, Int1, l.192-201)

Contacting a lecturer with an academic difficulty seemed to come with a rather high threshold for most participants at the beginning of the follow-up, as even Koala, who had already talked to a lecturer about music in Int1, claimed in Int2 to ask fellow students whenever he did not understand something in class rather than asking the lecturer. Moreover, Nadia, who faced severe academic difficulty in her first-year, met her tutor at the beginning of the year but described the group meeting as a question session throughout which the tutor tried to find out why they had chosen to study Veterinary Medicine. She never mentioned the tutor again and did not contact him either when she encountered her academic difficulties. Similarly, Sara commented in Int2 on the first consultation-hour she attended, arguing that she went together with a friend and that the lecturer was especially friendly and open so they dared to go see her. That this consultation hour fear might affect some students until the end of their degree appeared in Maduixa's last-year interview. Though she had already done all the obligatory consultation-hours with her TFG tutor¹¹⁹, she knew of several of her fellow-students

¹¹⁸ Due to a technical problem with the file I was not able to extract the line numbers of the quote when elaborating this thesis.

¹¹⁹ As the terminology might lead to confusions, I would like to highlight that the academic tutor is assigned at the beginning of a degree and for its whole duration, while the TFG tutor is only responsible for the student's final degree work (TFG for its acronym in Catalan) and assigned when the students matriculate for this or even several months later (see also *TFG Tutor assignment*). Yet another system are

that these were worried how to face these obligatory meetings with the tutors they got assigned for their final degree work.

Sara: this year yes and it's no longer such a thing as for example going to a consultation-hour. Last year maybe you also felt more (-) because you already feel at home in university

Interviewer: and the 1st consultation-hour you did, how did you...?

Sara: I went with another friend we went 2 and ;,

Interviewer: already a little prepared, isn't it? to not go alone?

Sara: sure sure (smiles) well and now it doesn't matter any longer but the first well yes. It matters to you, but it was also a teacher who is very close who doesn't build barriers so no, I mean you also feel more comfortable, so it's not that...

Interviewer: it took away your fear

Sara: sure [Interviewer: the 1st consultation-hour] sure (Int2 Sara, l.360-370)

The TFG¹²⁰ includes 4 obligatory meetings with your tutor, and there are people who are stressed to see how they can get them done. And I think, well, I've already done 4 and now I want to do another and I'll still do more (Int5 Maduixa, l.367-369)

Previous research has encountered a class difference in undergraduates' "engagement strategies", highlighting that middle-class students were more at ease when interacting with lecturers, while some lower-income undergraduates - especially those who were considered as "doubly disadvantaged" - were more likely to avoid engaging with authority figures (Jack, 2016). Similarly, lower-class students have been described as seeking the development of a trust-relationship to their lecturers to overcome the "existing social distance", experiencing consultation hours as a "hurdle hard to overcome" (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006, p. 87, translated by TS).

Here it is interesting to observe that Nadia had no difficulties to talk to her lecturers about future specializations in Int5 and furthermore worked with some of her lecturers in one of her extra-curricular activities (see *Extra-curricular activities and work experiences*). Apart from the pass of the years and an accomplishment of "developmental changes to self", in particular "changes in the way they managed their studies and the personal responsibility they took over their learning" (Maunder et al., 2012, p. 148), it is possible that it was easier for the participants to speak to their lecturers about positive topics, rather than academic difficulty. This would explain as well why Koala was able to chat with a lecturer about music in his first year, but was reluctant to ask a lecturer directly when he did not understand something in class.

Interviewer: And is there a relationship beyond the class, I mean to talk and to ask questions or...?

Nadia: they are 100% available. I have often talked to them, for example, about [[city in the UK] about feline medicine. You go to his/her office and ask or you send him/her an email with the doubts you may have, it's not necessary that they are related to the classes or anything (...) or when they finish a topic they always say something like "any question or doubt or anything, send me an email and we meet or meet me in my office" yes, this is something I think that is really good (Int5 Nadia, l.262-269)

student mentors, but though approaches in this line did also exist in the Catalan HE system, none of the participants ever mentioned any.

¹²⁰ For an explanation of the TFGs see: *Education and degree course organisation*

As we have already seen, Peter had difficulties to speak with his lecturers at all and Sara took special preparations for her first consultation hour that only served to speak about the preparation of a work and did not touch any negative topics. As Sara and Peter were identified as from social class A, while Koala from social class C and Nadia and Maduixa from social class D, we may be observing a social-class difference here, in the sense that students from lower social classes have more difficulties to establish direct contact with their lecturers even regarding positive topics, while middle and upper-class students avoid negative topics, but have less difficulties to interact with their lecturers regarding positive topics. This is in line with Bourdieu's and Passeron's (2007) assumption of habitus misfit intervening in lower-class students social relations in university. Peter explained the disconnection with his lecturers as a result of his shyness, but his hardly audible comment that there were other students 'with culture' who did not suffer such problems may indicate that he observed such a habitus misfit or even developed a 'habitus consciousness' (Reay, 2004). Although shyness was not limited to participants from social class A, none of the participants who mentioned conversations with lecturers in Int1 was from a family of origin with low cultural capital.

Towards the end of the follow-up, Peter mentioned personal conversations with lecturers when encountering them on the campus and claimed that the relationship was different now that he was no longer their student, as he felt less shy and reserved. However, from the way he described their contacts, they were pretty much like the contact Koala had mentioned in his first-year interview: The initiative to begin the conversation was shown by the lecturer, who marked the topic and Koala and Peter, respectively, limited themselves to answering the questions. As Koala mentioned messages from his ex-lecturers offering him jobs and mentioned repeatedly in the course of the follow-up to have talked to a lecturer, for instance about the degree's study plan (see also *Lack of control*), it seems that the lecturer-student relationship improved in the course of the follow-up for all participants, but those who had started with virtually 0 contact, did basically achieve the bottom line of contact some of their peers had already achieved by Int1. Apart from not turning the lecturers into social capital in the sense of capital acquisition and mobilization (Bathmaker et al., 2013), this may have important repercussions for students' academic performance and well-being and reproduce social inequality in many ways throughout and after HE. Informing about such connections in training courses for lecturers might help to improve their awareness regarding their role in reproducing social inequality and encourage them to actively counteract certain tendencies, for example by favouring a positive relation to first-in-family students. Further below, we will see more criticism regarding lecturers (see *Criticism & Ideas for Improvement*), but also aspects and characteristics of good lecturers as these may serve us as examples to learn from (see *The 'good' lecturer*).

Fellow students

Though the topic of social success appeared as of such importance in the course of the project that it will be treated in more detail in one of the axis of longitudinal analysis (see *Social success*), it is important to note the special role of fellow students in the transition from school to university. Previous research has shown that students had a rather clear idea of "normal" students, as people who moved out of their parents' residence to enter HE just after school and studied full time, reproducing with this popular discourses about "traditional" and "non-

traditional” students (Maunder et al., 2012, p. 144). Though moving out seems to be much less typical in Spain (Jurado Guerrero, 2001; Moreno, 2017), the participants in this project did also believe that University entrance represented a bigger change in the students’ lives if it was accompanied by a change in residence (see *Change and Locality*). Similarly, they seemed to have a clear idea about the centrality of social life in University (see also *Social success*), but encountered much more difficulties in achieving this than they had imagined in the focus groups.

While the participants encountered, once in university, that their relationship with their lecturers were as distanced as they had imagined in the focus groups, their relationships with peers became a main topic in the first-year interviews, though they had hardly been mentioned in the focus groups. In the latter, the representation of the student-student-relationship in university was dominated by parties and expected to be very good. In the first-year interviews, it became visible that the creation of new friendship networks required more effort than the students had expected and even participants who were successful in befriending new fellows commented on their nervousness or fears in this regard. Several participants related their social success with a personal development in the sense of an ‘opening-up’. The strategy to invest in social success first could be beneficial for academic success in the long run, as some participants’ academic performance appeared to be directly favoured by their social relationships (see *Academic success* and *Social success*).

Regarding the socializing with people I’ve changed, because there [in the home village] I don’t know as we already knew each other, you didn’t have to make an effort, to socialize. Here well, we have ((1sec)) as I was the only one from my village, well I had to make an effort and I think that I opened up a lot (Int1 Cara, l.153-157)

I had imagined it to be less than it really is that is to say, I’m delighted with INEFC¹²¹. I’m having a great time. The classes, yes they are harder than I thought and the studies as well, but but well, when you’ve got good relationships with your fellow students it helps you the study becomes more favourable (Int1 Mabe (see footnote 118))

Problems with social relationships were for some participants already a known experience from their time in High School. For some the university offered the option of a reset as they met many new people with similar interests, but for others the problems continued.

That was a big change, because in [[name of the village]] of course it’s, let’s say the offer of friends was limited wasn’t it? There were few people and you had to adapt a bit to what you found. And here it’s different, here you can say, be more selective “no that person well is more interesting” no? (...) I have found people well with affinities more [Interviewer: more similar?] more similar yes (Int1 Willy, l.110-116)

For participants like Nic the lack of social success turned into a severe problem as he felt so uncomfortable in class, fearing the laughter of his fellows, that he preferred to be invisible, even though he was aware that this prejudiced his academic success.

There are moments in class when I’ maybe you know? That I know the answer to something, but I say “I won’t say it” because, imagine’ if I say it wrong, they [fellow students] will laugh. If I say it right, they’ll laugh. And you know? I prefer not to say anything

¹²¹ INEFC is the acronym of "*Institut Nacional d'Educació Física de Catalunya*", which might be considered the sports faculty in the UdL, though it maintains a special name and certain organisational differences from other faculties, as it had been a different school in the past.

and keep it to myself and, if you want to or not, little by little you turn into like more, you become smaller. And that's well, at least I [experiment this] there are' there are people to whom this doesn't happen you know? But it happens to me and I feel smaller and even smaller with the time that passes and if you want to or not you also feel that this is wrong, because you feel worse and worse (Int1 Nic, l.292-296).

Social failure could be especially hard for the affected students, as they did not anticipate difficulties in this regard before entering HE. As previous research encountered similar anxieties among HE-students (Maunder et al., 2012), it is possible that social difficulties especially at the beginning of HE are much more common than the students expected, but a tendency to hide these difficulties and to not talk about them might facilitate the reproduction of a different social representation regarding university students as the embodiment of party animals, making those who do not identify with this and feel socially isolated feel even worse (see also *Social success*). Some of the participants found a back-up in their families, boy- or girlfriends or friends from school, but for some even these relationships became complicated as everybody seemed to have moved on to a new life.

We've all rather got a great deal of things to do and no' because of course now the people make stuff with their group from their university, this means, that is to say, before we were the group and now everyone has been divided into his group. And it's a bit more difficult to meet because "oh let's meet for dinner" "ai the thing is I'm already meeting with the ones from university" and that makes it more difficult. (Int1 Nic, l.217-221)

In the course of the follow-up, several participants mentioned difficulties with different groups of friends, often saying that these thought that they were not there for them, while they argued that they did not have more time. Piruleta experienced the same problem first with friends from her village and later on with friends she had made in her first year in University. Though different friends may be more or less exigent and especially friends who did not make other new friends to turn to – like Nic – may be more dependent on their old friends, it is eye-catching that the problem to catch up with everybody appeared repeatedly in the follow-up and also in other research projects, for example in Woodman's (2011, p. 121) study, where a participant described her troubles with friends who claimed that she had been avoiding them to a "physical impossibility" to meet them and still keep up in university. In this sense, the "new" experience of the participants, once in university, might have been the difficulty to stay in touch with different groups of people they did no longer meet on a daily basis, as previously in school (see also *Social success*).

With this change of going to university I found that many friends I had there (-) because there has been a lot of change (.) because they may not be in the university (-) [Interviewer: hm] and we have less contact (.) and I've had a very very very sudden change in that (.) that's why I had such a bad time because I did not have any friends here (-) nor there (.) because there; it was very strange (Int1 Piruleta, l.210-214)

Piruleta: With those I was friends before the problem is that they are like before, they party every Thursday and I'm the strange one because I do not go out. I prefer not to party and if I have practices, I prefer to say 'no' and as they now live together they are now more united and I don't like it because we could do other things but they prioritize the party but well you see

Interviewer: but do you keep in touch?

Piruleta: yes we are in the same working group and we meet for coffee and such things

Interviewer: then they tell you what they did at night?

Piruleta: at night they go out and party well not every Thursday but there are Thursdays that they want to go out by all means and they don't sleep and I don't do that and then some days we go for a drink and then to bed (Int2 Piruleta, l.225-233)

Interviewer: the other years you also talked about a best friend from the University?

Piruleta: Yes, but the relationship has become very distant because I have focused much more on the studies and well what shall I tell you? She turned colder, I didn't, I've always been there (Int3 Piruleta, l.254-256)

Social failure was clearly negative for the students' well-being and their academic success. However, social success in the sense of making new friends and maintaining existing relationships could also be time-consuming and complicate the students' time management, so the relation between social and academic success is complex. In HE, we can expect to encounter a dominantly middle-class peer group (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004, 2006), so the distress to be socially successful should affect especially working-class students. Reay (2015) identified the combination of academic effort and a working-class peer group as a cause of psychic distress in pupils. Reay et al. (2009b) showed that working-class students who successfully adapt to elite universities experience a certain shock on entrance, but more acceptance and compliance than throughout their schooling, where they were often the victims of bullying. This may indicate that even for working-class students HE entrance may be a positive, rather than a negative change; however, as the sample in Reay's research was successful in their adaptation, we cannot know if this forms part of their 'exceptional' success or is a common trend.

In this study, the participants who mentioned the worst difficulties to integrate socially (Nic, Ariel) belonged to families with high cultural capital, though Ariel had migrated in High School to Catalonia and the economic capital of her single-mom was despite her working as a physician rather low. The participants from social class A, on the other hand, did all appear as rather successful, in spite of certain difficulties. We will discuss this finding further in the axes of longitudinal analyses (see *Social success*), but it is possible that students from lower social classes who experienced social difficulties were less likely to become participants in the project, while those from the upper classes did feel so entitled to be in HE that they participated in spite of their difficulties, not doubting that they could be interesting participants in every case. Such a finding is in line with generally higher senses of entitlement in higher social classes (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). In this sense, the findings do, in the end, corroborate a social-class difference in the HE experience further. Diverse authors have commented on possibilities to improve student-student relationships by offering occasions to meet (Gibney et al., 2011), by taking architectural decisions that favour spaces for leisurely socialising (Levit & Linder, 2008) and by favouring student-networking through in-class activities (Bain, 2006). While such approaches favour the HE transition of all students, they should indirectly reduce social inequality by allowing especially first-in-family students to overcome their difficulties.

6.1.2. *Gap years and Pro-forma Enrolments*

None of the participants took a gap year before HE and only very few related to this possibility in the course of the follow-up, e.g. arguing that they might take a gap year after finishing their studies (Nic, Estanteria) or that they should have taken a gap year to first decide what to study (N.). In this sense, taking a gap year before HE did not appear on the horizon of possibilities presented by the participants. This is noteworthy as gap years are quite common in other European countries and other parts of the world (Heath 2007; Snee 2014; Curtis 2014).

Peter insinuated in his first interview that he had considered working abroad, but rather than a gap year, he seemed to consider this an alternative to HE and had decided to postpone this experience until after graduation rather than integrating international experiences within his studies once he had decided to enrol in university. In his last interview, he considered the possibility to temporarily join friends in London and work and live there for a year, but was not yet decided (see also *Mobility*). Nic considered in his second year that a gap year after graduation could be a way to postpone his labour market entrance to leave the economy more time to recover and Estanteria, a participant who did not complete the follow-up, mentioned in her first-year interview the idea to travel after graduation. Several participants spoke at different points of the follow-up of the possibility to do an *au pair* (Maduixa, Piruleta) or something else (Sara, Peter, Floreta) abroad after graduation, but nobody had actually ventured out on a gap year in the last interview round either (see *Mobility*). Though it is possible that the participants gained awareness of gap-year possibilities after entering HE, it is also conceivable that they knew about the alternative before but did not consider it attractive or feasible for some reason.

This is especially striking regarding the participants who did not achieve the grades to enter into their chosen degree course (Nic, Xenia, Estanteria) or did not know what to study at all (N.). At the moment of the first-year interview, Nic knew already that he would change his degree course in the next year and Xenia was preparing to take the PAU again. However, both had enrolled in a university degree and none of them mentioned to have considered spending the year differently, saying that they did not want to 'lose' the year. This shows that a possible explanation for attrition in the first year of HE in Spain is that students enrol for the sake of entering HE and without the aim to complete the degree course. Such a *pro-forma* enrolment enables the students to gather first-hand experience with HE so that they may be better prepared when they enter into their chosen degree course. A *pro-forma* enrolment can hence serve as a strategy to soften the transition. Students from social classes A and B are then additionally disadvantaged as they do not have the resources to effort such a 'soft' entrance and are likely to not even conceive this possibility (Reay 2004). Furthermore, they possess less second-hand information about HE, especially if they are the first members of their family to enrol in HE, and their academic success may be diminished by group work with fellow students who only enrolled *pro forma* and are less interested in their academic performance (see *Academic success*).

I suppose that, next year (-) with the [PAU] score that I have (-) I will be able to (-) I will be able to make the translation degree (-) translation and interpretation of English and then let's say that this is (-) the degree I'm doing here (-) if you want to or not it's a little bit

temporary you know? It's (-) to (-) to not be without doing anything until next year when I'm going to do what I want (Nic, Int1, l.26-30).

Especially N.'s case of prolonged academic difficulty and repeated doubts regarding her degree course and professional future may be an example of how a gap year, dedicated to discovering an adequate study choice, could avoid suffering and save the state and the affected families costs. As gap years are, however, also an upper- and middle-class domain, social inequality could be reduced by offering gratis trial courses open to High School students, in order to allow all students to gain first experiences in HE and smoothen their entrance and not just students with high economic capital. Moreover, such experiences could lower the fear some students seemed to experience regarding university and could furthermore allow them to expand their social networks before University entrance, apart from allowing them to see if a concrete degree course could be to their liking or not. Scholarships for students from rural origins and families with low incomes could avoid that the costs for housing and food could discourage students with low economic capital to participate.

6.1.3. *Intersections of social class and gender*

In this section, we will consider in more detail which gender and class difference arose out of an analysis that did not impose these dimensions of difference from the beginning on, but allowed differences to appear and then compared if these coincided with certain profiles or others (see *Analyses*). When analysing the transition from school to university in depth, I noticed interesting differences regarding the types of information and sources of information the participants related to and also identified several interactions between participants in the focus groups as highly interesting, as they visibilised power imbalances and can be understood as a display of femininities and masculinities (Budgeon, 2014) and further social divisions. In the following, I focus on differences that appeared to be related to gender, social class and their intersections at the end of the analyses and reflect on the effects of the two employed data-construction methods (focus groups and semi-structured interviews), as important differences between these appeared.

Worried girls and nonchalant heroes

As we have seen above (see *High School*), most focus groups started to dwell at some point on difficulties and worries. These topics were usually brought up by female participants, while the male participants remained silent, negated the existence of these difficulties in their particular case or disregarded their importance. Several female participants worried how 1) to identify their vocation, 2) to enter the related degree course, 3) to successfully meet the demands, and 4) to be successful on a crisis-shaken labour market.

Edith: I'm 17 years old and I don't know what I'll want when I'm 30 or 40. And now they make you choose a thing that, that in a certain way is what will determine your life. I don't know but it's like what you will be, what you will do. (...) I believe that it's something that you really need to think a lot and maybe' they make you' they force you to choose. (...) I believe that it's very difficult. (FG1, l.82-87)

N.: Before you enter a degree course you don't know exactly what you are going to find (...) because you've never been there and then, maybe, maybe you you think you're sure that

you're going to like this and then you get there and and tz (...) well no' I don't' no I see that it's not for me. I don't like it and I don't see myself doing this. It's your future.

Dori: I for example mathematics. I stink at mathematics. And I've seen that biomaths is on the syllabus. OK (laughter) maybe biomaths (...) you say 'oh that's easy'. But maybe I get there and 'what's that?' and you can't. (FG1, l.223-233)

Edith's quote depicts her unwillingness and inability to decide for the rest of her life, showing with her evocation of 'the job-for-life' that this imaginary remains important for young people, though rather than an ideal she pursued it appeared to torture her in her decision, so Chisholm's (2006) argument that the job-for-life ceased to exist and that young people embrace the idea of several job changes in their professional life is indirectly present in the argumentation too. Moreover, Edith displayed an awareness that vocational interests may change in the life course, as has been described in previous research (Hoff, Briley, Wee, & Rounds, 2018). The high importance ascribed to interests is furthermore in line with individualisation theories (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015) and the assumed repercussions for individuals and societies, as interest fits are good predictors for job satisfaction and job performance (Hoff et al., 2018).

N. expanded the problem with interests further, arguing that even if you think you like something, you may be mistaken and Dori's comment is an example of the influence of self-efficacy beliefs in the MST¹²² study choice (Yazilitas et al., 2013) (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*). As Dori was decided to study biotechnology in spite of her doubts, this may be part of the explanation why in Spain only the field of Engineering continues to be male-dominated (see *Demographics and University participation*): young women may question their abilities just as much as in other geographic contexts, but feel more ready to give it a try anyway. As other research has encountered that especially women from lower social classes are likely to choose 'achievable' degrees, in the sense of degrees with low attrition rates, compared to their previous academic performance (Torrents, 2017), this may be in particular true for women from the middle- and upper classes.

Koala, the only male participant in FG1, reacted to this discussion arguing that the girls should know by now what they wanted to do, discrediting their worry to take the right study choice. At the same time, he constructed his own study choice as straightforward, aiming for a vocational training first, so he was automatically exempt from the worry to enter into his aspired degree course. In the first-year interview, he had entered HE right away anyway once he got his PAU score. In the course of the follow-up, different alternative careers appeared in his narratives, including other University degrees but also further vocational trainings (see *Flushing up and vanishing alternatives*).

Koala: At the moment I'm decided to study, first of all, I want vocational training, in electronics. Design of electronic products. And then, if everything goes well, well, a degree course in electronic engineering. (FG1, l.5-7)

I changed my opinion actually, before I thought that I'd study a vocational training, but you see at the end the teachers and the parents and the friends and so on, well, they made me change my opinion. (...) I ended up studying a degree course, in electronics as well, industrial electronics. (Int1 Koala, l.7-12)

¹²² MST stands for "Mathematics, Science and Technology" (see *Study choice*).

Similarly, Jab refused in FG10 to reflect on an alternative degree course should his current plan fail, even when another male participant insisted on his answering the question properly. In his first-year interview he mentioned, however, that he had considered other alternatives before reducing his study choice to options with literally no entrance limitations, disburdening his study choice from the possibility to not score the necessary result.

Pasta: yes but, they said that what would you want to do if it [the chosen degree course] didn't exist?

Jab: I've got two options in mind so that in case that I can't do one I'd do the other one. (...)

Interviewer: and if they removed both?

Jab: certainly they' they won't remove either of the two. (FG10, l.298-304)

When comparing focus groups and interviews, we notice that several male participants who had constructed their study choice as straightforward and secure in the focus groups, admitted in the first-year interviews that they had felt stressed in High School and doubted between different options. Possible explanations for this are the effects of the data-construction method and the moment of data construction: Young men may be less able to express their worries in front of their peers, as weakness and emotionality are considered 'unmanly' (Schippers, 2007) and men are generally less likely to express their feelings (Simon & Nath, 2004). In the interview situation, their need to perform a hegemonic masculinity could be lower, especially as they were faced with a female interviewer. If this was true, focus groups would not be the most adequate method to speak with males about difficulties and worries. However, it is also possible that the different moments of data construction provoked the change, as admitting solved problems in the retrospective is in line with a 'masculine hero' who overcomes difficulties and does not endanger masculinity. If this was the case, it would indicate a male difficulty to access support, so we could assume an intersection with gender in the difficulties Davey (2009) describes regarding 'open-door-approaches' in her analyses of public and private school-support regimes. This is in line with findings from Isacco and Morse (2015) about young men not seeking-support. In both cases, peer-support appears little helpful for young men.

The male tendency to block difficulties in the focus groups had the effect that they hardly showed further coping strategies and based their accounts on objective information only (see *Information preferences and silence*). Some of the female participants, on the contrary, embraced the focus group as an opportunity to speak about worries, enabling us to observe further coping strategies and references to social representations.

In FG1 youth was constructed as a time when mistakes can still be corrected. This is related to the concept of youth as an 'experimental space', refuted by Casal et al. (2006b), but still relevant for the young people's imaginaries. Similarly to the job-for-life concept, it is possible that these 'outdated' concepts are still present but combined with other ideas, so young people receive contradictory messages they may turn into assets - as they did in FG1 by relating to their youth as a time for mistakes - or not - as Edith related to the job-for-life when explaining her difficulty to decide.

Spin: Yes, it's something that we've got coming up within two days, but we've got the luck that we're still young (...) we say 'well, I was wrong. I'm studying this' (...) and next year I'll start something else.' (FG1, l.193-196)

Here it is, moreover, interesting to note that the general consensus in all focus groups was that study choices had to be taken according to individual interests and abilities – that is to say, the participants seemed to have completely internalised the "individualisation thesis" that highlights that young people are free to choose whatever professional career suits their interests and abilities best, as the only responsible for their destinies, though research has highlighted that this public discourse has little to do with the constraints that continue to exist in reality (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015). Other possible criteria, mainly labour-market opportunities, appeared only as secondary criteria and were often depreciated by other focus-group participants, who argued, in particular, that labour-market opportunities depended on a candidate's initiative and that any person would find a job in their field, if she was good enough in it, whereat choosing according to interests and abilities was considered the key to success in the chosen field.

Especially in Spain, a strong public discourse on the economic crisis and the decreased 'objective chances' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) led to a direct contradiction between this ideal of an interest-driven study choice and a crisis-shaken labour market. N. and Mabe coped with this contradiction showing different strategies: N. constructed her identity as opposed to the social representation of unmotivated unemployed, reproducing public discourses that blame unemployment on the lack of motivation of those affected (Winker & Degele, 2009), especially young NiNi – the Spanish equivalent to NEET – and construct solutions around activation and emigration (Lahusen et al., 2013) and, in particular, 'employability' (Serrano Pascual & Martín Martín, 2017) (see *The precarious generation in Catalonia*).

N.: I believe that it's more important to do something that you like, and not so much to do something, tz that that has many job opportunities even though it's very important today because it's difficult to find work. But, tz, the job opportunities you also search for them yourself, if you want to do something and if you have initiative, well, you'll find job opportunities. If not here then elsewhere [Interviewer: Do you mean in another country?] hmhm for example. (FG1, l.62-67)

Mabe: I want to do INEFC (see footnote 121) and the people laugh at me saying that 'you won't you won't have work'. And (...) it seems to me that for the moment nobody is going to have [work]. (...) because there are many people and [there is] very little work. And secondly (...) in INEFC (.) there is as much work as on any other [degree course]. (FG12, l.375-378)

By reproducing the negative image of her peers, N. did not need to assume structural difficulties and could rely on her own future success by constructing an opposed identity – additionally ensured by expanding her reach beyond Spain. Several authors questioned these social representations (Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016; Strecker et al., 2018), arguing for example that if the number of job seekers is bigger than the number of vacancies, some will not receive a placement, no matter how well-educated, active, mobile and motivated they are (Bessant & Watts, 2014).

In the second example, Mabe disburdened her study choice from future job opportunities through an opposed strategy, arguing that these were equally bad in any field. Here we can observe a certain relation to public discourse speaking of the 'generation of precarity' (García

Vega, 2016)¹²³, though different authors have highlighted the heterogeneity even within this generation, showing that the crisis affected certain groups, e.g. women, more than others (Álvarez, 2015; Strecker et al., 2018). Although Mabe assumed difficulties for her professional future with this reference to the structural level, she disburdened her study choice from the responsibility for such difficulties.

Despite her eloquent coping with future difficulties on the labour market that allowed her to consider job opportunities as a secondary criterion for study choice in the focus group, N. came to study business management instead of architecture in Int1. Aware of her change in direction, N. spent more time deconstructing her choice for architecture than constructing her decision for economics (see as well *Family affairs*). Moreover, she seemed to gain a certain awareness for graduate unemployment in the course of the follow-up, arguing in her last interview that many sectors do not offer opportunities beyond precariousness. Just as in her Focus Group, N. continued to cope by constructing her identity as different, arguing that she had chosen a sector – business management – that was in her eyes still better off than many others (see *Job opportunities*). This importance of job opportunities for her own decision is - though added from the retrospective - not in line with the ideal of an interest-driven choice she constructed in the focus group. Focus groups may then be especially useful to observe young people's ideas about how a study choice should be taken - in the sense of social norms about decision-making processes.

It frightened me a bit because I thought 'if I felt bad this year [in High School] and if I start to study a degree course like architecture that I know to be difficult, I'll feel even worse for sure' you know? And' and I didn't want to go through this because the last year had been very bad already, and then I thought to myself and said 'well maybe I'll do something else' (N. Int1, l.21-25)

Emotional distress led her to reassess her self-efficacy belief – considering that scientific degree courses were too difficult for her – and her priorities – preferring to study something easy and feeling well, rather than continued suffering. Though she based this reassessment on her experiences in High School, her anticipation that the male-dominated¹²⁴ scientific degree courses are more difficult may be an example of how activities realized by men are ennobled (Bourdieu, 2000).

In Int1, N. hardly mentioned her PAU score, but in the further follow-up it became obvious that it represented an important limitation, forcing her to discard several degrees e.g. teacher training. Apart from a certain silence regarding her reasons to choose Business Management,

¹²³ https://elpais.com/economia/2015/12/29/actualidad/1451402645_255476.html [last access: 13.08.2018]

¹²⁴ Though in 2011 there were as many women enrolled in the science sector than men, this sector has been the last in Spain to overcome the previous male domination in Universities (see *Demographics and University participation*), so this domination is likely to still persist on the labour market. Moreover, N.'s original idea had been to study architecture, a degree that is considered within the branch "Engineering and Architecture" regarding enrolment numbers - the only branch in which the male domination continues in Spain (see *Demographics and University participation*) - and not in the scientific branch. Her reference to the scientific branch is here, however, justified by the High School organisation in three branches, combining sciences and technology, so she probably just used the abbreviation of this High School branch here (see *Education and degree course organisation*).

we may notice that she said to have pre-registered for the Degree in Tourism and only discarded it because it was not offered in the morning shift, claiming that she liked to continue her afternoon language courses. However, she did not mention at all the possibility to study English studies in the UdL, though it was offered in the morning shift and the numerus clausus was similarly low as Business Management, so it would have appeared a much more logical choice considering her criteria. As we will see further below, the experience of her older sister who studied Business Management might have turned the scale in her case (see *Family affairs*). However, we can also read these references as justification strategies: Her reference to a feminine trait – emotionality – and the indirect ascription of a female choice against MST to a low self-efficacy belief served as a way to justify her study choice, understating the importance of academic difficulty. Similarly, repeated references to her sister (see *Family affairs*) and a belief in job opportunities that offer economic stability in the field of Business Management (see *Job opportunities*), allowed her to justify her pursuit of this degree, while she could justify her repeated academic difficulties with a lack of motivation for this field, rather than assuming a lack of ability or intelligence on her side (see *Academic success*). However, the follow-up shows us that her change in direction did not improve her well-being, as she kept experiencing difficulties (see *Happiness*).

Information preferences and silence

Participants with low cultural and economic capital in their families of origin were rather passive in the focus groups and did not react to the invitations to participate in a follow-up. This reservation and attrition may be the result of group dynamics described by Bohnsack (2010) when mixing participants from different backgrounds, as the participants whose practices are different from those of the dominant culture feel insecure. However, the focus-group situation enabled me to observe interactions between the participants, for example how participants corrected each other's ideas and how the corrected participants reacted to these interventions. Before describing this further, different preferences for certain types of information sources and information are considered.

In the focus groups and first-year interviews appeared two main types of information: 'objective' or 'fact-based' information, e.g. regarding access to different study programmes, their contents etc.; and 'subjective' or 'person-centred' information about personal interests and skills that could be assessed through introspection, personality-based recommendations from significant others or standardised ability tests, though the participants did not usually know any and complained that they would have liked to take one. Both types of information could be offered through personal (teachers, friends, family members, etc.) or impersonal (websites, books, TV, newspapers etc.)¹²⁵ information sources and could be combined. Personal information sources are related to the concept of 'hot knowledge', 'high-quality, insider knowledge which provides them with superior understanding of the field of higher

¹²⁵ I do not differentiate specifically between virtual social networks, assuming that if these are just used to 'watch' posts, they function like websites (impersonal information sources) and if they are used to contact and actually talk to other persons, they function like personal information sources, no matter if the contacted person is a virtual contact only. In future research, it might be interesting to differentiate this further.

education' (Davey, 2009, p. 195). Access to hot knowledge depends in Davey's study on the participants' social capital, but we can add – considering the contributions made by Bathmaker et al. (2013) – that differences may exist in the way young people employ their social capital. In the study at hand, young men and participants from lower social classes showed nonchalance and passivity that question their ability to seek support and therefore as well their ability to mobilise their capitals – especially in schools with open-door approaches that require the students to actively seek support when they need it.

The gender-specific ways of presenting their study choices are reflected in the types of information and sources that appeared in the accounts. The male participants' straightforward study choices only required 'objective' information in order to find the study course that best suited their vocation. The female participants were much more likely to problematize the previous step – to identify their vocation – and hence related to person-centred information, as they explained how they had attempted to find out what they might like.

You should enter the different universities' websites and compare, I don't know, checking the study plans' I did this. Ehm instead of looking for names or the places where they do it or for the marks, well, directly go on looking through the study plans. And according to the subjects that you like more or, or something like this (Pasta, FG10, l.77-80)

Some people told me that, that because I'm very meticulous that technology was' was my thing. For my character and so on. On the other hand there were people who told me that they saw me completely in the social branch. I don't know, dealing with people (N., Int1, l.488-491)

Pasta's recommendation to base the decision on the subjects mentioned in the different study plans shows how he did not consider the definition of one's interests as a problem. Moreover, he sanctioned considering names, places or marks as unnecessary, while the effort to read through study plans was legitimate. As this effort is low when the field of interest is narrow and clear, Pasta could mention it without endangering his masculinity through a display of effort. If N. attempted to follow his advice, it would probably turn into a laborious and effortful approach going through the long list of degree courses offered in the social and the scientific branch – without solving the problem to first identify her vocation.

Participants corrected repeatedly each other's inaccurate interpretations or outdated information. This indicates that they had not previously used the whole potential of their classmates as a personal information source and gives us again the occasion to analyse interactions.

Spin: for example the', the numerus clausus. They aren't, they aren't updated until months before [University entrance] because, they always change. They say 'well let's raise them two tenths let's lower them' and that's...

Koala: but the numerus clausus is nothing significant.

Spin: no but, facing the PAU [Koala: it's only the' only'] (at the same time) in order to know whether to take more elective subjects or not (...)

Koala: it's simply the (at the same time) (2sec) simply the score of the last person who entered that degree course the year before. (FG1, l.165-178)

Cara: I'd like to give advice to Juan. The information he's got is a bit outdated, because teacher training [for physical education] has disappeared.

Juan: but they don't know. It's not yet decided.

Cara: Nono, the thing is, you've got to do primary school teacher. 4 years, the normal one and then one specializing.

Juan: OK (FG10, l.124-129)

Spin got informed through impersonal information sources, reading 'a couple of pages'. Judging by her comments, she may have seen that the *numerus clausus* changed every year and considered it important to know the score she would need this year. This shows that although she found out and read about the *numerus clausus*, she did not understand how it works. Koala corrected Spin's erroneous interpretation, but his assumption that the *numerus clausus* was not significant was not completely helpful either, as Spin's idea to take additional exams in the PAU to improve her score could be a valuable strategy. Koala's discrediting of her approach silenced Spin in the end, though it is not clear if she actually understood her mistake.

In the other example, Cara informed Juan that his chosen degree course had disappeared. Her presentation of the new options was not completely accurate either, as she argued that one has to study four years before choosing the specialization in sports, whereas this specialization is currently chosen for the fourth year of teacher training. It is possible that Juan only attempted to display a straightforward study choice in front of his peers by referring to an option he knew about because a friend or family member had chosen this path, although he had not yet done any research and did not decide at all. The confrontation with Cara showed the strategy's riskiness as he became even more vulnerable when Cara uncovered the inexistence of his chosen degree programme. In the focus-group situation, he was unable to use Cara as an information source, reacting instead with a quick withdrawal. The two examples show that no matter which information sources are employed, important concepts may remain diffuse, the information may be outdated or inaccurate. Obviously, an unfortunate combination of both sources may worsen the situation even further.

This adds additionally to the difficulties we have seen above regarding a lack of teacher support (see *High School*), that indicate the participants' preference for personal information sources and, therefore, the high importance of social capital and teacher support in this transition. This is furthermore in line with the importance of significant others for young people's future constructions (Woodman, 2011). However, just as their teachers, other significant others were criticised to be no longer useful as information sources either.

Jab: Now they've changed everything with Bologna. And not even the advice of people who have been studying there for many years and, that are those that are useful, well, they are of no use to you. [Interviewer: hmhm] And as we are among the first years, there are no people either who can advise you how to take the, the degree course. (FG10, l.399-402)

Jab's comment that the advice from HE graduates is no longer useful due to the Bologna process could be understood as 'hot knowledge' cooling down (Davey, 2009). However, we can argue that the HE experience is not limited to these changes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007), so Jab may still access 'hot knowledge' through his social capital, though he might have difficulties to distinguish helpful and outdated information. Other young people, on the contrary, may not even know older students who could tell them anything about HE, so social inequality is directly reproduced through this lack of social capital. This increases then, once again, the importance of schools and teachers for the University transition of first-in-family students.

6.2. Study-Choice Narratives under Construction

After this analysis of the origin, the transition from school to university, we will continue by considering the participants' study-choice narratives and their changes in the course of the follow-up. Just as in the previous section, the constructedness of study choice is assumed and elements that appear directly and indirectly as relevant for the choices and their narrative constructions are considered. In concrete, it is analysed for which participants University appeared as the logical next step and for which it was just one alternative; justifications through personal abilities and interests are considered, and examples of how these interests changed in the course of the follow-up are described. Furthermore, the importance of the participants' self-efficacy beliefs and ideas regarding professional profiles and labour market opportunities are scrutinized and direct role models in the family of origin are observed.

"En general, cal evitar de triar oficis creatius. Si no és possible, llavors la qüestió és una altra. Llavors no tens cap altra sortida. Vol dir que no has estat tu qui ha triat l'ofici, sinó a la inversa..."

Serguei Dowlàtov, Russian writer (1941-1990)

Roda Mots 10.02.2016

Though some authors apply rational-choice theories to study choice and expect young people to make their decisions strategically, considering costs and benefits (Brynin, 2012), I parted in this thesis from the beginning on from a different starting point: Apart from considering that it is impossible to predict the future labour market development (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999) or upcoming legislative changes or enrolment fee increases (see *Organisational problems*), it is highly difficult to predict one's abilities to be academically successful in a degree before having ever made a personal experience in this degree and in HE in general, though social contacts with such experiences may help to develop an approximation providing "hot knowledge" (Davey, 2009). Coming from social constructivism, I expected in line with Pais (2007) that young people construct, just as everybody else, their choices in the retrospective, rationalising them considering the bigger picture of their life course. As these life courses are yet less set and changes and a simultaneous advancement in different directions at once are more common than in adult life (Casal, Garcia, & Merino, 2007) (see also *Youth Research and Transitions*), I did furthermore expect that my participants' study-choice narratives would reflect such course corrections and show certain changes over time. In line with the theories described above (see *Study choice*), I understand narratives as mirrors of social positionings, as these positions are inscribed in the individuals ways to talk and to behave (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) and serve as a filter in their description and justification of social practices (Bottero, 2010), but include, nevertheless, a scope for agency (see *Capitals, field and habitus*).

Though study-choice narratives are not pure expressions of actual choices, they may include elements that came to influence in the study choice, but rather than an objective reproduction of all influencing elements, they construct a coherent image, ascribing or abnegating importance according to their strategic justification of their choices. The following example may clarify the conceptual difference between study choices and study-choice narratives: TV3, the Catalan public television channel, launched the first episode of what was going to become one of their most successful series in terms of viewer ratings on the 14th of September 2015 – years after the beginning of this longitudinal project. Though "Merlí", a philosophy teacher at a Catalan High School, arrived too late to influence the study choices of the participants of this project, the significant increase in enrolments in degrees of philosophy that has been ascribed to his success (Martínez, 2016), may serve us as an example of how study choices are, at the end of High School, influenced by remote ideas about degree courses and coincidences that push the visibility of a degree temporarily. TV has been described as "a primary source of children's early occupational learning" and popular TV series have also proven to serve as inspirations for young people's career aspirations in studies in other geographical contexts, as the UK (Archer et al., 2014, p. 76). However, the direct influence of TV is little studied and it is not clear why it seems to influence some young people and others not and if it is rather used as an information source for formed aspirations or if it directly influences aspirations (Archer et al., 2014). Merlí is in this sense an exceptional case as series or movies about philosophy

teachers are rare, especially in the Catalan context, and philosophy had not been a degree course with a high number of applicants beforehand, so the increase in enrolment figures may be directly ascribed to its success, while series on doctors, for example, are so common and the number of applications does anyway usually exceed the number of placements significantly that the effect of yet-another doctor series would be difficult to assess. However, in this study only few participants mentioned TV series and only in the focus groups, when the study choice had not yet been completed. In the course of the follow-up, nobody mentioned TV series or movies as an influence in their occupational aspirations and degree choices. When considering study-choice narratives rather than study choices, this may be a result of their not considering TV an adequate source to justify their choice (see *Interview characteristics*). We might even be observing a certain "learning" of which rationalisations for choices are adequate and which are not, if children are likely to refer to TV series while older students refrain to do so. This does not mean, however, that TV did not play a role in their occupational learning, as study choice is not limited to its narratives. In the case of Merlí, public discussions about its success and the effect on enrolment figures may have facilitated that students considered it adequate to relate to the series in their study-choice narratives – as the student in the quoted press note did (Martínez, 2016) – as they felt in good company.

In psychology, different theoretical frameworks have related vocational interests – and, in consequence, occupational choices – to aspects like “the person’s motivation, knowledge, personality, and ability” (Holland, 1958, p. 336 cited in Hoff, 2018, p. 6). From a study-choice narrative perspective, we can relate knowledge to “hot knowledge” about HE and degree courses (Davey, 2009) as well as social representations about studies and professions, including ideas transmitted through TV and mass media; ability finds its expression in self-efficacy beliefs (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*), while motivations and personality may be directly referenced to justify choices in narratives (see *What I was born for - or not* and *Professional profiles and the labour market*). Furthermore, Merlí can be interpreted as an initial trigger for an interest in philosophy that had to be reinforced by other elements if it was to turn into a relatively stable vocational interest (Hoff et al., 2018), though the weekly emission of a new episode may also have an effect on maintaining the triggered interest.

In spite of this conceptual focus on "study-choice narratives" rather than "study choices", previous research on gender- and social-class specific choices and reflexivity informs this section in many ways. Archer et al. (2014) highlight for example that children's occupational aspirations are high in all social strata, criticising public discourse and policy recommendations that continue to focus on improving aspirations. Considering the above described importance of an illusion of equal opportunities for the population's impression of justice (Bessant et al., 2011) (see *Social Inequality*), we can distinguish a public discourse that continues to ascribe different social positioning to higher or lower aspirations as a strategy to maintain the illusion of equality, as those who do not achieve more, choose to do so, rather than being the "victims" of social reproduction. By highlighting that aspirations are similarly high and that young people come to revise them in the moment of choice considering their realistic possibilities to achieve them, Archer et al. (2014) contribute to confronting society with inherent injustice, favouring that real equality may be achieved or at least pursued one day. Similarly, highlighting that young middle/upper class students consider university the logical

next step and do not feel daunted in the face of low academic performance and a deterioration of the labour market (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015), gives us an idea whose choices will be altered by alarmist public discourses, indicating that these contribute in the end to the reproduction of social inequality (see for example *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*).

In this section, we will see some examples of how the participants constructed their study choices quite differently from one interview to another or sometimes even within the same interview and how these changes do relate to social inequality. The immense variety in what the same participants came to say about their study choices, especially in comparison to the much higher continuity in what they said about other topics, does not only corroborate the constructedness of these choices, but may indicate that making-sense of life-course marking decisions could be considered one of the development tasks young people have to solve nowadays in their transition to adulthood. Repeated changes in itineraries or parallel advancement in diverse directions combined with the general impression of increased alternatives may force young people to repeatedly revise their study-choice narratives – and their life-course narratives – in order to integrate all elements, adapt to changes in direction and convince themselves and others to be on the right path (see also *Interview characteristics*).

6.2.1. *University – the logical next step*

As we have seen above (see *Higher Education*), University studies are for some young people the logical next step after school, while others have to actively decide to enrol (Archer et al., 2014; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Maunder et al., 2012; Reay et al., 2001). This active examination may furthermore explain why reflexivity among HE students appears to be higher among working-class students than their more privileged peers who basically seem to be guided by their habitus (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015; Reay et al., 2009b, 2001). That working-class students were more likely to conceive alternative plans in case of not entering into University, while middle/upper-class students seemed to be unlikely to imagine that this could happen (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015) may be furthermore related to a certain feeling of entitlement that is repeatedly carved out of the analyses of the participants' narratives in this thesis (see *Social success, Happiness and Health*) and may be understood as an element of their 'feeling like a fish in water' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) and has also been found in previous research (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). However, Laughland-Booÿ et al. (2015) also cautioned that middle/upper-class participants may choose University in spite of an "apparent mismatch between personal abilities and tertiary expectations", insinuating that this may lead to difficulties in entrance if they do not achieve the required scores and to academic failure once in University. In this sense, young people from working-class backgrounds may decide against HE or ambitious degree courses in spite of high academic performance (Torrents, 2017), while middle/upper-class youths may decide to enrol in HE and ambitious courses though their academic performance is too low to be successful in these fields. Both tendencies have negative implications for the individual and society, as some young people do not come to develop their whole potential, while others waste time and (state) resources on an attempt to study a degree that is bound to end in attrition or producing incompetent professionals. In this section

we will see up to which point university was the logical next step for the participants of my project, while academic difficulty will be discussed further below (see *Academic success*).

Towards the beginning of the follow-up (2011), it became already visible that only few participants had considered studying a vocational training rather than entering HE right away – Koala and Libro (dropped out after Int2) – and that even participants who had not been able to access their aspired degree course, preferred to enrol anyway in University, rather than to consider studying a vocational training or taking a gap year (see *Gap years and Pro-forma Enrolments*). In the course of the follow-up, several of the participants referred to vocational trainings at some point, arguing for example that it would have been a good preparative for their current studies (Sara, Koala), that they considered studying a vocational training to deepen their knowledge in a hobby (Nadia, Maduixa) or to achieve an additional professional profile (Ariel) (see also *... and what about work?*). Others mentioned vocational trainings when I asked them if they would have developed in the same way over the years if they had not entered University (Irina) or what they would have done if they had not entered (Willy). However, these ideas were usually mentioned from a retrospective and not pursued. Many participants represented university as the logical next step after High School, arguing towards the end of the follow-up that graduation was the first time in their lives that they did not know what exactly they would be doing in the next year (Nic, Maduixa). Some criticised this natural access to HE, considering that it fostered wrong choices as people ended up studying something just for the sake of studying, rather than because they really envisioned themselves working in the field (Skone); others embraced it, arguing that University was an experience you should not miss even if you may not need the studies for your future work (N.).

What do I know, studying the degree or, that is to say, at the beginning of the degree or in High School or like this (.) of course as you are doing what you should let's say what you're supposed to be doing (.) well no I at least did not think too much about it, you know? true to the motto "bua I do what I ought to be doing" [Interviewer: yes] but now I have to start deciding on my own what I want to do and where I want to go and what, you know? (Nic, Int5, l.949-953).

Interviewer: very well very well, and how do you see yourself? [Maduixa: now?] yes
 Maduixa: stressed [laughs] I don't know, I don't know how I see myself I mean ehm worried because sure it's getting closer as well. That is to say, I want to finish but at the same time I think 'incredible'¹²⁶ the university is almost over, because when you're little well you go to school you go to High School and you go to University, from here on it's all like very "OK and now what do I with my life?" (...) it's like very... (Int4 Maduixa, l.637-643)

N. mentioned in Int2 to be scared to abandon her degree though she had discovered by then that it was not her cup of tea, saying that she had always known for sure that she was going to study a university degree and just had to decide which, so quitting it completely scared her. Moreover, she considered university studies an experience that she did not want to miss so abandoning university completely did not appeal to her. Rather, she considered changing the degree course, but argued that she would have to be really convinced that the new degree was her thing, as she did not mean to jump from one thing to another without ever finishing anything. Here she constructed her personality as very indecisive and justified her decision to

¹²⁶ The word used in the Catalan original was "ostras".

continue with Business Management as a way to keep going and achieve a degree, while repeated changes might not lead anywhere. Similarly, she continued in Business Management after an application for teacher training was rejected because of her PAU score, but never overcame her academic difficulties completely (see *Academic success*). In this sense, she might be the embodiment of the students Skone was criticising, while her description of her social life (see *Social success*) and her Erasmus (see *Mobility*) put into doubt if she really came to enjoy University as an experience on its own (see *Happiness*).

I don't know. Hm I always' I've always thought that I wanted to go to university (-- I don't know maybe as an experience as well (-) [Interviewer: hm] because (-) hm I've always thought that everything' any experience can teach you something and that this can be good (Int2 N., l.222-224)

While we can read the criticism of studying just for the sake of it as an element of the tendency to close access to the own itinerary after completing it (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*), ascribing additional value to HE beyond professional preparation is in line with the 'game of free intelligence' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) and ideas of more just educational systems (Reay, 2012), so they may serve to justify having devoted time to HE studies without eventually coming to work in this field. Both approximations appear, in this sense, functional strategies to justify and add value to the individual path (see *Interview characteristics*).

When considering social class, we see that none of the participants from social class D commented on studying a vocational training, though Ariel mentioned a certain attraction to a training course for flight attendants, arguing that she could imagine to take it and then spend some years travelling the world in this job, before settling into an occupation with a more direct relation to her university studies. Just as Maduixa and Nadia who thought of a vocational training to improve their cooking techniques, Ariel did not perceive a vocational training as a way to obtain a permanent occupation, but as an enrichment in general. This did not question the upper-class strategy to pursue university studies. Considering that even the students who mentioned vocational trainings, only referred to them as possible "appetizers" for the university degree (Koala, Sara) and ended up in university anyway (see also Libro and Margarita), high aspirations and their completion may be even more common in Catalonia than in other geographical contexts and explain the high HE-participation rates (see *Demographics and University participation*). However, the mere considering of a vocational training may facilitate the diversion of these students to non-university studies and attractive job offers after completing a vocational training may set an end to the aspiration to study in University (see also *... and what about work?*). In some cases, it became also obvious that university had not been the natural next step for certain participants, because they expressed fears to fail or surprise at their success. Though Sara and Piruleta, both female teacher training students from social class A, had been among the high achievers in their degree, Sara expressed repeatedly fears to be able to make it in University and later on in her specialisation (see *Academic success* and *Health*) and Piruleta mentioned in her last interview, that she did not expect to finish her degree, though relativising that she referred to the pass of time, rather than her ability to graduate. This corroborates previous research indicating an intersection of gender and class, leading young women from lower social classes to be especially sceptical regarding their possibilities and hence to chose rather 'accessible' degrees (Torrents, 2017).

I've noticed that in doing interviews you notice that "incredible" a lot of time has passed, this and that has happened. Incredible, I wanted to do one thing and now I want to do another. These interviews are good to realize how you changed and how your whole life developed and that I really finished a degree though I did not expect it [Interviewer: you didn't expect it?] well, I did not expect it, it went very, I mean, I've just started the degree and suddenly I'm already finishing a master and it's very strange for me to say "wow, did really pass that much time?" All this, I have a degree that seems seems impossible, now, you say, theoretically... (Int5 Piruleta, l.718-725)

6.2.2. What I was born for - or not

The following quotes exemplify how some participants represented their interest in a certain field as a personal characteristic, developed from a very young age or even innate, a dream they were born to live, a professional future that was, in this sense, their only true alternative.

From a very young age I always liked everything with buttons. That's what my mother always told me and and well with playing with the play station, eh the first computer I had. Working, learning how to do little things, saying "oh I didn't know how to do this and now I do" and well as' as you like this stuff, mobile phones, electronic devices in general I like them a lot. And at the end I decided [to study] this. (Jab Int1, l.43-48)

I'm one of those people who can say that it's the degree course that I always wanted to do for example the dream. [Interviewer: hm] For me, well, a dream would be to be a social worker. Because I' I'd like to dedicate myself to working with the' the problems eh economic problems the problems of the third world. [Interviewer: hmhm] To put it like this. With, well, what are NGOs or something alike. And then I believed that in order to educate myself for this profession, that I could do social work. (Irina Int1, l.15-21)

As Jab dropped out after Int1, we cannot comment on changes in his study-choice narratives, but Irina made a very interesting move, combining her dream to become a social worker with an interest in anthropology. Anthropology appeared in her first year as a second degree she might study after completing social work and she mentioned a posterior master she would study to combine both. However, she highlighted in Int2 that she meant to move as soon as possible to Latin America and start working with indigenous communities, fearing that otherwise something could impede her to realise this dream and arguing that it was not compatible with a family life and therefore only a temporal aspiration. This certain time pressure may indicate that she did no longer consider to study another degree after completing this; however, the idea of continuing her studies turned to appear later on.

I've also thought (-) (laughs) eh when I'll finish the degree to do another degree. To study anthropology. [Interviewer: hm] Because of course stu' eh I'd live with communities (-) with with (-) cultures, to say it like this, with other cultures and I believe that anthropology would be very useful. So I would like to study social work, anthropology and then do a master related to the two. And regarding studies that would be all (laughing), I don't want anything else (laughing) (Int1 Irina, l.351-357)

If I see that the conditions are right (-) I will go on to study another degree in [[country of origin]] anthropology (-) I don't know if I commented' (-) I'd say I didn't. [Interviewer: anthropology? I don't think so] no no because I had not yet done it. But last year towards the end I started to consider to study anthropology, you know? (-) because I would like to (-) work with indigenous cultures [Interviewer: ah] so yes work in [[country of origin]] or in all' in any country of Latin America (Int2 Irina, l.64-69)

Irina: my plans for the future are (-) to be able to work in my country. And the thing is (...) I'm very sure, so (-) if I couldn't do it (-) then I'd like to work with some school for autistic children [Interviewer: hmhm] but my dream, so to say, would be this.

Interviewer: and then if you'd go to [[country of origin]] you would be working there with autists as well or?

Irina: no no with (-) with indigenous populations. And, but of course, they can be there, too (-) I've never thought of specializing in mental illnesses, but they exist there as well. And then, if I see that I face them, that it's necessary, then I'd like to do some specialization on this and apply it (...)

Interviewer: Ok so maybe you can put everything together.

Irina: Yes. And with anthropology, well, it would be very useful for me (-) in order to know how to deal with (-) with these populations. (--) So I want to mix the (-) the two professions, and not only limit myself to one (-) rather go expanding.

Interviewer: and then (-) is there an organization that you know that works like this or...?

Irina: no nonono

Interviewer: You'll have to find your ((place))

Irina: I'm (at the same time) yes I'm beginning to inform myself and yes (Int2 Irina, l.370-392)

I'm worried that (-) that I might pull' that I might pull back. That I'm not able to do it. Yes because the thing is, that I'm here in Lleida studying social work is to be able to achieve (-) these aims' well this' this goal. I could do it as some kind of volunteer, I mean, there are many NGOs where you can go as a volunteer and you do it. But I don't want to do it as a volunteer, what I want to do is to contribute (-) everything that I can. [Interviewer: hm] And then I'm afraid that in the end I might change the plans, that I choose (...) If I create a family here well (-) I won't be able to do it. And now that that it's the moment to do it, that's why I want to leave the sooner the better. Because I know that I want to do it, but of course you also have the thought of creating a family. [Interviewer: hmhm] And under such conditions you couldn't, you know? (Int2 Irina, l.453-462)

Though she had already conceived a “better” plan in the form of studying anthropology in her country of origin in Int2, Irina did not consider the possibility to abandon social work and study anthropology instead. Rather than pursuing her new interest, Irina constructed her identity in Int2 and 3 – and as we have seen already partly in Int1 – around the idea of becoming a social worker with anthropological knowledge. In Int3 she mentioned, once again, the idea to study a master in anthropology after completing her degree, but had her doubts if she would be allowed to access with a degree certificate from social work. As a plan B she conceived the possibility to study the degree in anthropology, should she still want to study another degree. Here we notice that she did no longer conceive the possibility to study a whole degree after graduation as natural as in Int1 and 2, though she did not discard it either.

I think I mentioned to you that in the first year I entered with much desire and enthusiasm to study social work, then in the second year, I had the same enthusiasm but as I had also gotten to know what anthropology was, it also interested me, I wanted to study something related to anthropology. And this year I continue with the same idea: Complete social work, be a social worker but with knowledge in anthropology (Int3 Irina, l.48-52)

Irina believed in Int4_1 that she would have learned more about indigenous communities if she had studied her degree in Latin America and anticipated to learn a lot in this regard in the course of her upcoming exchange year. Moreover, she considered studying a master combining anthropology and social work in Latin America after finishing her degree, expecting

that there would be more masters in this sense on offer. However, she turned to consider the possibility to study the degree in anthropology if such a combined master was not possible. In spite of this continuity in her ideas, she also mentioned her exchange year as a possibility to test if she really wanted to study anthropology, live in Latin America and work with indigenous communities – indicating indirectly that any of these elements could still be revised.

Moreover, she represented in the same interview that she wanted to leave Spain because she did not like social work in Spain, though she had argued in Int1, the other way around, saying that she had chosen social work because this would allow her to leave and work abroad afterwards. When I asked more for her dislike of social work in Spain, she explained that she had seen in her internship in her third-year that social workers spent more time with paperwork and administrative questions than in contact with the people they were supposed to attend. Moreover, she claimed that she had observed a very “occidental” contact, as people who did not comply with a requirement were not attended, no matter what direct consequences this could have for them, situating the norms above everything else. Here it is hence possible that she inverted her argumentation regarding social work, because of this disappointment when getting to know the practice. By limiting the administrative focus to Spain and supposing that she would find a different approach to social work in Latin America, she was able to maintain her motivation and her professional ideal, though she also indirectly reproduced national stereotypes, supposing that Spain was more bureaucratic and Latin America more hands-on and practical. As she highlighted her wish to live in the same surroundings as the “users” (*usuarios* – see as well *Becoming a professional*) rather than visiting them occasionally or never, we could also interpret this as a disciplinary difference between social work and anthropological fieldwork, rather than a geographically different approach to social work. Her comment that you may not be able to save the whole world but that you should at least care if you work in the social field, may also indicate that she encountered a difficulty to draw a line between work and private life and experienced the risk of helping professions to turn into a “helpless helper” when failing to “save” someone (Schmidbauer, 1992). From a pedagogical perspective, it might be positive that she encountered this shock with practice already throughout her studies, but from what she said, her degree did not seem to help her confront and solve this problematic anyway, so the internship rather became a risk factor for attrition, as it provoked her frustration and doubts regarding her professional future.

As well in Int4_1, Irina turned to tell her study choice quite differently, arguing this time that she had heard, in her second year of secondary schooling, stories about the sister of a friend who studied social work and travelled the Congo, Peru and Mexico. When she heard this, she thought “this is what I want”, arguing that she had had the idea to do the same before, but had not known how the degree was called. From then on, she was decided to study social work and, moreover, in Spain, arguing that the degree certificates of Latin American Universities were internationally less valued than a European degree. While she sold her study choice quite well in this interview (see also *Interview characteristics*), she indirectly reduced social work to travelling the world, though the high mobility of the friend’s sister may be rather exceptional for a social worker, in the sense of one possible professional profile among many others, while other degrees might have offered her much more options in this sense. Something similar happened in an interview project by Woodman (2011), as a participant valued nursing as a

good career option, because her aunt travelled a lot as a nurse and another said to have chosen environmental engineering, as well for the travelling. This tendency to abstract from a concrete itinerary to the whole degree course did also appear in other participants. Dharma, for example, discarded in FG12 nutritional sciences because she had heard of a girl who did not find work in this field after graduation (see *Job opportunities*). As travelling appeared as highly attractive for almost all participants (see *Mobility*), it is moreover likely that relating any degree/profession to repeated international experiences would attract potential students, especially in secondary school, as aspirations for an international career seemed to reduce in the course of the follow-up, so it is possible that they were even higher in school (see *Mobility*). Mobility promises may, in this sense, be an example of aspects triggering a first vocational interest in a field (Hoff et al., 2018), but do not explain why some of these interests are maintained and reinforced while others are discarded over time.

In Int4_2, Irina was about to graduate from social work and had just completed her exchange year in Mexico. She repeated her argument to dislike the job opportunities for social workers in Spain and criticised, moreover, her degree for not offering a sufficiently high academic and theoretic level. However, she also felt proud to call herself a social worker and repeated her idea from Int1 that this had been her dream. Nevertheless, she limited this positive evaluation by repeating the idea from Int4_1 that it might have been a mistake to study social work in Spain, as the social problems of Spain were of little interest to her. Here she claimed – in contradiction to her comments from Int4_1 – that she had not considered before studying a whole degree abroad, but would now do so if she were to study another degree or a master. However, she also relativized that studying in another university might be different, insinuating that her dislike might be reduced to the UdL and other Catalan or Spanish Universities might have been more to her liking. Moreover, she mentioned that indigenous communities had hardly been a topic in the study plan at the Mexican University either, so her idea that studying there she would have learned more in this regard does not seem to be completely justified with her personal experience.

Interviewer: And knowing what you know now, would you do something different if you could go back? (-) before the degree?

Irina: Mmmm (-) I don't know if I'd changed degrees or if I'd go to another university, I really don't know. Yes, I'm proud to be able say that I'm a social worker because, well, it really was what I dreamed of, but perhaps if I had known that I would end up a bit unhappy, not completely [unhappy] either, right? But a bit [unhappy], well I don't know if in another university it would have been different, I don't know. And regarding degrees... the truth is that I can't think of any other, at most I would have studied anthropology but in Latin America... No, the thing is that the problem is that the social problems that interest me, do not exist here, so it's very difficult to inquire about them, because well obviously they are not known [here], then my mistake was maybe it was to study here, to continue studying in Spain. But since I saw the opportunity, well, already living here, I've been living here all my life, well, I accepted, and I really thought' I didn't really think about going to another country to study. But now I know for sure, that if I do a master or some other degree, it will be abroad. (Int4_2 Irina, l.424-436)

In Int5, she claimed that it might have been better to study anthropology, but argued that she could not opt for this because the degree was not offered in Lleida and studying in another city would have been too expensive, considering the higher living costs. Here appears a direct

contradiction to her comment in Int2 that she chose to study in the UdL because it was the best university in social work in Catalonia. Moreover, it does not fit with the idea that she had discovered her interest in anthropology towards the end of her first year in university. Here it is, however, possible, that though she came to consider anthropology after her choice for social work she revisited her study choice with her new knowledge and came to decide then that it would not have been a real option anyway, as it was not offered in Lleida.

Interviewer: and now knowing what you know, would you do something different if you could go back?

Irina: Well, even though I like my degree, I might have studied another one [Interviewer: which?] Anthropology, for example and (.) I like the Universitat de Lleida but of course if you have the opportunity now that you have the experience, well, I would at least try something else

Interviewer: to experiment? [Irina: to experiment yes] but ((in another university or anthropology? anthropology is not offered in Lleida, is it?))

Irina: No. That's why I had to come to Lleida in every case, I didn't have the opportunity to go to Barcelona, because I couldn't pay for it then ((so 2seconds)) it was social work (Int5 Irina, l.200-207)

In spite of her continuous interest in anthropology, she did no longer mention a plan to study the degree or even a master in this field in Int5, preferring a master on human rights and considering to work in a future with an international NGO. Here she considered her lack of proficiency in English a difficulty, arguing that her degree should have obliged her to learn English. However, she could have studied English in parallel to her studies without such an obligation, so the need for an obligation is rather paternalistic (see *The invention of youth and development tasks*). That it did not occur to her to study English before, might be related to a change in her professional perspective, as the work with indigenous communities in Latin America did likely not require a special level in English, but the work with an international NGO did. However, considering the increasing internationalisation of HE, we can assume that HE institutions should prepare their students for “professional and civic lives in a globalized world” (Punteney, 2012, p. 405), even if they do not (yet) consider to pursue an international career. In this sense, the so-called B2-law that required any graduate to accredit the B2 level in a foreign language in order to graduate, can be read as a good approach regarding internationalisation and was also in Irina’s sense, though we will see further below that it provoked quite a polemic (see *Third-language accreditation*). Irina’s new orientation towards human rights and NGOs is also interesting, considering a certain conflict she described repeatedly regarding her future possibilities to combine her wish to work with indigenous communities and repeated travelling and a family life (see *Future ideals and fears*).

Interviewer: and the master, have you already selected one or ...?

Irina: the master is right there and it's this commission [the Mexican national human rights commission] with a Spanish university, la Universidad de Castilla (...) then they have an agreement, that is to say, the lecturers of that university of Spain come to Mexico and they give you classes, then that's very good because you can get the title in two places so if, for example, if I come to Spain and they ask for a title I do not have to accredit it officially and don't have to do all the paperwork that is very expensive [and] very slow, rather when I enrol I will already have a certificate from Spain and Mexico [TS: very well] so that's very good (Int5 Irina, l.51-58)

Irina: my intention was to do the master in anthropology but when the moment to do the master will come, I will see what I want to do: anthropology or [Interviewer: ah the one from Mexico?] yes

Interviewer: is in anthropology?

Irina: No, it's in human rights. But maybe in the moment, that is to say, I'll see, there's still minimum a year to go, well, I'll see which one I want to study (Int5 Irina, I.212-216)

Irina's vacillation between social work and anthropology might serve us as an example of how study choices are revised and constructed differently over the years, appearing on occasion more rational, pragmatic or vocational. Her case could be highly generalizable for students who are indecisive between two degrees. As several other participants mentioned the possibility to study another degree after graduation in Int1 (Mabe, Willy) or highlighted that they did not want to do so but knew people with such a plan (Nadia), it is possible that students who have difficulties to choose out of two options, tranquilise themselves at the beginning of their studies by supposing that they could perfectly study both degrees. In the end, only Ariel came to enrol in another degree after graduation (see *Family affairs*) and this though she had discarded this option in Int4, arguing that she did not want to finish her studies that old. A similar idea of a certain time pressure appeared in the accounts of several other participants: Nic, for example, had argued in Int2 that he wanted to participate in all exchange programmes his degree offered and considered taking a gap year to travel after graduation, arguing that the later he entered the labour market, the higher were his chances that the economy had overcome the economic crisis. In Int5, he showed a completely opposed argumentation, saying that – among other reasons (see also *Mobility*) – he did not participate in any exchange programme, because he did not want to prolong his studies and mentioned that he already felt slow in comparison to other people from his birth cohort, as he had not yet finished his degree due to his degree-course change. Xenia discarded from the beginning of the follow-up on to study another degree after graduation, as she did not want to complete her studies that old.

Interviewer: well but you don't try anything else to enter medicine?

Xenia: No way, I don't want to lose more years (laughing) I'd be (-) 40 years old and studying the first year of medicine, no way no no (laughing)

Interviewer: (laughs) well after graduating from one degree you can directly enter into another, can't you?

Xenia: I don't want any more [Interviewer: OK] (-) nothing [Interviewer: well (at the same time)] it's I'll do this, I'll do masters and a PhD and (smiling) (Xenia Int2, I.24-30).

This may indicate that studying more than one degree loses attraction over the years, turning the 'solution' to plan to study more than one degree into a 'mirage', as the second degree is little like to take place. Disburdening the study choice by assuming that the chosen degree is only the start, is in this sense not a very sensitive strategy, as the study choice remains equally crucial once the idea to study a second degree was discarded. Masters, on the hand, appeared a good option for some to reorient their itinerary without studying a complete degree, but are similarly selective and expensive, so social inequality continues to be reproduced. Double degrees may be very attractive for students who attempt to combine different fields or have difficulties to take a final choice.

The observed serious changes in the narratives highlight the situationality of any indication of the most important influencing aspects, indicating, like this, that studies attempting to establish, in particular through quantitative approaches, which aspects are the most influential in the choice of a certain institution or degree (e.g. Archer et al., 2014; Solsona Solé, 2015) are severely limited as they miss this situationality. Interestingly, the participants from social class A showed more continuity in their narratives as they did not revisit their study choices in such detail in the course of the follow-up. This may be a result of their higher reflexivity before entering HE (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015). Nevertheless, revisions may be useful to justify certain course corrections and serve to leave a better impression on lecturers or in job interviews (see *Interview characteristics*). In this sense, Peter's argument to have chosen teacher training with the specialization in sports in order to combine his interest in sports with a professional profile offering security and furthermore to his liking because he liked children, could make perfect sense in his first-year interview and save him from having to admit that he had not achieved the necessary score to enrol in the Sports Faculty. In his Int5, on the other hand, the same argumentation might appear a bit worrisome, as he might not leave a too good impression in a job interview with this rather little vocational argumentation. Seeking internal coherency from one interview to another and constructing a stable study-choice narrative may therefore not necessarily be positive and might favour the reproduction of social inequality if such a tendency was more common among disadvantaged groups.

6.2.3. *Dream or Nightmare*

While some participants suffered the "nightmare" not to enter into their aspired degree course (see especially Xenia *Happiness*), for others it turned into a "nightmare" to have entered exactly into what they wanted to study. Nic argued from his first interview on that he wanted to study translation and only entered *pro-forma* into English studies (see *Gap years and Pro-forma Enrolments*), highlighting especially his interest in Japanese. Though he never came to explain why he started to study Japanese, he had done so a couple of years before the beginning of the project and his Japanese teacher had told him about the degree in translation in the UAB, as she had studied there. He referred repeatedly to "hot knowledge" (Davey, 2009) he received from her, for example regarding exchange programmes. However, it was not at all sure that he would enter into Japanese as the number of places was limited and the students with the best scores were allowed to enrol first, having hence more choices. In Int2, he told me that he actually came to be the last of the enrolled in the Japanese group and that the administrative introducing his data, told him that he closed the group. Asked what he would have done if he had not entered, he said that he would have studied Chinese, continuing Japanese as an extra-curricular activity. I came to consider the whole system little apt for students with a clear plan to study a concrete language, as they could not know if they would actually achieve a placement in the language until formalizing the enrolment – when it was already late for a revision of the degree-course choice. However, Nic's argumentation came to change rather extremely, as Japanese turned from his dream into his "nightmare". As Nic adopted a discursive style based on a comical exaggeration of his bad luck and constructing his status as that of an underdog, there is certainly some exaggeration in his description of his difficulties with Japanese, but this does not mean that they do not contain a true core.

Already in Int2, at the very beginning of his studies in translation, Nic criticised people who chose a language they were already proficient in, arguing that the degree offered them the possibility to learn a new language and that they missed this chance, apart from “disturbing” in class, by leading the lecturers to think that they could advance quicker than was in the interest of the students. This indicates a lack of professional orientation as it appears only logical that someone who is proficient in a foreign language and considers becoming a translator, chooses this language in order to work in a future translating from this language. He, on the other hand, seemed to consider the degree as a way to study languages, rather than becoming a translator. Though Nic actually chose languages he had studied before himself, he kept highlighting that he knew very little Japanese and chose it in the degree because he wanted to learn it. The argumentation behind his language choice was hence that he chose languages he wanted to know – not languages he considered “easy” for him to learn or expected to be especially useful in his future life. Though he mentioned the risk to mix Chinese and Japanese up (Int2) and also said that he had attempted to study French in a past but it had not been his cup of tea (Int1), he seemed to believe that he would dedicate so many hours to study the chosen language in University that he would learn it for sure.

The only thing that I don't like is that there are many people who have (...) in my Japanese class, for example (-) there are people who have been studying Japanese for 5 years. [Interviewer: hm] (...) and they get there (-) and if they wanted to they could be giving us the class. And you say 'if you can do this, don't choose Japanese, you know? because, we've come here to learn and you know already more than the teacher' (laughs) and in English it's the same, that is to say we've got 5 or 6 persons in English class who already have the proficiency. You say "guys, if you've already got the proficiency, choose German translation, choose French translation", but then the rest of us looks like twats because you already have (laughing) you know? (-) and I don't know this annoys me a lot (Nic Int2, l.813-822).

In Int3, Nic highlighted that the subject that confronted him with most difficulties was Japanese, that he felt highly pressured and that it would have been easier if he had chosen another language, mentioning as an example French. In the same interview, he mentioned a change in his perception of Japan, arguing that he had idealised it in the past and was now more realistic, thinking that the Japanese were very strict and serious and would not help him at all if he went there and as he did not have the level in Japanese either, he would not want to live in Japan any longer. Moreover, he did not believe that Japanese would come to be of any use in his professional future. This indicates a change from an interest in learning languages to be able to make a living with the acquired knowledge. Asked if he could change the language, he confirmed that some of his fellow students were abandoning Japanese, but he would have to enter into the second year of French then and did not believe to be able to follow without having studied French before.

In Int4_1, before his stay in Japan, his perception of the Japanese had changed a bit, as he warned me that the Japanese were very interested in foreigners and always looking for someone to practice English, as they had difficulties to learn it. In Int4_2, he told me about his month in Japan mentioning many difficulties and problems – a bit like N. after her Erasmus in Germany (see *Change and Continuity*) – but was still enchanted with Japan, the Japanese and the Japanese cuisine and traditions and spoke with nostalgia about the possibility to return. However, he highlighted that he had only been able to communicate thanks to a fellow

student who went with him, as Japan was her passion and she had a much higher level than his. Given that he only stayed a month in the end and spent his time in a hotel working alone cleaning the rooms, he claimed to have not improved his Japanese either (see *Internationalisation.*).

Nevertheless, he chose to do his TFG in the field of Japanese and though he also described this as a complete odyssey he seemed to have been rather successful with it, as he had already received a positive feedback from his tutor in Int5. However, he continued to argue that Japanese was from all languages offered in his degree the most difficult and that the graduates who chose this language left with a much lower level than the students who chose other languages. Here he said that the graduates who chose Chinese left university almost as native speakers - a remark that might require some caution and could be interpreted as an example of his exaggeration of his bad luck. He, on the other hand, did not believe to be able to work one day with Japanese. However, he also ascribed this difficulty to the way to teach Japanese, saying that too much attention was paid to the symbols, permitting that students achieved good scores without really knowing the language, insinuating that the evaluation system allowed for a trick to pass without achieving the goal to learn the language. He would, therefore, not recommend the language, arguing that it was the worst choice from all options offered in his degree. Though we can interpret these comments as a sign of humility and also a way to ennoble his own itinerary, highlighting that he chose the most difficult language of all (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*), his argument was, in a nutshell, that he did not learn Japanese. This is a serious problem for a degree in translation and for a student who chose it, as he did, to learn in particular Japanese.

While such dramatic changes were not too common among the participants, it is conceivable that a highly influential idea at the moment of study choice, loses all its importance in the course of the studies, falling even into oblivion. This implies that research on study choices should be conducted as prompt as possible before or after the moment of decision, as the chances are higher that influential factors do still appear as such, even though a certain filter is probably always applied as we have argued above. Just as in the previous section, we can observe that the participant showing this rather extreme change in narratives belonged to social class D, while the participants from social class A tended to construct their study-choice narratives rather similarly over the years. Apart from the already mentioned implication for the reproduction of social inequality by missing out on the discursive strategy to best justify one's itinerary and the possible higher reflexivity before entering HE, this may also be an effect of interview characteristics, as especially Nic developed a very eloquent style, telling me lots of anecdotes and adopting the often comical role of the underdog (see *Interview characteristics*). In this sense, his narrative cannot be interpreted as selling his study choice 'badly', as he would probably not show the same approach in a job interview. Future research could enlighten such differences by observing and comparing student narratives in different situations, mainly speaking to a peer, to a lecturer, to a potential employer etc.

6.2.4. *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*

As we have seen above, a lack of efficiency of HE systems, measured through attrition rates and prolonged studies (see *Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation*), is often ascribed to a lack of preparation of the incoming students (see *The University Transition and Student Support*). Especially working-class students are often identified as at risk of academic failure, drop-out and prolonged studies (Rubin & Wright, 2017) and some authors argue that HE institutions have difficulties to adapt to their increasingly heterogeneous student population (Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews, & Nordström, 2009). Davey (2009) shows that different school-support regimes prepare students differently for HE and that “hot knowledge” about HE may be crucial, but is by no means distributed equally. Apart from this knowledge, previous academic performance and social representations regarding the levels of difficulty to expect in HE in general and in concrete degree courses may influence if students feel prepared to study a certain degree or not. Especially self-efficacy beliefs are expected to influence study choice and interest development, as individuals with low self-efficacy beliefs are less likely to develop interests (Hoff et al., 2018). Moreover, self-efficacy beliefs may be related to social divisions like class and gender and their intersections, as previous research has found that especially people from lower social classes and in particular women from lower social classes are more likely to choose 'easy' degrees, in the sense of degrees with low abandonment rates (Torrents, 2017). Such findings were corroborated by comments from Sara and Piruleta, female teacher training students from social class A, who repeatedly mentioned a fear to fail or surprise to be successful, in spite of being among the academically high achievers in their degree (see *University - the logical next step, Academic success and Health*).

We have already seen above that N. had severe difficulties to define her interests and to take a related study choice after facing academic difficulties in High School (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*), so her low self-efficacy belief may have had an influence here, though she constructed her learner identity throughout the whole follow-up positively, expecting success (see *Academic success*). As N. was identified as from social class D, this clear contrast between Sara, Piruleta and N. may be the effect of the class difference, leading N. to consider University her natural destination rather than questioning herself as Piruleta and Sara did.

In this study, I did neither test the students' abilities, nor did I obtain their academic results in school or university (see *Academic success*). However, we can still deduce different levels of preparation when considering the accuracy of information about HE structures (see also *Ignorance and misinformation*), the points of comparison for expectations (see *Change and Locality*) and the difficulties encountered once in University (see also *Academic success* and *Social success*). Like this, we can observe, for example, that only the private-school focus group mentioned the possibility to take additional exams in the PAU to enter into a degree course without having completed the related High-School stream (see *High School*). Though it is possible that the other pupils had not yet known about this possibility, because their focus-groups took place a bit earlier or that they did not mention the option because they did not consider it feasible, this finding might indicate an important difference in the structural knowledge on HE. The earlier pupils know that they can take additional exams in the PAU even if they did not course them in

High School¹²⁷, the earlier they can furthermore prepare for this option, for example through tuition lessons – and as such tuition is expensive, their perception of the option as feasible or not is likely furthermore influenced by their economic capital.

Though we have seen above that the participants were rather indignant about a new law relating degree courses to High School branches through an additional weighting of the scores achieved in related subjects for the final score and therefore limiting their chances to access a degree from a different branch (see *High School*), several participants showed also a belief that you should not attempt to study a degree in university you did not prepare for in High School. Prepared does hereby refer to not having coursed a certain subject in High School that appears on a degree's study plan and therefore discard the degree. In the rural school, a participant claimed that it was impossible to choose certain engineering degrees if you did not study chemistry in High School; when another participant told him that he could do a preparatory course just before the beginning of university and enrol anyway, he quickly discarded this as not feasible. Though he did not develop this idea further and we cannot know if he just did not want to take such a course, we can imagine that if participants expected university to be more difficult than High School as we have seen above (see *Change and Locality*), attempting to study a degree with one or more subjects they had not even coursed in High School might appear a kamikaze-enrolment, especially if the degree had a reputation to be difficult – as engineering degrees do. A short preparatory course may appear to be not enough to bridge the expected gap between 2-years of High School, especially if the self-efficacy belief in the concrete subject is already low. Considering that the participants chose for some reason a High School branch that did not include the subject or opted against the subject if it was offered in their branch, it is rather likely that the subject already discouraged them before, indicating that the roots of the problem may lie back in secondary school or even before. The very fact that a degree offers preparatory courses may then have the negative effect to induce potential students to believe that it is way too difficult for them, so rather than taking the preparatory course, which would require furthermore additional effort, they might come to discard the degree in question to study a more accomplishable option they feel more prepared for. In this sense, it makes, furthermore, a difference to offer 'preparatory' courses for especially demanding degrees or to offer 'trial courses' to allow High School students to test different options before taking their study choice (see *Gap years and Pro-forma Enrolments*).

These ideas and knowledge gaps together with the silences regarding further alternatives, e.g. the possibility to take a gap year to first take a study choice or prepare better for an aspired degree course, show how the participants' choices were limited by 'external circumstances', the association of High-School streams and degree courses, and their 'internal framework', discarding, ignoring or pursuing existing alternatives (Reay, 2004, p. 435).

¹²⁷ That this is possible is explained here under the question "Puc examinar-me a les PAU d'una matèria que he cursat a primer curs de batxillerat o fins i tot que no he cursat?": http://universitatsirecerca.gencat.cat/ca/01_secretaria_duniversitats_i_recerca/preguntes_frequents/pau_i_altres_proves_daccses/pau_per_als_estudiants_de_batxillerat/ [last access: 25.07.2018]. As the answer indicates, this possibility did not exist previously to the law published in 2009, so 2011 - the year when the participants took the PAU - was probably the second year, where this option was given. This may explain additionally why so few participants seemed to know about it.

To analyse these explanations from a meta-level, we can refer to a publication by Yazilitas et al. (2013) that analyses research publications on the gendered study choice in the field of mathematics, science, and technology (MST) published between 2005 and 2012 in peer-reviewed journals. Yazilitas et al. (2013) describe three main types of explanations for the gendered study choice: micro-level, macro-level and institutional explanations. Micro-level explanations relate the study choice to the psychology of the individual, arguing that girls show low self-efficacy beliefs, lack role models and are less interested in MST than boys. Macro-level explanations understand such individual differences as a result of socialization and culture and explain cross-national differences in women's attendance of MST between developed and developing countries with a female tendency to express their gendered selves in late-modern societies where individual expression and self-realization are highly valued and students are free to choose their studies. Institutional explanations argue that cross-national differences even within developed countries are the result of different education systems, whereat especially early tracking and freedom of choice provoke girls to choose gendered tracks, maybe because of the effects of puberty at the moment of choice (Yazilitas et al., 2013). This explanation is in line with the observation that the comprehensive Spanish educational system, only shows a male dominance in the field of Engineering degrees, rather than MST (see *Demographics and University participation*). However, a combined approach to explain gendered study choice is likely to be even more successful in explaining the observed differences. Though the theories and examples mentioned above do not solely apply to MST, we can say that the mentioned explanations are situated within the type of micro-level explanations.

In the light of this study and considering the warnings not to impose any social division to start with, we can highlight that the male participants were by no means exempt of the described micro-level explanations used to justify why girls do not chose MST degrees. While Jab seemed to have decided against certain "difficult" degrees because of his not having studied chemistry in High School, Andrés told me in his third-year interview that he had at first discarded to study the degree in tourism, because he feared the mathematical subjects. Dori argued, on the other hand, in focus group 1 that she meant to study biotechnology in spite of her difficulties with mathematics, hoping that she would be able to make it and Xenia claimed in Int2 to have chosen biotechnology as her second-best option after not entering into medicine, because it was a very difficult degree and she felt attracted to study something difficult.

Just from these findings we could argue that self-efficacy beliefs are not necessarily that different between boys and girls in Catalonia. However, Xenia changed her narrative in this regard significantly and came to say in her last interviews, that she should have studied an engineering degree, for example computer engineering. In the retrospective she ascribed her decision against this option to a low self-efficacy belief, saying that she had thought that an engineering degree would be too difficult for her. Here she argued that her self-efficacy belief had increased in the course of her degree, as she had excelled herself repeatedly and did now know that she was able to do much more than she thought after High School.

Xenia: (3) well (-) how could I say this? biotechnology is more complex (...) deeper, you know? the first year (...) in all agronomist degrees (...) we all have (-) almost the same structure the first year is all basic (.) [Interviewer: hm] but for example the others do biology as such, biology, ehm mathematics, one term physics one term and chemistry and

so on, you know? [Interviewer: hm] We do chemistry throughout the whole year, organ chemistry the whole year, biochemistry all year (-) biology biology we do molecular, cellular (-) then we do thermodynamics the whole year that is (-) hm [Interviewer: more things?] Yes it's deeper more (-) of course, because I think, I say "if you have to work with cells (-) you have to do it (-) well deep all those basics, that is to say, the basics of science" (-) [Interviewer: hm] it's much more elaborate than the other degrees. (...) it's more (-) more elaborate than all of ((agronomists)) [degrees] (.) [Interviewer: hm] that's why I liked it too (.) [Interviewer: that's why you chose it?] hm. (-) I don't know I like to go for the difficult, I don't know (laughing) (Xenia Int2, l.385-402).

Interviewer: Knowing what you know now, would you do something different if you could go back?

Xenia: another degree? (2) computer engineering [Interviewer: ah yes?] Yes (2) I wouldn't be so afraid of mathematics. I'd think that I could overcome them with tuition or whatever. But in the second year of high school I was like, I was very afraid of failing in that in maths. With the engineering degrees, I didn't see myself capable of an engineering degree, but now I do, now [I see myself] fully capable (Xenia Int5, l.236-241).

The contradiction between the argumentation in Int2 and Int5 may be common, as students may likely feel ambiguously about their abilities at the end of High School, considering that they do not know what levels of exigencies expect them in university and the PAU seems to persecute many like a dark shadow, testing their self-efficacy just as much as their knowledge and abilities. Social representations constructing University studies as difficult and elitist or a certain degree as especially unachievable are then likely to influence young people's decisions whether to attend University or not and into which degree course to enrol. This is important to consider regarding school support, as teachers might misinterpret their (male) students' displays of nonchalance as a sign that they do not care enough about the upcoming PAU and highlight the difficulty of this University Entrance Exam further, in order to encourage them to learn. In FG10, I could observe a teacher intervention in this line and the defensive reaction of the male participant, indicating that this strategy to encourage young people to study more, may be likely counterproductive.

Hemic: I'll do chemistry. I know it already, but well (-) I'll do it... (-) I already know what I will choose

Teacher: Yes, but, we've got to pass this exam that comes at the end of High School, the PAU, which I mention sometimes to you

[several: sometimes] [laughter]

?: sometimes we speak about the PAU (laughing) (FG10, l.175-180)

Yet another explanation for Xenia's change in argumentation could be that some young people come to 'relate' stronger to negative group stereotypes, for example regarding women or a certain ethnicity, throughout their degree than they did at the end of High School. In school, their belief in the functioning of meritocracy might still be stronger and they might consider stereotypes a matter of the past or of few narrow-minded persons with little impact for their lives. Over the years, their experiences might question such beliefs and lead them to reflect further on group stereotypes, turning these more visible in their narratives even if the essence of their arguments is to deny or refute them. Apart from a direct influence of group stereotypes on student performance (Bain, 2006), these may turn into a resource for some participants allowing them to justify their decisions. In this sense, Xenia, as a girl, could argue that she had not chosen an engineering degree because of fearing that it might be too difficult

and perfectly justify her belated reorientation towards informatics with this society-imposed fear, enabling her to construct a coherent life story towards a new dedication in informatics, though she had never shown much interest for this field before. The same strategy may have been active behind N.'s argumentation in Int1 that she decided against architecture, assuming that it was too difficult for her, after her stressful time in High School (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*). The continuing male dominance in the field of Engineering and Architecture may have allowed her - just as Xenia - to officially assume that it was too difficult for her, without actually putting her intellectual abilities in doubt. As we can only access the students' narratives regarding study choice and understand their choices as highly constructed, such different strategies may explain part of the observed changes in study-choice construction.

When comparing the researcher perspective to what the participants in this study said, it is noteworthy that the participants did not usually mention their PAU score as a limitation of their study choice, unless they were decided to take the PAU again or had already achieved the necessary score and only mentioned the academic difficulty as a worry. Though academic performance was cited as a limiting factor in other research (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015; Solsona Solé, 2015) and the PAU score appeared as an indirect limitation of several participants' choices (Skone, see *Professional profiles and specialisations*; Peter, see: *What I was born for - or not*, and N. see: *Family affairs*), none of them mentioned this limitation in their first interview and all justified their study choice differently, as if they had preferred the option they ended up with. This tendency to understate academic performance as a decisive element for study choice may indicate that such a limitation was not considered to be acceptable among the participants, in the sense of an impression that they had to justify their choices differently. Here it is possible that they did not mean to construct their life-course narrative on a first failure, choosing a more positive approach by justifying their study choice in positive terms rather than through such a limitation. Exceptions from this tendency were Xenia (see *Happiness*), Ariel (see *Family affairs*) and, though less dramatically, Koala, who mentioned to have discarded aeronautics because of the high numerus clausus (see *Flashing up and vanishing alternatives*). As Koala, Xenia and Ariel had all three migration histories, it is possible that this dimension of difference had an influence in their readiness to mention such a limitation, maybe because they could easily justify their lower academic performance with additional difficulties due to studying in foreign languages – this would also explain why Irina and Andrés, who were born in Latin America, did not show this tendency, as at least one of the official languages in Catalonia was their mother tongue (see also the comments on migration histories in the section *Academic success*).

In summary, we can observe that academic performance appeared, in spite of its popularity in academic theories on study choice, rather marginal in the study choice narratives just after HE entrance, even when it was obvious that the participants had not scored the necessary result to enter the degree course they had mentioned as an aspiration in the focus-group. This may indicate that the participants attempted to construct their study choices positively, invisibilising the lack of alternatives. Self-efficacy beliefs may have been rather low, anyway, at the moment of study choice, possibly as a result of the PAU exams and the social representation of HE and certain degree courses to be rather difficult. However, just as regarding academic performance, the participants tended to mention low self-efficacy beliefs

in positive contexts rather than as a real limitation, for example mentioning a fear that had turned out to be unfounded or justifying a posterior change in orientation claiming that a low self-efficacy belief had kept them from pursuing their current way before. Study-choice narratives constructed in personal interviews may therefore not be the best ways to assess self-efficacy beliefs and to study the effects of academic performance on study choice. Focus groups are an even worse option in this sense, as we have seen before that young people, especially young men, feel additionally pressured to comply with what is acceptable for them in their peer group (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*), so that the mentioning of academic difficulties and low self-efficacy beliefs becomes even less likely. However, interviews appear to be a good way to study under which circumstances students seem to consider a low self-efficacy belief or academic difficulty acceptable, permitting us deep insights into the mechanisms of constructing life-course narratives.

6.2.5. *Professional profiles and the labour market*

Though we have seen above that the participants showed a certain tendency to devalue job opportunities as a decisive criterion for the study choice in the focus groups (see *Intersections of social class and gender*), they never disappeared completely from the interview narratives either. Rather than factual vacancies and chances to achieve a position, we can understand references to job opportunities as social representations about fields that are expected to offer opportunities and fields that are not expected to do so. Such representations appear in public discourse and previous research has shown how the public discourse claiming a need for more engineers, led to higher enrolment figures in related study programmes in Chile (Dávila et al., 2008, p. 282). Though only one of the participants in this study claimed to have chosen her degree because of the job opportunities (N.), references to job opportunities in their own and other fields appeared repeatedly in the participants' accounts, as we will see in the following. Another finding that appeared repeatedly in the course of the follow-up was a certain amplification of the professional profiles the participants mentioned regarding their degree courses. Though previous research has shown that "a more extensive and detailed knowledge about occupations" is developed as children grow older (Archer et al., 2014, p. 68), the participants in this study were already older when the follow-up began and though several revised the professional profiles related to the degree they were studying, they maintained limited representations of the professional profiles of other degrees, indicating that these were not a question of age or maturity but rather an expression of 'common-sense beliefs' about professional profiles.

As the professional profile appeared repeatedly among the mentioned reasons to choose a degree course or not, limited or false assumptions about the professional possibilities may be highly decisive for the study choice at the end of High School and also explain attrition in the first years in university. Here it is especially interesting to observe the lack of school support through careers education, as "high-quality careers education and related resources (e.g. high-quality work experience) might be particularly beneficial for those who do not otherwise enjoy privileged access to dominant forms of cultural and social capital (which enables middle-class families to 'play' and succeed in the educational 'game'" (Archer et al., 2014, p. 76).

Though career education in school was not a topic in this thesis, we can observe that only few participants mentioned their schools regarding the formation of their occupational aspirations and not always in a positive sense: Willy mentioned a visit by the UAB informing about degree courses that helped him to choose political sciences – but not the UAB. Maduixa told me, off the record after her focus group, that her tutor had worked occupational aspirations in class by asking every pupil to say what they wanted to become. When she had answered that she wanted to be a director and producer, the teacher had laughed at her. That Maduixa pursued this idea anyway in the course of the follow-up, may be explainable with role models in her family (see *Family affairs*) and her upper-class background, making her less susceptible to school influences (see *High School*). In this sense, the problem of a lack of career education in schools may be applicable to the Catalan context too, though I would also like to caution that the British authors' approach of compensatory education included ideas of informing families about labour-market developments and new demands, indicating that they were not only interested in facilitating "that all young people can find routes to achieve interesting and fulfilling, well-paid jobs" (Archer et al., 2014, p. 77;78), but also to provide the labour market effectively, in the sense of "effective skills policies". Such approaches have to be seen critical, as labour-market developments are highly unpredictable (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999) and job quality does not only depend on being in employment rather than unemployed, but also on offering "a decent wage, job security and good working conditions" (International Labour Organization, 2017, p. 2), let alone personal fulfilment. In this section, we will see several examples that display the rather limited usefulness of labour-market predictions. Providing such information – no matter how outdated or little durable – may likely influence working-class families more than their middle- and upper-class peers, favouring the reproduction of social inequality, in spite of the obverse intention.

Professional profiles and specialisations

Good examples of the observed amplification of professional profiles were Skone and Nadia, as both studied degrees related to veterinary medicine and only mentioned the possibility to become a vet as a professional outcome in their first-year interview. This was especially noteworthy in Skone's case, as he studied the Degree Animal Health and Science (CSA, for its acronym in Catalan) and only planned to enrol in veterinary medicine after completing this degree thanks to an agreement between the UdL and the UAB (see *Sudden changes of the rules: Veterinary Medicine and the UdL*). If his wish was to become a vet, it would have made more sense to study veterinary medicine right away rather than risking that he might not achieve one of the 30 placements reserved for CSA-graduates from the UdL in the UAB. Though it is very likely that he had not been able to aspire to enter veterinary medicine with his PAU score as he even had to wait for the second assignments to enter CSA, Skone did not mention this difficulty in his decision, representing that he wanted to stay in Lleida and even ascribing his low score in the PAU to his relaxation and lack of effort once he had decided for CSA and saw that it had not required a high *numerus clausus* in the previous year. So rather than considering his score a cause for his choice, he explained his low score with his choice for a degree that did not require a better result – at least in the previous year. That he did not anticipate a possible change in the *numerus clausus* corroborates again the impression that many participants had

difficulties to understand these concepts (see *Information preferences and silence*), impeding more strategic moves.

In Int2, Skone sold his study choice much better, arguing that he would have more possibilities on the labour market and be more attractive for a possible employer than a graduate from the UAB, thanks to possessing two degree certificates instead of only one. He kept this argumentation up in posterior interviews, leaving the impression that once he had found a way to justify and rationalise his study choice, it became a basic element of his narrative. However, he changed his study-choice narrative yet another time in Int5 in order to justify a change in itinerary. As he came to envision a complete different professional future at the end of the follow-up, deciding to become a trader and not continuing the studies in veterinary medicine after graduation, he came to consider his study choice as an example of the people who just choose any degree, without really knowing what to do. Though he still valued his studies as a necessary step in his itinerary as he might have never discovered the stock market for himself if it had not been for studying this degree (see *Change and Continuity*), all the different job opportunities that he had described before passed from being highly attractive to not his cup of tea. The very fact that he kept changing professional profiles and attempted repeatedly to combine several in the course of the follow-up might have been an indicator in this line, as he did not seem too decided what to do.

While the professional profiles that appeared in his first interviews did all relate to vet and University, two quite obvious professional profiles for a graduate in veterinary medicine, other alternatives appeared in Int3. In concrete, Skone spoke of quality assurance for fodder, arguing that it was possible to earn more money with this than as a vet. He also mentioned an interest in research on the reduction of greenhouse gases through fodder, arguing that resources were assigned to such research lines given the overall preoccupation for the greenhouse effect and the climate change. Though this orientation towards money was in line with his idea to become rich through the stock market in Int5, none of these professional profiles appealed to him any longer and he decided against completing veterinary medicine after graduating from CSA (see *Change and Continuity*), arguing, moreover, that it would be difficult to find work with CSA only, as the idea to pay a consultant did not appeal to farmers and less if the age difference was significant.

Skone: no no, but the thing is, veterinary medicine, that is to say, veterinary medicine is not only the person that takes ((1)) an animal, a kitten and heals it. There are many people in my career, who are vets, aren't they? and are working in nutrition, in the markets, in food purchasing eh?

Interviewer: controls

Skone: nono, yes, but of the animal forage [Interviewer: ah] It's a very competitive market, then and with very little room for manoeuvre, then, in reality there are many veterinarians who are not that (...) typical it's not the animal's doctor (.) that is to say they are doing something else in reality

Interviewer: they did the degree but do something else

Skone: In fact, I can do it, I can graduate from this degree and get work as a nutritionist on a farm, or quality controls of meat in a slaughterhouse. These are things that the veterinarian can do as well.

Interviewer: and you, with your degree, you can do this already?

Skone: yes (Int3 Skone, l.489-502)

Interviewer: Because, have you tried to find work in your field? From this? Has it happened to you that people did not recognize it or something?

Skone: No, because... let's see, the following happens: right now everything I find in this area is of a kind of work that I don't like and that has nothing to do with my field. I could work as a commercial now or something like this, like selling pharmaceutical products you know? So that doesn't interest me, then, specifically in my field, I have not found anything. Probably because most people still don't know exactly what it is, you have to go explain it: hey, look ... (...) Do you know what is our problem? We have studied a degree, which consists in advising people, and of course, now, with twenty-three that I'm now, I don't think there are many people who are willing that I come to their farm and tell them "look, if you change this and do this like that..." and you know? a bit of that mentality is missing, a little more progress, because right now a person who is fifty years old, if I told him how he could improve things, he would not like it very much.

Interviewer: Because of the age difference? For saying this kid...

Skone: ... what will he tell me, someone who's been doing this for forty years... (Int5 Skone, l.242-258)

Similarly, Nadia said in Int1 that she had always wanted to be a vet and taken the final decision for this degree at the end of her secondary schooling, working hard throughout all High School to achieve the necessary score to live this dream. Here she highlighted her effort and even believed to have changed as a person, arguing that she became much more responsible with her work than before. This change in attitude did also bring about a change in her group of friends, indicating that it had far-reaching consequences for her life. In this sense, some of the "developmental changes to self" HE students face according to Maunder et al. (2012, p. 148), in concrete "changes in the way they managed their studies and the personal responsibility they took over their learning" may take place, in some cases, already before university entrance, while others, for example "taking responsibility for their own well-being (such as cooking for themselves)" and "organising their schedule, identifying learning needs and seeking help from tutors" may take place much later, as we have observed a persisting difficulty to approach lecturers (see *Lecturers*) and many students keep living with their parents in Spain (Jurado Guerrero, 2001; Moreno, 2017).

In Int1, Nadia was very happy to have entered into veterinary medicine and described the process of discovering her PAU score and the *numerus clausus* as highly emotional. Moreover, she distinguished herself from other students who considered studying another degree after graduating, highlighting that she wanted to work as a vet as soon as possible. She mentioned that she had made the pre-registration in biology and environmental biology in case she did not enter veterinary medicine, but highlighted that she had done so half-heartedly, as her one desire was to become a vet. Here it is interesting that she did not consider following Skone's path and studying CSA to enter veterinary medicine after graduation, as this might have been a better plan B than environmental biology. However, just as Skone, Nadia expanded her professional profile importantly in the course of the follow-up and mentioned alternatives like rural agent¹²⁸ (*agente rural*) that are also related to environmental biology. Here it is hence possible that Nadia exaggerated the constitutional importance, becoming a vet had in Int1 for her identity and that she could have been similarly happy with another degree. In Int5, she reduced her professional profile, however, again to the field of veterinary medicine in the

¹²⁸ For more information see: <http://agentsrurals.info/que-es-un-agent-rural/> [last access: 12.06.2018].

narrow sense, arguing that she wanted to study the specialization in felines after graduation and as this specialization was not offered in Spain she considered moving abroad to do so (see *Mobility*). Rather than speaking of becoming a "vet" or a "researcher", Nadia focused here on the field of specialization – a good possibility to indirectly include different professional profiles into one, while at the same time delimiting the field of interest.

Nadia: the other day I spoke with my father and I think that when I finish the degree I'll present for the *oposicions*¹²⁹ to rural agent, because I like it a lot, but as there hasn't been any call yet, I believe that it's going to take long

Interviewer: but is the degree needed? [Nadia: no] because, what do you do as a rural agent?

Nadia: That depends, or like rangers or for injured fauna, normally related to the environment (Int1 Nadia, l.232-239)

Regarding the specialization, it has to be said that Nadia mentioned from her first-year interview on an interest in specialising in wild animals, mentioning on occasion exotic animals, and argued in Int1 and 2 that she did not want to specialise in domestic animals, as this meant mainly treating cats and dogs and was always the same. Similarly, Skone devalued working in a clinic for pets, reducing it to being a pet groomer. In Int3 and 4 Nadia only mentioned wildlife and Int4 she mentioned an internship in a wildlife recovery centre. When I asked in Int4 for her interest in exotic animals and if it was included in wildlife Nadia confirmed this, but when I supposed that the exotic animals in Catalonia would rather be domestic, she also confirmed this, referring to parrots, snakes and turtles. Though wild cats could already appear here as the point of connection as they are both wild and exotic, she did not specify an interest in them and did not mention feline medicine as a field of specialization until her fifth-year interview. In Int5, she mentioned to doubt between felines and wild animals, leaving clear that these are separate specializations and that her interest in wild animals was not reducible to wild felines only. As the specialisation in felines should furthermore include domestic cats, her depreciative comments on the work in clinics from her first interviews come to mind. In Int5 she seemed to have overcome this perspective as she had also organised an internship in a veterinary clinic in Lleida for the next summer. This certain change, substituting an interest in exotic animals with felines but maintaining wildlife, may be a reflection of the specializations offered at a University in the UK, as she mentioned to have seen these programmes there and to be considering moving there with her boyfriend. As we will see further below (see *Mobility*), the explanation behind her slight change in interests and her new readiness to move abroad might have been her boyfriend.

Here it is furthermore interesting to consider how Nadia narrated cases of attrition in her degree. When mentioning a friend who quit the degree in Int1, Nadia highlighted that this was a rather rare case as everybody who enrolled for it was crazy about animals, and due to the high *numerus clausus*, nobody entered as a second choice. Though she had started to

¹²⁹ "Oposicions" are public service entrance tests. The level of difficulty, requirements and recognised merits depend on the concrete field and the labour category (see also footnote 98). University graduates may apply for the highest level (A). For more information and some insights into the different levels of difficulty in different fields see for example (Sánchez Silva, 2017): https://elpais.com/economia/2017/05/05/actualidad/1494005201_409228.html [last access: 14.08.2018].

experience first academic difficulties, she did not consider the possibility that someone might abandon the degree because of this and in later interviews we see that she had conceived the plan to change the university and continue the degree in the Universidad de Zaragoza should she consume the maximal number of examination dates in the UAB (see *Academic success*). Attrition due to academic difficulty did, hence, not seem to appear in her “opportunity structure” (Reay, 2004), as she seemed to believe that with the necessary effort everything was achievable. This focus on effort did also appear in her recommendations for potential students in Int5, as she highlighted that they would have to work very hard and forget about their social lives, but did not mention any special intellectual abilities as necessary. When another friend came to abandon the degree in her third year, Nadia explained this with psychological difficulties to stand a subject that required the students to visit slaughterhouses – another professional profile of vets Skone and Nadia had not considered in Int1 and did not come to embrace as their paths either.

While we can easily imagine that Nadia would have suffered an immense shock if she had not entered into veterinary medicine – see Xenia’s depression when not entering into medicine (see *Happiness*) – she embraced quite different professional opportunities as interesting in the course of the follow-up, indicating that even students who have constructed their identity over years based on a future profession, may come to revise the profession as they encounter new professional profiles they had not known before. Not entering into an aspired degree may then entail the risk to never discover and accept alternatives as equally interesting and valid. However, this did not seem to happen to Xenia, who rather came to devalue her original aspiration, arguing in Int5 that physicians were in the end subworker of scientists as the latter discover how diseases are caused and may be cured, while the first only apply their findings in the practice. As Xenia studied biotechnology at this point, she elevated her own professional profile above her original idea, but continued to limit the professional opportunities of medical students to becoming physicians, rather than assuming that they could also dedicate themselves to research. This may indicate that people tend to embrace the job opportunities their studies offer to them, but simplify the professional outcomes other degrees offer.

Already in Int3, Xenia had argued, moreover, that it must have been her destiny not to enter medicine as she would have never chosen biotechnology otherwise and now that she was studying it, she saw that it was to her liking. However, she also said that she was just starting to see that it was to her liking as the first year had been too general to be sure. This impression of the first year did also appear in other participants’ argumentations, indicating that it might be rather common that students still “test” their study choice in the first year in order to see if the degree is really their thing. If they do not really study degree-related subjects yet at this point but are already told by lecturers that the job opportunities in the field are rather bad, this might additionally favour attrition – especially if the students chose the degree considering labour market opportunities in the first place (see *Job opportunities*).

Xenia: I wanted to do medicine, the first year is in all the degrees the same, the basics, (...) now in the second year I start to like it more, I do not regret it [the degree choice], destiny, I would never have gone to biotech, now I like it, I like it a lot. (Int3 Xenia, 1.7-9)

Xenia: well in the second year of high school I didn't look at the job profiles and opportunities, that's the problem, well, I've chosen the second best that there was after

medicine. Now I wouldn't do medicine for anything in the world [Interviewer: oh no?] no, let's see, if the time turned back now and they'd tell me "do medicine we accept you" no. Well, I don't know, no... (...) what has changed is (2) I've seen the scientific world, they taught us how it works, didn't they? And the doctors are like the last ones in the queue, it's true, they have more money but they're like the fools, you tell them "look you make them drink this and their belly pain goes away", the doctor says "I'll make them drink this" and [laughs] I don't know as if... [Interviewer: you want to be the person who says "you make them drink that"] yes yes they've lost like prestige in my eyes, the doctors

Interviewer: because they are not the ones doing the research

Xenia: yes, because they don't know what's going on. (Int5 Xenia, I.265-277)

However, Xenia did also change her itinerary in her Int5, arguing that she was no longer interested in natural sciences and planning to study a master in economics, as profiles combining a scientific degree with economic knowledge were currently in demand on the labour market. This was also the interview where her interest in informatics appeared (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*).

Apart from simplifications, common-sense beliefs about the professional profiles related to a degree may also be simply wrong and, hence, lead students to choose or discard a degree out of the wrong reasons. Koala said in Int4 that he and his fellow students were surprised to discover the professional profiles their engineering degree pretended to prepare for, indicating that this had little to do with the common-sense suppositions that had led him to choose the degree. In concrete, he said that he had imagined that an engineer would work his whole life in his field of specialization, but that in reality, an engineer may work in many different fields, including those of other engineering degrees, design, arithmetic, human resource management and logistics. As he related these additional aspects of the work profile of an engineer with high exigencies towards the person, we can also read the comments in the line of a closure of the access to his degree (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*), though Koala himself claimed that this was not his intention.

Koala: One thing that has to be improved in the degree is to explain from, from the beginning, from the first course on, what this specialty is doing, because we started the first year and they said "yes, you will be electronic engineers and you will know a lot about electronics and so on" but nobody tells you what an electronic engineer does or what an engineer does in general, because for example the vast majority of the jobs, well the vast majority is also a lie but well, there is a large part of the things that an engineer does, which is to devote himself to projects, because with electronics there are projects, with mechanics there are projects and everywhere, cold electrical installations of whatever. Of course, all this is not explained to anyone in the first year, all this has been explained in the fourth year, I mean, in this things could be improved and this I could also recommend someone who is thinking about doing this degree, that they should inform themselves very well [Interviewer: of what they can do [with it]] of what they can arrive to do with this degree because, it's not for everybody, I personally, and it's not to close the doors for anybody of course, but I think that this degree is not for everyone, because you have to have a head prepared to devote yourself to think in this way and above all you have to be very motivated to study this, because you obviously have to do the work well, well that's [true] everywhere but here even more

Interviewer: And was there someone who was startled when they explained for what it serves at the end?

Koala: I was the first, I was the first, because I maybe I imagined engineering to be different, I maybe I imagined engineering as that you studied some knowledge and studied a lot about electronics and electronic circuits and mathematics and then, for the rest of your life, you did things with this. I was the first to be surprised in the sense, of course, I didn't think that an engineer's work could go and could cover so many fields at the same time, because you can dedicate yourself to doing mathematics all your life or electronic circuits all your life, but you can also do many other things as an engineer. (Int4 Koala, I.316-336)

As an amplification of the labour opportunities may increase the attraction of a degree, a lack of knowledge about the vast fan of possibilities offered in engineering degrees could counteract the trend to stagnation of student numbers in engineering degrees (see *Demographics and University participation*). However, highlighting the complexity of the professional profile as Koala did, may also discourage potential students further.

In the end, any graduate may redirect his or her itinerary slightly and work – temporarily or not – in a field another degree would have prepared better for. Rather than informing students about these professional crossovers, it would be important to highlight that university studies open up a broad fan of possibilities, as students acquire the competences to work in their concrete field of study and several more or less related fields, so that one degree allows for very different professional itineraries. If potential students were aware of the vast range of professional profiles they might adopt and that masters may expand these possibilities even further, they might disburden their study choice additionally from the labour market and false abstractions from singular itineraries – like in the case of the social worker who travelled the world in Irina's story (see *What I was born for - or not*) – could be avoided. However, a professional itinerary may lie at the margin of the professional prospects of many degrees but be the centre of few, so that knowing before entering university which degree offers to study the favoured itinerary at its centre could also improve the students' well-being in university and their chances to achieve this itinerary in the end, avoiding them to dedicate additional years and money to “correct” their itinerary into this direction, as Xenia planned through a master.

The possibilities to “correct” a chosen itinerary are, moreover, limited and decisions are not completely revisable (Casal et al., 2006b), as a master is not the same as a degree and both require important investments in time and money many people are unable to make once, left alone twice. This is in line with the changing time perception and increasing time pressure we have mentioned above (see *What I was born for - or not*). If students feel to be lacking time, this may 'push' them to determine their right study choice quickly, explaining why they do not take gap years (see *Gap years and Pro-forma Enrolments*) or are especially likely to abandon a degree in their first year, rather than risking to waste more time with it. As especially students from the lower social classes showed a tendency to seek developmental tasks, e.g. economic autonomy but also family creation, earlier (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*), such ideas may be more common or decisive in their *milieus*, while the participants from other social classes may cope with the pressure differently.

In this sense, High Schools should attempt to construct, on the one hand, an image of HE studies as preparing students for a wide range of professional itineraries, highlighting the possibilities for adaptations in the course of the career; and, on the other hand, improve the information available to students regarding the offer of degree courses and the professional

profiles that appear in the centre of each, as this could help them to take an informed study choice, rather than basing their decision on (false) common-sense beliefs or the – exceptional – itineraries of professionals with this degree certificate. Once in HE, lecturers and other staff could further highlight the broader fan of opportunities the degree offers in order to encourage and motivate students further. However, as we will see in the next section, several participants mentioned especially in their first-year interviews a contrary tendency, highlighting that their lecturers had told them about a lack of job opportunities in their field (Xenia, Nic).

Job opportunities

Regarding labour market prospects, I would like to dedicate some space to the participants' contradictory ideas, as these show very clearly that a labour-market orientation is little feasible, as the labour market itself is difficult to grab in its current state, let alone predicting its future development (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999). Nevertheless, most people have an idea of the labour market in general and in special fields and this influences their educational decisions. Rahona (2009) showed for example that enrolment rates in HE tend to increase in times of high youth unemployment, while they drop in contexts of generally high unemployment - according to the author, possibly as a result of a more pessimistic attitude and budget constraints.

Examples of rather different evaluations of labour-market opportunities appeared for example regarding veterinary medicine. While Skone was convinced that vet was an optimal professional profile, quoting in Int3 the occupancy rate as with 95% the highest in Spain, Nadia commented on the increasing labour precariousness in the field of veterinary medicine, mentioning an article she recently read. When I checked the occupancy rate, I found that it had been in 2012 at 90% (INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística), 2013) – so a bit lower than Skone said, though he might have mixed up occupancy rate and activity rate – and decreased until 2014 to 80% (INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística), 2015). According to a press note published in 2017¹³⁰, the unemployment rate among young graduates in veterinary medicine was of 95%¹³¹. As the author referred to data from the *Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal* (SEPE - State-run public service of employment, translated by TS), I consulted the reports published by the SEPE but was not able to identify where this 95% came from¹³². Though I cannot know which press note Nadia had referred to, I found several publications highlighting the high labour precariousness and low salaries in the field¹³³. So, in the end, both Skone and Nadia had a point with their arguments, as veterinary medicine continued to be the sector with the highest occupancy rate in Spain in 2014, nevertheless, the working conditions seem to have worsened in a rather short period of time significantly. This shows that depending on the

¹³⁰ <https://www.redaccionmedica.com/secciones/otras-profesiones/los-veterinarios-jovenes-aumentan-un-95-su-tasa-de-paro-en-un-ano-9061> [last access: 14.06.2018].

¹³¹ However, it has to be said that this press note showed little rigour, saying in its title that the unemployment rate had increased by 95% and in the text that it had achieved the 95%, which is by no means the same. Moreover, it did not specify the considered age group.

¹³² The reports from April 2017 and all other months are available online at: <http://www.sepe.es/indiceTitulaciones/buscar.do?idioma=es&tipo=titulados> [last access: 14.06.2018].

¹³³ See for example: https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/2017-02-12/veterinarios-precarios-sueldos-facultades_1329556/ [last access: 14.06.2018];

indicator very different ideas may be conceived about a degree and public discourse, as expressed in press notes that highlight the decay in a field, may provoke young people to discard degree courses believing that they offered no job opportunities at all (see a similar effect regarding the Erasmus aids *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*). Here I would also like to add a comment regarding Nadia's mentioning in Int3 of rural agent (*agente rural*) as another job opportunity that could be to her liking. Though the profile as an official would probably protect from the new precariousness in the field of veterinary medicine, it has to be said that according to the *Associació Professional d'Agents Rurals de Catalunya* no call for new placements has been published in the last 9 years¹³⁴. Once again, the used indicator determines here the perception, as this profession may be highly attractive regarding economic stability and working conditions, but rather little interesting when the chances of access are considered.

Other examples of negative labour-market prospects for certain degrees were mentioned regarding nutrition, journalism and medicine. While Dharma¹³⁵ said in FG12 that she had discarded the degree in nutrition after hearing that a graduate in it did not find work, Géminis argued that though labour-market opportunities should not be overrated, you must not choose a completely opportunity-less degree either, quoting journalism as an example in this sense. Floreta mentioned a recent graduate in medicine who could not find work and derived from this a worry to find work in her field, showing, moreover, as well a strategy to cope with this fear by highlighting her activity and mobility, creating indirectly a contrast to the negative image of young NEET (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*).

Darhma: well I, they told me, that a girl finished the degree in nutrition and that girl and that she didn't find work and so, and she had to start an engineering degree, and I had wanted, I had also been interested in this and so, one less (laughs) (FG12, l.364-366)

Géminis: I believe, for example the degree I want to do, it's not like (...) journalism, for example, where they already know that (...) that it's going down. (FG12, l.404-406)

Floreta: let me see, what worries me is for example that if I'm studying a degree, that I will have work afterwards. Just yesterday, I met a girl who has done medicine, studied 6 years and she has no job, she's working as a stewardess

Interviewer: with medicine?

Floreta: Yes, and she is working as a stewardess. It doesn't scare me, but I say fuck, (...) it worries me a bit, but, I don't know, if not [a job] I'll continue studying or I'll make a trip or I'll do something, because if you stop and stand still, it's when you have more bad luck, if you're active it's better, you have more opportunities (Int2 Floreta, 192-199)

Skone claimed, in his third-year interview, that the job opportunities for engineers were rather bad in Spain compared to other European countries, while we have already seen above that Xenia was convinced that engineering degrees offer better labour market outcomes (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*) and Darhma's comment in the quote we have just seen may also point into this direction. Moreover, Skone argued that a teacher would not move to another country, mentioning France as an example - exactly the country to which Margarita wanted to move after graduation, having considered to study the master for secondary teaching to be

¹³⁴ See the counter at the bottom of their website: <http://agentsrurals.info/> [last access: 14.06.2018].

¹³⁵ Darhma and Géminis were focus group participants who did not react to my invitation to participate in the interview follow-up.

able to move there with a scholarship for teachers. Here it is, moreover, interesting to see that the participants presented their impressions of job opportunities with an implicit stability and only Andrés commented on a change in job opportunities in his field, arguing that they had increased (see *Labour-market perceptions*). In this sense, students may tend to overestimate single remarks on job opportunities in a field as a durable situation - a simplification that may help them cope with the impossibility to take an informed study choice, but may also lead them to choose a degree half-heartedly or refrain from HE completely, if they think that the degree they aspired would not offer them work anyway.

Skone: what I say is, that is to say, a teacher is not going to, to France to be a teacher, no, well, normally, I don't think so. [But] an engineer, for example, yes it's true that in northern Europe he has more work, better paid and much more valued. (Int3, Skone, l.1247-1250).

Margarita: my plan was to study the master in secondary education this year and then with this master you can apply for scholarships for teachers, I wanted to do this, to go to France (...) I mean well it doesn't matter, the master was just a way to get to France (...) because if I had the master, they'd given me a scholarship to work as a teacher in a High School and then I would have used this to study a master in parallel, taking it easy but this [idea] to get the scholarship and work as a teacher there, well, it's not possible any longer as I don't have the master, but well, I said well, I want to leave anyway and I'll go there and make my way¹³⁶ (Int5 Margarita, l.27-38)

Regarding biotechnology it is noteworthy that Xenia said in Int3 – at the beginning of her second year in biotechnology – that the lecturers had told them that there were no job opportunities in their field and that they would have to search for them abroad, whereat Dori had argued in FG1 that she was decided to study biotechnology because she had seen a press note highlighting job opportunities in this field. As Dori did not continue to participate in the study we cannot know if she entered the degree in the end, but if she had achieved to enter just to be told in her first year that her reason to choose biotechnology had been a misinformation – at least according to some of the lecturers – this could have likely provoked her to drop-out.

While N. had been rather positive regarding the job opportunities in the field of Business Management in Int1, considering that her sister was working in this field, she reflected on the increased precarization that had led her sister to move abroad in Int3. Here she mentioned furthermore graduated cousins, arguing that her sister was better off in Germany than they in Spain, without taking into account their different degree courses. In Int4, she mentioned the cousins again, this time specifying that one had worked in the construction sector and one had studied chemical engineering. In Int5, N. compared her degree with those of friends and acquaintances, mentioning in concrete the precarious labour situation of her boyfriend who had studied biology and of a friend who studied audio-visual communication. Considering all the difficulties on the labour market in other fields, she argued that Business Management did still offer more labour opportunities than other degrees, though nothing was guaranteed either ever since the economic crisis. Asked for degrees with fewer possibilities, she mentioned audio-visual communication and history. While we will take a closer look at N.'s orientation towards family members further below (see *Family affairs*), her reference to friends and family members here – rather than to statistics (Skone) or press articles (Nadia) – can be

¹³⁶ The Catalan original said: "*m'espavilaré*"

read, in line with Woodman (2011, p. 126), as a way to develop “multiple practical, not necessarily conscious, strategies shaped in interaction with significant others” to cope with the “impact of the uncertainty”, “a general background anxiety” and “a feeling of security at risk”. Rather than a joined shaping, N. did hereby “use” her significant others to justify her degree course choice, so that shaping has to be understood rather broadly here.

While the result of her degree-course comparison served N. to justify her decision to study a degree that offered more economic stability than a career as an artist (see also *Family affairs*), it contradicted an idea she expressed in her focus group and in Int3, where she said that considering the amount of hours one spent at work, it was important to work as something to your liking. Peter argued in Int5 in a similar line, saying that it was better to study something you really want to work in, even if it then takes you several years to find a job, than to study something you do not want to work in and find a job right after graduation and work in it for the rest of your life. This argumentation is rather optimistic, as Peter expected on the one hand the existence of degree courses that allow for a direct and smooth labour market entrance and fix positioning, and, on the other, that one comes to find work in any field sooner or later. However, Peter seemed to refer here basically to his degree in teacher training and relate to his older sister's experience, as she started to work as a teacher a couple of years after graduation. It is eye-catching that teacher training appears almost as a bad option regarding the criterion of a smooth and direct labour market entrance, as if Peter was defending his study choice here against someone claiming that he should have better studied something else that allowed him to work right after graduation. Though we cannot know how the labour market transitions went in the end for the majority of the participants (see *Labour-market entrance*), assuming that you will start to work in your profession after two years does not actually seem too bad and, in spite of all cutbacks and precarization, especially the public sector continues to offer rather good working conditions and economic stability compared to other sectors. Here it is, therefore, as well eye-catching that while Peter justified his choice ascribing more value to vocation than to a smooth labour market entrance, though we could actually expect his degree to lead to a rather secure entrance and certain economic stability, N. defended a degree as offering economic stability, we might actually expect to be highly affected by precarization. In a way, it seems that the participants had had their doubts or were directly confronted by others with the possibility to have taken a wrong choice and came to share their defensive strategies in the interviews. If study choices are that continuously contested, this may explain the significant changes in their constructions further. However, Peter was also aware that teacher training offered him a smoother labour market entrance and more job opportunities than the sports sector and argued, as well in Int5, that he had chosen teacher training as a way to work in this field, considering that working with children was a good way to work with sports, as there were few job opportunities otherwise. With this he rationalised teacher training as an ideal solution as it combined a rather smooth, though not perfect, labour market entrance with his personal interests. However, it is noteworthy that he valued sports as more important than children at this point, as this together with a reference to the economic stability offered by the public sector might not sound too well in a job interview for a position as a teacher; in this sense, the stability in his study choice construction came with a cost to not improve his way of selling it (see *Interview characteristics*).

The alternative N. had continuously on her mind was her passion for dance. Many participants referred to the field of arts as not offering stable labour market opportunities and while N. spent most of her interviews wondering how she could link a stable professional career with her passion for dance, others only mentioned casually and without giving it much importance that they had discarded a career in an artistic field, knowing that only the best in the field were able to make a living of it (Floreta) or only considered their artistic activities a hobby, though they had already earned some money selling drawings (Nic). Similarly, a participant in an Australian interview project had discarded the music sector, because her mother considered it a "risky career direction", while another meant to become an actor in spite of quoting a 98% unemployment rate, believing that she was good enough to be among the successful 2%, a conviction even two rejections by performing arts courses did not erode (Woodman, 2011, p. 117). In an Italian study, several students who had chosen secondary schools specialised in arts, considered their future possibilities to work in this field as rather low or even zero and some discarded studying arts further in university as a waste of time and money (Uboldi, 2017). In this sense, a certain consensus seems to exist among young people around the world that arts is a very risky field only the best may make a living off.

As "arts" appeared among the top three aspirations of 10-12 year olds in a British survey (Archer et al., 2014), it is possible that many young people feel attracted to artistic careers at some point but discard these options later on, as little realistic and highly unstable. Steiner (2016) argues that though artists work more hours, earn less and face greater risks of unemployment, they are also more satisfied with their work, so this might explain why some people still pursue artistic careers. This dilemma seems to be the fulcrum of N.'s difficulties, though her low PAU score did also represent an important limitation (see *Family affairs*).

That N. did not dare to embrace a career in arts, may also be related to her *habitus*, as artistic professions are often the loopholes for young people from upper class families who have a family business to fall back on in case of necessity and "exclusive and elitist characters persist" (Uboldi, 2017, p. 5). Working-class young people, on the other hand, may perceive arts as a way out of hardship, as a "discovery" and promotion could offer much better alternatives. Moreover, arts may be for them a way to "reconcile a potentially dual and divided habitus", offering "a way of dreaming of a future that is different from the one that has been prescribed, without having to convert one's own class identity to the values of a bourgeois world" (Uboldi, 2017, p. 8). Middle-class youths have alternatives to pursue but not as perfect back-up plans as upper-class families in case of failure, so they are, in this sense, the only players who have something to lose. Moreover, the distinction from working-class families and continuous effort to become a part of the upper class have been described as characteristics of middle class habitus, so that economic hardship or a lack of economic stability are likely especially frightening for people with this habitus and may explain why as well the middle classes are likely to discard artistic itineraries, leaving this field to the upper-classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Uboldi, 2017). In this sense, N.'s dilemma could also be understood as a being stuck between a middle- and an upper-class habitus, as she is neither able to choose arts as her path, nor to discard it completely. However, it is also possible that N. ascribed so much importance to her passion for dance in her interviews, in order to justify her academic difficulty in a different field, as she did not mention dance in her focus group and only referred

to it as an extra-curricular activity among others in her first interview. Here it is, hence, once again important to highlight the difference between study choices and study-choice narratives.

Considering both the impossibility to predict labour market developments and the significant influence of labour market perceptions on educational choices, we can agree with other scholars who suggest to treat labour market prospects in the school curricula (Archer et al., 2014; Santana Vega, Feliciano Garcia, et al., 2010). However, rather than transmitting current trends, the focus should be laid on showing the ever-changing character of the labour market, enabling students to analyse current trends critically before taking a decision. Especially in Catalonia, with its characteristically long youth transitions (see *The precarious generation in Catalonia*), it is furthermore likely that one may find a recent graduate in any field who experiences unemployment or works in a different field. Following this argument, any degree may be discarded, turning the study choice into a lottery as it depends on pure chance if the students know somebody who studied a certain degree and is now unemployed or not.

Summing *pro-forma* enrolments (see *Gap years and Pro-forma Enrolments*) and the little encouraging encounters with lecturers (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*), who may easily discourage their students with random comments about their labour market prospects leading them to believe that there were literally no jobs in their fields (see *Labour-market perceptions*), in particular in the first year in University, high attrition rates may be rather normal for the Spanish HE system and the more interesting question could be why some students do not abandon in spite of all this.

Mission impossible: The informed study-choice

The high importance of professional outcomes in the participants' narratives, though as a secondary criterion after interests and abilities, may be a tribute to the social representation that choices have to be informed in order to be accurate; an idea that is also present in study-choice research, assuming that informed choices avoid job-mismatch, dissatisfaction and repeated career changes (Mberia & Midigo, 2018). The participants' narratives give us an idea which aspects they attempt to consider in their study choice: their interests and abilities, labour market prospects and the 'achievability' of the degree, in the sense of entrance limitations and the perceived difficulty, in relation to the self-efficacy belief in the field.

Some of the participants displayed difficulties to determine their interests and abilities, though previous research in the UK showed that almost all 10- to 12-year olds were able to state a clear occupational aspiration (Archer et al., 2014). Though already in childhood young people show "complex gendered, classed and racialised identities and inequalities, which render particular jobs as more possible and desirable than others" (Archer et al., 2014, p. 68), occupational gender segregation is even higher in adulthood than in this early occupational preferences, whereat especially girls are less likely to realise their childhood preferences (Alm, 2015). Moreover, even in childhood young people expressed insecurities regarding their possibilities to achieve their aspirations, some directly referring to the economic crisis, and appeared significantly more insecure – the authors employ the term "realistic" (Archer et al., 2014, p. 66) – than their predecessors in previous studies. This may hint at a tendency to form an interest-based occupational aspiration in childhood that is still rather disconnected from other aspects and repeatedly revised over the years. Considering that children are likely to consider their labour market entrance as lying in the distant future, they may furthermore

express daydreams in this regard (Leccardi, 1999b), experimenting with different ideas while almost everything still appears possible. Though interests are already influenced by social divisions, their importance of the latter may grow, as young people come to consider further aspects and eliminate options they perceive as unachievable or too risky, in the sense of low labour market prospects.

The discarding of alternatives that appear especially risky, like becoming professional artists or athletes, may explain why only few persons pursue artistic careers or attempt to become professional athletes, though these professions were in the top 3 of occupational aspirations in the British survey with 10- to 12-year-olds (Archer et al., 2014). Similarly, the *numerus clausus* of certain degree courses seemed to limit the study choices of several participants, forcing them to discard options they had previously pursued as unachievable. Additionally, the economic possibilities and place of residence of the family may limit the access to HE or to certain degree courses, if these are only offered in cities with high costs of living. Moreover, low self-efficacy beliefs influence here and as previous research has shown that gender and social class intersect in these perceptions (Torrents, 2017), especially young women from lower social classes may come to discard many options as unachievable for them. As we will see in the next section (see *Flashing up and vanishing alternatives*), migration histories may furthermore turn certain occupations unachievable, e.g. if certain nationalities are excluded from the application.

Though one could say that choices become more 'realistic' through this process of elimination, deciding for a 'better' alternative may be difficult afterwards, so this could explain the increased insecurity some participants expressed in this regard. If there are many options left after the elimination of unachievable or risky options, it may be difficult to pick the 'best' alternative according to interests, abilities and prospects (Edith); And if only few options are left, it may be difficult to identify with these, in order to construct a positive study choice rather than assuming that you took what you could get (N.) (see *Intersections of social class and gender*). Moreover, the participants' narratives indicated a pressure to construct an informed study choice, justifying the taken decision. However, their choices and justifications remained highly ambiguous and vulnerable, as they experienced difficulties to predict their own abilities realistically and tended to base their labour-market perceptions on rumours or single cases they had happened to hear about.

In this work, I argue that informed choices are, in the end, impossible, as young people may neither predict their future interests, nor the labour market development, nor their own abilities and skill development, so that the equation contains too many unknown elements to be solvable. Apart from a limitation, social divisions may then also turn into an asset, in the sense that they allow coping with this impossibility by limiting the study choice to options that appear 'adequate' for someone with their characteristics and background, making the justification of the choice as well easier, at it will be less questioned if it is perceived as adequate. Social inequality is then reproduced through the pressure and expectations projected onto young people to take an informed study choice.

This would explain gender- and class-specific study choices despite the generally high aspirations in childhood and has a direct implication for the educational system, as rather than pushing pupils to consider options they never aspired for, social inequality could be reduced by

encouraging and supporting students to pursue their high aspirations. Showing them how to assess the labour market and the limited usefulness of its current development for their choices may, furthermore, help to disburden their choices. The already mentioned suggestion to offer trial courses for High School students includes the additional advantage that they would allow young people to test different degrees and achieve a more clearer idea of professional profiles, required abilities and their own interests. In particular, highlighting that university degrees do usually offer many possibilities to orient into different directions in the course of the career may additionally disburden the study choice. So, summing up, social inequality could be reduced by enabling young people to form clearer ideas of degree courses - informing their choices - and, in parallel, showing them that an ideal choice is impossible at this point and that they will have possibilities to reorient their choices in the future, should they consider it necessary - disburdening their choices.

6.2.6. *Flashing up and vanishing alternatives*

Apart from the already observed amplification of the fan of labour profiles related to a degree towards the middle of the follow-up (see *Professional profiles and specialisations*), several participants mentioned at some points alternative study choices that flashed-up and vanished again without showing much relation to their current itinerary.

Koala seemed in his first-year interview to have chosen the engineering degree in electronics as the universitarian equivalent to the vocational training he had had in mind in his FG and his parents, friends and teachers had advised him against. However, he argued in the same interview, that he decided first to study an engineering degree, discarding medicine for its lack of relation to technology, and then chose electronics considering the costs and the numerous *clausus*, as he could not aspire to enter aeronautics. While medicine never again appeared as a topic, he mentioned repeatedly an interest in becoming a pilot and though this is yet another formation, it may indicate that his interest in aeronautics was in reality bigger than in electronics. Becoming a pilot might furthermore appear on the list of children's dream jobs, just as fire fighter, a profession he mentioned for the first time in Int5 and actually planned to undergo the public selection process for. As he mentioned in the same interview to be about to achieve the Spanish nationality and to need this nationality to be allowed to apply for the fire fighters¹³⁷, his migration history and nationality did directly limit his professional aspirations here. He was able to "overcome" this limitation by achieving the Spanish nationality, but as this process took 10 years and the public contest to become a fire fighter includes a physical test¹³⁸, he was actually running out of time to present, especially as

¹³⁷ Any position as a public official requires the citizenship of a member state of the European Union or Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, as these also signed special agreements with the EU that were ratified by Spain and that allow for the free movement of workers. See: http://governacio.gencat.cat/ca/pgov_ambits_d_actuacio/pgov_funcio_publica/pgov_acces_a_la_funcio_publica/pgov_sistemes_acces_sel_personal/pgov_acces_ciudadans_ue/ [last access: 02.07.2018]. As Koala's country of citizenship was not on this list, he referred to the Spanish citizenship as a requirement here.

¹³⁸ For a description of the elements of the physical test, see Annex 6.1.2 of a resolution for a public contest for fire fighters, published on the 4th of April 2018:

oposicions (see footnote 129) were not published with regularity since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008. This shows that citizenship may represent an important limitation to young people's professional aspirations - in Spain and beyond, as this requirement is also usual in other countries. As Koala did not mention the profession of a fire fighter until he was about to achieve the Spanish citizenship, it is possible that young people directly focus in their study-choice narratives on "real" possibilities and do not mention professions for which they do not meet a certain requirement anyway. In Koala's case, this may have actually favoured his access to HE, as he might have otherwise chosen to become a fire fighter right away, though HE titles are required to apply for a higher position within the ranks¹³⁹.

ah well, you see, another thing that I'd like regarding the future, I don't know if I ever told you this but I, vocationally, the thing I wanted to do for several years was to be a fire fighter [Interviewer: ah a fire fighter?] fire fighter yes. Now this year they finally published a call for *oposicions* for fire fighters and and and, of course, the bad thing is that I, as a foreigner, I don't have the Spanish nationality so I can't apply for the *oposicions* [Interviewer: ah no?] because the thing is, that is to say, the first requirement is the Spanish citizenship so. Because its civil service (...) this year we're on this, the citizenship, because we've been living here for 10 years (...) and this is a thing that I'd like to at least try once in my life to prepare me for the tests and, and to apply for *oposicions* to see whether... (...) now we have to take the exams for the citizenship [Interviewer: OK] and once they give us the citizenship I could [Interviewer: you could...] take, exactly, and, I don't know, at least try it, because (2) it's something that is quite to my liking and I don't know, we'll see how it'll go but [Interviewer: sure, it would be quite different] yes, it's got little to do one thing with the other, but, why not? (Int5 Koala, l.630-647)

Apart from the rather extreme changes in orientations and a disposition to do something completely else after having completed a degree and a master in one direction, we may notice especially two aspects here: On the one hand, all mentioned professions (engineer, pilot, electrician, fire fighter) are highly masculinised and he is the third participant out of five with a migration history who at least mentioned medicine as an option (Ariel, Xenia). This may indicate that the idea of achieving a high social position in the new country is still related to traditionally prestigious and highly selective professions like medicine, though the students with a migration history seemed to be at the same time especially likely to see their academic performance affected – possibly because of language issues, as they assumed, but probably as well through processes of institutional discrimination (Diefenbach, 2008; Gomolla & Radtke, 2007). Just as in England (Pickard, 2014), non-traditional students are like this, as well in Spain, excluded from the access to highly prestigious degree courses.

A similar children's dream job appeared in Peter's second-year interview. As he had started to earn money playing football in the amateur league, I asked if he had considered becoming a professional football player. He confessed that the idea had been to his liking when he was 14

http://dogc.gencat.cat/ca/pdogc_canals_interns/pdogc_resultats_fitxa/?action=fitxa&documentId=814512&language=ca_ES [last access: 02.07.2018].

¹³⁹ Compare for example the requirements for different ranks published by the Catalan Government: http://interior.gencat.cat/ca/arees_dactuacio/bombers/convocatories/bombers-funcionaris/ [last access: 02.07.2018].

or 15, but that he had discarded it as not realistic at all (see *Mission impossible: The informed study-choice*). However, he earned throughout the whole follow-up money with football, as he had started to train a children's team even before having the age to play in the amateur league himself and came to earn money as a player from the second year on, changing repeatedly his team.

Ariel showed rather extreme changes in her study-choice narratives in her first interview, saying at one point that tourism had been the most indicated degree for someone who speaks as many languages as she does and that it therefore was her first choice, though she could have also liked publicity. Later on she claimed, however, that she had only chosen tourism after discarding options she could not aspire to achieve with her PAU score, namely medicine, the degree her mother and several others in her family had pursued. At the end of the interview, she suddenly introduced veterinary medicine as another alternative she had considered. As she did not relate the different alternatives with each other, I asked for the degree she would choose if she was to study a second degree, repeating publicity, medicine and veterinary medicine as the options she had mentioned in the course of the interview. From the way she answered, it seemed that she thought about this question for the first time and that she would really like to study all, but that life was too short for this. However, she said at another point that she had considered studying medicine in her country of origin after completing her degree and yet at another that she did not want to return to her country of origin. As I have noticed an important decrease in contradictions in the course of the follow-up, as her language proficiency increased, I would not attach too much importance to this roller coaster ride in her first interview, as it might have been influenced by her linguistic difficulties. As mentioned in other sections (see *What I was born for - or not* and *Family affairs*), she came to discard the option to study medicine after graduation in Int4, but told me via Facebook that she was doing exactly this and in her home country, when I contacted her in order to meet for a last interview.

Floreta constructed her study choice throughout most of the follow-up rather openly. Though she mentioned having known a deaf boy in school and having attended a talk about stammering, she said in Int1 that this had not been a direct cause for her decision to study speech therapy, but rather coincidences. In several interviews she mentioned an interest in education, saying that she could have studied early childhood education (Int3) and said to have considered studying teacher training as an ideal complement to her degree (Int4). However, she did not wish to limit herself to the specialization in education at the end of her degree, studying both specializations – education and clinic – in parallel and completed her TFG in the clinical field. In Int4, she mentioned moreover photography as a degree that would have been to her liking as well, but said that she had decided against it, knowing that only the best were actually able to make a living of it (see *Job opportunities*). Though she ended up working with deaf users in Int5 and, remembering her deaf classmate from school, she confirmed that it was like the closure of a circle, she also highlighted that she might still change her itinerary completely if a different passion crossed her path. Moreover, her current work was temporal and she planned to not prolong her contract further, but could not know in what other specialisation she might find work afterwards, so she also maintained certain openness here by not limiting herself to auditory difficulties.

Though not all participants mentioned alternative choices with little relation to their actual itinerary, together with the diverse reorientations and amplifications of the professional profiles related to the chosen itinerary (see *Professional profiles and specialisations*), we can say that many participants had considered different paths in a past and kept changing their orientations in the course of the follow-up, corroborating the thesis of constructedness. Regarding the importance of the *numerus clausus*, I would like to highlight that the repeated references to degrees the participants could not aspire to enter, should not be interpreted as a sign that they all ended up studying their plan B. As we are considering narratives rather than choices, the flashing up alternatives have to be interpreted regarding the way they are employed. A reference to the *numerus clausus* offers, in this sense, a simple justification that does not require more explanations and may be understood, furthermore, as a filter that allows/forces students to discard degrees, they might have come to write of their list anyway if they had given them more thought. In this sense, the quick exclusion allows them to save time and energy. That, once again, the students from social class A were rather silent in this regard and did not usually mention alternative paths or discredited them rapidly as an unrealistic childhood dream as Peter did, may indicate that they felt an even higher pressure to construct their study choice as an informed and secure decision, though their decisions were likely just as arbitrary as those of anybody else. If this was true, young people from lower social classes might encounter additional difficulties to seek support and to redirect their itineraries, when these turn out to be different than they expected or not to their liking after all. Upper-class students may, on the other hand, turn their indecisiveness into an asset, showing that they are diversely interested and talented (see *Interview characteristics*).

6.2.7. *Family affairs*

The importance of family members and significant others for access and success and HE has been considered from different theoretical perspectives beyond direct economic support, e.g. referring to role models (Archer et al., 2014), access to hot knowledge (Davey, 2009) or emotional support (Reay, 2000). In spite of a tendency in research to consider the families of first-in-family students as little useful in the University transition due to their lack of knowledge and experience (Davey, 2009) or to even relate a working-class tendency to live close to the family of origin to lower levels of social mobility (Collins et al., 2015), some scholars have shown that close family ties are an asset as well for first-in-family students. This indicates that families are always important resources and if they are not, even this may foster successful transitions for some individuals, as they develop important resistant capital (O'Shea, 2016). However, different researchers have encountered significant differences in how parents from different social classes support their children's educational itineraries, describing working-class parents' support as 'hands off' (Archer et al., 2014) or 'laissez-faire' (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014), while middle-class parents are seen to actively engineer their children's résumés early on (Archer et al., 2014), making use of opportunities widening participation programmes may offer (Collins et al., 2015). Reay (2000) has furthermore shown that working-class mothers who follow the middle-class strategy to push their children's educational success, often jeopardise their children's wellbeing without having the resources to achieve their aims. Families are furthermore said to be of a special importance in southern European

countries (Walther et al., 2002), so the ways in which they appeared in the participants' narratives are doubly interesting for this study.

Several participants related in the course of the follow-up to family members and their study choices or mentioned to have considered studying a degree a direct relative had graduated in or was currently studying. This is in line with the above mentioned British survey on the occupational aspirations of 10- to 12-year-olds, as 30 out of 85 interviewees planned to occupy a profession one of their family members performed (Archer et al., 2014). However, the same survey found that all children showed high aspirations, even if their parents did not achieve anything similar, so that the "'working-class' students were much less likely to cite a family member's career as the inspiration for their aspirations" (Archer et al., 2014, p. 70). Rather than in the aspirations, the difference explaining the reproduction of social inequality may then lie in the role models and social capital in family, as young people may use their family members' trajectories as a role model to fall back onto especially in case of difficulty, as we will see in this section. On the other hand, the importance of family traditions regarding occupation and of family conversations about occupational aspirations (Archer et al., 2014) may favour that young people construct their identities around the careers they aspire to pursue and aggravate the crisis they experience when they do not enter or face severe difficulties to succeed in the degree even further (see *Happiness*). As upper-middle and upper-class families were the ones to directly intervene and help their children at a young age to build a CV that would facilitate their advancements towards their professional aspiration, social inequality is then additionally reproduced as these children may be more likely to have the required scores and CV to achieve their aspirations than their working-class peers, who receive a more hands-off support by their families (Archer et al., 2014). So, in sum, students from working-class backgrounds are more likely to lack direct role models and social capital to achieve their occupational aspirations, their families are less likely to engage in their CV-building into this direction and all this may explain at least partly why they are, in the end, less likely to achieve their aspirations.

Family is considered to be of special importance in Southern European countries (Walther et al., 2002); young people are more likely to prolong their cohabitation with their parents beyond the European mean (Jurado Guerrero, 2001; Moreno, 2017), and family support has never come to be completely substituted by a public welfare state (Sánchez Vera & Bote Díaz, 2011). Family dependence is, consequently, more common and accepted among the Catalan population, while young people in other countries who have started to face similar conditions recently suffer from this "southern Europeanisation" (Brooks, 2017, p. 7) or "Mediterraneanisation" (Serracant, 2012, p. 174) of their transitions (see *Youth Research and Transitions*)¹⁴⁰. We should therefore expect families to be highly important for the participants and have already seen several examples in this line, for instance when commenting on a reluctance to leave the nest after school (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*). Now we will focus on the role of family members in the study choice.

¹⁴⁰ We will see, however, further below that several participants "suffered" under their economic dependence from their parents (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*), so a higher acceptance of family dependence in Southern Europe does not mean that it feels completely natural either and may still be an issue for the affected young people.

Especially the study choices of older siblings appeared as highly important in the follow-up, as several participants referred to them and Peter and N. came to study exactly the same degrees as their older sisters: Peter teacher training and N. economics. Floreta had considered to study a degree related to education, but came to study speech therapy rather than teacher training like her older sister, not limiting herself to the specialisation in education either, by completing the mixed specialisation in education and clinic in the end. Margarita, on the other hand, served as a model for her younger brother, who came to study the same vocational training and university degree and in the same cities as she did.

As Peter and N. followed their older siblings rather directly, we will first take a closer look at their narratives in this regard. Peter argued, in Int1, that he had doubted between Sports and teacher training with the specialization in sports, because he liked children and sports. He came to choose the latter, saying that his sister's itinerary influenced him a bit, as she studied teacher training too and by seeing what she was doing, he thought that it could also be to his liking. As he first entered into the evening shift because of his PAU score and had to wait for a vacancy to be able to change for the morning shift, we can suppose that he had just enough score to enter teacher training and would not have entered into sports as a higher score was required. In this sense, the reference to his sister allowed him to construct his study choice positively, representing a rational choice based on his interests and previous knowledge on the degree, rather than having to admit a low academic performance in the PAU and how this limited his choice (see *Interview characteristics*). In the follow-up, he referred repeatedly to his sister, who did not only appear as of special importance to him as a personal confident, but, moreover, had a crystal-ball function, as he could foresee his own future job opportunities and labour-market insertion observing her present (see *Future ideals and fears*).

While this path seemed to work out quite well for Peter, N.'s attempt to follow her older sister's steps did leave her at the end of the follow-up as the participant furthest away from graduation, as she was still coursing several second-year subjects after 5 years. We will therefore consider her case in more detail before moving on to other participants.

Unlike Peter, N. did never seem completely convinced that economics was the right choice for her. In her first-year interview she mentioned having considered diverse alternatives and even had pre-registered for the degree in tourism, changing for Business Management once her parents had pointed out to her that tourism was offered in the afternoon shift, so she would have had to quit her extra-curricular activities (see *The Transition from School to University*). She seemed to have opted for Business Management when she was already running out of time to pre-register for the next course, so it is possible that she took her decision in the moment of stress by copying her sister's path. A quick decision would also explain why she hardly spoke about how she came to decide for economics in the end, dedicating much more time to speak about the discarded alternatives (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*). Thanks to her sister's experience, economics may have seemed to be a natural path, already accepted and known in her family, that did not require any justification as the other options did. Similarly to Peter, she referred in the course of the follow-up repeatedly to her sister when evaluating the job opportunities in her field and mentioned her cousins, friends and her boyfriend as indicators for the lack of opportunities in other fields (see *Job opportunities*). As I have argued above, her belief to encounter more economic stability as a graduate in business management than in the

world of dance, served her repeatedly to justify and maintain her study choice and she searched for possibilities how to combine her passion for dance with it. Her idea was, for example, to work in an enterprise selling dance dresses, though we may wonder if the tasks of a graduate in Business Management change significantly depending on the sold product and if the paper work would be more to her liking just because of the change in content.

Apart from her sister, her parents continued to influence in her itinerary. In her second year, she mentioned a 15-day summer job as an administrative in an enterprise her father had obtained for her and described how this first work experience had left it clear for her that economics were not her cup of tea. In her third year, she mentioned to have pre-registered for teacher training - her mother's profession - but did not enter because of her low PAU score. Actually, she had already mentioned the possibility to study teacher training in her first-year interview, but had discarded it because she did not really want to be a teacher. In Int3, teacher training did appear again as a route to becoming a dance teacher and not as the degree leading to primary school teaching. As she furthermore cautioned that she would still prefer to be a professional dancer rather than a dance teacher if she had the choice and that dance teachers do not earn much money either, this alternative seems to miss both of her main criteria: economic stability and being her passion. So she repeated the same approach as regarding economics, she followed a female family's member study choice, though it was not really to her liking, hoping to combine it after graduation with her passion for dancing.

As she did not enter into teacher training, she continued with Business Management. Considering the possibility to study in another city, N. mentioned this time that she had assumed a responsibility at her dance school and could not just leave, while she had said in Int1 to only consider options in Lleida, to not unnecessarily increase the costs for her parents. Once again it is eye-catching that even at this point she did not refer to the degree in English studies (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*), though she could have aspired to enter, and did not consider studying preschool education, though it was just as related to her job as a dance teacher for children as teacher training. This might indicate that in spite of her diverse rationalisations, N.'s decision was in the end marked by following her sister's itinerary.

In the same line, it is interesting to consider her Erasmus. Already in Int3, N. spent more time talking about her plans for an Erasmus than anything else. Though she did not choose the same country her sister had spent her Erasmus at, her choice of Germany was also related to the sister who had by then moved to Germany. Just as regarding her studies, her Erasmus did not quite work out in the expected way either, in the end, though she was convinced to have lived a life-changing experience (see *Change and Continuity*). In Int5, she continued studying business management without really liking it and claimed, in the retrospective, to have chosen her degree without really knowing which to do and following an idea that she had to pass on to a degree obligatorily, while it might have been better to take a gap year and think things through first, as several of the contacts she made in Germany did. Moreover, she mentioned her sister's experience again, arguing that it would have been better to study Business Management in Barcelona and that she would not recommend the degree in Lleida. As she had ascribed the differences between her degree and what her sister told her in Int1 to the Bologna process, her criticism of Lleida is as well an interesting change. The obvious solution would be to apply for a university change and finish the degree in Barcelona, the city of

residence of her boyfriend, but though N. would recommend prospect students to study there, for herself she did not consider the possibility.

In conclusion, N. showed a very high orientation towards her family, especially her older sister and seemed, on occasion, to only continue her studies in order to live the experiences her sister told her about, in particular an Erasmus. As she came to consider her study choice in Int5 as rushed, this confirms the impression that she fell back on her sister's path when her own ideas eroded, but afterwards she got somehow stuck on this path and did neither manage to advance at an adequate pace, nor to change for something else. As she said in Int2 and 3 to keep studying Business Management until a better alternative appeared on her horizon, this back-up plan might have kept her at the same time from searching for such an alternative. In the long run, this approach may have complicated her coming to a real decision for herself, precisely because it enabled her to keep going without. However, as we have mentioned elsewhere, her references to her sister's itinerary and her construction of dance as her big passion may also be related to habitus (see *Job opportunities*) or be seen as a strategy to justify her low academic performance in this field through a lack of motivation, rather than putting her abilities and intelligence into doubt (see *Academic success*). In both cases, her sister's itinerary allowed her to build her argumentation, even justifying her difficulties, though her sister was more successful in the degree than she was.

N.: If it's really an interesting subject for them and they like it, I would tell them go ahead and do it, of course. Well, everyone should do what they like, right? If that is what you like. Perhaps it's a bit sad but I might tell them not to do it in Lleida because, well, in my case, it might be a bit weird to say this because I don't really know how they do it elsewhere, I don't know if somewhere else they do it better, I can't really say for sure because I don't have that experience.

Interviewer: Your sister did it in Barcelona, right?

N.: My sister did it here, like me, and then she went to Barcelona to study another degree (...) and at her University, this is another topic, but the environment plays a huge role in it, she found another environment there, people were much more encouraged and involved and she also found perhaps better teachers. I don't know, I guess there's good and bad things everywhere, right? But, well, then I don't know, there's also, related to what we were talking before, I think that leaving is also good, you know? A change of scenery worked really well for me. (Int5 N., I.1016-1033)

Nic referred to his older brother, on the contrary to Peter and N., rather as a negative role model, arguing that he did not wish to end up like him. As he repeatedly told me about his brother off the records, I will not enter too much into the case and limit myself to say, that his brother interrupted his university degree and returned to live with his parents towards the beginning of the follow-up, where he remained until its end. As Nic said in his last interview, he was afraid to end up living forever with his parents too, highlighting that several other family members, apart from his brother, had also chosen this way. Though Nic had constructed his identity throughout the whole follow-up in direct opposition to this example, highlighting his mobility and wish to leave Spain and to live abroad, he was afraid to not have the guts to pursue this plan in the end – almost as if he might become the victim of some genetic condition that forced male members of his family into permanent parent dependence (see *Mobility*).

However, he also mentioned how his parents' decisions had influenced his study choice, saying in Int1 that he ended up with an interest in languages, because his parents had sent him to a private language school to learn English from a very young age. This shows that the influence of hobbies on occupational aspirations (Archer et al., 2014) also includes a certain family influence, as the parents decide where to enrol their children and which hobbies to support economically. In this sense, it were also N.'s parents who enrolled her as a child in her dance academy and Piruleta, who had been active for years in her local *esplai*¹⁴¹ working with children, mentioned high levels of participation in local activities for her father and older sister too.

Interviewer: How did you decide to study that? (-) of translation?

Nic: trans' (at the same time) translation? [Interviewer: hmhm] well, you know, I have always liked languages a lot (--) and since I was very, well, very small my parents have sent me to English courses (-) and, now, it's more than 12 years since I've been studying English, so then, whether you want or not, you learn something in the end, you know? (Int1 Nic, l.39-44)

The other participants either had younger siblings or no siblings at all, so they could hardly use them as role models.

Ariel mentioned already in Int1 a certain tradition in her mother's family history to study medicine. Though she repeatedly mentioned her mother's being a physician, studying medicine only appeared as one out of several options (see *Flashing up and vanishing alternatives*), until she told me via Facebook that she had begun to study medicine in her country of origin after graduating from tourism. Here it is hence possible that the drawing power of this family tradition was in the end stronger than it seemed, indicating that it is highly important to consider such traditions when analysing study choices.

Interviewer: And how do you see your career?

Ariel: Very interesting (.) [Interviewer: hmhm] I like it a lot (.) Yes, the truth is that I (-) think it is, it is my vocation. It hm comes from inside. Although hm I would have liked to hm (-) study medicine, but, (--) this is also really good (.)

Interviewer: Would you have liked to study medicine as well?

Ariel: Yes, my mother is a doctor, and my mother's brother is a doctor too. And, it is a family tradition, but well

Interviewer: So, you were in doubt about studying medicine

Ariel: It occurs that, hm I completed high school (-) in two years (-) and I had been here for two years (.) So, I did not get a very high mark of [Interviewer: average] yes (.) And that was why (-) it was impossible to study medicine (.) [Interviewer: hmhm] (--) well, in the future, if I finish tourism, I will go back to my country to study medicine (laughing) (Int1 Ariel, l.295-307)

Ariel: I would have liked to study medicine, I still think about it

Interviewer: Well, after finishing a degree you can start another one

Ariel: No. I would finish being 32 years old, I don't think it would be worthwhile. Too late (Ariel Int5, l.189-192).

¹⁴¹ *Esplai* is a Catalan word meaning educational leisure time. It refers both to an educational concept and to the building. Here it refers to a type of non-profit association that organises leisure time activities for children.

Highlighting a certain family tradition or role models within the family may, however, also be a discursive strategy to sell a decision or chosen itinerary better or to justify one's fears. This is what might have happened in Skone's fourth and fifth-year interview, when he talked about his girlfriend's study choice. In line with the changes regarding his own study choice (see *Professional profiles and the labour market* and *Change and Continuity*), he also changed his girlfriend's study choice in the same line: In Int4 he claimed that she had always wanted to study history, but that her parents made her study law instead, arguing that the occupational possibilities were much higher. From what he said, his girlfriend did then experience academic difficulty in the law degree – a thing he ascribed completely to the fact that law had not been to her liking and not to a lack of ability. The repeated academic failure did finally allow her to change for history instead, insinuating that her parents had to accept in the end that enrolling alone would not turn her into a graduate in law. In Int5, Skone claimed that his girlfriend was considering studying a master in international commerce, as she could envision herself working in this field in a future. Skone represented, this time, that his girlfriend had been another case of a student who did not really know what to do with their lives and just started to study anything. Though he said again that she liked history the new change was then the result of asking herself what she wanted to work as in a future, as the interest in history alone did not make the professional career. Similarly, he claimed at this point to have chosen CSA because he liked animals, indicating that this was not enough to build a future on. That this was just another example of changing study-choice constructions, though he sold it like the final break-through, becomes visible when we consider his previous comments about animals, that displayed a highly functional and profit-oriented perspective. In Int4, for example, he criticized fellow students who chose CSA being vegetarians, saying that it made no sense to defend animal rights and still study a degree on meat production.

There are people, in my career, specially... of course, it is a [meat] production career, a bit of a controversial issue, isn't it? But then, there is vegetarian people, vegan people, so it's a bit... you know. Then the rest of us think "what are you doing here?", "what do you think you are doing in this degree?" You need to have clear ideas, not to belong to Greenpeace and come here to save animals, I mean not to be the opposite, you need to be sure about your ideas, know what you want and that is why... (Int4 Skone, I.397-402)

In the case of Skone's girlfriend it is possible that her decision for yet a different master was related to the job opportunities in her field, as several other participants represented that the only realistic job opportunity for a graduate in history was to become a teacher and that this was not to their liking. However, this sudden interest in the future profession did also appear in Skone's own case, as he himself came to decide against continuing in veterinary medicine after realizing that he did not envision himself working in this field (see *Professional profiles and the labour market* and *Change and Continuity*). "The game of free intelligence" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007), disconnecting University studies from the professional future, turns in this argumentation into a trap, as it led Skone and his girlfriend to choose and study degrees that did not lead to professions they would be happy with in a future.

Members of the extensive family appeared in the accounts of other participants. Maduixa had two relatives working in the audio-visual sector and referred to them repeatedly as informants and a direct help to achieve an internship etc. However, she also distanced herself from them, directly contradicting their recommendations – especially when these turned into criticism,

telling her that she should have spent more hours at the set of the documentary production they had gotten her an unpaid job for – and pitying their children for never seeing their parents – an argument that appeared in the justification of her own decision not to have children as these were not reconcilable with a work in her sector (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). Moreover, Maduixa also mentioned several teachers in her family, explaining her own ease in talking to teachers and lecturers with this personal knowledge of teachers that allowed her to see them as other human beings rather than as superior authorities. This shows that family members may also have an important impact on young people even if they do not come to aspire the same career. Moreover, young people from families like Maduixa's can find role models within their family in very different fields, while others might be either limited to one field or lack such role models and social capital in general.

Several participants with family businesses did spend a significant part of their time helping in this business (Irina, Nadia, Cara) (see *... and what about work?*). However, none of them planned on continuing the business. Irina described a very close relationship to some of her four siblings, especially to the sister who was almost her own age, but at the same time, she went her own way, enjoying possibly a special status as the youngest member of the family.

In conclusion, we can say that it continues to make a difference to have an older sibling who enrolled in HE before, especially for students whose parents and other family members had not enrolled in HE, who can then be considered as 'the least disadvantaged group among the most disadvantaged' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007, p. 40, translated by TS; Rahona Lopez, 2009). In this sense, from the participants of social class A, Peter and Piruleta were still privileged as they both had older sisters with University studies and though Piruleta's older sister studied in a different city and field, her entrance to HE might have opened this way for her, too. Sara had no older siblings and was the first in her family to enter HE. However, it was important for her that her cousin entered HE in the same year and might have influenced her decision. That the cousin came to abandon her studies in the end could not have influenced her study choice as it happened later, but confirmed for Sara that it had been a good decision to stay in Lleida, as moving to another city, she might have encountered similar difficulties to focus on her studies as she reported regarding her cousin. Especially indecisive students seem to encounter a direct role model in their older siblings, though following their steps does not necessarily lead to success, as we have seen in N.'s case.

6.3. The Transition from University to the Labour Market

To close the circle initiated with the transition from school to university, this section focuses on the transition from university to the labour market. Like this, the whole university transition understood as the complete process beginning with the decision to enter HE and ending with a first labour market position is considered in this thesis. Though the data construction lasted 5 years, 1 year longer than the regular duration of degree courses, only very few participants finished their university studies and entered the labour market in the course of the follow-up, allowing us to mainly draw on comparisons regarding their previous interviews and regarding the participants who did not yet complete their degrees. In concrete, changes in the perception of the labour market, linguistic adaptation to the profession, but also changes in the perception of university from the retrospective and tendencies to ennoble the own itinerary while closing the access for others are considered.

"Es tendeix a pensar que la nostra fita és l'èxit quan, de bo de bo, la nostra fita és fer-nos
persones."

Jaume Cabré (Barcelona 1947)

Roda Mots 13.07.2016

"Hijo mío, la felicidad está hecha de cosas pequeñas: un pequeño yate, una pequeña mansión,
una pequeña fortuna."

Groucho Marx (citado por Víctor Küppers

http://www.kuppers.com/1/frases_que_me_gustan_1134784.html)

The transition from education to work continues to be of great importance in youth research (see *Youth Research and Transitions*), especially in contexts of high youth unemployment as in Spain (see *The Context*). Many authors have claimed that, with the rise of mass HE, degree certificates have lost the guaranteeing function for a smooth labour-market transition and a secure and socially-powerful positioning, but that life chances continue to be higher for graduates than for non-graduates (Bogino, 2016; Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Torrents, 2017). As we have discussed above, HE is the field for the reproduction of social inequalities *par excellence* (see *Higher Education*), so that broadening access to and success in HE continue to be a way to improve equality, even though it is possible that social reproduction is then diverted to the labour market, worsening the situation of young people who invested time and money to achieve HE certificates even further, if these never come to pay off (Brynin, 2012).

Though some authors explain job allocation through meritocratic mechanisms only and do not consider different social origins of the candidates, social reproduction theories analyse up to which extent social positions are reproduced in the labour-market positioning of young graduates (Jacob et al., 2015). The first theory – credentialist allocation – may apply especially in the access to the public sector, as this is "highly formalized, managed, and bureaucratically organized by personnel departments that consider only educational levels for choosing among applicants" (Jacob et al., 2015). The signalling capacity of degree certificates depends, furthermore, on the national context and is much higher in a country like Germany, where only 30% of the individuals of an age-group achieve HE credentials, than in the UK, where 55% of an age-group are usually HE graduates (Jacob et al., 2015). Considering the extraordinarily high HE-participation in Spain and Catalonia (see *Demographics and University participation*), the signalling capacity of titles should be rather low, though expensive private universities may offer a high signalling capacity for those who can afford it. Though none of the participants in this project realised the undergraduate studies in a private university, several participants from social class D insinuated or directly claimed that these are better but too expensive (Maduixa, Floreta, Skone). Independently of real quality differences between public and private universities in Spain, such beliefs may indicate a high signalling function of the certificates achieved in certain private universities.

The rather low signalling function of the public-HE titles may explain why even in the access to the public sector through *oposicions* (see footnote 129), though also highly bureaucratic and formalized, not only achieved certificates and scores are decisive, but a public contest is celebrated and additional criteria, especially work experience and further certificates – for

example regarding further studies, courses or language skills – are considered¹⁴². Moreover, the increasing tendency to temporal contracts even in the public sector may lead to further social reproduction, as the competition for the few posted positions increases, so being among the "best" gains a primordial importance. As social class continues to have an impact on academic performance (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Rubin & Wright, 2017) and middle/upper-class candidates are more likely to access "hot knowledge" (Davey, 2009) about upcoming calls and the weighting of merits through their social capital, these are in advantage. Young people with non-EU nationalities, like Koala, are furthermore excluded from the option to work in the public sector, unless they obtain the Spanish citizenship (see *Flashing up and vanishing alternatives* and footnote 137), limiting their professional possibilities significantly.

Diverse studies have shown, furthermore, that social origin continues to matter on the private labour market and that, especially in times of broadened access to HE and in the wake of the economic crisis, 'non-traditional' graduates, in concrete women, graduates who were born in foreign countries or whose parents did only achieve low levels of educational attainment, are likely to face labour precariousness, unemployment and difficult working conditions after graduation (Bogino, 2016). Especially graduates from lower social classes of origin are directly or indirectly disadvantaged (Avram et al., 2017) – through class specific "educational pathways and attainment, prior to HE"; "the chosen field of study"; "the chosen type of tertiary institution", or "labour market participation during their studies" (Jacob et al., 2015). Social and cultural capital can, furthermore, function as a "competitive advantage" (Jacob et al., 2015), though apart from its transmission from the parents to the children, the abilities to acquire and mobilise these capitals are crucial (Bathmaker et al., 2013). Employers may consciously consider variables related to the socio-economic origins as relevant or may subconsciously favour applicants from higher social classes due to a habitus fit that makes them look more alike and therefore apt (Groppe, 2006; Jacob et al., 2015). Jacob et al. (Jacob et al., 2015) argue, however, as well that the effects of parental education on graduates' occupational outcomes decrease over the years and theorise that meritocracy gains importance in labour-market positioning over the years, "because graduates' productivity is now observable and further occupational destinations are more likely to be acquired through graduates' own resources and work experience". As this productivity depends, nevertheless, on the achieved positioning on first entering the labour market, participants from lower social classes may end up in tracks they only accepted as a way to get started, while their upper-class peers may have more possibilities to set an interesting career path from the beginning on or accessing a fast track to promotion etc.

In order to differentiate student jobs from full-time work, I focus in this section on the labour-market entrance in the sense of the first moment in the participants' lives, when work as their main activity and studying had either disappeared or lost importance in their daily routine

¹⁴² See, for example, the oficial requirements for the *oposicions* published in 2017: <http://ensenyament.gencat.cat/ca/arees-actuacio/professors/oposicions/ingres-acces-cossos-docents/aspectes-generals/requisits2/> and the consideration of merits specified in annex 4 of the call, which stipulates on p. 50f. that candidates may achieve up to 3 points for additional training courses, while their academic results are considered only up to 1,5 points, whereat any candidate achieves a certain score automatically for having passed the degree: <http://portaldogc.gencat.cat/utillsEADOP/PDF/7507/1646571.pdf> [last access in both cases: 15.05.2018].

(regarding student jobs see: *... and what about work?*). In this project, only few participants had made this change, as most continued to work in student jobs or not at all at the end of the follow-up (see also *Degree of completion of development tasks*) and 3 out of the 9 participants who had graduated from their degree in Int5 were studying a master degree (Cara, Koala, Piruleta), Willy had initiated a 2-year master but interrupted it after the first year when he found a full-time work in his field. Several others were considering to study masters in a future, especially if they could not find work, showing that this option was definitely on their horizon of possibilities, though not all of them might ever come to pursue it. Master degrees may appear, to those who can afford them, as an attractive possibility to fill another year in their CVs, when a direct labour-market entrance is anyway little likely.

While this rather reduced labour-market insertion already represents an interesting finding in itself, we can furthermore observe certain developments with regard to labour-market narratives in the course of the follow-up and see if and how the participants' accounts changed over the years. We have seen in the previous part that many participants considered a rather wide variety of degree courses in their study choice (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes* and *Flashing up and vanishing alternatives*), came to amplify the spectrum of professional profiles related to the studied degree course over the years (see *Professional profiles and the labour market*) and revised, on occasion, their aspirations after first internships or work experiences in the chosen field (see Irina in *What I was born for - or not* and N. in *Family affairs*). Furthermore, we have commented on their diverse perceptions of job opportunities and that lecturers did often discourage labour market prospects. Now we will consider in more detail the changes in the labour-market perception, preparations for the labour-market entrance, the labour-market entrance of those who already entered into employment and how these appeared to have changed through this entrance, e.g. in their way to talk, but also regarding their narratives about their studies.

6.3.1. *Labour-market perceptions*

As we have seen above (see *Job opportunities*), several participants attempted to relate their study choice to labour market opportunities, but had difficulties to assess these, leading to rather opposed evaluations of the same fields. Moreover, their lecturers seemed to discourage them as several participants (Nic, Xenia, Maduixa) mentioned that they had been told that the labour opportunities in their field were rather low. When comparing the participants' perceptions of the labour market, we can distinguish certain phases: 1) cyclical crisis, 2) eternal crisis and 3) recovery. I choose here to reproduce the rather economist terms in phase 1 and 3, as the public discourse on the Spanish economy actually represented such ideas of crisis and recovery in the course of the follow-up. The public discourse in 2011, just at the beginning of the follow-up, spoke of a temporal crisis, a cyclical phenomenon that was going to affect the economy for several years before recovery. This idea was directly mirrored in several participants' accounts, who directly described the crisis in this terms (Skone) or believed that it would have ended by the time they finished their degrees (Cara, Nic).

Nic: The truth is, I am really thrilled. The problem is, of course, with the crisis (-) there are no jobs (-) and even if you don't want that to affect you, that throws you back a little bit, you know? (-) but I hope that when, let's see (-) you should think that I'll (-) I'll finish my degree in 4 or 5 years, you know? 4 or 5 years specially if I go on an Erasmus program,

because if I go to Japan, studying might be the last thing I will be doing (smiling) (-) but I hope that in 4 or 5 years the circumstances will be a bit better (-) and I hope to have acquired the sufficient level in languages and so on to be able to translate, to be able to' (-) to be able to work. [Interviewer: yes] (-) But well, seeing how things are right now I might finish my degree and go directly from being at university to being unemployed. (Int2 Nic, l.688-696)

Interviewer: How do you feel when you think about the future?

Cara: (--) Well, it will come. I think that with the crisis (-) there will be a change (.) [Interviewer: hmhm] In a near future, there must be a change since this cannot be sustained; things are really bad, then, I don't know what will happen, I can't tell, but I'm afraid because I have always lived very well since (-) I have always had everything with my parents and I think now that won't be possible (.) [Interviewer: hm] Now, when the time comes for me to wake up, [it won't be possible] to live as well as I have lived up to now. [Interviewer: hmhm] That is my worst fear (-) anyway...(Int1 Cara, l.435-444)

Cara: Well (smiling) [Interviewer: (laughs)] The future looks a bit black with the crisis (-) [Interviewer: hmph] But I have hope. Those who are finishing their degree now, they really have it difficult because it's the worst part, but I hope that for us, (-) we have started studying at the worst moment for the country, I hope that when we finish our degree (-) we will have the opportunity to work and so on. But of course it worries me, because the only thing I'm doing right now is spending [money] (-) [Interviewer: yes] and I'm not earning any money and well hmph (smiling) (-) that's the only thing, I think that's the only worry I have right now. (Int2, Cara, l.252-257)

Interviewer: hm () And how do you see the current situation with the crisis and everything?

Skone: I think that crises have always been there ph, that means, it is always the same, isn't it? and if you don't study at a certain age and don't, and just take [the jobs] that arise, I mean, today you have a job, tomorrow you get fired and you get another different job and so on. And you never think to yourself "this may work well for me today, but perhaps tomorrow it won't", well, there will always be people affected, harm will always be done, won't it? And, of course, finding a solution is important but, also, it is true that every 7 to 9 years there is crisis, there are cycles (Int3 Skone, l.532-539)

After several years of crisis, the public discourse showed a certain level of frustration, speaking of a depression¹⁴³, an eternal crisis¹⁴⁴, a generation crisis¹⁴⁵ or even a new labour paradigm¹⁴⁶ of crisis. In this phase of the follow-up, many participants did not mention the topic of the crisis until I brought it up and when I did so – usually at the end of the interview, after having asked for additional topics – many confirmed that the crisis was there and that they were a bit tired of talking about it, feeling that there was nothing they could do. Several expressed here a feeling of powerlessness and frustration. This may be in line with a coping strategy to actively avoid thinking about the future, Woodman (2011) described in an interview project for some of his participants who, nevertheless, did their best to shape their future.

¹⁴³ Consider for example: <https://www.invertia.com/es/-/recesion-o-depresion-como-es-de-profunda-la-crisis-espanola-> [last access: 20.06.2018].

¹⁴⁴ See: https://elpais.com/economia/2012/02/17/actualidad/1329491637_532783.html [last access: 20.06.2018].

¹⁴⁵ See for example: <https://www.elmanana.com/asi-millennials-generacion-crisis-millennials-crisis-generacion/3655807> [last access: 20.06.2018].

¹⁴⁶ See this analysis also quoting several of the pro-recovery press notes: https://www.eldiario.es/ultima-llamada/economia-espanola-recuperando-beneficiando-ciudadano_6_734986543.html [last access: 20.06.2018].

I really don't know, because as I did one year of journalism studies here in Lleida, I realised that the media leads you wherever they want, and I don't know what to believe, I don't trust them. And yes, the only information we get is from that source, and they say that we are getting better, but I don't think so, because they are cutting back on loans and either the media lies or they are taking advantage of the situation and doing more cuts than necessary, because it's excessive. I don't know, what I'm seeing is that the crisis has been normalised and now it's a long-term thing. (Int3 Maduixa, l.315-320)

Interviewer: Well, crisis has already been mentioned, but, it is not necessary to go on talking about it anymore. Everyone is a bit tired of talking about crisis.

Skone: I haven't talked too much, I don't care (...) actually, if you spend all day thinking about bad things or things you believe could go wrong, then you don't ... (Int4 Skone, l.704-708)

Another coping strategy that appeared quite clearly in this phase and lasted for some participants until the end of the follow-up, was a selection of a priority, sacrificing anything else to achieve it (see *Future ideals and fears*). Sara, for example, expressed her wish to become a young mother as a priority and though she hoped to encounter a stable employment beforehand, she sacrificed her aspiration to become a teacher, indicating repeatedly that she would accept work in any field. This readiness to work as anything was put into practice in her last year, as she told me to have sent applications to several super market chains and retail. Though she had not yet find a new job and already knew that she was not going to continue in the private language school, this absolute openness allowed her to cope with the fear not to find work and we can assume that her boyfriend's application for a fixed employment added to her reassurance.

Interviewer: And do you have any dreams? Anything that...?

Sara: I think professionally things will come up at some point, but no, I don't consider it my dream to work in a school, because I know I will do it. In contrast, starting a family of my own is a dream for me, because I have always had those values at home, to say well in a future to be able to have a family and to have children, I believe that this is more my dream than my professional career, everything will come up, but this aspect, yes, I would love to fulfil the dream [of having a family], because of course I would love to work as a teacher, but I know that if I'm not a teacher, I'll be something else, but that dream is something I want to do in life, so... (Int5 Sara, l.608-616)

Nic, on the other hand, set moving to the USA or at least away from Spain as his main priority and did also highlight that he would not mind to work in a different field than his studies, especially at the beginning.

Interviewer: Well, we have already talked a bit about your future, where do you see yourself ten years from now?

Nic: Ten years, whew! [laughing sounds] very far. Well, I'd like to think that ten years from now I will be working, I'm not sure if I will be living abroad, I hope so but, you know? You never know, I would love to be living abroad and working, and living on my own, I hope. (Int5 Nic, l.855-860)

Interviewer: Do you have a plan B?

Nic: Well, plan B (--) I don't know, I'd rather think that plan A will work in some way, you know? But I have never really thought about a plan B, because there are so many possibilities. I might not end up being a translator but I might be a teacher, or I might find a language teaching assistant position available, I might find something, you know?

[Interviewer: yes, yes] If I had studied another degree, I might be more limited in my options, but this degree opens quite a few doors, so I don't know. [Interviewer: no need for a plan B] Well, I mean, not a real plan B, you know? It's a plan A with several plans B inside, you know? [Interviewer: yes] And yes, basically (.) [Interviewer: very well, very well] The thing is that the lecturers are telling us all the time that even if we are studying translation we might end up doing something we haven't really thought about, you know? That most of the teachers that are there, they wanted to translate and... they wanted to be translators and, well, now they are teachers, you know? (--) So maybe I'm saying that I don't want to be a teacher and in five years I might be teaching, you know? [Interviewer: Of course, you never know] Exactly you never know. And I don't know. (Int5 Nic, l.890-902)

Towards the end of the follow-up, in 2016, started to appear a new optimism in the perception of the Spanish economy speaking of a recovery in spite of important sequelae (Díez, 2018), that coincided with a change in the perception of the participants who now came to believe that they and others would be able to find a job, if they were ready for certain sacrifices. Though the public discourse on recovery might have had a direct influence here, it is also possible that – just as in the previous phase the negative comments by lecturers – aspects of the participants' daily life and personal experiences made the difference. Several participants expressed, for example, their relieve to have encountered several job offers published in their field, when they started to search for them online (Nic, Xenia). This may indicate that they had come to believe to have virtually zero possibilities to ever work in their field in phase 2, so that any job offer – no matter how precarious and no matter how high the competition to achieve it – was already a reason to celebrate.

I have many acquaintances, well acquaintances and friends in the US and I asked them "hey, websites for..." you know? Similar to infojobs and those kinds of websites? [Interviewer: yes] So I asked them for websites like that that they could recommend... and they suggested a few, you know? The biggest ones, and I am sending CVs through those websites, you know? Like they were...

Interviewer: And have you got any answers?

Nic: Yes, yes, yes, the truth is I am quite astonished that they have quite a demand for that is to say for [Interviewer: for translators?] yes, I even found some enterprises that needed translation into Catalan in the US, you know? [Interviewer: Ah, that's nice] And as I'm telling you, I'm confining myself a lot because I really want to be in the US, you know? So I have only looked in the US (--) but also... (Int5 Nic, l.205-214)

Interviewer: that you were getting a little discouraged about the labour market ...

Xenia: it depends on the professors; however, the thing is Biotechnology is quite broad, isn't it? For example, here in Catalonia, we can do Food Biotechnology, food items, searching jobs I have noticed that many food safety quality control positions are required and it is true that there are those from food technology to take them, but with biotech we can also take them since Lleida provides us with everything about food and vegetables and in Barcelona you can get the biomedical and that's it (.) We have this plus because we are more... (Int5 Xenia, l.168-175)

In this, the participants' showed a rather low awareness of their possible abuse and came to embrace even highly precarious job offers as a chance they had to be grateful for. Andrés, for example, told me to give his best to leave a good impression at work, knowing that he had been offered a great chance. Furthermore, he criticised his fellow students who did not find work after graduation, blaming them for not being ready to move or to accept an unpaid internship first, while their sector was – in his eyes – booming (*en auge*). Here he did not

reflect at all on his living for 6-months in Barcelona working as an unpaid intern, before getting his current temporal work contract and that not all young people might be able to afford such a step. As Andrés himself did not have much economic capital to start with, he built in this on his boyfriend's capitals, moving in with his boyfriend's grandmother. In his accounts, he reproduced indirectly the public tendency to make the individual responsible for structural problems, that had also appeared in the focus groups and first-year interviews of some participants (especially N., see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*), but had disappeared from the participants' accounts towards the middle of the follow-up. The use(fulness) of this coping strategy may directly explain this, as the participants could construct their identities in opposition to those who did not find work because they lacked initiative, as long as they believed in the existence of work. In phase 2, when they came to doubt whether they would ever find work themselves, this strategy was no longer useful, as even the most prepared and adaptive would not find work if there was zero work on offer. In phase 3 and especially after having made positive experiences on the labour market themselves, as Andrés did, the reproduction of this negative image of their unsuccessful peers gained again certain functionality, as work opportunities were again perceived as existing, so that confidence in one's ability to achieve them could disburden future anxieties. In this sense, Andrés first work experience had a very positive effect for his future prospects, but he had to sacrifice his current well-being for this, as he experienced stress and pressure at work, had almost no free time doing several extra hours per week apart from an already rather tight schedule and had to live with his boyfriend's grandmother rather than like a couple. Considering that these sacrifices were temporal, he embraced them readily and felt happy anyway, though he already cautioned that he would not continue to feel happy in a future if he did not progress (see *Future ideals and fears*).

Interviewer: Very well, and how do you see your degree now if you glance backward?

Andrés: my degree? [Interviewer: yes] I think there are employment opportunities; you will have a future but you have to move. For example, I see classmates who remain there still. I don't know why, they don't move, don't go out, don't look for an opportunity, that's what I think. I mean, it is an activity that is flourishing in the country and it seems to me there are possibilities of finding a job; it's difficult because we are undergoing complicated crisis times, aren't we? We are recovering from all this issue; however, I do think it is possible to find a job. But, of course, experience is also required and it's always necessary to start from the bottom, [Interviewer: with an internship] that is to say you can't, with an internship or with, with a reception job, you know? with anything. And, you can end up establishing your own business, or as the Director of a company or something similar. But I do believe you can have a future with this (Int5 Andrés, l.131-141)

Similarly, several participants accepted a certain waiting period before being able to achieve the stable labour-market positioning they had been studying for (Peter, Cara, see: *Future ideals and fears*). Some participants even seemed to embrace precariousness as a long-term desire, in the sense of Chisholm's (2006, p. 16) argument that "young people come to want what they will, in any case, have to come to terms with". The best example in this sense was Irina, who dreamed of a life on the move, living with socially excluded indigenous communities and changing the location every couple of years. However, as we have seen and will see in other sections of this thesis (see *What I was born for - or not* and *Mobility*), she moderated her plans a lot in the course of the follow-up and in her last-year interview, she spoke of studying a master to be

able to access work in an international NGO – a compromise of travelling and helping but still achieving certain economic stability and social protection.

In conclusion, we can state that especially the highly negative image of the Spanish labour market the participants' developed towards the middle of the follow-up affected their well-being negatively and forced them to cope with strategies of active not thinking (Woodman, 2011) about the future. In times when they perceived their labour-market entrance as complicated and difficult, they coped by setting a clear priority that they aspired to achieve above all, making their future happiness depending on this, or by constructing their identity in contrast to the unsuccessful, reproducing negative images of their generation and, hence, indirectly contributing to the moral juvenicide my co-authors and I have argued to be witnessing in Spain (Strecker et al., 2018). In line with other research, the participants showed little or no awareness that social divisions could intervene in their labour market opportunities, corroborating the thesis that individualisation invisibilises social inequalities (Kelan, 2014), though these continue to mark the life chances of individuals (see *Social Inequality*).

6.3.2. Strategic preparation

As we have seen in previous sections of this thesis, it is assumed that young people need to construct their careers more carefully to be successful in contexts of increased competition (see *Youth Research and Transitions*). Both the credentialist and the social-reproduction approach highlight that degree certificates alone may not be enough to achieve an employment on a highly competitive labour market. Even though social reproduction is especially "easy" when candidates are selected according to assessments of their personal ability, as this leaves a rather broad margin for argumentation and employers may – consciously or not – choose candidates they feel more alike with (see above), social reproduction is also possible through an improved access to credentials or other apparently "objective" merits that are valued in applicants, e.g. language skills, international experiences, work experiences in renown enterprises in the field etc. Apart from hot knowledge about what employers want to see on your CV and hear in a job interview and how to achieve these elements, different capitals continue to be key in this process as not all young people may be able to participate in the extra-curricular activities, seek international experiences and complete unpaid internships in renown enterprises that are later on considered to improve their employability, because they lack the economic resources or social contacts to achieve this (Bathmaker et al., 2013). However, young people must not necessarily take conscious strategic decisions to improve their CVs, but may show a strategy to avoid thinking and planning too much ahead, but still pursue activities that allow them to shape their futures in ways that may increase their future employability (Woodman, 2011). Here it is therefore interesting to see who of the participants showed activities that were likely to improve their employability in a future and how they related to these.

Internationalisation

As we have seen above (see *Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation*), we can speak of an increasing internationalisation of HE and HE institutions wish to “prepare students for professional and civic lives in a globalized world” (Punteney, 2012, p. 405). Especially

international experiences and language skills are often considered a distinctive element on graduates' resumes (Bathmaker et al., 2013) and with an increased interest in internationalisation and, in particular within the EU, attempts to construct a transnational identity and labour market diverse exchange programmes have been fostered and some research on their effects and the general effects of mobility is available (Rubio & Strecker, 2016, 2018).

Wiers-Jenssen (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011) asked in a Norwegian study on mobile and non-mobile students if "education from abroad enhance[s] labour market prospects" and if this relates to their backgrounds. Apart from exchange students, she considered students who had completed their whole degree course abroad, though these "mobile degree students" are hard to trace statistically and expected to make up very small groups of the student population. In her results, Wiers-Jenssen (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011) described certain differences in the sense of a smoother labour-market entrance of exchange students, while mobile degree students encountered more difficulties to encounter their first employment than non-mobile students. Both types of mobile students were more likely to obtain international jobs, in the sense of working abroad or for international enterprises in Norway, and mobile degree students were especially likely to achieve a higher average wage 3 years after graduation, though this seemed to be an effect of their being more likely to work in the private sector. However, the study could not determine whether these were effects of the mobility or of selectivity, in the sense that only certain students achieve this kind of experience and are at the same time more successful on the labour market. Especially the group of exchange students appeared as the most positively selected, indicating that social inequality in the access to student exchange programs is a problem. While there were more females among the exchange students, students whose parents possess HE titles were in general more likely to be mobile (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011).

Regarding the comparability with Spain, it has to be said that Norway is a special country regarding mobility as it is described to have a rather long tradition of "mobile degree students" and continues to achieve with 6-7% three times the European average, plus approx. 3% of exchange students going abroad (European Commission & Eurodyce, 2007). The Norwegian universal support system for students is furthermore not only as well applicable to students who study their whole degree abroad, but includes additional aids for them, so that the economic difference between studying abroad and studying in Norway is rather small if given; in spite of this economic equalisation, mobile students "constitute a selected group" among Norwegian HE students, dominated by those of "higher social origin" (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). Spain is in this sense a quite different case, not only because of its weak welfare state and the dominant family-support regime (Sánchez Vera & Bote Díaz, 2011; Walther et al., 2002), but also regarding figures of mobility as the same report quotes Spanish students among "the least mobile" regarding degree mobility (European Commission & Eurodyce, 2007). However, Spain has been for years the European country with most outgoing Erasmus student, achieving in the academic course 2012-13 almost 10% of the total of graduates of the same year, while Norway lay with 4.88 % at the EU average (European Commission, 2015, p. 35). In this sense, Spain's student mobility is quite different from Norway, though the total share of mobile students is in the end rather similar.

Another interesting finding in the Norwegian study was that it confirmed the existence of an “accumulated effect of living abroad”, in the sense that students with previous international experiences or with parents who had been living abroad were more likely to be mobile students and, in turn, mobile students were more likely to pursue international occupations (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). Though mobility values did not appear especially high among Spanish HE students (Cortés-Pascual, Cano-Escoriaza, & Orejudo, 2014), international occupations in the sense of travelling and temporal living abroad seemed to have a special value for several of the participants in this study and had also appeared in previous studies as attractive (Woodman, 2011). Accumulating “mobility capital” (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011) should therefore be a good strategy to improve the possibilities to achieve this. Here it is not surprising that Irina, the most mobility-oriented student in the project (see *Mobility*), completed an exchange year abroad and moved abroad after completing her degree. Moreover, she was in many senses the embodiment of international experiences as she had been born in another country herself and constructed her whole identity repeatedly around mobility, as if being mobile was the only constant in her changing life.

Nic displayed a clear belief in the positive effects of international experiences for his posterior employability at the beginning of the follow-up. Aware of the difficulties one may encounter when searching work in a different country than the one of the HE experience, he planned to compensate for the lack of useful networks (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011) by building such a network as an exchange student. Though Nic appeared in this sense much more strategic than Irina, who at most considered her exchange year a possibility to test if the life abroad would be to her liking (see *What I was born for - or not*), he did not pursue the diverse options he had in mind in Int2. Though he travelled in summer to the US to visit friends and came to spend one month working in Japan, he did not take part in any of the student exchange programmes in the end, arguing that he did not want to prolong his studies or worsen his academic outcomes (see *Mobility*). The fear to worsen the academic performance has a certain resonance in previous research, as Norwegian mobile degree students have slightly lower grade scores than those who have an all-Norwegian education, but the academic results of exchange students were not given (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). However, this topic seems to be highly under-investigated. The Norwegian study did not consider the possibility of prolonged studies and did not share the academic results in HE, but found that the educational performance in secondary school was highest among exchange students and even mobile degree students achieved a slightly higher score than non-mobile students. This might indicate that academically most successful students are more likely to participate in exchange programmes, maybe because those with more difficulties decide against it fearing that their difficulties might be worse abroad. This was, however, not N's case, as we have seen above (see *Family affairs*). Though Nic seemed to be rather successful academically, Nadia showed an argumentation in this line, saying that if she had difficulties to pass a subject studying in her mother tongue, she could imagine how difficult it would be to study abroad and in another language.

I'd really like to go abroad (-) and to work abroad because to be here in Spain no (-) I don't like it too much, you know? (-) and therefore when (-) my intention is, while I study the degree well (-) try to make a few contacts for when I'll finish, to be able to work abroad, you know? (-) that's one of the plans I have (Int2 Nic, l.716-720)

Yes, this year I have looked at it again, all the options and everything, I have read the reviews and I would really love to go, but I'm scared of going there and maybe failing because of the language barrier, you know? It's also a loss of money because, yes, you get a scholarship, but it's only peanuts, you know? I am scared of like failing my (...) Erasmus, if it was in the same language, then yes. (Int4 Nadia, l.490-494)

Margarita highlighted in her last interview, when her plan for the next year was to study a master in France, that employers always preferred a candidate with an international experience to one without if the remaining characteristics were similar. This idea is in line with previous research on European employers that showed that these often consider that mobile students are more adaptable, show more initiative, assertiveness/decisiveness/persistence and problem-solving abilities, while a Danish study indicated that “general recruitment criteria overlap with the kind of skills employers expect mobile students to have obtained abroad, such as ability to cooperate, being good at networking, and ‘adaptability to different conditions and changes’” (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). Once again the relation of cause and effect is not completely clear, as we cannot know if these candidates show these abilities because of their mobility or if they did the mobility because they already possessed these abilities. However, from the employer perspective, a mobility experience functions in both cases as an indicator of certain personal skills.

Interviewer: And is the master's degree official so it would be recognized here afterwards, or you haven't really thought about that?

Margarita: I don't know, but I don't care, I don't care, it doesn't matter, if I come here with a master's degree from France it's because... it might be different legally speaking, but for my CV it's perfect. [Interviewer: Ok, very well, very well] Well, if I was here and I got a CV from someone who has INEFC (see footnote 121) and a master's degree on special needs and who has gone to France and come back, I would think: "Oh, very well, on top of that she had an experience and knows French", it reflects good on your CV. What if then they ask for a specific qualification and I realise that one doesn't work? That would be a bummer, but I'll do the necessary to get the validation. It would be worse if I studied the education master's degree in there, because I would not be able to use it, but a master's degree on special needs is more universal. (Int5 Margarita, l.795-803)

International experiences may then have a certain signalling function on the labour market (see above) and allow students to disburden their job interviews from the necessity to convince in this sense. This may be especially interesting for students who are not particularly assertive and decisive, as they could compensate the personal impression with their resume and achieve like this at least an opportunity to prove their ability at work, explaining the smoother labour-market transitions of exchange students observed in the Norwegian study (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). In this sense, especially N. might come to improve her employability a lot with her exchange year in Germany, though she focused on the personal experience and followed her sister's steps rather than mentioning elements of a strategic labour-market orientation (see *Family affairs* and *Change and Continuity*). Moreover, she completed the follow-up with many more language skills and certificates than other participants, having studied English, German and French, while most others only focussed on English, if studying any language.

Especially regarding the smooth or more difficult transition to the labour market, it has to be said that the Norwegian study did also find a certain incoherency, as students from degrees in the field of science and technology did take longer to achieve their first employment, though

these are highly demanded on the Norwegian labour market. Wiers-Jenssen (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011) explained this finding with a tendency of these graduates to not rush to accept any job, knowing that they had good chances to find offers. This shows, once again, that depending on the used indicator the labour-market opportunities in almost any field of studies may appear better or worse (see *Professional profiles and the labour market*). Arguing that mobile degree students face more difficulties because they lack local contacts, while graduates from science and technology choose to prolong their transition in order to achieve certain quality in their first employment is, in this sense, not completely rigorous, as different measures are employed depending on the authors hypotheses, rather than testing these, for example by studying if mobile students do really lack local contacts or if they also take their time to search for a 'good' offer first.

Considering the important social selection in the access to student exchange programmes and the high costs of such stays abroad that are in Spain - unlike Norway - not adequately compensated by financial aids (see *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*), social inequality is very directly reproduced, especially when international experiences achieve a signalling function on the labour market. However, important differences between international experiences seem to exist and it is, especially, not the same to participate in a student exchange programme than to move abroad to work (see Peter's comments regarding his friends in London in *Mobility*). In order to improve social equality, it would therefore make especially sense to promote the participation of first-in-family students in these programmes, offering not only financial aids but also the necessary support to ensure that they do not have to prolong their studies or face academic failure abroad.

Extra-curricular activities and work experiences

Apart from language courses already mentioned in the previous section, diverse other extra-curricular activities and work experiences can be considered distinctive elements that mark graduates' employability (Bathmaker et al., 2013). Just as international experiences the access to such activities is highly mediated by economic and social capital, as only students who can afford it and who have the contacts to enter have the possibility to achieve the most distinguished elements, for example an unpaid internship in an enterprise of high renown abroad. Especially work experience is in this sense highly relative as it is by no means the same to work out of economic necessity in a field that has nothing to do with the studies than to gain first work experience in a study related field.

Though we will take a closer look at the participants' labour-market insertion and work experiences further below (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*), we can observe already here that several of the working participants achieved student jobs with a certain relation to their field of studies (Cara, Margarita, Sara, Peter). As none of the participants who completed the follow-up seemed to have depended on economic incomes to be able to pay their studies, this may have allowed them to be more selective in their choice of student jobs. In this it is eye-catching that Irina accepted diverse jobs with rather little relation to her studies after moving to Lleida, as this seemed to have been crucial for her affording a parent-independent housing. However, the field of studies is also important here, as it is rather easy to achieve a work as an English teacher (Sara) or offering sportive activities (Margarita, Cara, Irina, Peter) without

having completed related studies, while entering into a job related to social work is much more difficult. N. achieved after her first year a paid summer job in her field of studies directly claiming that her father used his contacts to get her in. That she did not repeat might have been related to her rather negative experience at work and her conviction that her degree was not the right thing for her (see *Family affairs*). Her work as a dance teacher had less relation with her degree, but as she planned to either combine her degree in business management with her passion for dance or to study dance pedagogy after graduation, it was still highly related to her future employability. It is, moreover, noteworthy that N. did not actually search for work, it rather seemed to find her, while Sara mentioned a temporary job as a waitress on a festival before becoming an English teacher and also said to have sent her CV to supermarket chains and shops at the end of the follow-up, as this indicates that she was lucky to find a job related to her field of studies, but was not selective in the sense that she would not have accepted other offers.

Regarding unpaid work experiences, that is to say in particular internships, we can observe the following: Floreta worked as a voluntary speech therapist in an association before graduation; Nadia did an internship in a wildlife recovery centre and was about to complete another internship in a veterinary clinic, though she would still have to complete yet one more internship for her degree course, and Willy did his degree's internship in a political party he furthermore signed in for and began to be politically active himself. Andrés did an unpaid internship in the local tourist information in the course of his studies and worked for 6 months as an unpaid intern in a hotel chain in Barcelona, before getting contracted by them. As he mentioned that he got the offer because the previous "community manager" quit when he was about to finish his internship, it is possible that he was just lucky to be in the right place at the right time, though he repeatedly reproduced the public discourse on employability (see *Labour-market entrance*) and did not reflect on the possibility that his internship could have been a dead end and he could have ended up completing one internship after another.

Nadia mentioned diverse veterinary-related extra-curricular activities, like the membership in thematic student groups that allowed her to enrol into courses at a reduced fee, voluntary programmes and, in Int5, an activity in which students assist lecturers who realise post-mortem examinations on found carcasses to report on the cause of death. Especially this activity appeared to be highly elitist, as it allowed a very personal contact to the lecturers and served as a significant training experience, while not much promotion was made in order to avoid flooding the programme with volunteers.

I work in collaboration with SEFAS, which is the University's wild fauna copathology service. That means that when lecturers need help when they have to do a necropsy or something else [Server interrupting] so when lecturers need help because there is an interesting case or they need to do a necropsy, they help us by sending us emails or calling us asking if we want to help or [Interviewer: very good] (...) when they find a dead animal they take it to the University to know what happened. And that's when they call us, in reality we are very few students, it's not really out there that this program exists, because otherwise a lot of people would like to do it, it's not really known, and well, we go alongside the lecturer, who explains everything that they are finding out and you help them with the necropsy. (Int4 Nadia, l.72-84)

I don't know, it's difficult but in the job as a volunteer we are given, every 15 days more or less, training classes about Asperger's syndrome, autism and alike and I attend those classes and can include them in my CV, so it's useful at least (Int3 Floreta, l.182-185)

Sara, Peter and Piruleta, on the other hand, only did the obligatory internships and in the placements their degree ascribed to them according to their scores. Though important differences in the contents and quality were mentioned (see *Big differences between and within universities*), these internships do not serve to mark a difference in the CV, in the sense of additional work experience, as all students do them. Though Sara and Peter worked throughout their degrees with children and furthermore in the fields of their specialisation (English and Sports, respectively) and Piruleta worked in parallel to her master as a kangaroo for an autistic boy, they did not pursue unpaid internships to improve their CVs and Piruleta quit her job with the autistic child once she got a full-time contract in a residence for mentally challenged adults, though the first did actually have more relation with her degree and her specialisation. In this, it seems that the three did not pursue a strategic CV improvement, but worked out of economic reasons, especially at the end of the follow-up. In Piruleta's case, we can observe a certain change in this regard, as she mentioned in her third-year interview the idea to keep doing things to improve her 'employability', mentioning several ideas that would certainly look good on her CV. Here it seems, hence, that the participants from social class A were aware of the importance of a strategic CV construction and knew what elements would look good. However, they postponed this construction until after their degrees and then changed their priorities around graduation, so that CV construction lost importance.

Once we both [Piruleta and her boyfriend] have a job, we will try to live together and I will look for a job to make some money or a short course to train myself, learn English above all, and do not stop because I know that otherwise I won't find a job and I need it. And my idea is becoming an au pair when I finish, if I don't have a job, I will leave as an au pair (Int3 Piruleta, l.338-341)

Interviewer: And now you are doing *castells* (see footnote 116) here in Lleida, and not in your [[hometown]], right?

Piruleta: No, only in Lleida, and actually last year I stopped, last year was the last year, because now I will start working. I have been doing *castells* for years and you have to be really committed. Right now, I'm thinking that I want to focus on myself and start doing other activities, I don't know, and if it's possible I will go from time to time to *castells* but if it's not, it won't be a problem, I don't want it to be an obligation like it was those last years.

Interviewer: And you were also doing *esplai* (see footnote 141)?

Piruleta: In [[hometown]]. I also stopped going last year, because with the master's degree, even if it was on-line, I had a lot of work — and I was also part-timing on the weekends and I wanted to be with my partner and my family, otherwise I never saw them. That's when I decided to stop doing it, because I couldn't handle everything and I didn't want to do things badly. I was someone who was always doing everything and I was always stressed, so I decided to take things slowly and do things better, to be happier, and that's what I'm doing. [Interviewer: very good] Now I'm not going to any activity, zero. (Int5 Piruleta, l.162-175)

As all three of them studied teacher training and did, consequently, aspire an employment in the public sector, we could have furthermore expected a reference to the preparation for *oposicions* (see footnotes 129 and 142). However, neither of the three mentioned these public contests, only referring to the substitution teacher list instead. Though Sara mentioned a course on children's drawing that did likely count as a merit, she also complained about not

having known about the importance of additional courses and certificates for the position on the list after inscription. Though she also said that she would not have had the time to achieve such certificates anyway, this indicates that she had known rather little about the access to work in her sector. Moreover, her exaggeration of the importance of such titles in Int5 indicated a continuing misunderstanding as she seemed to believe that it would have been even better to first achieve certificates and then enrol onto the list, rather than enrolling directly after graduation. This is simply wrong as additional merits are only used for the order of all new candidates who inscribe in the same period, but candidates who inscribe later do not achieve a better placement than those who are already on the list, no matter how many additional merits they present. As Sara had already inscribed at the moment of the interview, this misunderstanding was not going to affect her directly, but if she proliferated such ideas to other students or had conceived the idea somewhat earlier herself, it could have directly worsened her labour-market entrance.

Connections

Though both English and German now similar expressions to describe the importance of social capital in the access to employment – English: connections, German: Vitamin B, whereat the B stands for “*Beziehungen*” (relations) – the Spanish labour market is often described as particularly marked by favouritism¹⁴⁷. Several of the participants reproduced this representation directly by referring to *enchufes* (literally “plugs”). While Cara claimed that you cannot even get a summer job in Mallorca without connections, Skone joked that I could achieve him a job in university in a future

While most participants indirectly or directly criticised the practice of nepotism, several achieved their work contracts thanks to connections: Willy told a befriended politician with a public office that he had graduated and was looking for a job and she gave him a call some months later, telling him about a temporal substitution he could apply for; N. got her first work experience thanks to her father’s contacts; Piruleta found both her jobs, caring for an autistic child and working in a residence for mentally challenged adults thanks to friend from her degree; Cara got a summer job in Mallorca thanks to her boyfriend’s father; Nic did an occasional translation job a lecturer of his passed on to him; Koala was included into a selection process after a recommendation by a lecturer; Maduixa got several unpaid internships thanks to her uncle and valued as well her fellow students and lecturers as possible future connections; similarly, I was the one to tell Sara about the vacancy in the language school she then came to work for. Several others mentioned a strategic use of connections, as Floreta claimed that it was important to know the right people and to stay in their memory and had already made positive experiences in University, because people knew her. Maduixa knew that her lecturers could be decisive for the labour market transition as many of them worked free-lance in the sector and highlighted that connections were in her sector crucial especially to get started. Willy ascribed high importance to having a broad and potent social network, but did not directly mention a strategy behind this, though he obviously used his network already throughout the follow-up in this sense, so he might not have seen a necessity to explicitly name this utility of networking.

¹⁴⁷ See for example: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/spain-and-hungary-tumble-in-ti-s-annual-corruption-report/> [last access: 07.07.2018].

Unlikely [Interviewer: okay] through public channels I think it is impossible, at least, this year. Perhaps in a couple of years, who knows?, and through private channels, unless you have a contact, I also see it unlikely [Interviewer: connections] exactly (2) or it may happen that you have luck, that you have an interview, but I always think if you have an interview, other 25 people or more will go as well, and among those there is always one known by the recruiter. So, he thinks from these two who are very similar, I prefer the one I know (Int5 Peter, l.491-496).

So I thought: "Men, why don't you find a summer job so you can earn some pennies and you don't have to be always asking your parents for money", which I felt bad about. And taking advantage of last year's contact, because the woman that gave me my internship was [[political function]], so I told her: "Listen, [[woman's name]], you wouldn't know anything about a job opening or anything like that?" And she answered me: "Well, I'll check it for you". And also last year I started being active in [[political party]], and therefore I knew the region's coordinator and I told her: "Listen, [[woman's name]], well, if you know about a job opening for the local government, no matter where it is, well, if you know anything, if you hear of anything, let me know, please". And one month passed, two months, and I was already thinking that they wouldn't have found anything, but 15 days ago, maybe 3 weeks ago, I got a call from that woman. She told me that a technician in the government's delegation in [[city]] had been injured, and that he would be on sick leave for about two months, and maybe even more, because he had fallen and had an injury in the spine and had to go into surgery [Interviewer: Wow] so she told me: "So, we have this opening and we have talked with [woman's name] (.) and we think that you would be the ideal candidate for this job, are you interested?" And I was like: "Of course I am interested!" (Int5 Willy, l.103-122)

Interviewer: But does it have anything to do with the degree? The scholarship thing?

Floreta: no, but it has helped me many times to be known by the people. I've been able to talk to the Dean if I had a problem or for other reasons. For example, this year I remember that I had a problem with the registration and when I called, they answered "Hi Floreta, how are you?" Being known by the people is an advantage, whether you like it or not, not only when you need a favour, but also because you are a person who works and gets involved and you receive something back, so I try to help (.) and it's cool (Int4 Floreta, l.262-268)

Of course, that is why now what one should do is study and get a university degree or superior-level vocational training and be practical and clever, not intelligent but clever; being intelligent means knowing maths, but if you are clever you try to get to know a certain person because he's the boss of whatsoever, not with the objective of being put into a job through connections, but perhaps if he knows you and thinks you are good then... that is why you need to talk to people and have contacts because otherwise it's bad, for now I study and then... (Int2 Floreta, 201-206)

I think I won't have enough. I am actually doing this degree, as well because I want to learn, but more specifically to earn a certification. Because I won't be learning everything I need for the professional world, but through these studies I will meet people and start networking, and this can open other doors, which will lead to interesting things. So, I don't know, right now I think in a way it gives me more time before entering the professional world and it's kind of a preparation, you know? Because when I was little I thought that having a degree was everything, but it's not like that, you only learn the basics. (Int3 Maduixa, l.407-412)

This indicates that social capital may have a much higher importance in Spain than in other European countries, allowing for a rather direct reproduction of social inequalities through

contacts. Apart from young people from lower social classes, especially immigrants should then face disadvantage, unless they are able to quickly acquire and mobilise social capital in their new surroundings.

6.3.3. *Labour-market entrance*

In this section, it is interesting to see that 4 of the 9 participants who finished their degree achieved work in their field rather quickly: In the last interview round, Andrés (social class C) and Floreta (social class D) worked full time in their respective fields of studies, Floreta with a one-year contract that had already been prolonged once and Andrés with a one-year contract that included a 6-month probation time that was about to finish. While Floreta was decided to decline further offers to prolong her contract, Andrés claimed that he could achieve an infinite contract after the year. Koala (social class C) found a half-time job in his field of studies he was able to combine with a master degree. Willy (social class B) had just begun to work full-time in a temporal substitution in his field of studies and said that he had been told that the chances were good that the contract would be prolonged after these months, so he had already adverted university about his dropping out of the two-year master he had begun to study. Out of the other 5 graduated participants, 1 had achieved a full-time employment with a one-year contract but not in her field of studies (Piruleta, social class A), 2 continued to work in their previous student jobs (Cara, social class D; Sara, social class A) or had achieved similarly precarious and limited new employments (Irina, social class C) and only 1 (Skone, social class D), did not work at all but out of his own decision (see also *Degree of completion of development tasks*). This may indicate that their labour-market entrance was in many senses easier as they had anticipated (see *Labour-market perceptions*), but came with rather high levels of precariousness, in the sense of temporality and partiality. That especially Piruleta and Sara, the participants from social class A who had already completed their degrees at the end of the follow-up, were not working in their fields of study, may indicate that their transition was more difficult or that they were less selective in their job search, though the strong state regulation of access to the public teacher staff may also lead to a certain delay in the labour market entrance. As the follow-up ended here, we cannot know if this precariousness was in the end only temporal as the participants hoped, but can state for now a certain ease in the transition that inspires hope. Though important gender differences on the labour market persist, as women still show a more heterogenic labour market participation, periods of economical dependence, fewer chances to ascend to high positions and a lower mean salary for the same work (Walther & Stauber, 2007; Winker & Degele, 2009), some research has indicated that these differences become more evident over time, as differences seem to be highly related to maternity and this is increasingly postponed (Vieira & Miret Gamundi, 2010). In this sense, we should not expect too big gender differences regarding the first labour market entrance, which is likely precarious for men and women alike.

Yes, I have been sending CVs, I sent some to schools, to semi-private schools, and I still have some left to send. I will try to do it before the classes end. And, well, I also had some problems with my job so I started sending CVs everywhere, *Decathlon*, everywhere, but nothing has come up yet [Interviewer: Oh, sorry], nothing has come up yet, but well...

Interviewer: So if back then you had been offered...

Sara: If I had been offered any job, even at *Mercadona*, I would have taken it and left my job. [Interviewer: Ok] But well (.) that hasn't been the case (Int5 Sara, l.49-55)

Interviewer: And do you have any possibility to go back to that school or...?

Sara: They called me to offer me an interview [Interviewer: Ah, that's very nice] but I didn't get the job. [Interviewer: Oh, sorry] But I understand it, I mean, I am someone who just finished my studies, I'm sure there are a lot of people with much more experience than I have. And they told me: "Religion is a requirement", and I have no certification for religion, so I could not get in. But I don't want to close any door, and they told me: "If it's not this time, it will be another one" (...) And I also understand that it was a permanent contract, so no one will be hiring someone that has never worked in a school for that position. So they picked a guy who was already older than I am and who had been working for years and he had been doing replacements there, so I understand it. So maybe if they need a replacement one day they might call me, but otherwise... I understand, because it was a permanent contract, it was a shame because it would have been nice, but well. (Int5 Sara, l.175-189)

Then I went there, because in Lleida the job offerings were only part time and I wouldn't have been able to save any money. And I didn't want to start studying a master's degree right away, I wasn't sure and I didn't have the money, and I didn't want my parents to pay for it, I wanted to pay it myself. So I said: "I'll go to [[Spanish island[]], I will work, get some experience and save money". [Interviewer: Ah, very good] because that's difficult, because when you're looking for a job they always ask for 2 years' experience, and it is a bit [Interviewer: impossible] impossible if you just finished your studies. And this opportunity, even though I had to go to another place that was not Lleida, but well, it has been a new experience and, well, you have to go for it a bit blindfolded¹⁴⁸, but well (Int5 Floreta, l.8-16)

Interviewer: So that's when you started to work at the special-care home?

Piruleta: Well, it's just since July that I'm on a permanent contract. Before that, I was going on alternate weekends, and during the week they used to call me for specific days like: "now you can work this day, and can you come this other day?" And I was always saying yes, because I was interested in getting experience and also for the money.

Interviewer: Yes, that's what you were telling me, that sometimes you couldn't meet because they called you.

Piruleta: Exactly, because it was like: "does this day work for you?" or "can you come this day?" and I couldn't say no, because I wanted to work there in the long term. And look, it worked, and now I have a contract, well, for now it's a one-year contract. [Interviewer: ((2sec)) that you said about a paid leave?] Yes, a man took a paid leave for a year. [Interviewer: Full-time] Yes, I work full-time, I don't even know how many hours I work in a month, I haven't looked at it in the contract, but I work almost every day. And then I have two days off, and it can be on Monday, on Tuesday, or the weekend, it depends. But it's really nice and I really, really, really, really like it. (Int5 Piruleta, l.76-90)

Especially the last quote from Piruleta shows, furthermore, that she knew rather little about her new working conditions and mixed work-related terminology up. She used for example the word "permanent" (*fixe*) to distinguish her new contract from the previous months in which she worked on stand-by, substituting others whenever she got the chance to do so, but without any stability. So she probably meant her new stability and full-time contract with the word 'permanent', it is usually used to refer to permanent contracts as in contrast to temporal contracts. Her contract was, however, temporal. Moreover, she did not even bother to check

¹⁴⁸ The expression used in the Catalan original was: "*tirar-se a la piscina*".

for the hours she would have to work per week in her contract, expressing her delight at this better contract in comparison to her previous situation - indicating again rather low exigencies.

Moreover and in line with Chisholm's (2006) advertency that young people come to want what expects them anyway, several participants seemed to perceive advantages in their current situation. Working few hours and finalising their contracts with the end of the school year in order to have the summer free (Sara, Cara, N.) or to only work in summer in order to be able to concentrate throughout the academic course on their studies (Nadia) was embraced by the participants as a necessary condition to combine their studies with first work experiences (see also *... and what about work?*). After graduation, precariousness was also perceived as an advantage at this point of their careers, as several participants considered their current occupations as nothing they would like to do forever and therefore took the idea that they would end rather soon as an opportunity to achieve something better afterwards or to at least make a change. Koala insinuated that he could have signed a better contract if he had not been studying a master and displayed much confidence that he would achieve a full-time contract in his current workplace or elsewhere as soon as he told the employer to be ready for it, but was also considering to change jobs. Floreta described her move to a Spanish island as an active choice between a full-time employment – only available there – and high partiality and, in consequence, low salaries in closer proximity to her parents' residence. The temporality of the job on the island did then turn into an asset, as she considered it a possibility to gain first working experiences – necessary to be able to aspire to a better job elsewhere – and to save money, before returning to her autonomous community.

This high acceptance of temporary employments was, hence, related to a rather low job satisfaction. The narratives of the participants who had made first experiences on the graduate labour market were full of negative aspects. In this sense, their hopes were not limited to aspiring infinite contracts and more economic stability in a future, but also to achieve a more attractive daily routine.

Especially Andrés, Floreta and Koala, the three participants who had already spent some time in their jobs at the moment of the last interview, expressed a high level of dissatisfaction with their current daily routines that may indicate a certain "shock" when entering full-time employment. While Koala and Andrés claimed to have no time for a social life and described their current routines as highly monotonous and repetitive, Floreta ascribed her inactivity and lack of a social life to her displacement. As she mentioned repeatedly a certain subliminal conflict with her colleagues but also difficulties to trace a line between her work and her private life, as users attempted to cross this line by sending her private messages and inviting her to dates, Floreta seemed to be especially unhappy with the work-related relationships. However, this situation seemed to exhaust her in a way that she did not have the energy to be active in her free time. Her point of reference was hereby clearly her extraordinarily high level of social activity in HE, as she felt that in comparison to this, her current sporadic visits to the gym, the dancing course she frequented once a week with some friends and the occasional weekend trips to discover the island were next to nothing (see *Social success*). Rather than to her new working routine, Floreta ascribed this change indirectly to her change in location, constructing a strong contrast between her time use when visiting Catalonia and her time on the island, as she returned to her high levels of social activity on her visits and even spoke of a

new awareness of the value of her time that made her be highly selective in the choice of people to spend her time with. Though this indicates a certain auto-exclusion and active reduction of her social network, Floreta seemed to be convinced that once she had returned to Catalonia, things would become different again.

Andrés seemed to be more aware that he and his boyfriend would have little free time and especially little free time together now that they were working, but expected to compensate this lack of time by adding quality to the time spend together once they moved out of the grandmother's residence and lived together as a couple. So for him, the problem was not his full-time employment, but his housing situation and, at most, his fear to fail at work which he explained with his lack of experience. Koala ascribed his current difficulties at work to the Spanish mentality, arguing that his boss and colleagues left everything for the last moment and then forced him to hurry and do things in a rush, he would prefer to do taking his time, in order to avoid errors. From the way he describes the situation, it seems that such errors have already happened, so here we may be also observing a frustration caused by a dissatisfaction with his own results - very similar to Andrés - though he did not search for the problem in his own abilities, blaming his bosses and colleagues instead. He planned to move in the future abroad, finding a place where he could be happier. This shows that all three of them ascribed their low satisfaction to rather minor circumstances instead of considering full-time work in itself as the cause of their dissatisfaction.

I want to leave Spain because it's not the place for me, because most people's mindset, or, at least, most people I know, is not like me, because it is very: "No, keep calm, everything's alright" and that is not serious at all, and I'm realising it now at the enterprise I work for, it's a very disorganized way and it brings out issues later on. For example, the boss or someone else might come and say: "No, I need a device for this afternoon" (-- "What? You could have told me two days ago, because you already knew, didn't you? It didn't take much and I would have had more time to get it ready and try it, to make sure it worked perfectly... Because, well, afterwards we will have an issue like 'this device is not working'... Well, ok, I'm sorry, I do what I can, but sometimes I can make errors and specially if we want everything at the last minute and rushing it" (Int5 Koala, l.272-280)

Yes, I'm really happy. Let's see, I'm starting and sometimes I feel a bit frustrated since I'm being demanded really too much because I am the last who has entered, I'm the new one [Interviewer: yes] and, of course, they want to see an efficient person, don't they? So I sometimes feel frustrated because I'm not doing things well, but I make a lot of effort. It happens that I'm new and I don't have much experience either, you know, and sometimes I feel as if, I worry about whether I'm doing things right, I mean, I don't want to disappoint people because I was given an opportunity and (.) and, well, I don't know (Int5 Andrés, l.24-30)

[[Spanish island]] is not my place, why? because my surroundings, the people that surround me and so on aren't to my, I'm not completely happy (Int5 Floreta, l.865f.)

In spite of these rather different explanations, a common trait is that all three full-time working participants were unhappy in their current work, but constructed this unhappiness as a temporal sacrifice, embracing temporariness as a promise of change and hence improvement (see also *Happiness*). By ascribing their unhappiness to aspects different from the fact to be working full time – the housing situation (Andrés), the difficulties with social relationships at work (Floreta) and the Spanish mentality (Koala), respectively – they could

cope with the shock by conceiving solutions in a rather near future thanks to their current temporality and that did not put in doubt the possibility to be happy in a full-time job in their field of studies – a doubt that could easily induce a crisis after all these years of preparation.

Though many other participants had not yet achieved a labour market entrance, they already experienced a similar tendency regarding a reduction of their social networks (see also *Social success*). While many participants had believed in the course of the follow-up that they would stay friends forever with their friends from university, several mentioned difficulties to stay in touch after graduation. When talking about their friends, we notice furthermore that several participants mentioned different numbers of friends at different moments of their last interview. This may indicate that they were in the middle of a process of re-evaluating their friendship network and that they had not taken a conscious decisions to stop to consider someone a friend, but just did not remember this person in a certain context, though they did in another.

Several participants developed sophisticated subjective theories (Latour, 2005) about friendship and though they often considered rather opposed aspects crucial for maintaining a friendship, they generally claimed – with high emotionality – that the end of the friendship had not been their fault. Sara considered, for example, that the other girls from her group from university who had stopped to stay in touch and did not even write on WhatsApp any longer did so because they had a wrong idea of friendship and did not see a reason in maintaining the contact to a friend just because they did no longer meet on a daily basis. She, on the contrary, maintained her friendships no matter how far her friends moved and knew that things were going to be exactly like they used to be on their next meeting. While she did not consider geographical distance or physical contact relevant, she ascribed high importance to a certain frequency of any kind of contact, assuming that WhatsApp could compensate for a lack of personal contact. Floreta, on the contrary, told me that she had been invited to a dinner with fellow students from University on the weekend we met for our last interview, but decided not to attend when the possibility opened up to spend the time instead with an old friend she had not seen in a long time. Here she highlighted that her time in Catalonia was severely limited so she had become more selective in choosing the persons with whom to spend it. While she did like spending time with her fellow students before, she now thought that it did not make much sense to attend the dinner and spent the night hearing the updates of everybody, as for the people she had maintained the contact with she already knew what they were doing and for those she did not stay in touch, she did not have a need to find out now what they were doing either. In spite of the different approaches, this shows that friendships turn to become a critical topic after graduation, requiring students to cope with the negative emotions and temporal impossibilities they face. Sara did not face the same limitations as Floreta did, as she never left her birth town and had rather too much free time after graduation, as she could not find a full-time employment and continued in her part-time student job. Floreta, on the contrary, worked full-time and too far away for any of her local friends to drive by spontaneously. That forced her to being more selective than Sara, so she justified her criteria, while Sara was able to condemn those who had not selected her, because she did not have to be selective with anybody. Rather than social class, factors like geographic distance and free time may be influential in this process, though these may be, in the long run, influenced by social class if the lower social classes experience precariousness for longer periods of time, so

an indirect influence could be given. The sudden reduction of their social network, adds to the rather difficult adaptation to a full-time working routine, increasing dissatisfaction.

now for example, yesterday they had made a' this speech therapy dinner from the people that were going [to University together], but I did not go, I did not go because I did not feel like seeing' how do I explain it, right? It's not my everyday, is it? I do not share anything with them, or no, my time now is very valuable, you know? So I ... (...) since I'm here [[Catalonia]] when I'm on [[Spanish island]] I do not care? Because of course what do I do? Nothing but of course when I'm here it's like I have to make the most of it [Interviewer: of course] and I said it does not matter, I'm not going because what are we going to do? I will tell them that I am in [[Spanish island]], they will tell me they are working, I don't know where I bang bang bang but this is what I know, you know? I did not see the substance of saying I can use the chance and have a good time, no, I prefer to use the chance to be with my friends of a lifetime¹⁴⁹ and, you know? I don't know, I have reached another point of, I don't know (Int5 Floreta, l.494-503)

This one girl, for example, when the University year was ending and summer was starting, she already stopped texting us on the group, because she's not from here, she's from [[name of city]], so she stopped texting. And you would think: "Come on, we can see each other even if it's not at University", but you already see it coming and...

Interviewer: So it's not because of London, it's because they are actually like that

Sara: It's true that some people need to be in touch daily with someone to consider themselves friends, but I am not like that. I know I have really good friends even if they are far away and I can't see them, but I know they are there, so I don't need this daily contact where you meet and see each other every day, no (.). So, the ones who don't understand this are the ones who are left down the road, the ones you know nothing of anymore, and it's a pity, but (Int5 Sara, l.558-567)

Another topic related to work is the question if and how Universities support their students and graduates in their labour market entrance. The UdL offers a vacancy database for students and graduates and celebrates an annual job fair but none of the participants ever came to mention them. Nadia mentioned a web portal from the UAB that officially wanted to help students in their search for paid internships. In her experience, the use of the portal was, however, different. Though all offers on the portal had to include an hourly payment of 5 €, the companies arranged unpaid agreements with their interns anyway, especially in Nadia's field. Moreover, she insinuated at another moment that she had found the placement herself and had been told by the university that the veterinary clinic had to offer the placement through the portal so she could present for it. The practice to 'force' students to formalize their internship through the portal, though they had found it in a different way, does only seem to provoke additional work to the students and their 'employers', while it could furthermore provoke false hopes in other students who might apply through the portal to an offer that is already given. A possible explanation for this obligated use of the portal might be that the university attempted to improve the portal's success rate and hence their image in supporting students' labour market entrance. Moreover, such practices help to obscure practices of nepotism, as placements achieved through connections may appear the result of an objective competition if these are published and granted through a web portal.

¹⁴⁹ The expression used in the Spanish original was "*amigos de toda la vida*", referring especially to childhood friends who continue to be friends.

Interviewer: And about the internship you are starting soon, is it a paid one, or...?

Nadia: No, no, no [Interviewer: No, no, no paying here...] no way, I mean, actually, if we had done the contract through *treball campus*¹⁵⁰, which is a platform from university to ease these internship contracts... It's like a virtual platform where you sign up and upload your CV, and everything is made so that you fill in the application exactly like they want you to, and then the company also has to fill in some other things, and then the companies publish job offerings, and some of them are paid ones. In theory all internships should be paid, and you should compulsorily get paid 5 Euros per hour, but of course not all companies do it, some of them do (...) make an unpaid contract, they find you via *treball campus* but only find you, you know? They don't make your contract via this platform [Interviewer: Ok], in other words they talk with you and you end up reaching an agreement and making the contract directly (.) [Interviewer: Ok] which is the way it had always been made, the thing is, well, students were complaining about the internship issues because they were taking advantage of them and so on, so they created this platform to be able to regulate a little bit all this, but it's really useless, but well (...) there are certain degrees where the internships are paid ones, but not for veterinary science or medicine and these kind of branches, no. (Int5 Nadia, l.48-66)

6.3.4. *Becoming a professional*

Previous research has paid certain attention to how young people's work values change in the course of their studies and once in work. A study conducted in Spain considered intrinsic ("conditioned by his or her personality") and extrinsic ("dependent upon external factors") work values of first-year HE students, differentiating regarding the extrinsic values furthermore between pragmatic, social and mobility (Cortés-Pascual et al., 2014, p. 733,734). While the study showed the high importance of intrinsic work values, the authors argue that as "individuals consolidate their professional careers, they gradually come to place comparatively less importance on their jobs than on other facets of their lives and adopt more extrinsic work values (mainly related to remuneration)" (Cortés-Pascual et al., 2014, p. 735). While the authors only draw on first-year students in the cited publication, the longitudinal project at hand may give us further insights into the development of work values over time, though the limited labour-market inclusion at the end of the follow-up limits the possibilities to study its effects.

We have seen in previous sections how interests and abilities – intrinsic values – (see *What I was born for - or not* and *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*) appeared as crucial in the participants' study-choice narratives. The opinion and model of significant others – social extrinsic values – (see *Family affairs*); perceived job opportunities in the sense of risk of unemployment and employment stability – pragmatic extrinsic values – (see *Professional profiles and the labour market* and *Flashing up and vanishing alternatives*), and the anticipation of mobility – mobility extrinsic values – (see *Professional profiles and the labour market*), also played a role for the participants in this study. In some cases we have observed a certain conflict, as they believed on the one hand that you have to study something that is to your liking and that you can envision yourself to work in, but chose on the other hand a degree that was not their cup of tea, because they perceived it to offer certain economic stability (N.). From this perspective, we can hence also read the described

¹⁵⁰ The name was not translated, but "*treball*" means "work".

dilemma as an unsolved conflict of intrinsic and extrinsic work values and ask if this affected N.'s study choice and academic success negatively.

While N. had started towards the beginning of the follow-up to highlight the importance of economic stability and continued to believe until the last interview in the importance of experiencing fulfilment at work for personal happiness, others showed a certain change in the course of the follow-up. Skone came to mention the importance of his future salary in Int3, arguing that he would likely earn more money thanks to having achieved two degree certificates. Being rich turned into his main objective in Int5 and though he highlighted an interest in helping others with this money, he showed a work ethic directly opposed to Andrés, discarding any hard work – or actually any employment or laborious entrepreneurship – and favouring an economic activity that would allow him to connect and disconnect anywhere, anytime. Other than N., Skone did not experience any value conflict, as his idea to invest on the stock market seemed to perfectly combine his intrinsic interest to not work hard with his extrinsic value to become rich. However, in his account of his last year in university he seemed to have faced such a conflict and actually came to solve it by identifying with the profile of a trader. Here it is interesting that he claimed to have perceived traders in the past as rather repugnant and had never considered to become one himself. Thanks to a first contact with a – possibly less repugnant – trader, he had revised this perception of traders and developed a new identity construction, perceiving himself as such, that allowed him to solve his value conflict (see also *Change and Continuity*).

Interviewer: well I thought of healing kittens as well

Skone: (laughs) but that doesn't bring any money eh? (Int3 Skone, l.508-510)

Skone: Exactly, I only saw money and that, but I did not see where it came from, right? And in the end, I, before I thought about all that, I saw the people who worked in the markets as people... well, as overbearing and arrogant people

Interviewer: This guy is very different of course ... he's also all tattooed it's that he does not comply with the style, the image you have ... (interrupted)

Skone: Yes yes, what happens is that, already in general you know the prototype of the person, you know? It reminded me a bit of the plastic surgeon prototype, you know? a conceited person, a person who... then when I discovered all this, this what I'm telling you, right? I did not have it or planned or anything, you know? I started reading the book for such, I was interested, I tried it and from there I continued, little by little I kept doing ... (Int5 Skone, l.821-829)

Peter, on the contrary, came to ascribe more importance to well-being and happiness and argued that he would worry and suffer less because of academic difficulties if he had to study his degree again from the start. Here he assumed, indirectly, that graduation would be enough for him, rather than aspiring certain academic outcomes or to not fail a subject. As this change in attitude happened once his academic difficulties had made it clear that the latter was not too realistic, this is in line with a finding from Reay (2000) on mothers who favour their children's academic outcomes unless these face academic difficulty, considering in this case their children's happiness as most important (see also *Social success*). Similarly, N. constructed her study choice in her first-year interview highlighting that she had not wanted to repeat the negative experiences from High School and ensuring her well-being, once her PAU score had been too low to actually study architecture as she had had in mind (see *Worried girls and nonchalant*

heroes). In this sense, happiness may gain importance in the course of the life, as other aspirations are discarded. However, ascribing importance to happiness in their accounts must not necessarily mean that the participants did actually gain happiness, as N. continued to suffer throughout most of the follow-up (see *Happiness*). The flip-side of this narrative were participants who were academically more successful and seemed to sacrifice their present happiness for high academic outcomes (see especially Sara and Piruleta, *Health*). Moreover, apart from individual aspirations based on previous experiences, general tendencies regarding aspirations are possible: At the beginning of the professional career, the aspirations might still be high, explaining why several participants accepted to experience a certain dry spell of sacrifices before achieving complete happiness (see *Labour-market entrance* and *Happiness*). Especially in the accounts of Peter, Sara and Piruleta, University appeared as a sacrifice and graduation was related to a liberation, as they were now able to rest and take things easier.

Peter: I would tell them that with the degree, if you work for it day after day, it's tranquil, that, that they should not worry, that things are always working out at the end, well, now I have a co' a friend who is in the second [year] and he says to me "damn, the thing is that I do not make it, I do not make it" " you, keep calm" I say and that I also said the same and in the end everything worked out

Interviewer: Yes, I think that the second year was the year that you were all very busy, that was very hard

Peter: yes, the second year was the key year and then third and fourth was quite relaxed. (Int5 Peter, I.382-387)

I don't know, I do not like it to define myself eh? (.) Eh (-) I don't know, it's what I've told you I see that maybe I've made a change as a person, well, not as a person, a bit in my mentality, in my way of being (2)[Interviewer: thanks to this subject of proceedings?] I believe that the subject and the fact of having finished these university studies..., when I finish my degree it's about doing the work [as a teacher] and that does not cause me a lot of stress (-) that is to say, I believe that (.) When I was doing my degree there were many phases, many times of the year when I was very dazzled, out of a grain of sand I was making a mountain (.) and I think that marked my personality a bit, and from now on, starting from the fact of having finished being a lot calmer and more relaxed, having much more time for myself, I think I have also changed quite a lot (.) [Interviewer: yes] I'm more receptive and more content, (.) usually [Interviewer: very well very well, more focused] that too [Interviewer: very well] with different ideas (Int5 Peter, I.458-469)

The longitudinal character of this project allows us to observe further changes, apart from work values. In the course of the follow-up, but especially once in work it was possible to observe certain changes in the participants that did not only affect the contents of their accounts, but also their ways to express them¹⁵¹. We have already seen above that Xenia came to depreciate physicians as pure subworkers of researchers (see *Professional profiles and the labour market*) and that Irina started to speak of "users" after her third-year internship (see *What I was born for - or not*). The same change in the used terminology appeared in Floreta's interviews and was even more eye-catching as Floreta had spoken repeatedly of "patients" in the past, indicating a certain overcoming of this clinical approach, at least linguistically. As "user" has come to substitute the term "client" that had substituted previous terms like "case" that were

¹⁵¹ Furthermore, we could consider changes in the looks (clothes, hair and accessory) and the ways to move, but as these were not captured in the audio-recordings a systematic analysis was not possible.

criticized for reducing the affected persons to their problems (Robertis, 2003), this shows that the participants quickly adapted to the current linguistic trends in their fields. In spite of the ethical reflections that motivated the diverse terminological changes especially in social work, one might wonder if this change in terminology was accompanied by a change in attitude and behaviour or if it merely represents an euphemistic way to label the same practices. Irina was very critical with the professional practice she had observed in her internship, but did not reflect on this wording; neither did Piruleta wonder if calling the inhabitants of a residence for mentally challenged adults – yet another euphemism – “users” made sense in contexts of forced institutionalization. The quick adaptation to the official jargon after their first exposure and the lack of reflections about the implications of this terminology in the interviews might indicate an under-examination of these sector-inherent contradictions.

Other changes in the participants' ways to express themselves that may or may not be related to their labour-market entrance appeared in several last-year interviews: Floreta had moved to a Spanish island and used several local words and expressions in her last interview. Similarly, Koala and Andrés used an increased amount of Anglicism. Willy changed his way to express himself in an interesting way: Instead of answering my questions right away, he only commented on a concrete aspect of the question or he answered as if I had asked something else. When I asked, for example, if he would still like to move abroad, he answered that he would not have any problem with moving abroad, though this does not tell us anything about his preferences.

Interviewer: would you still like to leave? Would it still be to your liking?

Willy: yes, I wouldn't have any problem to leave (Willy, Int5, l.699f.)

As he had studied political sciences and mentioned for the first time in Int5 that he had become a member of a political party and could imagine to go into politics himself, though he had discarded this option in earlier interviews, I could not help but relate this style in answering to the way politicians answer interviews and construct their discourses. As Hilaire and Padwa (2011) argue in their handbook for persuasion, politicians are at a continuous risk to provoke a scandal by answering especially hypothetical questions as their answers expose them to vulnerability and press and opponents only wait for such an occasion to attack. The best way to avoid the scandal is then to not answer the question, though the authors consider it better to explain this with the inherent difficulty of the question than by refusing to answer right away. Willy's strategy to turn the question upside down or to only focus an aspect is, in this sense, an even more valuable strategy as it neither exposes him to vulnerability, nor enters into a philosophic discussion on question types, nor affronts the interlocutor directly. Moreover, the high importance Willy ascribed to having a broad social network appeared to be in line with this perception of his becoming a politician.

In a political consulting office or (-) but, for example, when they tell me, right? "You should be a politician". Well, no (.) maybe I'm not interested in being a politician, and also it's different (.) [Interviewer: hm] Of course (.) maybe you do it for a while because, well (-) let's pretend to be politicians (laughs). (Int1 Willy, 206-209)

Interviewer: well that, a higher position, as a politician as well or...?

Willy: maybe yes, maybe yes (Willy, Int5, l.553f.)

[laughs] No, maybe yes, I mean, I don't see myself pursuing a political career right now, but I'm not ruling it out, I don't know. I don't know, I mean even in a political office, or at the public official level, I mean, I don't know but eh, being a functionary at a Department or a Ministry, I don't know, I don't know. (Willy, Int5, l.556-559)

Andrés last interview was also full of technical terms he encountered in his new work environment, namely the English job description to be a “community manager”. Moreover, he showed a highly client-oriented attitude that I would call in Spanish as “*servicial*” (ready to be of service; accommodating), putting the clients’ needs and satisfaction repeatedly over his own. As this attitude may be very useful in the hotel sector, there might be a direct relation to his current work. However, he also spoke of the Spanish economy reproducing neoliberal discourses of meritocracy and a “healthy” competition for attractive employments, in which the “best” candidate wins. “Best” was hereby associated with showing a work ethic of hard work and having more work experiences. Though this idea is supported by his experience to have achieved a contract in a hotel chain after an unpaid internship, he also mentioned that he was lucky to be there when the previous community manager quit, so rather than a result of his good work as an intern, his contract may have been a result of pure luck. That he did not refer to connections at all, may either be related to his lack of connections and, hence, a certain ignorance of their importance, or a wish to invisibilise this importance in order to ennoble his own itinerary. As he ascribed high importance to happiness (see *Happiness*), negating the importance of a capital he was missing, might furthermore be a (subconscious) strategy to maintain his happiness, as negative thoughts in this regard might affect it. As young professionals in a British study also tended to refer to their lack of work experience when explaining their different treatment at work, rather than considering the existence of inequalities (Kelan, 2014), Andrés argumentation is in line with this, as he did not assume a discrimination due to a permanent characteristic – as could be his migration history or sexual orientation – but due to his temporal lack of experience, directly related to his age. Xenia, on the contrary, was highly aware of the possible discrimination people from her country of origin might face on the labour market, referring to the experiences of a girl she knew from her country of origin on the German labour market. However, she never said that she expected to encounter the same difficulties on the Spanish labour market or wherever she might come to move and as she also spoke very positively of a - highly precarious - employment another friend from her country of origin found in Norway, it is possible that she related her criticism solely to Germany.

Andrés: what recommendations? Let's see, I would encourage them to do it because I think it's a career that has a future, that (.) Eh (-) if you like to face the public and you have people skills it's a good career, because you have to have people skills and it's a field where you have to maintain contact with the person, you know? [Interviewer: yes] and it's important because let's say that to work in tourism, it starts with the reception because it's tourism (.) And you have to have a good relationship with the client and have a willingness to help to accommodate the client's needs, you know? And that's very important (.) If the person is not like that, it's not even necessary that they sign up for that career because it won't... (Int5 Andrés, l.236-242)

She has been made an offer to go to the United States as a Spanish teacher (-) and she has ((preferred to meet)) in Germany with the German guy (smiling) (-) and she can't find a job because of her [[nationality of the country of origin]] (.) [Interviewer: ah really?] That is to

say, the Germans reject her because of being [[nationality of the country of origin]] (.). It looks like... (-) when she goes to interviews, she's very well received and when they sign the papers and such (-) she indicates that she is from [[country of origin]] and so on (-) they tell her "no", that they are sorry but that the (-) they even said it to her face, once they told her in the face that (-) for being [[nationality of the country of origin]] that there are many people who don't tolerate it and who don't want' because, of course she's looking for a job as a teacher (-) [Interviewer: um] [they say] that the parents, well, that they don't tolerate the [[people with the nationality of origin]] and "many parents who wouldn't" [Interviewer: um] (-) "who wouldn't be happy with you and we don't want you" (Int2 Xenia, l.687-699)

Furthermore, Andrés way to talk about the sector and selection criteria may indicate certain identification with the position of a hotel manager; a job he was aspiring to achieve in a future. In this sense, participants might not only adapt to their field once they work in it, but also orient towards the positions they aspire and are – in some cases for the first time – able to observe in their professional role. This corroborates the thesis of a coping with inequalities by invisibilising them (Kelan, 2014). However, as only few participants had achieved full-time employment at the end of the follow-up, future research will have to shed light on social divisions and how they influence in these processes.

6.3.5. *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*

Independently of their having entered the labour market or not, several participants showed at the end of the follow-up a new perspective towards their degree course and constructed their itinerary in another way. Though criticism did not disappear completely, the high levels of criticism regarding their lecturers, degrees and universities achieved towards the middle of the follow-up were not maintained. While several participants worried before their graduation if they were prepared to work and considered that their degrees had not prepared them ideally (Cara), the considerations turned a bit more benevolent after graduation, highlighting for example the acquisition of knowledge and skills that gave them an advantage regarding candidates who did not course their studies and attempted to work in the same fields (Cara, Margarita, Nic). As this change shows some similarities to the described change in perception of their school (see *High School*), we might be observing a general human tendency with important repercussions for social research, in concrete regarding the moment of data construction.

Moreover, several participants presented their criticism in their last interview in a way that excluded themselves from the negative effects. Sara and Piruleta criticised for example that anybody was able to pass their degree and that many of their fellow students chose their degree without a vocation and passed it prolonging their studies significantly and with low scores. They, on the contrary, had chosen the degree out of vocation and did not prolong their studies, achieving furthermore good or excellent academic results and this, in Sara's case, in spite of a part-time job. Such a tendency to ennoble the own itinerary was rather common at the end of the follow-up: Xenia claimed, for example, that some lecturers were not exigent at all, but that her TFG-tutor had been exigent with her. Nic considered his degree as achievable and even believed that it would be possible to study it in less time, but claimed at the same time that Japanese was the most difficult of the languages one could choose, ennoble indirectly his itinerary (see *Dream or Nightmare*). Piruleta mentioned that she had doubted to

choose her specialisation because of a peculiar lecturer who had even made her cry in class, but came to study this specialisation anyway (see *The 'good' lecturer*), highlighting furthermore that her whole degree was more exigent in the UdL than in other Catalan universities and that this was in the end good for the students as they graduated as better professionals.

We first met him in the third year, that is to say, rather late and (.) he was the typical [lecturer] who demands a lot, quite serious, but then when you went to talk to him alone it was okay, that is to say, he wasn't one of those who wanted to harass the students but yes he was quite demanding (Int5 Xenia, l.216-218)

Interviewer: Ah, so, during the specialization phase, some people left? [Piruleta: Yes, they couldn't do it, they couldn't stand it anymore] So they switched specialisations?

Piruleta: Yes, it was the first year that people failed that specialisation. No one had ever failed it before, and this woman got really demanding and, but well, there were also some people that got what they deserved, it's true, things are the way they are. (Int5 Piruleta, l.300-304)

Piruleta: Eh, that they should do it in Lleida, because talking to people I know who did the same degree, I think it's the most challenging place and it's where you have teachers like the one I got who make you really learn (.) Yes, sure, they also have teachers like this there, but I think in Lleida, and a lot of people say so as well, it's really well recognized, and I would tell them that

Interviewer: Your specialization? Or your degree?

Piruleta: that they should do my specialization. It's a specialization that should be mandatory for all teachers (.) because they really teach you how to address diversity (.) how to deal with a kid that has some difficulties with something, or who doesn't know how to read, or who doesn't know I don't know what. Well, in there you are taught how to deal with that, and that's something that is not addressed during the degree, well, only in a very simplified way, and that's where you get the specifics (.) so yes, I would tell them to do that specialization. (Int5 Piruleta, l.451-461)

Floreta directly referred to the concept of work intrusion (*intrusismo laboral*), claiming that in the field of speech therapy, many currently working professionals were not actually speech therapists. While work intrusion has a clear connotation of occupying a work one is not actually authorised to do, Floreta applied it to older colleagues who had completed their studies before a separate degree in speech therapy was offered in Spain. These professionals did usually study a pedagogic degree, e.g. teacher training, and did then specialisations and courses that allowed them to work as speech therapists when this professional profile appeared; so in this sense they were authorised for this work, independently of differences in their studies. Floreta's labelling their itineraries as work intrusion can therefore be read, in the end, as a devaluation of their itineraries and an ennobling of her own itinerary. As she had considered degrees in children's education a good complement to the degree in speech therapy in previous interviews (see *Family affairs*), this devaluation of the pedagogic itinerary specialising in speech therapy was a rather new element that appeared after graduation.

Floreta: of course, and the work intrusiveness that there is, it's incredible

Interviewer: many people who work as speech therapists and are not speech therapists

Floreta: they are not speech therapists, very crass, you imagine now, because you have had a child, haven't you? [Interviewer: yes] well imagine that, for whatever I hope nothing ever happens in life but imagine, something happened to him and he has to go to a speech therapist [Interviewer: and she's not a speech therapist] if maybe you don't tell her, that is

to say, you don't check that she's a speech therapist, maybe she's not, you know? Now in this way I make you empathize with what it is to have a person working on something that is not her [profession], you know? (Int5 Floreta, I.917-923)

Floreta: Everybody knows it but they are people who, because of their qualifications, I don't know what they were called in the past, they were like *diplomaturas*¹⁵²? No [Interviewer: *licenciaturas*?] *licenciaturas*, well I don't know what it is, but in the end instead of being a teacher they are speech therapists

Interviewer: but it's not the specialization in special education?

Floreta: Exactly, things like that, but they are specialists who have been doing courses and doing things to finally be speech therapists, legally they are speech therapists what happens is that they are not, you know? It is very difficult because speech therapy has become a degree rather recently, from 1990 or so [Interviewer: the people from before ...] people before that had not studied [speech therapy], they were interested in different subjects that touch on the subject of speech therapy and then they have stayed with that work but they are not speech therapists, you know? All of those eh those people that have stayed between one thing and another are doing an occupational intrusion and that...

Interviewer: It doesn't seem right to you

Floreta: It doesn't seem right to me and I see it difficult, that is to say, I see it', that is to say, to make them see that they're not, because of course those people have more experience than me, you know? (Int5 Floreta, I.948-962)

Sara and Piruleta had been highly anxious regarding their academic performance and described high levels of pressure and related suffering in their first interviews, but came to request even higher academic exigencies and an entry-test towards the end of the follow-up (see *Health*).

They should do an attitude test and it should be really vocational. It should be someone that is really into it and that is capable, because not everyone can be a teacher. To be a teacher you need certain skills, I'm not saying I've got them all, no, but someone who lacks motivation and who is ashamed of going in front of a whole class, no, they can't be a teacher, because that's not... (Int5 Piruleta, I.466-469)

While the ennobling of the own itinerary may directly serve to improve their labour-market opportunities, this tendency to close the access to their profession could limit the competition by reducing the number of further candidates. Such closure-tendencies appeared repeatedly once the first time in HE had passed: Irina argued, similarly to Sara and Piruleta, that many people chose her degree without a vocation. Here she assumed indirectly that students who lack an intrinsic motivation to study a degree, do so because they perceive the degree as achievable and are interested in the higher salaries graduates are said to achieve. While Sara and Piruleta required their degree to become more difficult and less achievable, Irina argued that these people could find many other easy degree courses and professions with much higher salaries. In Int4_2 Irina argued, again in line with the argumentations presented by Sara and Piruleta, that choosing a degree without a vocation produces dissatisfied professionals who do their job badly, highlighting the negative effect of these "bad" choices for their "users" and society in general. In Int5, she argued, moreover, that choosing a degree without a vocation condemns to unhappiness.

¹⁵² Floreta and I are using terms from the Spanish degree course system that existed previously to the Bologna reforms (see *Education and degree course organisation*). *Diplomaturas* were 3- and *Licenciaturas* 5-year degrees.

Interviewer: What would you say to the students who are finishing high school?

Sara: I would tell them that it's a degree (.) and that, ok, it's not easy, but it's not difficult either, but if you don't like it, it's not worth doing it, because, I mean, you will go through the first year, in the second year you will do your internship and if you realize then that you don't like it, it's not worth to continue and be taking the place of someone who wants to be working on this. It's not only that you are taking their place, you are also working with children. I mean, education is the foundation of everything and if you, without having the validity or the enthusiasm to work with children, can be teaching children... For that matter, if it was some other office job or a computer related job, it wouldn't matter if you don't have a vocation for that, you bear with it and you aren't hurting anyone. But when you have children in front of you and a job that involves facing people... those are the profiles that need to be there, I think they should be quite complete (.) but well (Int5 Sara, 1.97-107)

While the main argument from these rather “achievable” degrees was hence that it was bad for the individual and society as a whole to choose them out of the wrong reasons, participants from “difficult” degrees, highlighted this difficulty - another way to close the access. Nadia claimed that her degree was so exigent that potential students should be aware that they would have to completely abandon their social lives. While Xenia highlighted repeatedly that the students in her degree were extraordinarily good and intelligent and still had problems to pass, Nadia constructed academic success as a matter of effort and did not insinuate a requirement of special intellectual competences or abilities. This might be a tribute to her own academic difficulties at the beginning of her degree (see *Academic success*). However, she painted the picture of her degree as so dark and highlighted that one had to feel a really strong vocation for this profession to endure the degree that she would probably scare off potential students if she came to tell them her recommendations. Especially Nadia was, moreover, exaggerating in her description of her degree as we can observe that her social life was quite important in her first-year interview (see *Social success*) and that she had time for diverse extra-curricular activities in the course of the years (see *Extra-curricular activities and work experiences*). The strong vocation, an idea in line with psychological theories on different phases of interest development that argue that the strongest vocational interests become resistant to frustration and obstacles (Hoff et al., 2018), was in Nadia’s account enough to endure the sacrifices to become a vet. Xenia – who lacked such a strong vocation for her degree herself (see *Professional profiles and the labour market*) – highlighted the lack of job opportunities in Spain, constructing an image of a degree that apart from being highly difficult does not offer many professional opportunities. Considering the rather low self-efficacy beliefs that seem to be predominant among young people at the end of High School (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*), such warnings may likely divert students to other degree courses they perceive as more achievable and with more labour opportunities, especially when they have difficulties to identify a clear vocation, as several female participants did (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*). As female candidates are said to embrace effort more willingly (Bourdieu, 2000) while their self-efficacy beliefs are lower (Yazilias et al., 2013), making them choose easier degrees (Torrents, 2017), Xenia might especially effectively discourage female applicants and Nadia male applicants. Both degrees include, however, more female than male enrolled students whereat females have come to

more than double male students in veterinary medicine (EDUCAbase, 2018a), while biotechnology counted in the UdL for years with more female than male students¹⁵³.

Interviewer: Something that has been good? Something that has been bad?

Xenia: I don't know I think that in perspective the whole experience is good (.) it's true that for example during the university studies you have a little bad time because maybe you do not like a subject or you do not like a lecturer or a lecturer does [his lecturing] a little bit badly or has bad things like those typical [bad things], but in perspective, the bad things also contribute, you know? A little bit of wisdom and a little bit they make you more, I don't know they make you get up¹⁵⁴ a little bit, be more understandable or work a bit more, give a little more of yourself, you know? And so in perspective everything is very well (Int5 Xenia, l.160-166)

Because of the university studies, because it forced you to make an effort, that is to say, a university degree it is useful for (...) just like in secondary school they force me to learn something that maybe in two weeks I forget, you know? But what it is useful for, is to excel yourself as a person, to improve as a person, in the sense that you are going to believe more in yourself, you are going to have more capacity for learning, for patience, for trust in yourself that is why I think that a university degree changes you (Int5 Xenia, l.360-367)

Interviewer: Very well (.) and what advice would you give to the students who are thinking of studying veterinary medicine?

Nadia: That they should really be sure of themselves and that they must be clear on wanting to dedicate their life to their studies for the next five years. And that they should enjoy summer time when you don't have to do anything, but that during the academic course they will be up to their eyeballs with work, and it's really like this.

Interviewer: Very well (.) any other recommendation, any other...

Nadia: I don't know, that if they like it and don't do well they shouldn't give up (.) they should continue trying, and trying, and trying, and in the end they will find the way to learn how to study that works for themselves. (Int5 Nadia, l.301-308)

I read an article that explained it: there are many veterinary schools and each year there's more and more veterinarians, so there is less work. What a lot of veterinarians are doing is earning their life by being on calls and earning 600 Euros per month, and, you know? They can't work on that full-time, they have to do small jobs on that. (Int4 Nadia, l.133-136)

Interviewer: Very well, and what recommendation would give to students who are thinking of choosing your degree?

Nadia: That they should summon their courage and be really eager to study and park social life, because it's a degree that asks for a lot of hours, you get really absorbed. And if you really want to do it, it's like that, you know? You can't, especially during the first and second years, you need to be dedicating a hundred per cent of your time to your studies, you can't... Christmas holidays? Forget it. Easter? Forget it (.) I don't know.

Interviewer: Well, you are really encouraging

Nadia: But it's true, otherwise, you need to study a lot, otherwise you won't pass. But it's really rewarding, and if you study, it's perfect. I would encourage them to choose this

¹⁵³ See the statistics offered on the University's website: <http://www.biotecnologia.udl.cat/ca/titulacio-xifres.html> [last access: 22.06.2018]. It is not possible to offer national statistics regarding this degree as EDUCAbase, the statistical data base by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports quoted regarding veterinary medicine, does not include biotechnology on the list of degree courses (see: [http://estadisticas.mecd.gob.es/EducaJaxiPx/Tabla.htm?path=/Universitaria/Alumnado/Estadistica/2016-2017/1GradoCiclo/CapituloI/IO/&file=mat_4\(2\).px](http://estadisticas.mecd.gob.es/EducaJaxiPx/Tabla.htm?path=/Universitaria/Alumnado/Estadistica/2016-2017/1GradoCiclo/CapituloI/IO/&file=mat_4(2).px) [last access: 22.06.2018]).

¹⁵⁴ The expression used in the Spanish original was "*espabilarte un poco*".

degree but having on mind that they won't be partying much, but it's really cool (.) And it's worth it. (Int4 Nadia, I.352-360)

Attempts to close doors and to ennoble one's own itinerary may not necessarily work out, apart from discouraging individuals who come to be directly exposed to them. Though Piruleta and Sara attempted to devalue the easy-track to study their degree slowly and without achieving good academic results and demanded more entrance exigencies, at least on the current teacher-labour market their better results do not directly influence their access to work in public schools, as they can only aspire to inscribe into a list of supply teachers until *oposicions* (see footnote 129) are announced and for the positioning on this list the mere moment of inscription and the presentation of additional certificates for courses are more important than the achieved scores in university (see footnote 142). In this sense, their strategy is not rewarded in the end and does not come with an advantage. Moreover, they did not seem to feel entitled to request a change from university to avoid their suffering at the beginning of their studies as participants from social class D (Nadia and Maduixa, see *Health*) did (regarding different senses of entitlement see also Edgerton & Roberts, 2014) and gave recommendations that would actually worsen this suffering even further for future generations, as they requested that more students should fail and be forced to quit their degree. At the same time, they did not seem to have a deep understanding of the public sector, as they rather applied a logic of the private sector, expecting that having studied the degree quickly and with good scores in parallel to diverse other obligations and engagements would make a difference, instead of attempting to best exploit the criteria of the public selection process.

The observed tendencies to “close” the access to the concrete chosen degree course discourage, furthermore, the use of recent graduates or students who are in their last year of studies to tutor first-year students or to inform High School students about their degrees. Especially female participants seemed to be more likely to close the access – possibly because they embraced effort as something positive and had no difficulties to admit to it, while male participants constructed their degrees as rather achievable, in line with ideologies of talent. Though there was no direct class-difference observable regarding this strategy, social inequality might be reproduced if graduates from working-class origins discourage younger contacts from their *milieu* of origin to follow their steps. As these are less likely to know HE graduates, listening to the negative descriptions of Piruleta and Sara might easily reinforce their impression that university is not for them, while young people from higher social classes are much more likely to take HE for granted and therefore at most revise their degree-course choice, if they listen to such complaints at all.

6.4. *Axes of longitudinal analysis*

In the previous chapters we have already commented on several results from a longitudinal perspective. However, there is more to this. In this chapter I describe the results of my systematic longitudinal analyses, explaining in detail the 8 axes that were carved out of the longitudinal comparisons, as well in dialogue with the theory and methodology, and then applied to all participants. As described in the methodological part (see *Analyses*), I developed these axes as an intermediate step that allowed me the completion of the last two steps of the documentary method – type constructions – without having to press my participants into a unique global typology that would have necessarily disregarded some of their facets. By developing typologies within the axes, the richness of the material is translated into diverse typologies that situate different participants once within the same type and once within opposed types, according to the focused axe. By comparing the developed types to the participants' backgrounds, it is possible to identify influences of social divisions and their intersections, developing detailed approaches to consider how social inequalities are reproduced.

6.4.1. *Degree of completion of development tasks*

"The first cut is the deepest, baby I know / The first cut is the deepest / I still want you by my side / just to help me dry the tears that I've cried / cause I'm sure gonna give you a try / and if you want, I'll try to love again / but baby, I'll try to love again, but I know / The first cut is the deepest, baby I know / The first cut is the deepest"

Cat Stevens (1967) *The first cut is the deepest*

"Si sigues cumpliendo años, al final te morirás."

Groucho Marx (citado por Víctor Küppers

http://www.kuppers.com/1/frases_que_me_gustan_1134784.html)

Hurrelmann's (2007) distinction between development tasks related to the private and public sphere (see *Youth Research and Transitions*) may require some adaptations to the changing social context, but is still in many senses adequate to capture the progress young people make in their transition to adulthood. As I have argued above (see *Theoretic Background*), we can understand the time an individual spends as a full-time University student as a certain type of transition, the University transition. While this transition represented in the past a prolongation regarding non-University transitions but ended with a rather quick completion of all remaining development tasks once the individuals completed their studies, we may wonder if the crisis and other characteristics of our current society have not provoked a general prolongation of transitions and a precarization of the graduate labour market (Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016; Strecker et al., 2018), so that the University transition is no longer different in these senses. Moreover, HE regimes may provoke important differences in the University transition, for example regarding the possibility to reconcile University studies with other spheres of (adult) life, like work and child raising, so that in some contexts University students may have long completed all development tasks when they graduate while in others – e.g. in Southern Europe (Serracant, 2012) – they may still have to invest several years before being able to achieve economic autonomy and, in consequence, parent-independent housing. Analysing the participants' itineraries from this lens enables us, furthermore, to distinguish different types of transitions, showing that even within the University transition in Catalonia different types of transition are appreciable and how these may be influenced by social divisions.

The following table (Table 9) summarises the participants' progress regarding the different development tasks at the moment of the last interview. Though all tasks are based on Hurrelmann's (2007) theories, I made certain adaptations, in concrete, counting the simple expression of the wish to have children in the future as a completion of the development task or considering the end of the degree as the completion of the formation, though even beyond master degrees, lifelong learning (Chisholm, 2006) is certainly going to affect many of the participants and appeared in several interviews as a desire, as participants mentioned plans to continue their formation through courses. Whenever the participants achieved a paid employment, I considered that they had achieved a first labour market insertion, though this does by no means mean that they achieved economic autonomy. Similarly, several participants lived without their parents in the course of the follow-up, but their housing was still parent-dependent as these paid the rent or owned the flat. I still considered that it makes an

important difference when you stop sleeping under the same roof as your parents and marked this task as given whenever the participants lived without their parents, no matter if they did not pay the rent themselves. In many senses, my adaptations of the development tasks were, hence, designed to capture the rather small steps on the way to adulthood, instead of insisting on a complete achievement of the tasks developed by Hurrelmann. This is also an indirect tribute to the theoretical reflections on changing contexts and increasing precarity that forces young people to take steps towards adulthood back – for example, moving back in with their parents or depending again economically on them after a period of economic autonomy (see *Youth Research and Transitions*).

Table 9: The participants' progress (N:17) regarding development tasks following Hurrelmann (2007) in their last interview.

Participant	Public sphere		Private sphere			Total +
	End of formation (here: degree course)	Labour market insertion	Family independent residence	Steady partnership	Wish to have children	
Andrés	+	+	+	+	+	5
Ariel (Int4)	-	-	+	+	+	3
Cara	+	+	+	+	+	5
Floreta	+	+	+	-	-/+	3-4
Irina	+	+	+	+	+/-	4-5
Koala	+	+	+	-	+	4
Maduixa	-	-	+	+	-	2
Margarita	-	+	+	-	Not mentioned	2
N.	-	+	-	+	+	3
Nadia	-	-	+	+	Not mentioned	2
Nic	-	-	+	-	+/-	1-2
Peter	-	+	-	+	Not mentioned	2
Piruleta	+	+	+	+	+	5
Sara	+	+	+	+	+	5
Skone	+	-	-	+	Not mentioned	2
Willy	+	+	-	-	+	3
Xenia	-	-	-	-	+	1
Total +	9	11	12	11	9	

All indicators refer to the participants' last interviews, in all except in Ariel's case, Int5. As Ariel did not participate in a fifth interview in the end, her fourth interview was employed for this table.
 Plus (+): the development task had been completed
 Minus (-): the development task had not been completed
 Plus/Minus (+/-) and "Not mentioned": in the case of the wish for children (an adaptation of Hurrelmann's task to better encompass tendencies of deferred parenthood and its current facultative character), I additionally allowed for the option "+/-" (indicating that the participant had directly commented on not being sure in this regard) and "not mentioned", when the possibility did not appear as a topic in any of the interviews with the participant.

Regarding the total progress displayed in the table, we can identify two types: 1) High progress, including the participants who achieved all or almost all of the development tasks (4-5) and 2) Low progress, those who are just getting started in this sense (1-2). Only Willy, Ariel and N. appeared with 3 development tasks somewhat in between. Willy moved back to his parents when he got a job at a commutable distance from their residence, but had lived for the whole course of the follow-up without his parents and was repeatedly mentioning his wish to find a life partner, though he did not achieve this aim and consequently missed this development task in the last interview. Willy may be considered, in consequence, closer to the first type. N., on the contrary, was still coursing second-year subjects in her fifth-year interview, indicating a significant prolongation of her studies. Her labour market insertion was with 4 hours/week rather small, though, and she claimed to only use the earned money for leisure activities. She had lived throughout the whole follow-up with her parents, only changing her housing for her Erasmus term. We can hence consider that N. was closer to type 2, though it is also interesting to highlight that her factual autonomy (economic autonomy, independent living, and graduation) was rather low, while she expressed a clear wish to have children. In Ariel's case her fourth-year interview was the last, though she had not yet completed her studies but told me through Facebook that she had graduated as stipulated. However, we cannot know how her other development tasks had changed without a last year interview, though it does not make sense to raise her score further.

Taking a closer look at type 1 (high progress), we see that from the eight included participants – Andrés, Ariel, Cara, Floreta, Irina, Koala, Piruleta and Sara – four achieved the highest possible score, a 5. Irina and Floreta reduced their score by arguing that they were not completely sure if they wanted to have children and Floreta and Koala were lacking a stable partnership. Though this might leave the impression that it was more difficult to achieve the development tasks in the private sphere, it has to be said that any labour market insertion was marked with a plus in the table, though important differences existed regarding the weight of the labour activity in the participants' lives. The dominant case among the participants with a job had been throughout the whole follow-up that they were full-time students who worked part time, often only few hours per week (N.) or only in summer (Nadia) (see *... and what about work?*). Several of the graduated participants kept this "student"-labour activities up, while studying a master (Cara) or because they did not find a different employment yet (Sara, Irina). Others obtained half- or full-time employment before their last interview (Floreta, Koala, Andrés, Piruleta, Willy) and some of those who were about to finish their degree, spent more time working than studying in Int5, as they only coursed very few credits in their last year (Peter, Margarita). Moreover, some of the participants who had never worked in the course of the follow-up, mentioned first labour activities – sometimes paid, sometimes not – and commented on a first search for job offers in their field (Maduixa, Xenia, Nic and Ariel). This shows a general trend towards more labour activity towards the end of the follow-up (see also *The Transition from University to the Labour Market*).

The participants of type 2 (low progress) – Xenia, Skone, Peter, Nic, Nadia, N., Margarita and Maduixa – were all except Skone still undergraduate students. Skone was in many senses an exception, as he aspired to become rich through investments on the stock market rather than a job in his field of studies and was preparing for his first investments. Regarding the other

participants in this type, it has to be said that all participants who changed their degree course after the first year (Maduixa, Nic, Xenia) automatically lost their chance of completion of their formation in the course of the follow-up, as this meant that they were at most in their last year when the fifth interview took place. However, several other participants were still studying their degrees as well when we met for the last time, indicating that they prolonged their studies (N., Peter, Margarita). Nadia studied a five-year degree course so she would have been unable to complete it within the project duration anyway, even if she had not prolonged her studies as she did.

That only 9 out of 17 participants had completed their degree course when we celebrated our last interview is hence relative and it makes more sense to say that only 4 participants prolonged their studies (see *Academic success*): Peter and Margarita by one year throughout which they only coursed a very limited number of credits, Nadia by approximately one full year and N. by several years, as she was still coursing some of the second-year subjects in her fifth-year interview. While N. and Nadia expected to remain economically dependent for several years, most participants who were about to graduate, spoke about their wish to achieve economic autonomy rather soon. Exceptions were Maduixa and Peter. Maduixa explained that in her field – audio-visual communication – it was usual to spend several years working in unpaid internships until you achieved the experience and the contacts to receive a paid contract. Peter expected that he would have to wait a couple of years for the first call from the substitution teacher list, basing this assumption on the experience of his older sister. At the moment of the last interview, he was not yet sure how he would spend this waiting period, but though he had been earning some money throughout the whole follow-up, he did not mention complete economic autonomy as among his immediate aims. Piruleta and Sara who had both studied the same degree as Peter had already achieved economic autonomy thanks to accepting jobs outside their field of studies.

Similarly, several other participants achieved employment after finishing their degrees that allowed for economic independence, though not necessarily in their field of studies and usually with fixed-term contracts or other conditions indicating precariousness. Willy found a job in his field when he decided to search for it with all his means and Andrés got an employment after the completion of an unpaid internship in a hotel chain. Koala, a participant who had always lived with his parents and never earned any money, moved from his parents' residence to a parent-independent flat in another city to study a master and found a half-time job in his field of studies that even enabled him to economic autonomy from his parents before his last interview. This may indicate that the participants who pursued a quick economic autonomy had good chances to achieve it if they were ready to accept work outside their field of studies and several who were considered type 2 might have passed on to type 1 within months after graduating.

After this focus on economic autonomy, I would also like to comment in more detail on one of the development tasks from the private sphere: being in a stable relationship. As such relationships may both begin and end rather suddenly and even a participant who claimed to be willing to let some time pass before entering into a new relationship could end up with a new partner within days after articulating this thought, this task escapes in many senses the logic of progress that may apply to the other tasks. However, we can comment on the duration

of the participants' relationships at Int5 and notice that Andrés and Peter had been ever since High School with the same partner. While Peter spent the most part of the follow-up in a distance relationship and did not even mention the idea to move in with his girlfriend when she returned to Lleida, Andrés lived with his partner in the last interview, but considered their cohabitation as rather atypical for a couple, as they did not share a bedroom, living together with his boyfriend's grandmother. Just as in several previous interviews, Andrés highlighted in his last interview again his wish to marry and become a father and set up a certain timeline for these events, arguing that he was happy with his current situation, but would feel like a failure if he did not advance both in his work and in his partnership (see *Happiness*). He showed a strong orientation towards his partner, discarding directly certain possibilities he knew his boyfriend would not support, in particular regarding mobility (see *Mobility*).

Ten years would be thirty four. Where do I see myself ...? (-) travelling, that is, having a single life, travelling around the world, living all over the world, no. Because I know I will not do it, because my partner is not very adventurous, he likes to travel but going on vacation to a place, he does not like to experiment and go somewhere else to experiment, going somewhere else to experience for a time, he would not do that. Moreover, his career does not allow it, because he is a lawyer and he can't apply the laws from here in another country, there is no ((-)), so I would like it, but I could not have a relationship with a person with me dedicating myself to travel through different places and him living in another place, it's not possible like this, with a person, right? (Int4 Andrés, I.508-515)

Peter mentioned his girlfriend repeatedly in all his interviews and expressed his happiness at her return to Lleida, after years of studying in other cities. However, he ascribed a similar importance to his sister, who had also just returned to live in Lleida and was in all interviews among his confidants. In his last interview, he was about to graduate, but his girlfriend did still need several years to finish her studies. He supposed that he would start to work as a teacher in a few years and claimed to have not yet decided what do after graduation, considering the possibility to temporarily join his friends in London (see *Future ideals and fears*) or studying a master in Barcelona. When I commented on the return into the distance relationship this would represent, he only said that he did not doubt that his girlfriend would support him in such decisions, as he had given her his support, too, when she moved to another city to be able to study her aspired degree.

Skone had been in a relationship at the beginning of the follow-up and mentioned his girlfriend, among others, as a reason to study in Lleida. He also considered it difficult to realise his dream of living a couple of years in the USA because of her and said that it was complicated to meet with his friends from school and the new friends from university, because he attempted to spend as much time as possible with her. Right at the beginning of the second year he mentioned their separation, explaining that this end and his grandfather's death had left him without vim to study, so he failed one subject (see *Academic success*). Asked for relationships, he claimed in Int3 that he had been a single for a long time and believed to be better off like this. In Int4, he mentioned a new girlfriend he had met shortly after the third-year interview and continued in a relationship with her in Int5. In the last interview, he did not move to the USA either, but continued with this dream and when I asked for his girlfriend he confirmed that the idea was to her liking too, highlighting, though, that this was not crucial for his decision as he believed that a relationship could not function if one of the partners

abandoned a dream for the other. Such an increased articulation of independence within the relationship did also appear in the narratives of several of the female participants who had separated in the course of the follow-up from a boyfriend and found someone new later on. As I did not ask for previous romantic relationships, we cannot know if the participants who highlighted their independence in their relationship from the beginning on had been through a separation in the past, but a certain effect of the first lovesickness, as in the song by Cat Stevens quoted above, seems likely.

Xenia had begun a relationship right at the beginning of the follow-up, but had just left her boyfriend in Int5, though he was still attempting to return with her. They had spent most of their relationship as a distance relationship as he lived in her country of origin, but visited regularly. When speaking of the reasons for the separation, Xenia explained that she had noticed that she did not want to move with him to the UK, though she had told him in the past to go ahead with these plans, when he had to take the preparations to achieve a placement there (see *Future ideals and fears*). When she told him about her plan to study a master in Barcelona, it was too late for him to achieve a placement in Barcelona, but he was willing to continue their distance relationship. At that point, she came to think that he was much more engaged in their relationship than she was and that this was not good, so she left him, initiating a stressful phase of confrontations with her mother who supported his attempts to gain her back (see *Happiness*). Though many factors intervened in her narrative, the fact that her boyfriend had to take certain decisions about a year earlier than she may have influenced in their problems, as they were not on the same page, so to speak, in their life planning. As women show a tendency to seek life partners who are already a bit older than they are (Bourdieu, 2000), such an advance in the male partners' life course may lead many women to either follow the male lead, adapting their own decisions, or end the relationship.

no (.) I mean, I think I'm too young to give up on what I really want, that I could do perfectly well in England doing my master's degree in bioinformatics through distance learning and just coming here, you know? But it's not what I really want and I'm asking myself "and if I was single, what would I do?" And it's this, [I'd] go to Barcelona [Interviewer: very well] I mean I'm too young to commit myself to having to move for another person and do something I don't want 100%, it's not that I wouldn't want at all, that I'm not attracted at all, but it's not what I want the most (Int5 Xenia, l.407-413)

he started to think about England while I was like', he assumed that I would go with him and when it was my turn to think about things (.) I said "no" (.) And he thinks the total opposite of me, I think I'm too young to commit to commit myself in this way with this person and he is like "no, for me first is the relationship, first you are you" and me "if I don't give you so much why do you give me so much?" It's not fair, the scale is not well balanced for the relationship (Int5 Xenia, l.441-445)

Cara became the girlfriend of a fellow student towards the beginning of their undergraduate studies and continued in this relationship at the end of the follow-up. In spite of several flat changes, her boyfriend and she had never come to live together and she kept highlighting the possibility of a sudden rupture whenever I mentioned him and the future. However, they studied the same master and in the same city after graduation, so a certain coordination in their decisions appears likely. As they graduated in the same course, they could take their decisions in parallel, so the problem of the male lead did not apply to Cara's case.

Maduixa and one of her fellow students became a couple just before her completion of the Activity Diary in year 3, but their relationship had already ended when we met for the third-year interview. After he broke up with her, they continued being friends and were again a couple in Int5. However, Maduixa highlighted that University left them little time to spend as a couple and that they had stopped to study together, noticing that they tended to sidetrack each other. She argued to not yet know where their relationship was going, but had already cancelled her plan to directly move to London after graduation. Similarly to Cara, she did not mention her boyfriend as a reason or even interlocutor for this decision, arguing that she decided to postpone the plan, because she had to confirm early on if she stayed in her flat or moved out and had not wanted to end her rental contract before finding another place to stay in London, but had not had the time to organise her stay in London either.

Piruleta told me in her last interview about the rather traumatic end of her last relationship that had also begun in the course of the follow-up, but was already in a new stable relationship and had moved in with her new boyfriend. She had shown a strong orientation towards her first boyfriend and even considered to change universities and complete her studies with him in Barcelona - a plan she said to have discarded in Int3 because of the additional costs living in Barcelona would have entailed. After their separation, she described him in very negative terms, claiming that he had limited her in diverse ways. Regarding her new boyfriend, she showed a very different attitude, arguing that she had a clear plan that included a return to her hometown within the next years, so he could either follow her or leave her, but this would not alter her decision. In this sense, she did not only highlight her independence as most of the other female participants did, but furthermore assumed - at least in her narrative - the role of the leader, leaving it to the man to either adapt or quit, but not allowing him to participate in 'her' decision either.

Piruleta: For him it's impossible to come here. If I organize myself well, I can [go], so that's how we are doing it. If we could see each other more, it would be better, but we see each other when we can.

Interviewer: And are you planning something together? Like you were saying about transferring to another University?

Yes, I would like to go live there in 4th year, that's when you can choose your specialisation. I would like to go to Barcelona and change, because there are more specialisations there. Let's see if my parents allow me to, because it would be more expensive and I feel bad, in here everything is cheaper. (Int2 Piruleta, l.324-329)

At the end of June, at the beginning of June, I left my boyfriend, we had been together for 3 years [Interviewer: ah you split?] yes, because no, because he was very jealous and because of many things that were not adequate and that made me unwell and I left him (Int5 Piruleta, l.30-33)

In the same village, yes, because all my family is there... my sister, who will be living there, because she's with her partner and they have an apartment. I don't know, we've become really close in those last years since, since we meet, even much more because we lost two grandparents, well, now it's 3 since not so long ago... [INTERVIEWER: Oh, dear] and that has really brought us closer (.) a lot, I mean it was a big shock but that has really brought us closer, and now we have one grandmother left and, I'm telling you, I would give her my life, she's everything to me and, I don't know, I want to be there (.) I want to end up there because when I'm older and I start a family I want my kids to live there and be close to

family, like how I grew up, and that has shaped me into who I am today. I don't know, we'll see.

Interviewer: Very well, so then you'll have to take your boyfriend with you there?

Piruleta: If I'm with him, he will come, and if I'm not, then he won't [Interviewer: he can go wherever he wants] he can go wherever he wants, but I do want to end up there. (Int5 Piruleta I.139-149)

Sara became a couple with a childhood friend from her village in the course of the follow-up and was living with him in the last-year interview, considering that she was by now having an adult life. Though she highlighted that her boyfriend would have supported her if she had decided to move abroad temporarily after graduation, he would not have joined her and she considered it more important to enjoy her new life with him for a while, arguing that she could still have the international experience later on (see *Mobility*). Though she did, hence, recognise the importance of her boyfriend in her decision, it was still her decision and he would have supported it. This may indicate that though she oriented strongly towards her boyfriend, she felt that such an orientation could leave a wrong impression and highlighted that her decision was based on her own well-being and interests, rather than his influence.

Nadia began in the course of the follow-up a relationship with a friend she had known from school but only started to consider a friend in the year before becoming a couple. As he studied in Lleida and she in Barcelona, they were in a distance relationship. In her last interview, she mentioned several plans to move abroad after graduation, mentioning that she would go together with her boyfriend but that he might need another year to complete his studies, so she would wait for him in this case. Though she seemed to have fewer problems to admit to her boyfriend orientation, she also constructed her plans to move abroad as a result of her interest in a specialization that is not offered in Spain and mentioned conversations with her lecturers in this regard. As she had mentioned slightly different specializations in previous interviews – instead of feline medicine she had spoken of wildlife and exotic animals – and her boyfriend had already realised several stays abroad in the past and seemed to be decided to leave the country again, it is also possible that she indirectly adapted to his wish to leave, turning it into a necessity for her professional future. This impression was further confirmed by the additional question she suggested for my interview guiding, asking if the participants' decisions had been influenced by other people, like their parents or partners, or not. This may indicate that she was aware of her boyfriend orientation and struggling to integrate it with her independence, indicating that the pursuit of independence is not only born out of negative experiences with separations, but also considered a social norm for young women they attempt to meet in their narratives.

Eh (3) If all the decisions they've made during the time they were doing their degree, I mean, or if when they decide what they want to do in the future... Do they make those decisions for themselves, because they really want to do that? Or do they rather let themselves be influenced by their partner or their parents, or...? I don't know, for example, I want to do what I like, but I always take into consideration my partner. I mean, the fact that he could come with me or not. For example, If I have to leave and go live for five years in the United Kingdom, maybe if my partner says: "Well, don't go, find something else, somewhere we could both go" or "yes, go, it's a great opportunity and I'll do whatever I can to come as well", I take that into consideration, rather than telling him: "No, no, I want to

do this, so I'm doing this. And I don't know... we'll find a way to see each other, but I want to do this". (Int5 Nadia, l.517-524)

Irina had separated from a boyfriend in the course of the follow-up, describing life partners afterwards as a possible limitation and a risk factor that can impede the realization of your dreams, but was again in a relationship in her last-year interview. Her new partner was from Mexico and she lived with him in Mexico whenever she was not travelling. As she claimed that he shared her mission to travel the world, he seemed to be more compatible with her dreams than she had expected a boyfriend to be (see *Mobility*). However, her latest plan was to study a master in Mexico, where he was still finishing his studies.

Ariel mentioned a boyfriend in Int4, but as she left the country after finishing her degree and did not meet me for a fifth interview, we cannot know how this relationship developed. In her fourth interview, she mentioned to have ended the contact with her virtual friends because her boyfriend had asked her to do so, but believed that he would change with the time. As he lived in Barcelona, she had achieved a placement for her last-year internship in Barcelona and planned to live with him for the duration of the internship. For after her graduation they already had the plan to move together to a country where he got a job offer. From her Facebook messages we can deduce, however, that her plans changed at some point.

Ariel: well this year, we met during the summer in June and this year he started his Master's [in Barcelona] and I go on the weekends, in some cases I go and in some cases he comes here.

Interviewer: ah, but he's from here? from Lleida?

Ariel: Yes, he has his parents here

Interviewer: Well, bad luck, that now he had to leave

Ariel: well I will also finish this year so it's almost there

Interviewer: and you'll go there to Barcelona too or ...?

Ariel: Yes, in fact I have the intention, that is to say, as I am in the fourth year, I will do all the subjects in the first semester, in the second [semester] I have to do the internship and I will try to do the internship in Barcelona (Int4 Ariel, l.40- 49)

Interviewer: ah, you also had these friends online when you were sad, didn't you? [Ariel: yes] do you still have them?

Ariel: my boyfriend is somehow jealous, right?

Interviewer: ah he doesn't like it?

Ariel: and of course I have lost contact, I have not lost it I have them there, but I don't speak, I've explained the situation they understand me, I suppose it's the beginning, we will see (Int4 Ariel, l.360-365)

Floreta had been in a relationship only temporarily in the course of the follow-up and was a single at the end. Though she had spoken with much enthusiasm about her boyfriend in the interview when they were in a relation, she hardly mentioned him in the following interviews and spoke about relationships and families like an observer who was still wondering whether to join or not. However, she did not discard the possibility to end up with a traditional family model in the end, saying that it was not what she wanted at the moment, but that her wishes and plans could change.

That's, I think that's the ideal of society, isn't it? I don't know, I don't believe in it, I believe in' I believe in the person who decides their things, I believe in myself, okay? if in 30 years, not 30 years but I don't know in 10 or 15 years well I decide to be a single mother, for

example, because at that moment I don't have a partner and I want to be a mother, whatever, because I'm well with myself and I want to leave descendants, leave in the world someone who has my blood so to speak, well then I will be, why not? I don't know, but I don't need to have a partner if I don't have a partner it wouldn't... (.) I don't know, it depends, what do I know? maybe yes I'll be, come on, the most [Interviewer: traditional] idyllic family ever or something like this but I don't know (Int5 Floreta, I.1037-1043)

Margarita had been in a distance relationship in her first interviews with me – year 3 and 4 – but never said much about her partner and did not mention him at all in her last interview, even when talking about important people in her life, leaving the impression that she was a single by then. However, she never confirmed this impression.

N. and Koala had been a couple at the beginning of the follow-up and left each other twice in its course, allowing me to observe that interestingly the rupture was a topic for Koala when N. had left him and for N. when Koala had left her, while the one leaving the other did not say too much about the end of their relationship. N. found a new boyfriend just before her Erasmus term and experienced a distance relationship while being abroad, but also after her return as her boyfriend lived in Barcelona and she in Lleida. As she was still several terms from finishing her degree, he was much more advanced in his life course and she supposed that he would play a role in her future decisions, if they remained a couple, but explained that it was too early in their relationship to say so for now. Koala mentioned a new woman in his life in Int4, but had difficulties to remember who I was talking about when I asked for her in the last interview. However, he mentioned his wish to become a young father and the necessity to find a girlfriend first.

My parents had me when they were quite young (.) and (.) I think that's something, because during high school you meet people like: "No, my parents are I don't know how many years old and of course, my father is getting a bit lazy because he can't move that well" or "my mom is the same, she can't take me anywhere, she's always busy" or other things like that. And I think that when you're younger, you have more energy, you're eager to do more things. Maybe you have the same amount of free time, but you say: "Ok, I'll make an effort". And I don't know, I think that I would love to be a young father. What do I mean when I say young? Young means, I don't know, I'm saying whatever comes into my mind, around 30 years old. You don't need to be much younger, you don't need to be older, but around 30 years old I guess it's a great age for me (.) and what if it's before that age? If it's before that age, there's no problem. And if it's after that age, it's also fine (.) but (.) mostly, one needs to take that attitude, one needs to say: "Ok, I have to be an active father, someone who is there for my son", and not only being the paternal figure and that's it, the son can grow by himself, can't he? I don't know, that's something that I, I think that in order to truly become an adult, I'm lacking that (.) but to get that, I first need to get that other thing, the other half, right? The partner right now, obviously, at this very moment, I don't, but...

Interviewer: What about that girl in Barcelona...? [Koala: Barcelona...?] Didn't you have a girlfriend in Barcelona for a while?

Koala: Ah, yes, she left to study, it's already been one year since we're not together, no. (Int5 Koala, I.835-850)

Nic and Willy highlighted both – just as Koala – their wish to find a life partner, but did not find anybody in the course of the follow-up. Nic claimed that it made no sense that he never found somebody as he should have even more possibilities to find someone, being bi-sexual.

However, he only mentioned his sexual orientation on that occasion and never commented on it again, neither did he ever mention a person who he would have liked to date or anything in this line.

Willy mentioned his attempts to date a fellow student he thought felt shy and therefore hesitated, but came to consider that she had not been interested in him after all. He also worried about his chances to find a partner for life in his village and was therefore decided not to stay there, though he returned to live with his parents when he got an employment at a commutable distance. Though he repeatedly argued not to be in a hurry to find someone, his desire for a relationship became a topic in almost every interview and he said in Int3 that his 20th birthday made him think that he should start to advance in this respect, so we can imagine that with each year he should worry even more about his difficulties to find someone, pressuring himself in this regard (see *Happiness*).

Willy: I like her, but I'm not in love with her, that's nothing that I'm in a hurry with either, but the other day, for example, I turned 20 years old and 20 years and you're still here... but well, this will arrive too, this will arrive too, one day or another... (Int3 Willy, I.421-423)

When comparing these different cases, it is interesting to see that the only participants who did not achieve any romantic relationship in the course of the follow-up were male (Nic and Willy), while all female participants had had a partner at some point of the follow-up. While several of the girls highlighted their independence and some repeatedly considered the possibility of a rupture (Cara, Xenia, Irina, Margarita; N. and Piruleta regarding their new boyfriends), several male participants mentioned their wish for commitment (Andrés, Koala, Willy, Nic), indicating that a certain intersection with gender may exist in Pais' (2007) description of partnerships as continuously open to separation (see *The invention of youth*).

Nic was the only male participant considering the possibility that he might not become a father, arguing that he never really liked children, but still accepting that he might become a father anyway, saying that you can never know what life brings. While Nic did not ascribe much importance to his potential parenthood, Peter, Skone, Nadia and Margarita never mentioned plans for becoming parents in a future in any of their interviews.

Several of the other female participants (Irina, Floreta, Ariel), expressed their doubts regarding motherhood and commented on the impression that society imposed motherhood on them, though Irina also highlighted that she had discovered in Spain that one could decide against becoming a mother, while this was in her country of origin unthinkable. While Irina worried about the compatibility of a family with her dreams of working in indigenous communities and travelling the world, Floreta argued that she did not feel like becoming a mother but might come to want this in a future. While she would not pursue motherhood if she did not develop a desire for it, she wanted to have nephews and see her parents in the role of grandparents. Ariel mentioned that early motherhood was a must in her country of origin and that women were considered old with 26. She also described life as a path that included motherhood and seemed to accept this path for herself, though she did not envision herself as a mother yet. When I supposed that she expected that she would want to be a mother at some point, she did not contradict this idea, but a certain doubt remains as she did not completely dissolve these contradictions.

Irina: And then it happened that I noticed that, getting to know the sisters of your friends or older people who tell you "no, well I don't want to be a mother" and then at first, at first you think "how little human", right? Because your mind is structured in another way, but then you notice that ah well that they simply don't want to be it and I think that it's the best because if you don't want to be it, it means that you won't bring an unloved child to this world because, to be a mother out of obligation, I believe that it has to be horrible for you and for the person you are raising, then, if you have a choice, it's better, isn't it?

Interviewer: and then would you consider at some point to have a child? ((3sec))

Irina: Yes, it would be, I don't know, if at the time I still had the illusion of travelling, I wouldn't want it to be something that held me back or that made me say "not now, because I want to travel" or "I stop travelling because I have a child", I'm aware that a child, especially a baby, has to have the greatest possible comforts and if it's necessary I'd stop travelling for two or three years, but I would like to pursue an alternative education, maybe, that is to say perhaps not a child who goes to school every day, but who learns while travelling, that is to say, maybe he won't learn in a history book that he may not even read anyway and maybe copy in an exam so he can achieve a score, instead of being in that place and really discover what happened and what is happening, that is to say, it seems interesting to me because I think it's very badly viewed if someone travels with their children and yes I have spoken about it a few times and they tell me that no way, that they wouldn't let me do it and I don't know if I would do it or not, but, because until the time comes I don't know what I would do, but now I think about it and it seems incredible (Int5 Irina, l.754-773)

On the first sight, these findings are in line with Budgeon's (2014) remarks regarding new hegemonic femininities that combine feminine and masculine - namely independence - traits and seem to indicate that something similar might be true for hegemonic masculinities, as several of the male participants embraced the feminine trait of caring with their wish for commitment and family creation. However, when we consider especially how several of the female participants related to motherhood, we can observe a rather direct reproduction of traditional concepts of motherhood that seem to be even further reinforced as motherhood is no longer mandatory, so women may decide against children if they are not able or willing to comply with the implicit ideal of the "good" mother: Maduixa directly argued against motherhood, claiming that it was incompatible with her professional future in the film industry and highlighting how she pitied the children of families she knew whose parents never had time for them. Similarly, Floreta mentioned the family her sister worked for as an *au pair* in the UK, believing in a cultural difference that was not to her liking, as these parents hardly saw their children. She was terrified by such a family organisation and argued that it was better not to have children if you were not to care for them afterwards. These observations are rather opposed to social-role theory as the participants did not seem to consider work and family as more reconcilable because of knowing women who combined motherhood with a demanding career as some authors suggest (Chait Barnett, Gareis, Boone James, & Steele, 2003), but rather considered career-oriented parents as 'bad' parents. As Maduixa did also consider herself still closer to the children- than to the adult-side, it is also possible that the participants were more exigent with parents, as they did not identify with parents, but with children. The request that parents should spend more time with their children is rather common in many children's books, series and movies, but is not usually quantified in hours. Though the participants did not seem too exigent by requiring parents to give their children the goodnight kiss as Floreta put it, it is not clear at all how much time they would consider an adequate

amount and how this time should be spend. As none of the participants planned on becoming a stay-at-home parent either, they did not reject role models of working mothers either, but criticised the ways of some parents to reconcile work and family life, differentiating between parents who work and care for their children and those who work too much to care properly. Rather than assuming a general difficulty in family and work reconciliation, Floreta explained the situation in the British family with a cultural difference and Maduixa identified a certain sector as difficult to reconcile with a family life, arguing that it was better not to have children, working in her field. Here she criticised, furthermore, some of her fellow students who did speak about the wish to become mothers and who she considered absolutely inept for this role.

Maduixa: I don't picture myself being married, but being on a relationship, I do. But I'm not sure about marrying, I don't have any maternal instinct, zero, I love children, but when they're not mine. For now, I'm thinking that I won't have kids. With my career, I think it would be something bad for them. Because if you go to a production, like, imagine, Lord of the Rings, it's a two-year shooting, what do you do with the kids? Either you take them with you to New Zealand, or you leave them here... or I don't know. It might be doable, but if I was the daughter, I wouldn't like it if my mom was leaving for two years.

Interviewer: Do you think that one must have a more developed maternal instinct?

Maduixa: Of course, working at a TV and having a kid... But, from what I see, I think: "poor girl"... I don't know, that's why those things I don't... But being home with the kids is also not an option, I don't like it. I have friends who want to get married and have children, and I find it too monotonous. I don't like that kind of life, maybe in five years from now I'll tell you: "Look, perhaps yes". But for now, my parents are shocked¹⁵⁵. (Int3 Maduixa, 1.378-388)

Floreta: my sister is an au pair because the parents can't take care of the children and I don't like this, I like that the parents are there, if you have to stop working for a while [reducing] a few hours, well, you know? Because I think it's important, isn't it? The fact of saying "I'm the one who is educating my children"

Interviewer: and do you think that it's different here?

Floreta: yes I think so, at least what in this particular case of my sister (...) here au pairs are very rare, yes there are maybe kangaroos who, when the parents can't go when the children leave school, they [go and] give them the snack or whatever, you know? That is from 5 to 7 or something like that but, but my sister works until almost 9 o'clock at night and sometimes she kisses them good night and they don't see each other, the parents don't see the children, you know? And it's like, you know? a little ugly but well... (Int4 Floreta, 1.478-489)

This may indicate that the girls gave much more thought to their becoming mothers or not, because they considered having the choice between becoming a dedicated mother or not becoming a mother at all. As previous research suggests, this may even influence their study or specialisation choice, as they may favour more family-friendly choices especially if they plan on early motherhood rather than postponing "childbearing until after one's career is established" (Chait Barnett et al., 2003, p. 306). Here it is noteworthy that Sara, the only female participant who highlighted her wish to become a young mother, chose teacher training, a degree which is usually perceived as highly reconcilable with a family life. However, contrary to the hypotheses formulated by Chait Barnett et al. (2003) the participants in this study did neither construct their study choice considering the perceived reconcilability of the aspired career with a family,

¹⁵⁵ The expression used in the Catalan original was: "*els meus pares es fiquen les mans al cap*".

nor did they narrate strategies of active postponement of motherhood or family size reductions. Rather they seemed optimistic about family and work reconciliation, as we will see in the following, indicating that this did really not bother them when taking their study choice and is in line with the tendency to actively avoid thinking about the future described by Woodman (2011). This does not mean, of course, that they may not end up postponing their maternity or choosing family-friendly itineraries within their sectors, but at least at this early stage of career development such strategies were either not given, subconscious or not perceived as socially accepted and therefore not mentioned in the interviews.

Though the participants did not specifically refer to a differentiated role of the mothers regarding the fathers, it is eye-catching that none of the male participants worried about his ability to be a good father. As several male participants related to the need to find a mother for their children (Koala, Willy) and Andrés, the participant in a relationship with another young man, considered an adoption or surrogate motherhood, while Sara and Floreta commented on father-less options to become mothers, these differences may be furthermore related to the social representations of reproduction and child raising. Possible limitations to their fertility were not considered by any participant, so it was indirectly assumed that any woman may become a mother if she wants to and without a father, while men need women to become fathers. In this sense, the female participants' comments regarding their rather high exigencies for parents to care more for their children than for their careers in order to be "good" parents, may be reduced to mothers only, as women have the possibility to become a mother without a man, while men depend on women to become fathers. The pressure on being a "good" mother is than higher than the pressure to be a "good" father, as fathers are, by definition, dispensable. While single-mothers seem to have gained acceptance in comparison to their social discrimination in the past (consider the insult "bastard" that is still in use, though, and diverse laws that continue to discriminate single mothers whose children were born out of wedlock¹⁵⁶), "uncaring mothers¹⁵⁷" are persecuted.

Sara: Of course, I'd love to be a young mom and be able to have a certain stability. Whew, we're not there yet...

Interviewer: Are you thinking about a father too, or...?

Sara: Well, if there is a dad, yes, if there isn't... [Interviewer: by yourself] Yes, I've always said that if, for example, I'm 35 years old and I'm still single, I'd have a kid all by myself. Because that is... being a mother, that is the only thing I know for sure that I want to be. A mother and a teacher, and that's it. (Int3 Sara, I.957-964)

As we have seen above that several of the female participants ascribed high importance to their independence within their relationships and seemed to consider a separation as a permanent possibility, we can say that this independence achieved, in certain ways, even the

¹⁵⁶ Consider for example this petition from change.org that denounces a discrimination of single mothers who had never been married in comparison to widows, who have access to financial aids and reductions as "numerous families" (*familia nombrosa*) with two children: <https://www.change.org/p/stop-discriminaci%C3%B3n-a-las-madres-solteras-mariogarcessan-dolors-madre-soltera-con-dos-hijos-familia-numerosa-Il%C3%A9venlo-al-congreso-ya> [last access: 09.06.2018]. As Sara claimed that her family had lost this condition in the course of the follow-up (see *Scholarship programmes*), it is however also possible that this different consideration of single mothers depending on whether they had been married or not is losing practical importance.

¹⁵⁷ The German expression "*Rabenmutter*", literally "raven mother" was on my mind here.

'reproductive arena' (Connell, 2009), as women are so independent that they do not require men to become mothers. Though we can read this importance of independence with Budgeon (2014) as a new hegemonic femininity, combining masculine and feminine traits, independence is in the end used to centre exigencies regarding 'good' parenting once again to women, reproducing traditional role models regarding motherhood. So even though Maduixa constructed her future ideal in a certain opposition to the normal biography and Floreta highlighted that she would not become a mother just because society expected her to do so, they indirectly reproduced social representations regarding motherhood and assumed an orientation of a mother's life towards her children, criticising those who do not follow this line with the argument that they should not have become mothers in the first place. This continuing special importance of mothers is also in line with Reay's (2000) research that suggested that mothers engage in a special way with their children, offering emotional support, knowing that if they do not do so, nobody else - that is to say, the fathers - will and that this would disadvantage their children.

In spite of this high exigencies towards parents and especially mothers, some participants seemed to be, at the same time, little aware of possible difficulties to reconcile work and family life. Xenia, for example, dreamed of becoming a successful business women and having a baby in 10 years, while Irina worried about the pros and cons of having an anthropologist-mom, but considered that children could only benefit and learn from their cohabitation with different cultures throughout ethnographic fieldworks. This may tell us a lot about the reconciliation of work and family in the present. Previous research has shown that young professionals tend to explain an underrepresentation of women in leading positions in their workplace with their decision to become mothers and a tendency to prolong the maternal leave, return only part-time or even stay at home once the baby is born (Kelan, 2014). Rather than criticising difficulties to reconcile work and family life or consider other aspects that difficult the promotion of women independently of their maternity status, these young professionals seemed to assume a certain emotional change that happens to women after the birth of a child (Kelan, 2014), reproducing, in my reading, social representations of motherhood in a similar way as my younger participants did. And just as my participants, these professionals showed a tendency to invisibilise gender inequality: Though several "confronted some special treatment which often bordered on or was outright sexism" (Kelan, 2014, p. 799), they ascribed these situations to their young age and lack of experiences rather than sexism and assumed that a generational change had happened and that gender inequalities were either a matter of the past or much less pronounced. In many senses, young women are left in a position of continuous fighting, self-doubt and exposure to criticism, as it is by no means easy to reconcile professional success family life (Sánchez Mira, 2016), let alone with independence and being a single mother, attempting to resemble idealisations of motherhood. This "unspeakability of gender inequality" (Kelan, 2014, p. 801) or its ascription to age differences makes it additionally difficult to confront it.

In the development of socio-genetic types, we can observe a certain accumulation of participants with high economic and cultural capital in their families of origin in type 2 (little progress) and of participants who lack these capital in type 1 (high progress). When we focus on the development tasks from the public sphere, we see that none of the participants who were identified as from social class A changed their degree course and though Peter prolonged

his studies, the prolongation was rather short and he only coursed very few credits in his additional year, leaving him in a situation of quasi-completion that was even reflected in his wording, as he spoke several times of his degree as if he had already finished it completely. Margarita's case was even more tragic as she would have finished her degree by the last interview, if she had not failed her TFG. As she only had to revise her TFG, she spent the additional year very differently than the other students from type 2 who prolonged their studies significantly (Nadia, N.) or had changed the degree course (Xenia, Maduixa, Nic) and had all, except Xenia, been identified as from higher social classes. In Xenia's case, her migration history may intervene in her class positioning, in the sense of a loss of economic capital in the parent generation due to immigration (see *Measuring Social Class*), but as Andrés, Irina and Koala still showed a quicker transition and more progress in the last interview, the differences would not disappear through a revision of their social class positioning. As the participants' migration histories and countries of origin were highly heterogeneous, it is not possible to generalise their cases here in a common tendency. Xenia, in concrete, might have more in common with the higher class participants who changed their degree course and her parents might have compensated their lower economic capital as she had no siblings.

In all this, it is furthermore interesting to consider how the participants defined themselves, when asked where they saw themselves on a continuum between youth and adulthood. In line with findings by Stauber and Walther (2007) that young people avoid to consider themselves adults, few of the participants considered to have completely arrived at adulthood yet. Willy considered himself completely adult, arguing that his move to the city and living on his own brought this change on, so the residential emancipation was the main point in this approach. Sara directly considered herself as very mature and leading an adult life, arguing that she had always been too old for her age. Piruleta argued that to be an adult, you have to feel like one, but explains that she could not yet completely feel like an adult, as her recently achieved economic autonomy was still precarious and might get lost again, so she still indirectly relied on her parents. Moreover, she considered to be still lacking important work and life experiences to feel like an adult. In this sense, she embraced the possibility to become an adult, by feeling like an adult, with the pass of time, without necessarily achieving all development tasks, supporting the impression of a prolongation of the youth phase, as she felt that not enough time had passed yet to make her feel adult. Several other participants believed - like Sara and Piruleta - to have matured, but had difficulties to see themselves as adults, possibly because the image they claimed to have developed of adulthood as children was rather different from what they were experiencing themselves, but maybe also because, adults enjoyed a rather bad reputation in their eyes: Maduixa described adults in her last interview as sad, unhappy, lacking vitality and even disrespectful, Irina considered them trapped in a routine and obligations and Xenia insinuated that adults do not exist, because nobody knows 100% what to do - a characteristic she had expected to find in adulthood, though when reflecting further after the last interview, she also claimed that she could now see that her parents had never had this security either, even though they left this impression on her when she was younger. Adulthood is then turned almost into a myth, like Santa Claus, you are told to believe in when you are a kid, but as they turn older, young people realise that they are not really ever getting there. However, rather than the end of adulthood, this highlights that young people are changing their definitions of adulthood as they approach it.

Moreover, their argumentations showed that they did not necessarily reject adulthood either, but could be defined as adults in their alternative definitions, as Irina claimed for example that adults have to be very conscious of everything and that such consciousness may be gained through travelling - and she did the travelling at the end of the follow-up and constructed herself as highly reflexive. Piruleta ascribed similar importance to travelling, considering that travelling leads to life experience and adulthood is gained through such experience. In this way, these participants ascribed mobility an unprecedented importance for their life paths, whereat it is interesting to observe that Irina was the most mobile among the participants, while Piruleta was rather little mobile, though the mobility of her older sister had enabled her to visit her on several trips (see *Mobility*). For Sara, adults face more responsibilities and worries than young people, but also enjoy a free weekend. Though not all occupations allow for free weekends, Sara's point of comparison was here the life of a student, who is bound to be a student 24/7, while adults were - in her perception - able to disconnect on the weekends. As she also spoke of being more responsible, we can see once again a combination of the internal change with a more structured working life that includes certain privileges. However, as she also claimed to have been adult for a while before achieving to live the adult life she was leading in her last interview, the internal change acquires more importance than the external. In this sense, it seems that several participants actually already met their own definitions of adulthood, even if they did not like calling themselves adults and those who did, did so by choosing the development task they already completed as a point of reference to highlight their adult status. The main element in the transition to adulthood seems then to be the internal view, the feeling to be adult or not, while development tasks turn into a resource to justify this perception, no matter if to support (Sara) or to reject (Piruleta) current adulthood. That the participants from the upper classes showed less references to the development tasks, is probably a side effect of their having achieved less development tasks in the course of the follow-up and considering to be still further away from achieving them, as a too strong focus on development tasks, would deny them the possibility to be adults, if they did not define it differently. Deferrals between feeling like an adult and having an adult life as Sara expressed, may however lead to tensions and require coping, as young people may feel like 'losers' for not achieving their aims - an idea implicit in Nic's consideration that he should have achieved economic autonomy by now, because other people in his cohort did and also related to Andrés future perspective to feel like a failure if he did not progress in the next years.

When I was a kid, I thought that by the time I was 18 I would be "wow". Well, I mean, when you're a kid you see the grownups very grown-up. [Interviewer: yes] And when you reach that age you realise you're still so small and young. (-) Well, I can say that I have grown-up a little bit, (-) but I don't know, I'm still so "ah", listening to Disney songs and these kind of things (...) you can't stop being in touch with your inner child, that's the first thing, because if you have a child you will have to have that inner child, otherwise you will be a dull parent (...) Well, I'm not saying you have to be immature, that's horrible, but you should have this happiness and this dynamism that children have. Also, for your own sake, you shouldn't lose that, because it could affect yourself and the way you interact with others, it could affect your work and everything (...) Therefore, I think that no one should feel like a complete adult, never (.) for your own sake, otherwise you lose the essence of... (...) Some people are like that, they become more and more adult-like, but afterwards these people fail to realise that life isn't, life isn't happy like that. So, I don't know, one must have a little

bit more (-) more happiness, I don't know, you can always have a bad day but (.) you need to keep this (.) I don't know. (Int5 Maduixa, I.1137-1155)

In conclusion, it seems that social class influences the velocity with which the participants progressed in the completion of development tasks related to economic autonomy. While some participants from higher social classes (N., Maduixa, Nadia) did not attempt to advance first progress in the direction of economic autonomy throughout their undergraduate studies and even assumed to adjourn it for several more years at the end of the follow-up, the participants from lower social classes showed such early advances and progressed in general much quicker towards the completion of the development tasks. This is in line with previous research in Catalonia that indicated that young people from lower social classes are less likely to live with their parents and more likely to work earlier (Torrents, 2015). Such a tendency for a shorter transition was explained in the past with the smaller material resources of the lower social classes, leaving them less time to invest in education before receiving the benefits (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006). While this was usually used to explain why these young people do not access HE, we see in this study that a similar tendency may hold true for university students, highlighting the variety of transitions within the University transition, mediated, in particular, by social class. Moreover, a gender difference regarding the private sphere is possible, as more female than male participants were in the course of the follow-up and at its end in a relationship and had moved out or were about to move out of their parents' residence. Regarding the reproduction of social inequality, these findings indicate that one reason why young people from lower social classes refrain from university studies is the prolongation these represent for their transition to adulthood. Attempting to achieve at least a certain income in parallel to their studies may give these students the impression to be less dependent on their parents and hence enable them to cope with their prolonged transition better. However, diverse studies have indicated that student jobs influence academic outcomes negatively (Araque et al., 2009; Cooper, 2013)¹⁵⁸, so this tendency may add additionally to the already described reasons for lower academic results and a higher risk of attrition or prolonged studies among students from lower social classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Lassibille & Navarro Gomez, 2009; Rubin & Wright, 2017) (see also *... and what about work?*). Gender differences in the imaginaries regarding parenthood in combination with the pursuit of independence, may explain why so many female graduates either decide against motherhood or against their careers (Furlong et al., 2011): They may feel that they have a choice and that they could not be a good mother and still successful in their careers, choosing either way. Both approaches appear in public discourse as societal problems as the first case promotes the given demographic change further¹⁵⁹, while the second case is considered a loss in human

¹⁵⁸ Gibney et al. (2011) argue, however, that the true cause behind low academic performance is an underestimation of the required workload, leading to the dedication of too little time to the studies. Work may, in this sense, be one among many reason to dedicate little time to the studies and may be compensated if students recognise the importance of dedicating more time to their studies, cutting back on other activities. In my reading, this does not mean, however, that students who have to work in order to subsist are not disadvantaged, as they have to organise their time much better than those who do not have to work (Walther & Stauber, 2007) and may easily miss out on something, especially as other studies highlight the importance of taking part in university life for academic outcomes (Rubin, 2012b).

¹⁵⁹ As press notes can be considered an expression of public discourse, see for example this article that also highlights the tendency to exaggerate the low fertility among female academics without a statistical

capital and public funding invested into their education and training¹⁶⁰. Well-being is, furthermore, in both itineraries affected, as both decisions lead to regrets, as a study by WZB, ZEIT and infas (2017) highlighted¹⁶¹. And as the cited press articles show, the problem is mainly focused on the women and their decisions, increasing the pressure on them even further, rather than considering policies to improve the reconcilability of work and family and to promote role-models that allow men and women to feel like good parents while making a career.

6.4.2. *Interview characteristics*

"Una mateixa cosa, dita per una mateixa persona en moments distints, ja no és la mateixa."

Joan Fuster (Sueca 1922-1992)

Roda Mots 28/03/2017

"Qui no comprèn una mirada no comprendrà tampoc una llarga explicació."

Proverbi àrab

Roda Mots 20.03.2015

In the course of the follow-up I noticed important differences regarding the characteristics of the interviews, in particular their duration, the length of the breaks the participants were able to stand without filling them with words, their eloquence and whether or not they came to ask me questions back in the course of the interview. As social positionings are inscribed into the ways to talk (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) (see *Social Inequality*), such differences may mirror social divisions. In line with Bohnsack's (2010) comments on how cultural dominance influences the behaviour of focus-group participants, we can expect social divisions to intervene in the interview situation; a systematic approach how to analyse such differences is however still missing. If I had wanted to analyse my qualitative interviews quantitatively, I could have measured most of these characteristics directly, considering in the case of "eloquence" a combination of the use of connectors and sophisticated terms, the mean number of words per sentence or the variety of vocabulary used. Additionally, I could have counted the contradictions that appeared in my analyses of the interview content and identified different levels of abstraction and reflexivity.

All this would have contributed little to making the point that I had noticed and wanted to visualise in this axis: Some participants "sold" themselves much better than others, leaving a much better impression in and directly after the interview. Though this impression did sometimes dissolve in the in-depth analyses, conversations are not usually recorded and analysed in-depth afterwards, so that the impression remains active and may influence directly on a person's chances in a job interview or when talking to a lecturer. In this sense, this axis

basis (Soldt, 2005): <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/demographie-kinderlose-akademikerinnen-1208614.html> [last access: 09.06.2018].

¹⁶⁰ See for example: https://www.focus.de/finanzen/news/tid-9891/muttertag-warum-akademische-hausfrauen-die-groessten-verluste-einfahren_aid_300299.html [last access: 09.06.2018].

¹⁶¹ For more information on the study see: <https://wzb.eu/en/research/presidents-project-group/project-group/projects/vermachtisstudie>. For a discussion of the study see for example (DPA, 2016): <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/familie/zeit-studie-egal--ob-kinderlos-oder-eltern---akademiker-bereuen-ihre-situation-24710136> [last access in both cases: 26.06.2018].

may not only give us a more detailed idea of the interview situations, but also of what impressions the different participants are likely to leave on their interlocutors in other situations. This is, however, also relative as a short parenthesis regarding the findings of an Australian study about career aspirations in High School may show. Laughland-Booÿ et al. (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015) considered their working-class participants as more reflexive, because they had considered more alternatives in their study choice, developed solutions for possible obstacles and had a plan B should they not be admitted to University, while their middle/upper class peers basically limited their options to University and had difficulties to imagine obstacles that could get into their way, so they did not conceive a plan B, even if their performance in school was rather poor. While I interpret this difference as a sign of the class-difference between considering university the natural next step or just one out of many alternatives (see *University - the logical next step*) and consider that understating academic difficulty may be a way to "sell" better in an interview with an interlocutor without direct access to the actual academic performance (see *Academic success*), in the Australian study the affected middle/upper-class participants sold obviously less, as the researchers came to consider them little reflective, more passive, lacking "engagement" and "abstracting away" risks rather than confronting them (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015). Though I agree with their interpretation that working-class students are more likely to develop reflexivity in their study choice because of their exposure to adversity, in the sense that they "find themselves in situations for which their social location has ill-prepared them; for when their available capital does not appear sufficient to negotiate the immediate situational challenge" (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015), I also consider their ways to describe the middle/upper-class participants as rather pejorative, while these might – in my reading – leave a better impression on their lecturers or future employers than their working-class peers if these continue to mention worries and diverse alternative plans. Moreover, the authors only seemed to compare the working-class students who aspired University studies in the long run here, while nothing was said regarding those who, faced with low academic performance in school, had decided to get a job right away or to choose a training that did not require HE just as their parents, as this could also be read as a lack of reflexivity and pure habitus-guidance, though it may appear more adequate to the authors, considering it "consistent with their abilities and interests" (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015). Moreover, I believe that though being reflexive may certainly sell good in academic contexts, it also depends on what you reflect on. Too much reflection about alternative career paths and academic difficulty may also lead to the impression that these young people were not completely prepared to pursue their studies, did not follow a clear vocation or chose out of necessity rather than interests and ability. In this sense, it is important to ask in which context which argumentations are more likely to leave a good or a bad impression and similar argumentations may leave different impressions depending on how they are presented, though in the concrete situation other aspects of communication, like non-verbal communication etc., are likely to influence, so 'communication skills' are very difficult to measure objectively and a perfect ground for social reproduction (Groppe, 2006). One reason why social inequality is, at the latest, reproduced on the labour market, may be that selectors directly look for candidates who are able to convince them with their personal narrative and who seem to fit in socially, appealing to them as a potential friend rather than a mere colleague (Boliver, 2017).

When applying this axis of analysis to the different participants' cases, I put down everything that caught my attention in the concrete case, leading to a quite big variety of characteristics I considered. For Maduixa, I made for example a note on her extreme rate of speaking, as this velocity explained that even short audios turned into long transcripts, while even short breaks were absolute rare. Margarita, on the contrary, spoke rather slowly, enduring many long breaks. Ariel's linguistic abilities in Spanish were still limited in her first-year interview, but improved significantly in the course of the follow-up, leading to longer and more complex answers and allowing her to reflect upon the questions in new ways – and this seemed to directly influence in her answers, as she showed a strong tendency to simplifications at the beginning of the follow-up. Skone tended to formulate lengthy sentences and employed connectors and sophisticated terms from the first interview on, often returning questions to me with an indirect indication that the question was not well formulated or that he did not explain himself better because I was not prepared to follow such remarks. He also showed from the beginning on a high tendency to develop subjective theories (Latour, 2005) about the issues I brought up or he added himself (see *Change and Continuity*). In the analyses, I jotted down everything that came to my mind, as I could not know which of these characteristics would turn out to have a distinctive character at the end of the follow-up and the change in the participants' ways to express themselves once they had entered the labour market (see *The Transition from University to the Labour Market*) were directly extracted from this axis. In consequence, some of the things I observed in this part of the longitudinal analysis have already been explained in other parts of the thesis and others turned out to be negligible for the focus on social inequality. In the following we will therefore focus on the characteristics that appeared to have a relation to social inequality, apart from sharing one interview characteristic that is of a special general interest, as it allows the reader to imagine the interviews better and to understand why certain participants are presented in much more detail and many more quotes arose from their interviews than from others: the interview duration.

In the following table (Table 10), I have added up the duration of each interview in minutes, calculating the total minutes I spent in the interview situations with each participant and the mean duration of their interviews. As a result, we see that I spent with some participants more than 500 minutes in interviews (Nic, N.), while others only slightly passed the 200 minutes line, though they participated in all interview rounds (Cara). While many of the participants who were gained through the amplification of the sample and some of the focus-group participants gave rather short first-year interviews (Libro, Maduixa, Willy, Sara, Piruleta, Peter) and prolonged their interviews in the course of the follow-up – probably as well as a consequence of my interview guidelines – others already made it to almost an hour or more in their first year (Nic, Skone, N., Koala).

Table 10: Interview Durations in minutes

N°	Participant	Int1	Int2	Int3	Int4_1	Int4_2	Int5	Total	Mean*	Rank**
1	Mabe	32	68					100	50	
2	Cristóbal	36						36	36	
3	Estanteria	35	26	69				130	43	
4	Nic	51	66	135	64	112	94	522	87	3
5	Nadia	39	30	89		60	54	272	54	14
6	Libro	24	100					124	62	
7	Maduixa	22	35	71		85	111	324	65	7
8	Skone	58	54	99		93	107	411	82	4
9	N.	67	68	136	86		170	527	88	2
10	Koala	52	81	109		116	100	458	92	1
11	Floreta	42	39	101		82	123	387	77	5
12	Willy	22	46	66		38	77	249	50	16
13	Cara	32	31	61		40	45	209	42	17
14	Jab	34						34	34	
15	Sara	18	65	72		43	63	261	52	15
16	Ariel	28	48	97		60		233	58	10
17	Piruleta	25	74	83			71	253	63	8
18	Irina	28	44	100	68	53	80	373	62	9
19	Xenia	48	63	67		52	58	288	58	10
20	Peter	26	64	82		59	58	289	58	10
21	Andrés	27	36	85		97	43	288	58	10
23	Margarita			64		67	88	219	73	6

Total Minutes | 5769
Total Hours | 96

Int = Interview. The numbers indicate the interview number. In the case of the participants who completed an exchange programme, a previous and a posterior interview were conducted when possible, so that Int4_1 and Int4_2 are differentiated.

*Means were rounded.

**The 17 participants who were considered in the follow-up were ordered into a ranking starting with the participants with the highest interview duration mean.

When comparing the rank according of the mean duration of the interviews of the participants who were included into the longitudinal analyses to main social divisions, we see that the first participant from social class A appears with rank 8 (Piruleta) and Peter (11) and Sara (15) lie even further behind. Though several of the participants with the shortest interviews were ascribed to social class D (Cara – 17 and Nadia – 14), this might indicate that social class influences the interview duration, e.g. indirectly influencing the participants' well-being in the interview situation and readiness to tell me things, or their eloquence in explaining things, just as well as the number of things they could tell me about (for example in the sense of trips, extracurricular activities etc.). There is no gender difference observable in the duration of the interviews and though Ariel's rank (10) might have been influenced by her language difficulties, it is not completely clear if these should shorten her interviews (as she might tire earlier and tell me less details) or lengthen them (as she might take longer breaks or additional

questions and explanations to understand questions and elaborate her answers). None of the other participants with a migration history had similar language problems and there was no pattern observable in the sense that they tended to longer or shorter interviews.

Regarding social inequality, we can say that the duration of the interview did not coincide in any systematic way with the impression the participants left on me or with other parameters that I would consider a sign of selling themselves well. Nic, for example, spent a part of his second-year interview talking about the wild cats living on campus and even showing me pictures of them, leaving me – in combination with the content of the interview – with the impression that he felt lonely and needed someone to talk. In the course of the follow-up, he partly overcame his difficulties with social success (see *Social success*) and came to entertain me in his last interviews with long and funny anecdotes about his life. While I left him rather worried after Int1 and 2, Int5 was hilarious, though many of his difficulties continued to appear. In this sense, the impression he left improved, but we can also suppose that he would not have told the same stories to a lecturer or in a job interview, but if he came to tell them when meeting new acquaintances, they could have influenced his social success. By turning his pessimistic view on his life and, in particular, choices (e.g. his language choice and the topic of his TFG see *Dream or Nightmare*), into a comically exaggerated 'underdog' narrative, he actually turned it into an asset.

Regarding lecturers or job interviews it is interesting to focus on aspects these might consider negative unless the participants came to justify them well. A good example is the prolongation of the studies. N. gave quite convincing explanations for the prolongation of her studies (see *Academic success*), though the longitudinal character of this project allowed me to compare her explanations to previous interviews. When she told me, for example, in her last interview, that she was so far behind in the official schedule of her degree, because she had coursed few credits and combined her studies with a job, I knew that she had only matriculated for fewer classes in one year, indicating that she failed several subjects in the course of her studies, and that she only worked 4 hours/week. While she might convince a recent acquaintance that the prolongation of her studies was not a result of academic failure, I knew that this had also played a role and did not quite buy her justifications. Something similar could happen with lecturers, though she herself mentioned having achieved privileges with her argument to be a working student (see *... and what about work?*). Here it seems that N.'s direct use of positive identity constructions helped her to appear more convincing in her justifications, while other students might have more difficulties to identify this easily as a successful learner after all this failure and hence sell less convincingly.

Similarly, N. related her difficulties to take a study choice repeatedly to "bad timing". In Int2, she believed to be already too old to become a professional dancer and that she would have had to decide to dedicate herself for this as a child if she wanted to achieve it. She therefore considered becoming a dance teacher as an alternative and embraced a job offer in her dance academy as an opportunity to see if this was to her liking. In Int3, she claimed that it was and that she had therefore pre-registered for teacher training, but did not achieve a placement in the end due to her low PAU score. Here she said that she had even considered to present another time for the PAU but had been advised otherwise, as there are no placements left in teacher training anyway, so taking the PAU in September would have been too late. While her

relating the problem to a late decision and lack of knowledge, highlighting her own motivation and readiness to take the PAU again if it made sense, considering her second-year interview, we can say that if she already considered becoming a dance teacher by then, she could have decided earlier to take the PAU again and take it in spring rather than in September, achieving the possibility to enter into teacher training. In Int5, she said that it might have been better to take a gap year after school to take her study choice with more time, but relativized this thought saying that she was not sure if she would have been able to make the same use of an earlier international experience, arguing that she might have needed to mature first. Though she represented to have a much clearer idea now and to be much more decisive, she seemed to be rather stuck and not advancing in any direction (see *Change and Continuity*). N. was in many senses a special case as the question I came to ask myself was no longer why she studied her degree, but rather why she did not abandon and start something else. Though, from this perspective, N.'s trajectory could appear rather disastrous, she sold it repeatedly rather well, always finding a justification for her difficulties and always claiming that they were by now overcome and always speaking of herself in a very positive way, claiming for example in Int2 that she was about to take a decision, testing the dance teacher alternative first etc.

Well, maybe it's a cliché, but I think I've truly matured (--) eh, I think everything over much more, it has been great for me. Before leaving, I didn't have anything clear, I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I wasn't happy with my degree. I was a bit lost. I didn't have anything clear, I was really lacking motivation. I was really, really discouraged, so I wasn't going anywhere, because I didn't feel like doing anything. [Interviewer: yes] And that was so great for me, I have a clearer mind, I've put all the pieces together. I came back with much more clarity: I know what I want to do, how I want to do it, when... I have everything now. I know what my goals are and I'm taking steps towards them (...) I suppose that being alone helps (.) when you're constantly surrounded by people, whenever you have a problem you have someone there to help you, don't you? And they take charge¹⁶². But when you're alone, you need to do it by yourself. And then, you also have many moments when you're alone and truly by yourself, and I think those moments are times to reflect (.) and you have the time to consider things, to look, to get to know yourself better, as well. [Interviewer: yes] Because when you're here, like I was saying, whenever you have a problem you get help, and you don't get to see how you would react to certain things, but when you're alone, you can only count on yourself, and that's it. (Int5 N., l.13-25)

In some cases, misunderstandings left me with the impression that the participants did not explain themselves well – an important competence in any academic field but especially in pedagogic professions. Peter was especially in his first-year interview very nervous and needed several attempts to explain to me on which days he had his football training, as he mixed his own training days with the days he trained his kids-team. His difficulty was in many senses opposite to N.'s as it got easier for him to talk to me once I knew him better. Though something similar might happen with his lecturers over time, in a job interview he would likely leave a bad impression – or at least an impression of being nervous.

Peter: then at 9 o'clock, I have to go to, I train a football team (-) and well until 11 o'clock, I after that I get home I eat and put a little TV on and then I go to sleep.

Interviewer: and do you train every day?

¹⁶² The expression used in the Catalan original was: "*i et treu les castanyes del foc*".

Peter: I don't train, well, now we have finished but I trained 3 days Mondays and Wednesdays, no Mondays and Thursdays (-) Tuesdays Thursdays and Fridays (.) (-) and the other two days when I don't have this I train the children (.) from 6 to 8 o'clock (.)

Interviewer: oh so yes you train every day

Peter: I mean yes (.) I train and then I coach¹⁶³ (.) I'm a player and a coach (.) [Interviewer: ok] with [Interviewer: I understand now] with my team I train at night at 9 (-) and then the other two days um I happen to coach a team (Int1, l.58-68).

Another example of a suboptimal impression appeared in Piruleta's first-year interview, as she argued that she would like to work temporarily in Finland, because someone had told her that the Finnish education system was very good. As Finland had been repeatedly a topic in diverse press releases and public and political discourse about educational systems, a source to justify this was here not really necessary and many people would probably just state this affirmation as a fact and not mention any source for it or directly refer to an official statistic like PISA. By mentioning a personal source here, Piruleta left the impression that she had missed out on all these public discussions about PISA and the Finnish education system and only happened to notice by chance that the Finnish education system could be of interest to her. From a teacher-training student, we could furthermore expect a more critical attitude and reflections about such generalized affirmations about education, though it is true that she had just started her degree at this point. Rather than leaving a bad impression here, we could hence argue that Piruleta did not make complete use of the opportunity to leave a good impression, as it would have sounded completely different if she had said, for example, that she felt a professional curiosity to live temporarily in Finland and achieve first-hand experiences with its educational system to be able to judge it and possibly identify useful elements to integrate in the Spanish classrooms.

(-) well (.) I above all that (.) travel and learn from (-) from others, from other um from other education from other sites (.) I don't know (.) I would like, they recommended Finland to me because the education is very good there (-) and I don't know, go and try (.) to try to learn, to do some short course there (-) to learn more things (.) [Interviewer: um] to improve (.) and especially English (.) [Interviewer: (smiles)] because (laughing) it's a language that is now universal and I need to learn it (.) (Int1 Piruleta, 300-305)

When comparing different interviews from the same participants, we can notice that misunderstandings as the one from Peter's first-year interview disappeared from the transcripts over time or were treated with much more naturalness, assuming that I was the one who did not understand, rather than getting nervous at not explaining themselves well. Moreover, all participants, including the non-traditional students, started to speak more as experts in their field of studies, employing field-specific terminology and reflecting on polemic issues. Though this might also be a result of their habituation to the interview situation and the development of our participant-researcher relationship (see *Insider/Outsider Status & Unconditional Love*), it could also be an effect of their studies that did – in spite of all criticism – allow them to change in the course of their studies. The participation might have had a training effect here,

¹⁶³ In English, the difficulty to distinguish his own training from his training kids may be less comprehensible, as the word "coach" applies to the second case and marks the difference from training quite clearly. In order to reflect the ambiguity, I've opted to use "train" for both cases above, introducing the word "coach" only here, as the original expression in Spanish was clearer to: "yo entreno y luego hago hago de entrenador".

as participants like Peter might have gotten better in explaining aspects of their lives to people who do not form part of their daily routines themselves.

However, some differences persisted until the end and may indicate that the participants from higher social classes did not only feel from the beginning on more comfortable in the interview situation, but did furthermore construct their role as interviewees and the power-imbalances differently. While the participants from the social class A gained security and eloquence in the course of the follow-up, adopting often an expert-posture towards its end, the participants from higher social classes indirectly claimed more and more control of the interview situation. From the beginning on, they were the ones to ask me questions back or to put into doubt the rather difficult and questionable questions I asked about how they perceived themselves. Especially Skone approached me from the beginning on with certain dominance, asking me even before our first interview to send him my socio-economic questionnaire and repeatedly commented on my project as if he was a supervisor, considering where I might encounter difficulties. In many senses, he kept challenging me throughout the whole follow-up and this influenced our relationship and my analyses. The participants from social class A, on the contrary, did never question my interview guideline and usually reacted nervously and with desperate attempts to say something to these questions. Several of the participants from the higher social classes began in particular their last-year interview with a narrative they had prepared for me and even told me that they would come to answer my questions later, when I interrupted with a question before they had finished (Nic).

Interviewer: and how do you see yourself?

Skone: (-) at the university?

Interviewer: as a person

Skone: (-) as a person (laughing) (.) This question is difficult huh? (laughing) (-) what? the thing is that of course I don't understand (-) it's very general

Interviewer: for example, do you think you have changed since High school when you started studying at the university?

Skone: from High school, in the in the ESO¹⁶⁴?

Interviewer: or since the A levels? (4) If you have changed now when you started university studies?

Skone: well (.) (shrinks air) eh (.) I don't think so ... (Int1 Skone, l.241-251)

Nic: It's because if I don't explain it like this, you know? I lose sight, right, so we were...

Interviewer: Yes, tell me, tell me, you've already prepared your speech.

Nic: with notes prepared, nono (Int4_2 Nic, l.22-25)

In conclusion and considering that the participants showed a certain evolution and habituation to the interview situation in the course of the project, overcoming their initial excitement, we can focus especially on the last-year interviews to differentiate 2 types appeared regarding this axis: 1) the eloquent and dominant (Nic, Skone, N., Maduixa, Floreta, Andrés, Koala, Nadia, Xenia, Irina) and 2) the concise and contained (Cara, Willy, Peter, Piruleta, Sara, Ariel, Margarita). As argued before, several participants changed in the course of the follow-up showing a stronger tendency to belong to type 1, though Xenia was an exception to this. I

¹⁶⁴ ESO stands here for "*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*", the Spanish secondary comprehensive school for pupils aged 12 to 16 years, approximately. High School refers to the last two years of schooling that are not comprehensive and mean to prepare, among other things, for the University entrance exam (see *Education and degree course organisation*).

count Xenia as among the type 1 participants as this typology is based – once again – on the end of the follow-up. However, one of the main characteristics I documented in this axis was the immense variety between her interviews: While her first interview was exceptionally long and full of personal and emotional details, she seemed to be avoiding me and my questions in Int3 and in Int4 I did almost all the talking. Within each type we may, furthermore, observe different levels of the described tendencies as Skone was for example extremely eloquent and dominant, while Xenia expressed her control over the interview by blocking certain questions but only entertained me in few occasions with her eloquence and most of the other participants in this type gained eloquence in the course of the follow-up and expressed a certain control in the last interview, e.g. by bringing a prepared discourse of the news they wanted to tell me at the beginning, but did never come to challenge me in the ways Skone and Xenia did.

When comparing these types with the socio-economic background of the participants, we see – as anticipated before – that the participants from the lowest social class (A) were all categorised into type 2, while most of the participants from the highest social class (D) gather in type 1. It is furthermore eye-catching that the two participants from the remote rural area (Cara and Willy) were categorised into type 2 and that most of the participants with a migration background formed part of type 1, Ariel being in many senses disadvantaged as her last interview was her fourth-year interview and she was the one who arrived latest to Catalonia and did still show severe linguistic problems at the beginning of the follow-up. Further research would be needed to analyse up to which extent these observations are coincidences or if these social divisions do intervene in interview styles. Especially the influence of social class seems to be, however, rather obvious and is in line with the literature that argues that lower social classes are less used to interview situations and therefore more nervous and less able to express themselves and to question their counterpart (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Stahl, 2016). That these differences attenuated in the course of the follow-up may then hint at a training-effect that habituated all participants with the situation and may have – beyond the positive effects on their ability to reflect about their lives Floreta and pointed out – a positive influence on the participants' future attempts to handle interview situations, or even oral presentations and job interviews, as they might have achieved a certain nonchalance and routine in expressing their ideas orally that could come to influence in all spheres of their life. Future research could focus on the design, implementation and evaluation of in-classroom interventions in this line, to see if social equality could be improved in this way.

6.4.3. *Academic success*

"No hi ha creació sense esforç , però el que compta és que l'esforç no es noti."

José Antonio Marina, Spanish philosopher and pedagogue (1939)

Roda Mots 31.01.2014

Academic success and failure are important topics in the literature on HE students, as they are highly related to student attrition. Rubin and Wright (2017, p. 3) argue, for example, that working class students are less likely to be “academically successful” in the sense of being “academically engaged”, the grades obtained and “intellectual development” are lower and

they are less likely to stay enrolled, complete their degrees and to be satisfied with their university experience. In a study conducted in the UK (Thiele et al., 2016), girls were found to perform academically better than boys – both in school and in HE – non-white ethnic groups were found to perform significantly worse than and students who had attended a public school were significantly more likely to achieve a good qualification in their degree than students who had attended independent – that is to say: private – schools, even though the private-school students did enter HE with better school grades. However, socio-economic background and neighbourhoods were not found to influence the academic performance. These authors explain this arguing that public-school scores do not represent the students' "true/academic potential" (Thiele et al., 2016, p. 1434). This means that private-school scores do either show this potential or exaggerate it, as these students are more likely to achieve lower scores in their last year in the degree than in school. Interestingly, this finding does also insinuate that these students are able to show their academic potential once in university. However, quite a different explanation for this finding will be developed in this section. What is important to observe is that members of subordinated groups do not only usually achieve worse results regarding their peers from dominant backgrounds, they are more likely to 'underachieve' in the sense of "a student's performance at an attainment level below that expected for a child of their particular ability" (Collins et al., 2015, p. 2), indicating that these young people do not develop their complete potential.

In times of 'mass-HE' (Trow, 1999) and an inflation of graduation certificates (Brynin, 2012), the overall grade of the final student record may furthermore have a decisive power for the labour-market positioning, so the selective character HE offered in a past through access is now transferred to achieving certain grades – and a certain CV (Bathmaker et al., 2013).

In this study, I did neither wish to ask my participants for direct "proof" of their academic outcomes nor did I usually bring the topic of academic success up myself, as I feared that such a focus could make the participants feel uncomfortable and favour their drop-out. In consequence, we can only rely on their comments and assessments of how they were doing academically and this is necessarily subject to their own definitions of success. Peter, for example, may have considered himself as successful as long as he graduated from his degree even if a year belatedly. His fellow students Sara and Piruleta, on the other hand, left quite clear that for them their degree was too easy to pass and that students who needed to prolong their studies to pass it, should rather be excluded and not be allowed to become teachers (see also *Health*). So while Peter might have perceived himself as "successful", though not among the best, Piruleta and Sara might have considered him an underachiever. Rather than objective results, it is hence necessary to consider how the participants related to their academic outcomes, if and how they mentioned them and how they constructed their identity in this regard. A certain comparison to actual academic outcomes is, however, possible as the longitudinal character of the project allowed me to notice it when the participants prolonged their studies and as I did ask repeatedly for scholarship programmes and they tended to – mistakenly (see *Scholarship programmes*) – ascribe their rejection for a scholarship to academic failure, this topic appeared anyway.

Coming from this approach to academic success, we can develop two different typologies, one according to the participants' academic success and another one regarding their ways to talk

about academic success. In the first typology, we can include three types: 1) high achievers, 2) ordinary success and failure and 3) increased academic difficulty. How to translate these types into grades depends on the concrete degree courses, as prolonged studies and academic failure are among the ordinary in some degrees, while in others it is rather common to achieve good grades, so high achievers need to achieve extraordinary outcomes to be considered as such. We can use the academic requirements for general scholarships as an orientation here (see *Scholarship programmes*) and notice that academic failure seems to be much more common in engineering degrees, where students may still be eligible for a scholarship after suspending several subjects and prolonging their studies.

The receipt of a scholarship is, in some cases, an indirect indicator of good or excellent academic outcomes, though we will see further below that many participants seemed to be excluded out of other reasons so the non-receipt does not tell us anything in this regard (see *Scholarship programmes*). In this sense, we can argue for example that Koala, who repeatedly received scholarships and also obtained one for his master degree – where the academic requirements are higher (see *Scholarship programmes*) – was probably among the high achievers, though he failed one first-year subject ones and did not usually speak a lot about his academic outcomes. That several lecturers contacted him in the course of the follow-up to gain him as a TFG student, a trainee or offering him a student job, corroborates this impression further. N., on the other hand, was obviously among the least-academically successful participants, as she prolonged her studies significantly, failing subjects every year and still coursing some second-year subjects in her fifth-year interview. Regarding the other participants, most came to fail a subject at some point, especially at the beginning of their studies (Sara, Peter, Skone, Koala, Nic, Margarita, Nadia, N., Willy). It is, however, more difficult to assign them clearly to a type, as they may not have mentioned all their failed subjects and different degrees of difficulty of the degrees have to be considered, but are difficult to assess as abandonment rates - used in some studies to determine the difficulty level of a degree (Torrents, 2017) - may be influenced by different factors, as this PhD thesis has manifested. Regarding teacher training, for example, the participants came to tell me about the extremely high rate of failed students in their year in a concrete subject, so that Sara's and Peter's suspending this subject may not necessarily mean that they were underachievers, while Piruleta's passing the subject might be read as an indicator that she belonged to type 1, being a high achiever. Nadia suffered academic difficulties in her first year, but advanced at the usual pace from her third year on, participating furthermore in diverse extracurricular activities, some of which did have an elitist character, indicating that she had likely passed to be among the high achievers of her degree. Willy left in the course of the follow-up the impression to be a high achiever, as he achieved the required PAU score to enter into his aspired degree course in the aspired university and usually passed all exams, though some in the makeup exam period. In Int4 he even told me a story about a lecturer who told them to have prepared a very difficult exam they were all going to suspend (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*), but he still passed it with a 5. After all this academic success, he mentioned, however, in Int5 that he did not achieve the necessary mean score in his academic record to be eligible for a scholarship for his master studies (see *Scholarship programmes*). As this score was in the case of his master a 7, we can consider two possible explanations: Either he was not as academically successful as it seemed or this score was

beyond the realistic outcomes in his degree, indicating that the academic requirements for scholarships are too high in the case of masters, worsening social inequality further.

In the second typology, concerning the narratives around academic outcomes, we can distinguish between participants who hardly ever referred to their academic outcomes, usually only giving indirect indicators of academic success or failure (like the receipt of a scholarship or the – often false – assumption to have been rejected for a scholarship because of having failed one subject); participants who ensured to transmit that they were academically successful, but attempted to be humble and quote external sources rather than their own assessments, and participants who talked a lot about their academic outcomes, highlighting either their success or failure. I would like to call the first type "the silent" (Koala, Cara, Margarita, N.), the second type "the humble" (Sara, Nic) and the third type "the expressive" (Piruleta, Xenia). The following examples may help to better understand the delimitation of these types: Sara was ascribed to the humble type, because she did not usually bring the topic of academic success up, but mentioned occasionally her good results in the PAU and towards the end of the follow-up her overall good results in the degree. Hereby she showed a tendency to introduce this success as a context information necessary to understand another story or opinion she was sharing or referring to an external source, for example the comments of a lecturer. When she came to mention a suspended subject in her second-year interview, she immediately compensated this impression of academic difficulty by highlighting that her grade point average had been above the required minimum for scholarships anyway and that she only failed this subject because of the unfair evaluation system (see also *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*). Piruleta, on the other hand, was extremely expressive regarding her fears of academic failure in Int1, but did also highlight her academic success in the following years and came to construct her learner identity as a high achiever in comparison to fellow students who had difficulties to speak in public – a deficit she considered especially worrisome for future teachers, constructing her identity as well as a good teacher in this sense (see *The Transition from University to the Labour Market*). However, she had needed the academic success to construct her identity in this way and had severe doubts to be able to meet the requirements in her first-year interview. Similarly, Sara was worried about the possibility to fail at the beginning of her studies and mentioned towards the end that she had been afraid not to meet the requirements for the specialization in English, though she had been working as an English teacher in a private language school before. This may indicate that even though she experienced academic success, she kept worrying if it was enough.

Yes, yes, I also worried because I had never taken English lessons in a language school, for example, and grammar and things like this are harder for me. Therefore, when I saw people who had the Advanced [Certificate of English] and things like that, I thought: "I'm not enough", but I was wrong. Then you realize that it isn't necessary to have been studying English all your life, but rather having... all I have learnt has been by going here and there, and now I also have the Advanced [Certificate of English]. (Int5 Sara, l.250-254)

Until now they gave us [financial] aids, because we're a *familia nombrosa*¹⁶⁵, but as my older sister has finished her degree, they don't give us any aids anylonger and this year, for

¹⁶⁵ The term "familia nombrosa" (large family) refers to a title families that meet certain criteria may achieve, allowing them certain advantages and discounts, for example in public transport and enrolment fees. For an overlook over eligible family constellations see:

example, I've paid half the enrolment fee and as I achieved a "with distinction" they also discounted that (Int3 Piruleta, l.57-59)

Piruleta: Well my impression is that many people enter into teacher training and many do not serve to be teachers

Interviewer: and are these people who do not pass later?

Piruleta: or they don't pass or they do without doing anything or you see that they are super shy and if they can't speak in front of us, imagine [what they'd do] in front of the children (...) in order to enter this career there should be something, I don't know what, some exams or something for that people, so in some way you could see if they want to learn or just get the degree (Int3 Piruleta, l.405-420)

Another participant who was quite expressive about her academic outcomes was Xenia. Her biggest academic failure happened just at the beginning of the follow-up, when she did not achieve the required score to enter medicine. In total, she took the PAU three times and though she scored a better result each time, she never entered into medicine and finally abandoned this plan. In parallel to these attempts, she had begun university as a *pro-forma* student (see *The Transition from School to University*), but abandoned the degree and began biotechnology instead. Once she had enrolled into biotechnology instead, she kept constructing her learner identity as successful and highlighted her being among the best students in her degree and how a certain competition among the students of her degree pushed her to do even better – another example of the positive effects of social integration (see *Fellow students* and *Social success*). In her Int3, she mentioned, for example, to be among the best of her year and argued repeatedly that this degree was difficult and that only the best students chose it and still encountered difficulties to pass. In her last interview, Xenia said that her degree had led her to repeatedly excel herself – note that the personification regarding her fellow students disappeared – and indicated a tendency to underestimate her own abilities, just as Piruleta and Sara, arguing that her academic success had shown her that she could have studied an engineering degree instead, but that she had not dared to do so when she had to choose a degree, believing that it was too difficult for her (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*). Her success in University had led her to reassess her self-efficacy belief in this sense, but she discarded to study yet another degree after finishing the first, arguing that she was getting too old and wanted to finish her studies someday (see *What I was born for - or not*).

Andrés constructed his learner identity repeatedly as a high achiever, highlighting that he passed all subjects while many fellow students had to repeat them or abandoned the degree completely. Moreover, he spoke of achieving good results and that the degree was working for him, while he justified his abandoning of the degree in English studies first with the need to earn money when his mother lost her work and later on with the change in the study plan that stopped to be to his liking. However, he mentioned in Int3 that he failed a CLUC¹⁶⁶ exam,

http://treballiaferssocials.gencat.cat/ca/ambits_tematics/families/families_nombroses/ [last access: 13.08.2018]. In Piruleta's case, her family consisted of two parents and three daughters, so they entered into the first case of a large family and lost their title, when the oldest sister finished her studies. Sara, on the contrary, was the last considered constellation: a family that lost one parent to death, so one adult and two children are left.

¹⁶⁶ CLUC is the name of the English exam of the *Commissió Interuniversitària de Formació i Acreditació Lingüístiques de Catalunya* (CIFALC), a Catalan institution that assesses and certifies proficiency in

obtaining B1 in all parts minus in oral expression. Though he justified this failure with his nerves, we could have expected a higher level in English from a student who had begun to study English studies twice. This may, hence, indicate that he faced academic difficulty in the previous degree, but did not wish to admit to it. Similarly, Ariel did not achieve the necessary score to study medicine and mentioned certain difficulties with one first-year subject in her first interview, but continuously constructed her learner identity as a high achiever, arguing that she was good with numbers and letters and that her academic difficulties were only temporal, caused by her lack in language proficiency and, in the case of oral presentations, her nerves. She never mentioned a failed subject and received the general scholarship (see *Scholarship programmes*), indicating that she achieved a certain academic success – and that her mother did really not earn much in spite of her being a doctor (see *Measuring Social Class*). It is, hence, eye-catching that though Ariel and Xenia faced difficulties to enter their aspired degree programme, all participants with a migration history were academically highly successful and tended to construct their learning identities as high achievers, even if some – Koala and Irina – were more humble about it and did not usually bring the topic up. This might indicate that only the most successful students with migration backgrounds make it to university and that especially girls tend to underestimate their abilities, choosing degrees they may easily succeed in. However, in the case of Xenia and Ariel, their difficulties to enter medicine might indicate an indirect disadvantage for students with a migration history in the PAU, for instance because of issues with language proficiency, that pushes them into less prestigious degrees, missing out on their human capital and reproducing social inequality.

That severe academic difficulty was rather rare at the end of the follow-up is probably influenced by the longitudinal character of the project, as participants with severe difficulties were probably more likely to drop-out in the course of the follow-up (as Estanteria did first regarding her degree and somewhat later regarding the project¹⁶⁷). Regarding the participants of the socio-economic survey to amplify the sample, those with severe academic difficulties might have directly refused to participate from the beginning on. From this perspective, it is even more interesting to study N.'s case in more detail, as she did not only continue her degree in spite of repeated academic failure, but kept furthermore participating in the project.

N. often only mentioned failed subjects because I brought the topic up myself towards the end of the interview if it did not appear before, considering that the special importance of academic difficulties in her case justified this slightly different procedure. In Int 5, I even had to repeat the question several times before I got a clear answer. When I asked how many subjects she had passed in her Erasmus term in Germany, for example, rather than answering "2 seminars", N. started with a long and detailed description of her experiences, including

languages. For more information see: <http://www.cifalc.cat/certificats-dangles/> [last access: 03.06.2018].

¹⁶⁷ Though Estanteria dropped out before completing the vocational training she began after abandoning her degree in social work, she told me in her last interview about her diverse plans to return to University. Years later, I happened to meet her as a student of another degree of the Universitat de Lleida (UdL). This may indicate that, in spite of her severe academic difficulties and her temporal dropout, Estanteria pursued – and most probably achieved – a University credential in the end. As she was identified as from social class D, a class-effect appears likely, as she did not only have the economic possibilities to prolong her formation years like this, but furthermore felt entitled to achieve a University degree, so severe academic difficulties could not discourage her permanently.

several anecdotes and without ever coming to the point to summarise the number of subjects she passed, until I repeated the question.

Interviewer: Were the subjects you took in Germany recognized once you got here, or...?
(...)

Interviewer: Then, were any of the subjects you took there recognized eventually?

N.: The seminars. [Interviewer: both seminars] Both seminars and yes, I got good grades (.) but the other courses were extremely hard, I had a hard time with those. (Int5 N., I.234; 434-436)

Whenever she came to admit academic failure or the prolongation of her studies in the course of the follow-up, she directly justified and relativized them (see *Interview characteristics*). Regarding a suspended first-year subject, she argued for example that she failed because she had not coursed this subject in her High-School branch and highlighted that it was the first time she ever failed a subject. Similarly, she ascribed her low score in the PAU to the wrong High-School branch choice in Int1. When she failed several subjects in her second year, she explained this with a lack of motivation and the idea to change her degree course and study teacher training instead, highlighting moreover that she had started her student job as a dance teacher, when the academic failure began. In her fourth-year interview, she did not make any reference to her academic outcomes, which was in part logical as the interview took place before the summer as she had advised me about her upcoming Erasmus term. In Int 5, she avoided telling me about her academic outcomes and explained the difficulties in Germany with a lack of language proficiency (see *Change and Continuity*), highlighting that she improved a lot in this sense. Moreover, she ascribed the prolongation of her studies to a decision to course only few credits per year, caused by a lack of motivation for her degree, though she had only coursed fewer subjects in her third year and must have failed several subjects repeatedly to still course second-year subjects in her fifth year. Throughout the whole course of the follow-up, she continued hence with the tendency to construct her learning identity as a successful learner and only admitted in Int 5, that her repeated academic failure had led her to doubt her intelligence. Here we can observe, as in many other interviews from the participants, a tendency to admit to difficulties from the retrospective, when these were considered overcome, as N. was convinced that she was doing much better now. The extrinsic ascription of her difficulties to external factors may have favoured, furthermore, her persistence, while intrinsic ascriptions are likely to favour attrition, though we cannot know if she was really this convinced that her difficulties were not her own fault or if she constructed her itinerary like this in the interviews, in spite of severe doubts about her intelligence and abilities. In both cases, social class may influence here as participants from lower social classes would have likely abandoned their studies under similar circumstances.

As the developed typology is closely related to the previous types of academic success, a change of trend regarding academic success was also often accompanied by a different way to relate to academic failure in the interviews. Nadia, for example, faced her difficulties basically in her first-year in university and highlighted this failure in the second-year interview by saying that she had failed 4 subjects, rather than highlighting that she had passed 3. While she had anticipated difficulties with one subject in her first-year interview, these results shocked her visibly and led her to take drastic measures: She met with a coach who trained her in learning techniques and only matriculated in her second-year for the failed first-year subjects. As she

did not have to repeat the practical lessons, this reduced her workload effectively to less than the half. Though this approach facilitated her academic success in the second year, it had the disadvantage that she stopped to meet the friends she had made in her first year in class, only coinciding with those who repeated some subjects too. This decision could have easily provoked difficulties in her social integration, but as we will see in the following axis (see *Social success*), quite the opposite was the case, as she maintained her friendship with students she befriended in her first year throughout almost the whole degree course and benefitted from these contacts academically, e.g. receiving lecture notes. At the same time, she occupied at least at the beginning a special position among the new first-year students, saying that these considered her an expert in HE and came to consult her with their questions. When she came to fail one of her first-year subjects again in her second year, she still enrolled for all second-year and the failed first-year subject in her third year – keeping up the pace with the new first-year students – and succeeded from then on academically, despite the sudden increase in workload. While we can read her decision to see a coach and to only enrol for the failed first-year subjects in her second year as a sign of a deterioration of her self-efficacy belief, she constructed already in Int2 her learner identity positively again, arguing that she actively sought out a solution for her lack of ability and ascribing this lack extrinsically to a failure of a school system that had not taught her how to learn efficiently.

Because I studied hard, really hard, and nothing (-) I wasn't delivering (.) and this summer my parents went, they were going to (-) they got ((1)) a man (-) who taught me (-) some study techniques like (-) how to better face certain exam situations, so that I wouldn't get nervous and all that (.) and for the moment, it's good. (Int2 Nadia, l.65-69)

The direct inversion into a coach – and possibly the work of the coach who might have helped her to regain her self-esteem and confidence – allowed her to begin her second-year without the anxiety to fail and even when she came to fail the first-year subject for a second time, she did not consider to abandon her degree, considering a University change if necessary. Moreover, we can read her decision to course all second-year subjects and the suspended first-year subject in the next year as a sign that she had turned to construct her learner identity as successful, rather than considering a further reduction of her annual workload, because she had failed the first-year subject again while only coursing 4 subjects. Her comments regarding the number of times a student may fail a subject before being excluded from the degree and the knowledge that she could then change universities and still complete the degree elsewhere, may indicate that she was not completely sure if she would be finally able to pass the first-year subject but was able to cope with her worries by investing time in actively informing herself about the rules. This 'hot knowledge' (Davey, 2009) about university functioning but also the economic security that her family would enable her to prolong her studies and to move to another city if necessary, did likely allow her to disburden her efforts and concentrate on her studies without suffering – or at least mentioning to suffer – the levels of anxiety Sara and Piruleta referred to. Even before passing the notorious first-year subject in her third year, academic success did pretty much disappear as a topic from Nadia's interviews and she only told me that she had finally passed the first-year subject, because I directly asked for it. This may indicate that the recovery of her successful learner identity was even more important for her narratives than the actual success – here in the sense of passing the subject. Sara and Piruleta, on the contrary, experienced the opposite situation, mentioning repeatedly

a doubt and anxiety to fail, though they were actually doing quite well. As failure came for them with an important additional economic burden – the re-matriculation fee – and especially Piruleta was already worried about the sacrifice her parents had to make to enable her to study, economic capital seemed to play a crucial part in these processes. While academic failure was for Sara and Piruleta a dark shadow that haunted them like a "nightmare" in spite of their relatively good results, N. and Nadia experienced it much more naturally and did not consider it a reason to abandon their studies. In this sense, it is even possible that Sara and Piruleta came to appear among the high achievers at the end, because the fear to fail had motivated them to keep their effort and activity up.

In conclusion, we can say that the participants who experienced academic success were much more likely to belong to the humble type 2, while the ones with academic difficulties either remained silent or talked away their academic problems (N.), belonging hence to the silent type 1 or turned their difficulties into a main topic of the interview – the expressive type 3. In this sense, we can also interpret their silences and expressiveness as different coping strategies in the face of academic difficulty. When comparing these types with the participants socio-economic backgrounds, we can furthermore observe that the participants with the severest academic difficulties were from social class D (Nadia, N.). Though this might appear a contradiction to the above cited publications that expect academic failure to be a problem of working-class students, the logical explanation is that the participants from social class A who experienced academic failure did directly decide against participating in this project (see a similar argumentation regarding social success in the next section, *Social success*) and those who participated were possibly especially successful because they had chosen degree courses that were relatively easy for them, fearing academic failure. Previous research has indicated, moreover, that students from lower social classes and in particular women from lower social classes tend to choose 'easy' degree courses, in the sense of low abandonment rates, even if their previous academic results were high (Torrents, 2017). In this sense, high academic performance is generally expectable for students from lower social classes.

The participants who referred to academic difficulty – or only the risk to face it – as a cause for psychological distress, were both assigned to social class A and female (Piruleta, Sara), so we could be observing an intersection of social class and gender in this regard (see *Health*). With Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) we can expect that they perceived their academic performance and abilities as worse than those of their fellows, even if they achieved better numeric results. Bain (2006) mentions the influence of negative group stereotypes on academic outcomes, but to observe this, Piruleta and Sara would have to first identify as members of the affected group and as we have seen through the subjective measure of social class (see *Measuring Social Class*), this is not at all clear. Though Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) expected female students to show more effort, they also argued that students from higher social classes were less likely to make an effort, as this enables them to ascribe academic difficulties to a lack of effort afterwards, instead of questioning their abilities as students from lower social classes, who directly give their best, do. As N. changed her discourse in this regard in the course of the follow-up, we can say that she identified with the female strategy to show effort whenever talking about her current and future assignments, but opted for an upper-class strategy to negate her effort and ascribe her academic difficulty to a lack of effort in the past. This allowed her, furthermore, to

develop an impression of positive personal and academic development and progress that most probably sells better than openly questioning your abilities (see also *Interview characteristics*). Once again, the longitudinal character of the project undermines this good impression, as we notice that she argued similarly in most of the interviews, always claiming that the problems of motivation lay in the past and that she was now showing much more effort and would hence be successful, just to explain her anew failure in the next interview again through a lack of effort and motivation. In this sense, the observed differences may lie in the well-being in the HE system, as Nadia and N. seemed to encounter ways to cope with their academic failure without jeopardising their well-being completely, while Piruleta and Sara sacrificed their well-being and even came to speak of “anxiety”, though they never faced such extreme failure as Nadia and N. did.

Another aspect that appeared crucial regarding academic success were the frequent difficulties with group works. Bain (2006) argues in his analysis of the practices of the best college teachers that these employ group works as a way to make their students talk in class and to encourage them to share ideas and resources they can then use for their individual works, but do not usually request collaboratively written works, arguing furthermore that group works are a failure when they force students to do something in a group, they would be able to achieve individually in a more efficient way. From the comments of most of the participants, we can deduce that many of their lecturers used group works in a different way and that written group works that had to be elaborated outside the class room were very common. Peter argued, furthermore, that the working groups were forming in function of their usual academic results, so that a person with a certain average could only pick a working group within the same range. This indicates that the formed groups were, at least in his degree and year, rather homogeneous, though heterogeneous groups are expected to lead to better outcomes as the students can more effectively help and learn from each other (Bain, 2006). Moreover, such an allocation to a group with a similar potential to your own, limits your potential to achieve better results and outperform yourself, so that the group might slow its members down or discourage their attempts to become better. Only few participants mentioned in-class group works in the sense Bain (2006) praised them, but those who did, considered them a good way to get into touch with their fellow students (Nic), as we will see in the next section (see *Social success*).

Especially the teacher training students felt flooded by group works and Peter did directly represent that his academic success had been compromised by his belonging to a little efficient group at the beginning of his degree. In this sense it seems that academic success comes to depend very directly on the students' ability to identify efficient group workers at the very beginning of their degree and befriend them to form part of their groups. As we have seen above (see *The Transition from School to University*), the Catalan HE system seems to include many *pro-forma* students who enrol in a degree rather than taking a gap year, when they do not yet know what to do or their actual plan A did not pan out well. Several of our participants seem to have been *pro-forma* students in this sense (Nic, Xenia, N.) and neither Nic nor Xenia came to pass any subject in their first year, while we have already commented on N.'s prolonged academic difficulties in her degree. *Pro-forma* students do hence represent a direct risk for the academic outcomes of their fellows, as these are likely to have to complete group

works with them. Though few participants mentioned difficulties because of abandoning fellow students, several considered the belonging to an academically potent working group as crucial for their academic success and changed their working groups in the course of the follow-up. Such changes were, however, as well difficult, as lecturers did – out of obvious reasons – not usually allow them once the academic course had started, so the students had to put up with their groups even after severe conflicts and confrontations. If they were able to avoid such confrontations in the course of the group work, the very attempt to change the group for the next course could still provoke confrontations and lead to conflicts with their previous working group, while their acceptance into another working group did also depend on their social success.

Peter: Well, with classmates. We had a group of 4 or 5 friends. We were closer last year, when we were doing assignments together. And at first, everything was all right, but once the end of the academic course was approaching and at the beginning of this academic course, a lot of things started happening. There were 2 or 3 classmates who were never coming, they didn't care about the assignments at all. We didn't end up being angry at each other, we still talk and all, but it's not like it was in the beginning. We get along, we meet, and everything is fine, but it's a colder relationship than before, because of what happened.

Interviewer: And what was that?

Peter: Because in the end, there was a point when 2 or 3 classmates were tired and said: "Let's change groups, each one of us goes to another group and there'll be no problems". And it's true, there were no problems, but even if you don't want to there's always... (Int2 Peter, I.229-238)

Considering the literature, students from social class A should be more likely to face difficulties befriending fellow students due to habitus clashes, their feeling out-of-place in HE etc. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Grundmann et al., 2008). Making academic success directly depend on social success – e.g. through group works – is then likely to jeopardise the academic success of students from social class A further, rather than helping them to establish a potent social network and gain social capital from higher social classes, leading to worse academic results and a higher risk of attrition and, hence, the reproduction of social inequalities. In summary, it seems that the use of group works observed in this thesis did not follow pedagogical recommendations in order to ensure best academic quality, but rather abused the technique, requesting in some degrees group works for almost everything, and jeopardised the students' academic success and well-being, as these came to depend on their social success and ability to become the member of an academically potent working group.

Regarding the finding that the students from social class A were academically more successful than some of the participants from social class D, I would like to revisit the study from the UK quoted at the beginning of this section (Thiele et al., 2016). These authors believed that the better academic results of the public-school students at the end of their degrees were explainable with their not showing their whole academic potential in school – an observation that indirectly states that they do show their whole potential in University. In line with the research at hand that observed persistent class differences in academic success in University (see *Theoretic Background*) and considering that social class correlates in many locations with school type as families with more economic capital send their children to private schools (Davey, 2009; Dávila et al., 2008), another explanation seems to be more coherent: as academic performance is lower among students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, only

the best enter HE and even these may choose degrees that are rather accessible for them, so it is rather easy for them to achieve good academic results in HE. Should they not receive good results, they are furthermore more likely to abandon their studies, feeling that they are not apt – and not entitled – for HE studies after all, so that the last-year performance is likely to only include the academic results of students from low socio-economic backgrounds who were successful in HE. Students from high socio-economic backgrounds, on the other hand, may choose even difficult degree courses with more ease and not abandon HE that easily even when faced with academic difficulty, as they feel entitled to achieve this formation, have the economic resources to prolong their studies etc. This is in line with a research study in Australia that showed that poorly performing middle/upper class participants were still decided to go to university, while their working-class peers favour non-university options under this conditions (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015). This research may furthermore question an approach described in psychology, which assumes that vocational interests turn resistant to frustration and obstacles when they are “well-developed and self-regulated” (Hoff et al., 2018), as this would reduce the social-class specific tendency to withdraw or persist when faced with difficulties in HE to a lack of strong vocational interests among lower-class students. Following this line of thought, low-performing final-year students were much more likely to belong to higher social classes and as these are overrepresented in private schools, while the students from lower socio-economic backgrounds predominantly access public schools, a school-type difference may appear in the British study, though social-class specific (degree-course) choices cause the difference. Something similar might explain the sex-difference that appeared in the British study, as girls might choose degrees that are highly accomplishable for them, turning automatically into the best in their degree. However, with the data provided in the article it is impossible to know if this explanation is feasible, as the authors did not differ for different degree courses, excluding only those that are stipulated to last longer than three years.

6.4.4. Social success

"You've got a friend in me / You've got a friend in me / You got troubles, then I got 'em too /
There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you / If we stick together we can see it through / 'Cause
you've got a friend in me / Yes, you've got a friend in me"
"You've got a friend in me" (1995) by Randy Newman (Toy Story)

As we have seen above (see *The Transition from School to University*), researchers and universities in some countries pay a special attention to the social integration of their students, helping them to construct a potent social network (Gibney et al., 2011), as a lack of such integration has been identified as a risk factor for attrition and social integration is directly related to academic outcomes (Rubin & Wright, 2017). Especially students from lower social classes are said to be less socially integrated in University (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Reay et al., 2009b; Rubin, 2012a). Moreover, the University transition is not limited to academic transitions, but includes furthermore “personal, social and lifestyle transitions” (Maunder et al., 2012, p. 140), making it necessary to adopt a more holistic approach, as the one described in this thesis. Actively creating a positive atmosphere among the students in a classroom is also among the practices of the best college teachers from a US study and is considered to promote excellent

learning outcomes (Bain, 2006). In this project, we have noticed, however, that only few participants mentioned lecturer' behaviours that favoured the social integration of their students directly and even in these cases the social aspect seemed to be a secondary effect and not the purpose (Nic). Nobody mentioned events offered by the institutions to favour student integration, though some students mentioned how they organised such events themselves (Nadia, Xenia). In many senses, the Catalan HE system seems to not fully use the potential social success represents for their study programmes – and the students do not seem to demand for interventions in their social life either, so a clear-cut distinction between the academic and the social sphere is accepted and reproduced on both sides.

In spite of this lack of institutional intervention, it is interesting to see how the participants described their social success in the course of the follow-up and how this related to their academic success. When comparing the participants' social success, an obvious differentiation between the most and the least successful comes to mind. In my analyses, I noticed however that this axis was among the ones showing most changes in the course of the follow-up. I would therefore like to compare different phases, commenting on the socially most and least successful participants and their ways to talk about their social lives in each phase:

1) *The Freshmen's high.*

In the first year, most participants experienced an immense boost of their social life and came to idealise their fellow students, especially in comparison to their friends from school, highlighting that they had much more in common with their new fellows. I would like to call this phase "Freshmen's high", in an analogy to the so-called Runner's high, a high a Runner experiences when his body starts to produce endorphins in reaction to his prolonged running. Many of the participants seemed to fall at the beginning of their HE studies into a high rate of social activity and met so many new people and did so many things that they left an impression of hyperactivity and inebriation. The few participants who remained in the first-year interview exempt from this tendency spoke, on the contrary, of negative feelings like disappointment (Ariel) and even fear (Nic). Ariel's previous experiences in High School marked her feelings indirectly, as she had not been able to make any friends after her arrival to Catalonia and felt excluded in school. Before entering university, she had convinced herself – and several others had told her so – that things would change in university and that she would make many friends there, but this did not turn out to be true in her case, leaving her disappointed and frustrated. Though she came to make some friends in the course of her degree, social difficulties and failure appeared repeatedly among the topics of her interviews and she constructed her identity repeatedly distinguishing her from her fellow students. Both Nic and Ariel showed furthermore certain issues with trust, as Nic argued in his first interview that he never drank alcohol, fearing that he might come to tell others something they could use against him and Ariel argued in Int2 that you cannot trust girls, choosing therefore a male friend as a confidant – but this friendship did not end well either, as we see in later interviews. Their highly negative experiences might therefore additionally depend on their attitudes and preconceptions about people in general, though we are probably observing a process of reciprocity here, as the negative experiences did likely worsen their attitude towards people and this attitude led to further negative experiences etc.

Their tendency to construct their identities in distinction from their fellow students did appear similarly in other participant's accounts: Xenia and N. As all four had in common that they began studying a degree that had not been their first choice, this might be another result of their *pro-forma* enrolment (see *The Transition from School to University*). While having chosen the same degree seemed to automatically facilitate the identification and contact with the new fellow students, as Willy expressed it, the assumption that all the others studied the degree because they were really interested in it, favoured that *pro-forma* students did not develop a sense of belonging. Willy had – like Ariel – faced social exclusion in school and admitted repeatedly that he did not have any real friends in school. University entrance did not only facilitate him many new contacts with similar interests among which he was able to find several friends; he did moreover move from his remote rural housing to Barcelona and spoke excitedly about the opportunities the big city offered to him, living the freshmen's high maybe even stronger than some of his fellows, though he did not make as many friends as some. In the course of the follow-up, he mentioned repeatedly activities through which he expected to get to know even more people and gave a special value to the creation of a potent network, considering at the end of the follow-up that he had achieved this (see also his way to talk almost like a politician: *The Transition from University to the Labour Market*). Maunder et al. (2012) stated an importance of a "collective group identity" as a way to relieve anxiety and cope with academic requirements, so this indicates that difficulties to identify with the fellow students may have important repercussions for student well-being and academic performance beyond the described relation between academic and social success regarding social integration and group works.

Some participants were able to compensate their lack of social success in University through other friends, their families or their life partners, but several experienced difficulties in this, too, as their friends from school had integrated into new social groups in university and had less time to meet them. Regarding life partners, only few participants were in a relationship at the beginning of the follow-up (N., Koala, Skone, Peter, Andrés; Xenia just started a relationship after entering HE) and as Skone and Jab – a participant who dropped out after Int1 – argued, having to spend time with their girlfriends could also affect their social success negatively, as they had less time to meet with the new people from university. N. first represented Koala as her saviour, arguing that he was the only person she had left in Lleida. After their separation, she came to consider that her social isolation had been Koala's fault, changing her narrative here completely from saviour to culprit. Other participants (Ariel, Koala, Nic) came to compensate their lack of social success through virtual communities, making friends on the internet they then met offline (Ariel, Nic) or using the internet to stay in touch with the friends they did no longer meet in their daily life (Koala). Nadia even mentioned that she attempted to meet other freshmen from her degree course before the official beginning of the semester, contacting them through a virtual group, she joined. Though this attempt did not work out to well in her case, it shows that students have an interest to advance their socialising before the official beginning of the course and would probably appreciate events organised by the university to get in touch earlier (Gibney et al., 2011). The internet may, furthermore, have a compensatory effect for students who feel shy and have difficulties to start to talk to their fellows (Boyd, 2007), apart from offering advantages of a certain anonymity, a broader geographical scope and the possibility to enter into conversation with

someone knowing that this person is also looking for someone to talk – and therefore on this website – and without having to fear rejection, as anybody not answering to an initial message could impossibly have done so in rejection of a physical attribute of the person etc. All this may explain the importance of virtual friends for Nic and Ariel.

The participants who changed their degree course did either live a second "freshmen's high" after the change (Maduixa), or the first, after having missed out on this experience in their first degree (Xenia). In Xenia's case, it has to be said, however, that though she started her new degree with a very positive interview full of good considerations for her new fellow students, she never came to integrate herself much socially and made very few friends. Towards the end of the follow-up this seemed to have changed, though, as we will see in the third phase. As Xenia left repeatedly the impression to be suffering a certain depression, it is furthermore possible that her psychological attitude affected on her consideration of friends, leading her to say that she had no friends at all anywhere in Int1 (see *Happiness*).

2) *Business as usual.*

In a second phase, most participants "sobered", describing their fellow students in less ideal terms and reducing their social activity a bit to favour academic engagement. Many turned to revive their pre-university friendships with friends from their schools, neighbourhoods, villages or extra-curricular activities. Cliques and best friends appeared among the fellow students and certain routines and "traditions" were formed in these groups. Though some participants remained much more socially active than others, the immense difference observed in the first interview decreased a bit, as even the most active participants started to organise their time differently and gave less importance to their social life in their narratives, while the participants who had appeared socially isolated or very little integrated in the first-year interview, started to mention a broader social network and positive interactions with a bigger number of their fellow students. Ariel, for example, moved in with friends from university and – when their cohabitation did not work out well – she had other friends to move in with. Nic changed his degree course and as his second-year interview took place at the very beginning of his new degree, he had still not been able to befriend anybody and left again the impression of social isolation (see *Interview characteristics*). However, he did not turn to describe the fears that had appeared in his first-year interview and in the third-year interview he started to mention a group of friends he had made in university and related repeatedly to other social contacts.

Those who early on started to lag behind in their studies and therefore had to integrate in many subjects within a new group of freshmen (Nadia), did not revive the freshmen's high, feeling different from the new first-year students anyway. In Nadia's case, this distinct identity construction did, however, not avoid her to experience positive interactions and befriend some of her new fellows over the years. That this is not necessarily always this easy became visible in Andrés' comments regarding his second beginning in his previous degree. After an interruption he justified with the need to earn money when his mother lost her job, he returned to the newly reformed degree, but abandoned it again rather quickly, arguing that he did no longer like it after the reforms. Different moments of the follow-up made me suspect that he had also faced academic difficulties, though he never directly said so (see *Academic success*) and when speaking about his beginning in the degree of tourism, he highlights

repeatedly that he felt much more welcomed and integrated than when he began the previous degree for the second time. No matter how he justified his second abandonment, a lack of academic and social success may have intervened as well, indicating their importance. In Int2, Andrés mentioned confrontations between two groups of students from his class and though he did not belong to any of the groups and did not intervene in their fight, he felt that it affected the whole atmosphere in class negatively. From what Ariel told me in her second-year interview, she formed part of the fighters and though everything seemed to have started with a misunderstanding, she ended up highly disappointed from her fellow students, arguing that there were "bad people" in her degree and that you could not trust them. While Ariel seemed to be repeatedly in the centre of conflicts, Andrés rather showed a tendency to avoid conflicts and commented on the conflicts of others like an impartial observer. In Int3, for example, he mentioned a conflict between his boyfriend and another member of their shared friends group – Andrés argued that his boyfriend and he preferred to maintain their friend groups separate, but also had a group of shared friends – who was now hardly ever contacting him either, so he was in the end the prejudiced of their conflict, though he had never intervened. As we will see further below (see *Mobility*), Andrés was much more critical with his boyfriend in Int3 than in any other interview and repeatedly represented him as a limitation to his life (see for example *Mobility*), so it seems possible that their relationship was experiencing a certain crisis at this point that became visible in these comments.

The main characteristic of this phase was that the participants considered their social activity as "normal", even if they maintained rather high levels of activity in comparison to what the participants who had finished their studies described for their new routines after graduating (see also *The Transition from University to the Labour Market*). In these narratives, the emotional parts did not refer to especially "cool" activities or new contacts, but to conflicts with their fellow students (Mabe, Maduixa, Piruleta). Several participants explained these conflicts directly with their sobering and a change in their attitude that let them to withdraw, partly, from their social activities, while others told me stories about intrigues worthy of any soap opera. Others kept changing their best friends without mentioning much reason for this (Nadia, Koala), though it is not always clear if the best friends they mentioned were actually very close friends and would have ascribed a similar tag to the participants or if they were just the closest among the friends. Koala, for example, spoke in Int1 of friends from school and regarding university of a guy he had already known from school too, who joined his degree belatedly. Koala explained his lack of contact with the high number of students per class and though he did not give much importance to not having made friends yet, he also described the arrival of his acquaintance from school as a relief, indicating that his lack of social contact had not been completely comfortable for him either. However, he did not meet this acquaintance outside university, limiting their contact to sitting next to each other in class and he would not tag him as a friend yet. He constructed an identity distinguished from his fellow students, criticising their tendency to chat in class and highlighting that he did not like to go clubbing. Though he stayed in touch with his friends from school, their studying in the morning and he in the evening shift reduced, in his explanation, their possibilities to meet and certain alienation was taking place. Asked for confidants, he mentioned – apart from his mother and girlfriend (N.) – a friend from school who was currently studying in Barcelona. This guy is likely the friend he mentioned from Int2 on, arguing that this had studied in Barcelona, but dropped out and returned to Lleida,

taking Koala repeatedly to go climbing. Apart from this friend, Koala said in Int2 to have lost the contact with his friends from school, arguing that many had left Lleida to study in other cities – an argument he had not mentioned in Int1. Asked for the access to University among his friends from school, it is eye-catching that the friend who abandoned his degree and changed for a vocational training was the only one who stayed his friend, while all those who had moved on to university disappeared in his second-year interview from his friend list. As Koala had considered studying a vocational training himself, this might indicate a similar class position and habitus that could explain why they remained friends even when the other one moved to Barcelona. Regarding University, he mentioned a change of shift and believed that the students from the morning shift were more interested in social relations, but though he said that they were getting along well, he did not mention any friends and did not seem to meet them outside class either. He lost all contact to the students from the evening shift and mentioned to sometimes enter into conversation with his new fellows by asking someone who sat close to him in class to explain him a detail he did not understand completely. This may indicate that the threshold to ask a lecturer is high and that social integration can influence academic success positively. Moreover, students may use academic topics as an excuse to enter into conversation with their fellows. However, Koala continued to not join his fellows when these organised parties or planned to go clubbing together, though he knew about their plans. In spite of this auto-exclusive tendency, he also argued in this interview that he was feeling more comfortable (*estar a gusto*) with the whole group of people at University than back in High school, indicating that his social success in High School had not been too high either, so he had mentioned a rather big group of friends in his first interview. He explained this difference, arguing that they were older now and shared the same interests and objectives, while in school, there were many more people and everybody had different ideas and interests. In this sense, he seemed to identify with his fellow students, in spite of his auto-exclusion from their social lives. In Int3, he studied again in the evening shift as the last two years of his degree were only offered in the evening shift. This entailed once again difficulties to meet friends, as these were in class in the morning and could not meet at night either, as they had to get up early for their classes. When I remembered that he did not usually like to go out at night, Koala highlighted that he did not like clubs, but he liked it to meet people, have a drink or go for a walk. Apart from a certain approximation of his description of social activities to the activities he had previously described as typical for university students, he constructed himself here as the one willing to meet, while his friends told him no. However, the impression of little social success remains the same, especially among his fellow students, as these studied the afternoon shift with him, so he must have been thinking of another group of people when giving the shift-explanation for their difficulties to meet. When I asked in more detail, he explained that he did not usually meet with his fellow students, arguing that they maybe just never had the occasion. He lost the contact with his friends from school who moved to Barcelona, but stayed in touch with the climber and another friend from school, who presented him, furthermore, to a third guy, with whom they were now forming a group of four. Asked for the development of these friendships, he described different processes that were all characterised by a rather slow progress towards friendship, as he knew the climber and the other friend from school for years before he started to consider them friends. When I asked for the friends from school he had mentioned in his first year, Koala did not remember

who he had been referring to. He also mentioned friends from his country of origin here, but only met few of them on a trip last summer, arguing that he lost the relationship to many of them due to the distance and their different development, after having been friends as children. In general, he was still not among the socially most successful participants, but mentioned many more friends in this interview than in the previous years. In Int4, his climbing friend had moved to another city to study a University degree, after having finished his vocational training. This made it again difficult for them to meet, but Koala highlighted how much he had come to consider him a friend and how they were now organising couple-meetings with their girlfriends on the weekends. His girlfriend, the sister of another friend, was about to return to Barcelona to continue a degree she had interrupted, so they were about to pass on to a distance-relationship and in Int 5 he had difficulties to remember her when I made a direct question and highlighted that their relationship had not lasted too long. Regarding his fellow students, Koala mentioned one fellow who he had started to do group works with in the third year, highlighting that they were both very engaged and that this fellow never failed a subject in the whole degree. They kept working together in their fourth year, but their contact was limited to the University classes and works and Koala already anticipated that they would lose the contact after finishing their degree, considering this normal. All in all, Koala seemed to have a rather limited social life even before University, but experienced a certain boost – in comparison to his usual level – towards the middle of his studies. Moreover, he always had a good explanation in mind to normalise his lack of social success.

Similarly, Skone repeatedly ascribed his not meeting with fellow students to their not staying in Lleida on the weekends. However, he mentioned fellows from further away who were unable to travel home every weekend, so this did not explain his lack of social integration either, though it enabled him to construct an image in which social integration was generally low. Both, Skone and Koala did therefore leave the impression of a lack of social success, though they did not face severe difficulties in the sense of conflicts either and did not suffer from their lack of friends, as Ariel did. Just as we have seen regarding academic success, these participants talked their lack of social success away or justified it with extrinsic ascriptions. Another example in this line was N., who came to ascribe her lack of social success to her boyfriend once they had broken up, but then showed a similar tendency of auto-exclusion to hardly meet her friends, once she was in a new relationship. Moreover, social success also had a downside for the participants who achieved it, as they started to complain repeatedly in this phase that university did not leave them enough time for a social life, blaming especially the overall workload (Maduixa, Nadia, Floreta). As they still mentioned quite many social activities, this is likely an effect of their perceiving high social activity as “normal”, so that reducing the activity further would have seemed wrong and antisocial to them. In a way, they also experienced more difficulties to maintain their friendship networks, because they had constructed rather extensive but separate networks, requiring them to split their free time between different groups (the friends from school, the friends from university, the friends from work etc.). However, that the socially successful participants brought up similar arguments about having to reduce their social life due to their academic obligations led to a situation where many participants showed rather similar argumentations in spite of their very different levels of social success. In this sense, the overall idea that university – and especially the rather new tendency of continuous evaluation – disables students’ social life facilitated, in

this phase, that the students with less social success could explain this away and avoid feeling like losers, as they might have felt in phase 1.

3) *Nostalgia.*

We have seen above that N. felt nostalgia regarding her High School once in University (see *The Transition from School to University*), a backwards orientation that was likely related to her difficulties to find friends among her new fellow students. Though several other participants showed a tendency to speak much better of their schools than in the focus groups, none of the other participants seemed to miss school in the same way as N. did – either because they experienced the Freshmen's high or because school had already had its downsides too (Ariel). Towards the end of the follow-up, the social lives of many participants experienced a sudden change. Andrés and Floreta, who had both begun to work full-time, complained about a complete loss of their social life and did not like their new routines, but felt at the same time too tired to attempt to fill their little free time with more attractive activities. Piruleta and Sara had both moved in with their respective boyfriends and attempted to maintain the contact with their friends from university and school, but were already experiencing a certain reduction of these cliques, as some of their friends had moved away or resulted to be little interested in maintaining a regular contact after graduation. Koala showed a certain nostalgia regarding social life in general, highlighting that he had only maintained the contact with one friend from school, had already lost the contact with his fellow students from his degree, was hardly in touch with his friends from his home country who had by now started to move to other places as well, complicating it for him to visit them all at once and anticipated that he would also lose the contact to his new acquaintances from the master after its completion. Though he left again an impression of little social success and seemed to have lost the friends he had mentioned in previous interviews, he also spoke very positively of his fellow students from the master, arguing that he trusted them though they had had too little time to become real friends and even came to consider that it had been worth studying the master in spite of his general dissatisfaction with it, because he had gotten to know these fellows thanks to it. Interestingly, none of the participants who had started to work in their fields (Floreta, Andrés, Koala) mentioned friends among their colleagues and Floreta even indicated certain conflict, while Koala complained about the working morale and Spanish mentality in general, indicating as well a certain difficulty. This may indicate that it is more difficult to make friends at work, explaining the significant reduction of the participants' social lives and their nostalgia regarding university.

Willy had just begun his new job and quit his master in his last interview, so it was too early for him to experience a bigger change, but he had already noticed some differences, when he moved for his last year in Barcelona towards a smaller town rather than living in the city centre. Cara and Margarita continued pretty much the life they had had throughout their degree as they kept living in a shared flat and only few of their friends had moved away, while the majority did either study the master for secondary schooling Cara studied or were like Margarita still completing their degree. However, they also showed a tendency to be aware that they were living an adjournment of the unavoidably upcoming change and made plans to continue to work as skiing instructors (Cara) or to become skiing instructors (Margarita) as well, in order to continue to cohabit with their friends on the winter weekends. Xenia

described a wave of nostalgia affecting all the students and several of the lecturers of her promotion and mentioned plans to live in Barcelona with friends from her degree, indicating that their relationship was towards the end of the degree much closer than it had been before. Irina had graduated and moved to Latin America, travelling in the year before the last interview several different parts of the world and living in Barcelona for a while. She herself described the last months as so full of activity, that she considered the time she spent on intercontinental flights as a break that allowed her to reflect about all the new experiences she had been gathering. In many senses, her level of activity was therefore opposite to the new routines Floreta and Andrés were complaining about and she had started to live the life she had been dreaming off, when her studies still forced her to stay in the same place. Moreover, she still had the possibility to "return" to her old life on her visits, as most of her friends from school and university kept living in the same places and doing the same things, as they had prolonged their studies. Here we might, hence, expect that nostalgia could hit her a bit later, after settling down or at least finding a stable employment that would bind her again to a working place. Peter, who was still studying in the last year of the follow-up, did already experience a growing distance from his fellow students many of the graduated participants described, as he was among the few students of his degree who prolonged their studies and did no longer meet his graduated friends from university on campus. He was, however, able to compensate this lack with new friends he made in his diverse jobs and with his sister and girlfriend who had both just returned to Lleida after several years living in other cities. All in all, we can say that the social activity of the participants changed at graduation and even before, if they were among the few students in their year, who prolonged their studies. In both cases, the less frequent contact brought on a certain distancing in many of their relationships, while the participants who had started a new routine with many working hours, felt in a certain sense that the good times were over (see *The Transition from University to the Labour Market*). Though some of them had complained in the fourth-year interview that university did not leave them enough time to cultivate their social life, they missed their social activity in the fifth-year and gained a new consciousness of the high level of social activity they had considered normal throughout the years in University (Floreta).

These phases appeared surprisingly similar in the different participants' accounts and may hence indicate a high generalizability of these observations. Similarly, the tendency to justify or silence a lack of social success somehow was also rather common among the participants with difficulties in this regard and became much more visible than these techniques regarding academic success, probably because I asked directly for social success and was less cautious than regarding academic success (see *Academic success*). The very fact that I treated social and academic success so differently can be seen, in the end, as an effect of the social representation that social success is a usual by-product of university studies, while academic success lies at the core of the university experience and is much more difficult to achieve. The same representation may, furthermore, explain why the participants saw a need to explain their difficulties away or ascribe them to their own decision to maintain the distance, instead of just stating them as a fact or normality.

In this study, social success appeared, to be much less natural than the participants themselves had expected. Similarly, previous research on the transition to University encountered social-life related difficulties and worries among their participants (Hughes & Smail, 2015; Maunder

et al., 2012). Social success may, therefore, be a common attribute ascribed to HE students, leaving students with difficulties in this regard in an especially vulnerable position as they may easily feel "strange" and further out of place. This explains furthermore why even participants who were successful befriending their fellow students, mentioned initial difficulties in this regard (see *Fellow students*). Here we can suppose that a lack of social success may be even worse for the affected students' well-being in University, as they would expect to achieve it naturally, while academic difficulties are more normal and acceptable. In this sense, it is also possible that the participants who constructed their identity in distinction from their fellow students, did so because they were coping in this way with the difference they were anyway experiencing. In doing so, they furthermore reduced their image of university students' social lives to an implicit abuse of alcohol, arguing that they did not join them for their social activities, because they did not like to get drunk and would not have a good time with everybody around them getting drunk (N., Nic, Koala, Xenia). This does also indicate that while academic difficulties were usually ascribed extrinsically, social difficulties were justified intrinsically, with personal preferences and auto-exclusive tendencies. Once again, this may be the result of a general acceptance of academic difficulties as rather normal and of social difficulties as strange and exceptional, so that different justification strategies become necessary. Future research could shed further light on likely causes and consequences of social difficulties and on how lecturers and HE institutions could help their students to avoid or overcome such problems.

However, not only the socially less successful participants overlooked the positive effects of social integration for their academic success or their ability to persist when faced with difficulties. None of the participants reflected directly on how their social success had favoured their academic success, though several mentioned the importance of their friends for their well-being and of well-functioning working groups. In this sense, they reproduced the clear-cut division between the academic sphere and the social sphere and ignored the diverse interactions and feedback between these spheres, just as the institutions did. This became especially visible towards the end of the follow-up, when I asked the participants for recommendations they would give to new students in their degree course, as none of the participants mentioned social contacts as a crucial part and Nadia even argued that they should forget about their social life if they wanted to achieve academic success (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*). Peter mentioned, furthermore, well-being, arguing that he would recommend the new students to take things easy and not to worry too much about having to repeat a subject, arguing that he would worry much less if he had to study his degree course again from the beginning on (see *Becoming a professional*). Nadia's devaluation of social success is especially interesting, as we have seen that her own social success in the sense of a continuing contact with students from her first year who could pass her their lecture notes and other 'hot knowledge' regarding the subjects they had coursed just a year earlier as she did, did probably favour her academic success. Especially her co-habitation with one of the friends she made in her first year, did here perfectly compensate for the lack of contact on campus and her flatmate appeared in Int3 as among her most important friends, if not the most important. In Int4 and 5 she passed, however, to a rather secondary role, indicating that the double-advantage did not last forever either. That even Nadia was not able to recognise this positive effects of social success for academic success can be read as a sign of how engrained this

distinction was in the participants' thinking. However, the negation of the importance of social success can also be read as another example of a tendency to ennoble the own itinerary, several participants showed towards the end of the follow-up (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*). In concrete, Nadia might have felt a special need to negate the positive effects of her social success, as this would have lowered the merit of her academic success indirectly. Similarly, her dramatic description of a life devoted to studying is likely to discourage other students from choosing her degree, so this exaggeration¹⁶⁸ can also be read as a – subconscious – effect of a wish to close the access to her degree and, in consequence, the future competition on the labour market (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*).

Though a stronger intervention of the Universities in their students' social integration could improve the well-being and academic success of all students, we can highlight, once again, a special advantage for the students from lower social classes and the improvement of social equity if such interventions were pursued. The participants in this study showed an almost opposed tendency to what is described in the literature (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Grundmann et al., 2008; Rubin & Wright, 2017), as the participants with most social difficulties belonged to the social class D (Ariel, Nic), while the participants from social class A did not display special difficulties neither with social nor with academic success. Here we might be observing a geographical difference, as none of these previous studies had considered the Catalan context, or even a methodological short-circuit as many studies only considered first-in-family students and did then assume that their difficulties were unique to their backgrounds, though they had not actually considered traditional students and could hence not know for sure if these were not affected by the same problems - an example of how researchers impose social divisions and generate findings in line with their expectations (Winker & Degele, 2009). It is, however, as well possible that we are observing an effect of the employed data construction method and the longitudinal character of this study: While the previous studies did often rely on questionnaire methods or employed one data-construction moment only, I approached the participants inviting them to take part in a longitudinal project. The threshold for participation was in this sense higher and students who considered abandoning their studies or felt strange and atypical in HE were probably less likely to display an interest in participating. Especially in the moment of the amplification of the sample, students from social class A who experienced any kind of difficulties did probably not wish to participate in a project on the HE experience, so likely only the most successful from social class A were ready to participate. An auto-exclusion from this and other studied could, however, disadvantage further, as several of my participants highlighted at the end of the follow-up the positive effects of their participation for their own ways to reflect about their lives (Floreta, N.) and were in general highly thankful for having been able to participate (see *Comparability & Reciprocity*) and I furthermore noticed a certain training effect of the project that

¹⁶⁸ I consider the word “exaggeration” adequate, as Nadia’s own description of her daily life included diverse extra-curricular activities and a social life many of the graduated participants were dreaming of at the end of the follow-up. Though her normalisation of this as nothing special was normal in this phase and several participants complained about University not leaving them enough time for their social commitments (business as usual), representing that she did not have any social life contradicted her description of her daily life.

might prepare the participants better for job interviews and other situations in which they have to explain their itineraries (see *Interview characteristics*).

As I was especially interested in successful cases in order to overcome the deficit perspective of youth research (Andresen, 2005) (see *The invention of youth and development tasks*), this pre-selection does not represent a major difficulty for my research. Moreover, it allows us to observe relations other research is not able to capture in this way. That the participants from social class D who encountered academic (N., Nadia) and social (N., Ariel, Nic) difficulties did continue to participate, for instance, may be read as a sign that all these difficulties did not lead them to doubt their rightful belonging to HE. This sense of belonging and entitlement may be especially crucial, as other studies have encountered that the sense of belonging mediated between social class and academic adjustment (Rubin & Wright, 2017, p. 3), while entitlement is higher in the upper classes (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Improving the social integration of all students should then enhance especially the situation of the students from lower social classes, on the one hand, by constructing broader and more potent social networks, and, on the other hand, by increasing their sense of belonging to the HE institution and HE in general. This should, furthermore, affect their well-being positively and lead to better academic outcomes – both in the sense of academic performance and (personal and professional) knowledge and skill development – and lower attrition. This would lead to a bigger number of positive role models for other potential students from lower social classes and could influence their social representations regarding the levels of difficulty and their own aptitude for University studies, leading to a broadening in access. A bigger satisfaction with their HE experience and increased social integration might, moreover, influence the graduates' employability, as they should acquire more social capital throughout their studies and may be more likely to participate in extra-curricular activities that look good on their CVs (Bathmaker et al., 2013). However, it is also possible that this social capital is quickly lost after graduation, as Koala lost most of his friends from school, only maintaining a prolonged friendship with one who had abandoned his university studies and did not seem to belong to a higher social class either. Students who were able to integrate socially in HE may come to develop a feeling of belonging and entitlement that goes beyond University, similar to the one the participants from higher social classes already seemed to possess, enabling them to appear securer and to sell themselves better in job interviews (see *Interview characteristics*).

Another social division that might intervene here is a migration history. Despite the immense differences between the migration histories of the different participants, it is eye-catching that 3 out of 5 mentioned difficulties in their social integration (Koala, Ariel, Xenia). Andrés highlighted his integration in his degree, but mentioned problems in this regard in his previous degree and in school and though he had considered some of the friends from university as very important towards the beginning of the follow-up (Freshmen's high), he did not consider anybody a confident and already anticipated in Int4 that he would lose the contact to many of them. Though neither Koala nor Andrés ever related their social integration to their migration histories, Irina was convinced that she was lucky to look very similar to the people in her Catalan village (physiognomic capital) and arrived early enough to speak Catalan without an accent, so many people did not even notice that she was from another country of origin. She compared her positive integration directly with other cases of foreigners in her school who had

never achieved the same social success she had. Ariel and Xenia believed that it was more difficult for them to make friends in school, because most people already made their friends at the beginning of their time in school, so when they arrived years later, everybody already had friends and was not interested in integrating them. While Irina expected a discrimination because of being different, Ariel and Xenia did, hence, expect that they missed the right moment for friendship formation, but as this cannot explain their lack of social success in University, there might be more to this and it is possible that their migration histories influenced their social success negatively. Especially Ariel seemed to suffer from this situation, as she entered repeatedly rather abruptly into the topic. Xenia was a bit of a different case as she came from a country of origin with a rather high immigration rate and mentioned in some interviews friends she made in Lleida who were from the same country of origin, as if this common ground had been the basis of their friendship. However, she also argued that she had much higher aspirations than these friends and that their friendship did not last too long, because of this. In a way, her narrative resembled here the descriptions of Grundmann et al. (2008) regarding educational climbers, who live their ascent as a curse for their social life, as they lose the friends from their *milieu* of origin without making new friends in their new surroundings. Similarly, Andrés mentioned repeatedly the nationalities of his friends, showing that several of them were also from abroad, though not necessarily from the same country. These accounts may hence indicate that migration histories are important distinctive elements that may difficult the identification with some and favour the integration with others. However, other aspects like the age on arrival, the physiognomic fitting-in and language proficiency do also seem to influence, apart from the country of origin. Further research could enlighten these hypotheses further.

Ui the first weeks were very difficult because it's hard to relate to the people (-) hm everybody is too closed and no, they don't they don't relate much (.) but then you already start to make friends and relate and (-) that's good (Int1 Ariel, l.35-38)

Ariel: no (.) to me the [Interviewer: well how had you imagined it? and how is it? (laughing)] I had imagined it in, I don't know, something more fun, more interesting, but when you get here (-) it's not that interesting, because I don't know there are bad people always every' everywhere, you know? and people who want to hurt you (-) and I don't know

Interviewer: but among the lecturers or students?

Ariel: the students (.) (-) [Interviewer: there are bad people?] yes (Int1 Ariel, l.67-73)

Interviewer: So, what happened since our last interview last year?

Ariel: Well, the school year has ended, it ended last year, and I don't know, people have also changed, you know? At first, they seemed like friends and now, they aren't.

Interviewer: The ones from your degree?

Ariel: Yes, and they are fake, very, very fake. (Int2 Ariel, l.2-6)

I don't have friends from (-) High School (-) and it's that I don't (-) I don't have friends (laughs) (Xenia, Int2, l.196f.)

Similarly, it is noticeable that several participants mentioned their life partners as limiting their social life. N. believed after her separation from Koala that he had kept her from meeting her friends and mentioned that he had had a special problem with one of them, she therefore did not meet any longer. Andrés commented on losing the contact with a friend because his boyfriend was not getting along with him, considering himself the victim of their conflict, though he had never intervened himself. Ariel mentioned online friends over years and

seemed to compensate her overall lack of social success with these friends, but in Int4 she had explained that her boyfriend got jealous, so she had to stop writing to them, though she still had them on her contact list. Though it is comprehensible that the participants mentioned negative aspects of their ex-partners and ascribed the fault for anything that did not work to well in their lives to them (see as well Piruleta), Ariel and Andrés mentioned their boyfriends as limiting their social lives while they were in a relationship, indicating that they were aware of making an effort to please them.

Another aspect to consider here is the direct and indirect cost of the activities that could favour social integration. Rubin and Wright (2017) identify “fewer finances” as one of the reasons favouring a lower commitment with University – academically and socially – as these students are more likely to have other commitments occupying their time, mainly jobs. As a second reason, these authors mention “older age” and though this PhD thesis did not consider mature-aged students, the relation between age and other commitments – work, childcare etc. – may still be influencing in the participants’ tendency to pursue master studies in a future, as we have seen above (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*) that the students from social class A showed a bigger tendency to complete development tasks earlier. In other words, it is possible that, though none of the participants had achieved commitments related to parenthood yet, the participants from social class A were to achieve such commitments earlier and could then be deviated from further studies, reproducing social inequality through the access and success in master degrees rather than through undergraduate studies. As this is again highly related to finances as well – the price per credit is significantly higher in master degrees, while the scholarships for master degrees come with higher requirements and offer smaller reductions (see *Scholarship programmes*) – economic capital appears once again crucial for the reproduction of social inequality. The less money the students have at their disposition after having dealt with their living costs, the more decisive are their priorities for the selection of the activities they come to pursue. Several of my participants mentioned on occasion to have decided against or to consider refraining from an extra-curricular activity because it was not important enough for them to justify its economic costs. Andrés argued, for example, that he would not join his fellow students for the final trip they were organising, if the destination was not too his liking, arguing that he would not waste his hard-earned money on such a trip. Though a feeling of debt towards the parents has been identified in previous research as more common among students from lower social classes (Torrents, 2017), several of my participants showed argumentations in this line. In particular, Floreta and Nic came to exclude themselves from activities, though they had the money to pay them, arguing that they preferred to save the money or to spend it differently, considering that it was their parents’ money in the end. While several participants showed such an argumentation regarding social activities only, Floreta did not want to enrol in a private language school, when she had not achieved a placement in the EOI¹⁶⁹, arguing that it was much more expensive. Floreta developed strategies to not use her parents’ money and still be active, achieving, for instance, free access

¹⁶⁹ The *Escola Oficial d’Idiomes* (EOI) is a public institution offering state-subsidised language courses for adults. In spite of an important increase in the enrolment fees over the last years, these courses continue to be quite cheap in comparison to private language schools and include the right to take the official exam, which is furthermore on occasion the only recognised certificate in *oposicions*. For more information see: <http://queestudiar.gencat.cat/ca/estudis/idiomes> [last access: 31.05.2018].

to the campus gym in exchange for helping with its promotion. Nic, on the contrary, only attended the gym in the first year and quit once he had to pay for it. However, Nic did also travel to the USA and Japan in the course of the project and bought several expensive electronic devices rather than returning the saved money to his parents, so this may indicate that rather than a need to not spend the parents' money, he used the reference to them as an 'excuse' for not being more active - similarly as N. and Maduixa argued to not be giving money to beggars, because it was not their own but their parents' money and would therefore not be right.

The fewer finances students have at their disposal and the bigger they perceive their parents' economic sacrifice (see for example Piruleta's worries in *Health*) or their own sacrifice in paid work (see Andrés), the more selective they are regarding the extra-curricular activities that come with an additional cost. And if their social integration is not the best to start with, it is more likely that activities with their fellow-students are not among the first on their list of priorities, leading them to exclude themselves further and losing out even more in their social success – so that a lack of social integration comes to favour further disintegration in the end. Here it is hence important that the institutions come to favour activities without additional costs that allow their students to meet and socialise. Currently, universities help to finance diverse student associations and groups by ascribing them a small budget (Floreta), but only very few participants mentioned to take part in such groupings (Nadia, Floreta) and that both these students were identified as from social class D, is in line with the finding that students from lower social classes are less likely to engage in society memberships (Rubin & Wright, 2017). If access to such activities is not broadened, investing money into them is, in the end, a way to reproduce social inequality, as this money finances the social engagement of students from higher social classes only. Not allocating any money to these groups is, however, not a solution either, as the least money they have, the more likely they are to require higher payments from their members in order to be able to realise activities, so that students with fewer finances would be even less likely to enrol. However, several characteristics of Rubin and Wright's study, building on data from the USA and Australia, may question its generalizability for other contexts. Society memberships are, for example, much more common in the Anglo-Saxon context than in Spain or the EU in general. Moreover, mainly students from degrees in psychology participated in the study and men were underrepresented and, though psychologists do not tend to consider this as a limitation of the representativeness of their samples, Bourdieu's and Passeron's (2007) comments on social-class typical study choice introduce the question if students from one degree may be comparable to other degrees when considering social class. In this sense, further research is needed to confirm a class divide in society memberships in the EU and to study feasible solutions.

6.4.5. *Future ideals and fears*

"Lo más importante en la vida es que lo más importante sea lo más importante."

Stephen Covey (citado por Víctor Küppers

http://www.kuppers.com/1/frases_que_me_gustan_1134784.html)

"Que será será / Whatever will be, will be/ The future`s not ours to see / Que será será / What will be, will be"

"Que será será" (1956) composed by: Jay Livingston and Ray Evans

Future orientations are a common topic in youth research, as two of the premises of the discipline are that young people still have the bigger part of their lives in front of them, while they are also expected to form the future of society and bring on possible change (Ecarius, 2008). As we have seen above (see *Youth Research and Transitions*), the concept of a normal biography is by now obsolete, apart from being criticised for only having considered a part of the young population – white, middle- and upper class men. In the recent Spanish context of crisis, two colleagues and myself have expanded on an approach in which we speak of a "moral juvenicide", highlighting that many young people face situations of extreme precariousness that prevent their permanent achievement of economic autonomy and hence of an adult status and life-style, while being labelled with negative tags in the public and politic discourse (Strecker et al., 2018). Just as regarding the development tasks in general (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*), we may anyhow argue that the concept of the normal biography may still serve us to compare up to which point young people continue to construct their future in line with it or not, coming to embrace the conditions they will anyway face on the labour market as their own ideals (Chisholm, 2006). Many typologies developed in previous research categorised the young people's future narratives basically regarding the level of planning these showed, differentiating e.g. plans, hopes and dreams (Nilsen, 1999); hopes, wishes, blue sky plans and precise plans (Devadason, 2008), or open future, future reduced to ordinariness and absent future (Pais, 2003). Others have developed a typology based on the attitude towards future, differentiating for example between "the worried, the competitive and the indifferent" (Alm, 2011) or have described an orientation based on daydreams regarding the long-term future, combined with more active planning for the extended present (Leccardi, 1999a). Woodman (2011, p. 111;126;113f.) considers a focus on the level of planning a "misreading of contemporary sociological theory" and highlights that "people can be both present centred and future oriented concurrently" and develop "multiple practical, not necessarily conscious, strategies shaped in interaction with significant others"; while "progress is impeded by this recent focus on planning or not planning". We have already applied this approach regarding study choice narratives above (see in particular *Professional profiles and the labour market* and *Family affairs*) and will now focus on the participants' ideas regarding their future regarding their development over time and their relative position in a continuum between an orientation towards the traditional normal biography and more alternative plans. In this both individual agency and structural constraint are acknowledged (Woodman, 2011), as the combination of Bourdieu's theories with an intersectional approach expressed in the developed methodology permits this (Bathmaker, 2015) (see *Analyses* and *Capitals, field and habitus*).

In this project, future was from the beginning on a recurrent topic, so it is possible to compare how the future narratives of the participants changed in the course of the follow-up. In many of these narratives appeared two opposed aspects of future that have motivated the title of this section: future ideals of having an attractive life and future fears of not being able to achieve these ideals. In concrete, we can differentiate the following types for the narratives appearing in the last-year of the follow-up: 1) normal biography (Sara, Piruleta, Cara, Koala,

Willy, Andrés, Xenia, Peter, N., Ariel), 2) alternative biography (Irina, Margarita, Skone, Floreta, Maduixa) and 3) openness (Nadia, Nic). Many participants argued at the beginning and throughout the course of the follow-up that it was impossible to imagine their future, as too many aspects intervened and everything was highly insecure, including their own aims and objectives. Margarita represented furthermore that thinking too much about the future was against her philosophy of life and Xenia argued that she felt old when she started to think about the future. While we can read this as a focus on the extended present (Leccardi, 1999a), this type lost weight in the course of the follow-up as more and more participants came to mention clearer ideas about how they imagined their future. This may be either an effect of their development in the course of their studies, or an effect of the longitudinal character of the project, as the participants might feel more willing to talk to me about such a personal topic once we knew each other a bit better and they could build on the bits of information they had given me in this regard in previous interviews, rather than having to construct the whole imaginary from zero.

That so many participants appear in the end in the first type may be the result of their graduation, inducing them to think differently about their future. Cara, for example, had always been a representative of the future-openness type, even blocking my repeated questions for her future plans indirectly with arguments of high future insecurity and openness. In her last interview, she had however the much clearer idea that she would work as a teacher in a future – the logical consequence of her studying the master for secondary school teachers, she had actually already mentioned in her focus group but then came to consider just one out of many possibilities in her first-year interview, highlighting that she had no idea what she would do after her graduation. When I gave her the advice to inscribe as quick as possible onto the substitution teacher list, as I had heard that it took years to receive the first call after inscription, Cara explained that she was not in a hurry to start working as a teacher, feeling that once she did so, she would be beginning the rest of her life. Though she could envision herself as a teacher, married and with children, this was not a life she was already willing to start. She also argued that unlike her friends she did not really have a dream and though she could imagine this future for her, it did not seem to excite her either. Rather than to achieve economic autonomy as quick as possible, Cara planned on a trip to Nepal with her friends and only had the idea to repeat as a skiing instructor in the next winter. In this sense, we can say that she was ready to accept her future path as more set than in the previous interviews, now that she was about to complete her studies with a very clear professional profile, but she was still constructing a certain gap between the current moment and this future life.

Cara: and after the university studies, I don't know, it's so far [in the future] and with the crisis you don't know what will happen (smiling) (-) [Interviewer: (smiles)] I don't know, we will see (.)

Interviewer: but something that you would like to work in or ...?

Cara: yes (at the same time) secondary school teacher (-) [Interviewer: hmm] yes I would like to (.) if I can, yes (.) What happens is that in order to do this, you have to do a master's degree (.) [Interviewer: hmm] a special master (.) without you can't (.)

Interviewer: and you don't know yet if you want to do it ...?

Cara: well, ((you see)) it's still far away (.) [Interviewer: OK] on principle, yes (.) But, let's see (.) we will see (.) (Int1 Cara, l.426-434)

Interviewer: Because... Could you get into the teaching lists [Cara: Of course, yes, yes] or do you think that...?

Cara: I could, but I think that I won't register for it (.) because now I'd like to... If I get into teaching it's like... like I will be there for my whole life, [Interviewer: Ok] and now I'd like to do other things (.) it's the same if they open *oposicions* (.) I'm not sure to apply if they open them now, because you already know you won't be getting in the first time you try. I'm the last one on the list, I don't have any points. And people who are preparing for *oposicions* are really focused on that, they are doing everything they can to get points and get in. And right now, it's certain that I wouldn't get in. (Int5 Cara, l.365-372)

Well, ten years from now... if I'm now 23 years old, when I'm 33 years old... (-) I don't know, maybe already... [Interviewer: Already retired [[laughs]]] No, not retired, but maybe I will be more in a family mode, and I'll have children and such. I don't know, it's in ten years. [Interviewer: Yes, yes] But I'm not like people now, there are a lot of people who say: "I don't want to have children", isn't that right? I do see myself having a, quote, traditional family, unquote. (Int5 Cara, l.399-402)

Another example in this line was Willy who dreamed at the beginning of the follow-up of moving to another European country and working in institutions of the EU (see also *Mobility*). This topic lost importance in the course of the follow-up and towards the end I had to ask him if he still considered moving abroad and he confirmed that he would do so if it was the way to find a job in his field, but it did no longer appear among his dreams. This may be related to a more realistic assessment of his chances to get such a job, as he said in Int4 that it was very difficult to work for the European Commission and that he had more chances to find work as a civil servant in a Ministry or Council¹⁷⁰. Moreover, he started to mention from Int2 on a worry about finding a girlfriend and came to envision himself as a father in the future, worrying that he may not achieve this aim in the end. In this, he showed a tendency to shorten the time until the moment of achievement significantly: He said in Int3 that he did not expect to be married yet in 10 years, though in a stable relationship and said in Int4 that he did not suppose having children in only 10 years, though relativising this with the phrase "you never know". In Int5, he said that he would like to be in a relationship and maybe already creating a family of his own in 5 years. Willy's process was, in this sense, marked by a growing family orientation and a wish to settle down in the line with the normal biography. His rather alternative approach in Int1 might have been a side-effect of his freshmen's high (see *Social success*), but it is also possible that he turned to value more the aspect of having a family after experiencing death and sickness in his family of origin (see *Change and Continuity*), and, as well, because this was the development task he was experiencing the most difficulties to achieve so he might have started to give it additional thought (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*).

Interviewer: And what if we look into your future? What will happen in the next few years?

Willy: What will happen...? Well (.) ((especially considering the economic situation in which we are living)) it's hard, isn't it? But let's say... (.) But well, for starters I'd like to study my degree here and if I can go on an Erasmus program, then that's perfect, isn't that so? (...) And then, once I'll have finished my studies I'll have to look for a job, but abroad, not here in Spain... [Interviewer: Don't you want to stay?] No (.) No, because there aren't a lot of good opportunities for skilled workers (.)

¹⁷⁰ Here I am translating from "*conselleria*", considering that he directly mentioned the labour category of a civil servant and given his studies in political sciences.

Interviewer: (--) And where do you want to go? To Germany as well?

Willy: Germany, the United States, Belgium... (-) even France, I don't know (.)

Interviewer: (-) Ok, ok. [Willy: yes] (3) And other than that, do you have anything that you would say "I'd like that in the future", or...?

Willy: Well, there is a (-) a career path that is quite tempting, right? Which is working at the European Commission, right? (.) That's one of the career paths I could take... [Interviewer: In Brussels?] Yes, in Brussels (.) Yes, yes, yes. [Interviewer: (-) Would you like that?] Yes (.) Yes, yes (he laughs). (Int1 Willy, l.187-202)

Interviewer: Well, yes, things are different now. But those are good news, right?

Willy: Yes, in theory yes, that uncertainty you have, right? And little by little that uncertainty starts going away. Well, that's great, yes, it is, yes (.) yes.

Interviewer: Yes, because I remember that sometimes you were saying that you might have to leave Spain to find a job...

Willy: Yes, I had said that, yes, I did, well, it might still be the case, right? Nothing is final yet, right? But it's good, yes, for now I'm happy, yes, yes. And, well, that I've been able to get my first job, let's see, it already took long, because of course I could have started working at 16, and I haven't been able to start working until I've been 22 years old... So, counting the contributions I'll have to pay, I may have to retire when I'm 70-something years old. (Int5 Willy, l.229-237)

Interviewer: Of course, then, 10 years from now...

Willy: 10 years from now, I will already be 33, so (.) Well, the same as with 28, yes, and if I could have a son or a daughter, then it would be even better, yes. (Int5 Willy, l.542-544)

Similarly to Cara, the participants from teacher training were also very sure about their professional future and that it would take them some years to achieve an employment as teachers. Peter told me about his sister's experiences in the same field and assumed that he would have to wait a couple of years for the first call from the substitution-teacher list. While he did not search this gap actively as Cara did, he still accepted it willingly as a break he would have to take and had different possibilities in mind how to fill his waiting time, among others, studying a master or living temporarily in London (see *Mobility*). However, just as Cara, he was not willing to make to concrete plans for this waiting period and literally said in his last interview, that for now he only had decided to decide after the summer what to do next. In this, he resembled some of Woodman's (2011, p. 121) participants who were described as "actively trying not to think about the future while actively trying to shape it". As Peter was quite confident to get into work as a teacher within a couple of years, he might be an example of "a sense of being on the right track and relative security" and his "sense of confidence about the future" might allow him to enjoy the present (Woodman, 2011, p. 123;124). Sara and Piruleta, on the contrary, were much less confident regarding their future and more willing to abridge their waiting time as much as possible and had both already gained economic autonomy and parent-independent living in their last interviews. They furthermore described a much clearer image of their future, not only mentioning their hope to become teachers – expressing much more insecurity in this regard than Peter did – but also their wish to create a family and, in Piruleta's case, even a set idea in which locality she would be living. Rather than spending the time waiting and enjoying themselves as much as possible, they were willing to take sacrifices and work in precarious jobs they were completely overqualified for – Sara had been sending her CV to diverse supermarket chains at this point and Piruleta had already started to work in an asylum (see *Labour-market entrance*)– in order to expand their economic

autonomy and maintain it over time. Especially Sara expressed her worries regarding her future in terms of anxiety, leaving clear that she would have wished to live her future ideal right away and was not enjoying the current insecurity at all. In line with Woodman's (2011) theory of active not thinking about the future, she claimed to prefer it to think about her present and her private life than about her highly insecure future. Piruleta argued in a similar line that she did not like to make many too many concrete plans for the future, as it was only frustrating to have to change them anyway. This shows that even graduated participants with a clear professional profile and aspiration perceived their future as highly open and had to cope with the associated insecurity.

Interviewer: And how do you see yourself?

Sara: I think I'm in a very good moment (.) my personal life is good. Professionally speaking, I've been having a hard time, because of the job situation, and, on top of that, because of the incertitude of not knowing "what will I be doing next year?". Not knowing what I will do makes me nervous, that's why I try not to think about it too much, because I get stressed and I get nervous. So, because my personal life is good, I try to focus on that, I try not to think too much about the other thing, if that hadn't been the case, if I wasn't having a good personal life at the moment, I couldn't have handled it, I couldn't have handled it. (Int5 Sara, l.573-579)

Though many other degrees did not come with such a clear professional profile, many participants had a much clearer idea what they would like to do for a living towards the end of the follow-up, so the main question was if they were going to achieve this or not. Here it is interesting to see that although Floreta, Andrés, Willy and Koala had already achieved a first employment in their field of studies in their last interview and Sara had been among the candidates for a position in a private school, the general tendency in the participants' narratives was to expect a temporal dry spell before arriving to the oasis of a work in their field of studies. In a certain way, it seems that they valued a normal biography especially, because they felt that they might be excluded from it, so that achieving it would have been a big success rather than a sentence of monotony and boredom. In other words, the difficulties in achieving economic autonomy and labour security may have provoked some young people to consider its early achievement as attractive, while the tendency had been in times of economic growth and social insurance to search for a more interesting, diversified and fulfilling professional future (Holding, 2006). However, professional fulfilment and economic security must not necessarily exclude one another and it is also possible that the participants were willing to start their professional future as soon as possible, because they expected to feel fulfilled in their jobs. Especially the participants who were still in university did not seem to be too aware of the effects of a full-time employment for their daily routines and free time and did not seem to consider that a job in their field of studies might come to feel monotonous at some point. As the participants who had already begun to work full-time complained a lot about their new routines and their lack of a social life (Floreta, Andrés), further participants might come to reconsider this once in work, but as the follow-up ended at this point we cannot know this (see *Labour-market entrance*). Several participants showed furthermore a tendency to relocate their desire for adventure towards the private sphere, dreaming to travel the world (see *Mobility*). Floreta and Koala did both relate their current complaints to their location, though they also mentioned their routines, lack of free time and, in consequence, of a social life. The reference to location may have helped them to cope with their dislike, as it allowed

them to expect an improvement rather than having to assume that their lives would from now on always be like this. Koala said in concrete that he had to move to another country to be happy (see *Happiness*), while Floreta planned to return to Barcelona and mentioned living for a couple of years in the Netherlands as a plan for her future that would allow her, once again, to spice her life up with an international experience (see *Mobility*).

An interesting case in this type was Andrés. He was a bit older than the other participants at the beginning of the follow-up, as he had begun to study another degree before, but more importantly than the age difference, his aspirations for a highly normal biography were affected by his sexual orientation. Andrés highlighted from the first-year interview on his wish to get married and have children, claiming in Int1 that he wanted the “typical” and in Int2 the “normal”, arguing that 90% of the people envision their future with a job and a family. However, it was not before November 2012 – after Int1 – that the Spanish Constitutional Court decided that the law legalizing gay marriage in 2005 was constitutional¹⁷¹. Regarding fatherhood, Andrés mentioned in Int2 adoption, a topic I brought up again in Int3, commenting on the case of a friend who had spent years on the waiting list. This time, Andrés argued that he was not yet in the position to become a father, because he did not have the economic possibilities to take care of a child. In later interviews, he turned to mention economic difficulties as a reason not to have children, highlighting the economic costs of child-rearing – a difficulty that affects parents independently of their sexual orientation and might be of special importance to him, as he seemed to have faced economic hardship in his family of origin in the past. In Int4 and 5 he mentioned his wish to have children with 30, considering that this was a good age. When I directly asked in Int4 if his way to achieve parenthood was adoption, he confirmed this and mentioned that they already had a look into the requirements and were far away from being eligible due to economic reasons. Moreover, he mentioned that he would like to have a biological child and represented surrogate mothers from the US, where this practice is legal, as another option. After Int5 he told me about new research on the possibility to introduce the genetic code from a sperm cell into an egg cell, allowing homosexual men to have a biological child from both fathers. However, it may be significant that he only mentioned these options when I directly asked for it, reducing his worries regarding child-rearing to economic difficulties. In a way, he seemed to resist a different treatment or consideration of his case, avoiding commenting on any additional difficulties he might face, never constructing his identity in relation to his sexual orientation and usually referring to his boyfriend with a gender-neutral term – *pareja* – invisibilising their homosexual relationship linguistically (see *Language Issues*). However, he did openly answer when I brought

¹⁷¹ We did not usually talk much about the marriage aspect, though Andrés highlighted in his third interview that he wanted a “wedding-wedding”, including the party and everything. Here it is important to comment on the legal situation of the homosexual marriage in Spain: After its approval by the Spanish Congress of Deputies in 2005 (see: https://elpais.com/sociedad/2005/06/30/actualidad/1120082402_850215.html), the law was immediately brought to the Constitutional Court of Spain (see: <https://elpais.com/especiales/2015/matrimonio-homosexual/>). Until the Constitutional Court’s decision in 2012 (see: https://politica.elpais.com/politica/2012/11/06/actualidad/1352222651_734714.html), the law existed under the constant threat of being abolished, though this did not stop many couples from marrying anyway (see: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/06/25/espana/1340644797.html>). [last access in all cases: 04.06.2018].

the topic up, indicating that he did not have a problem to talk about it either. In this sense, his early and clear preference for the “normal” biography can be read as a sign of his overall wish to normalise homosexuality in society.

Interviewer: Ok, and another plan? I don't know (-) any other plan for the future?

Andrés: No (.) (--) Having children, well, adopting (.) I don't know, the usual stuff (.) (3) I think that we all (--) I mean, we have like a (-) a very clear vision of what our future will look like. [Interviewer: Yes] For 90% of the people that means finding a job, starting a family and being happy. I mean, those are the priorities, right? (--) That's the goal of any person, well, in my opinion. I would like that. [Interviewer: Yes, the traditional path] Exactly. (Int2 Andrés, l.439-444)

Interviewer: If we talk about the future, what do you think will happen in the coming years?

Andrés: My goals are to finish my degree, to be able to travel a little bit, to get married, to have children but not yet... I have still got things to do

Interviewer: Plant a tree, write a book

Andrés: (Laughs) writing a book, maybe, we'll see ...

Interviewer: Your partner also wants those things?

Andrés: Yes, also to get married, and have children. We've never talked about commitment, of course seven years is a long time, it's like a kind of commitment, we're a couple but each one on his own

Interviewer: As for your marital status you're a single still. And would you marry or form a civil union¹⁷²?

Andrés: I would marry, with a party and everything, including a celebration (Int3 Andrés, l.437-447)

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Andrés: Yes, we have already looked at it, it's as you just said, it's a very long process, ((-)) income, we still don't have the income, we'll see later, but well... it's like that, it's hard, complicated. I'd also like to have, to be able to have a biological child of mine, with a surrogate mother but it's much more expensive

Interviewer: It's illegal, right? or is it legal?

Andrés: It's legal in the US. Not here. You can't do it here. But of course, it's a lot of money, I don't know, when I win the lottery ... (Smiles)

Interviewer: Well, you can donate, imagine to yourself that there are some...

¹⁷² The expression in the Spanish original was "*pareja de hecho*", a legal alternative to marriage that exists in Spain. For more information on the differences and similarities of these legal figures in Catalonia, see for example: <https://www.bresserslaw.com/blog/derecho-de-familia/pareja-de-hecho-o-pareja-estable-en-cataluna-en-que-se-distingue-del> [last access: 17.08.2018].

Andrés: But I don't want that. I don't want loose children out there, I want a child of my own. (Int4 Andres, l.542-550)

Interestingly, 4 out of 5 participants with a migration history appeared in type 1 and Irina did not completely discard complying with main elements of the "normal biography" – mainly regarding an employment and motherhood – either, so here it seems that these participants were especially prone to follow the normal biography (see also *Degree of completion of development tasks*).

While the participants in type 1 embraced – some more enthusiastically than others – the normal biography as their future, Irina, Margarita, Maduixa, Floreta and Skone actively constructed alternative biographies. Interestingly, their rejection of ideas of adulthood as a settling down and constructing a family under conditions of economic stability, did often include plans for travelling (see *Mobility*). Irina dreamed at the beginning of the follow-up of working with indigenous communities at the margin of social exclusion in Latin America and considered a change in location every 6 years attractive (see *Mobility*). As she planned on living with these communities, she experienced a certain conflict with the normal biography – and its vindicators in her family – especially regarding motherhood and discussed repeatedly if and how she could include children into this future. Towards the end of the follow-up, the same conflict continued, but she appeared much more convinced that it would be possible to combine her plans for a life on the move with a family. Here it is, however, eye-catching that her plans did no longer mention the 'guerilla' and seemed to have moderated significantly, in the sense of no longer searching for especially dangerous places to live.

I mean (at the same time) I can't have a life (-) in the rural world. Having a family in the rural world is very dangerous, in [[country of origin]] there are guerrilla groups. [Interviewer: Hmm] And so that's also a reason why I'm so interested in that, because they are (-) their rights are being completely abused. But of course, I wouldn't take my family to live next to the guerrilla, you know? So, my plans are also to make use of my life while I'm young, do everything I can, and then, when (-) I have to settle down, then I don't know how that will go. That's also why education, well, mental disorders, because that might be a quieter environment to work in. [Interviewer: Hmm] Or maybe combining those two places, you know? (Int2 Irina, l.467-475)

Irina: the thing is that they learn a lot and I think they learn a lot more because when you go to school it's an obligation and the only thing you like is when you're playing, that is when you are not in class (.) And [this happens to] all children similarly, unless you are someone who strangely likes to study with the rules that are there, but you really aren't learning anything, because you learn everything by force, and you already feel that you forget it, but if you are the one who is discovering it, I think you learn the triple, so if it's about the learning, I think it's the best thing [to travel with children], but they also talk about stability, right? "Oh, but a child then will never have friends", maybe he'll have more chances of having friends because he'll know more people and will be more open or maybe less, the thing is, it's not going to be better or worse because of the travelling, it's simply going to be different

Interviewer: so if the day comes that you say "I want to be a mother" it wouldn't be life changing but to integrate it [Irina: yes] in life ...

Irina: maybe I'll say "I want to settle down in a place" (.) or I say "but I want to continue travelling" (Int5 Irina, l.780-792)

Margarita only mentioned children once saying that a normal person would want them and several other things, but that she was not so sure in this regard. Though it was not completely

clear from her comment if she referred especially to motherhood or the other aspects a 'normal' person would want, Cara's comment that it was nowadays 'normal' not to want motherhood and that she was different in this sense may indicate that Margarita as Cara's best friend and flatmate was among these motherhood-critical friends. Similarly to Irina, Margarita dreamed of repeated changes in location, but while Irina was driven by the idea to work and help communities living without amenities, Margarita envisioned herself surfing on a tropical island, leaving the impression that though she might not be seeking special comfort, she would not live in surroundings of hardship either. Moreover, she only made clear plans for her extended present and seemed to hunt adventures whenever these came to her mind. In her last-year interview, she planned, for example, to study a master in France, considering the main word in the phrase "France" and the master only a means to receiving economic advantages and an excuse to move there. However, she was also aware that such a stay abroad would look good on her CV and improve her employability, so in spite of her claiming of a special life philosophy, she was not closing any doors towards a more well-ordered life either. Similarly, Irina highlighted that she did what she liked and was decided to change her life whenever it was no longer to her liking, leaving like this the possibility to settle down once she tired from a life on the move. This is also in line with Floreta's ideas, as she highlighted that she would not begin to live her life in a certain way just because society was dictating her to do so, but might still end-up with a picture-book family if she came to conceive at some point that this was what she wanted. In this sense, we can say that even these participants related their alternative biographies to the normal biography and anticipated that they might come to prefer it at one point.

Margarita: In 10 years? [I'll be] 35 years old. Well... living in one of those islands [laughs]. I don't know what I'll be doing when I'm 35, I have no idea. Normal people would say: "I'll have children". But I'm not so sure, maybe I'll be living a luxury life, travelling, I don't know. Ah, I can't be bothered to be thinking about that, 35¹⁷³

Interviewer: Well, relax, it's just for the interview.

Margarita: I know, I know, it's because there are so many possibilities, in 10 years from now... Whenever I tell you my plans, one year later they've already changed. They are always changing. (Int5 Margarita, l.648-653)

Skone's categorisation as type 2 is mainly based on his last-year interview, where he presented the idea of a professional future as a rich trader, refraining from a work in his field of studies – or any kind of work in this sense, as he also considered that becoming an entrepreneur was too laborious. Furthermore, he mentioned a wish to travel and to live for a couple of years in the USA, while he never said anything about children – neither planning nor discarding parenthood (see *Change and Continuity*). Maduixa was classified as another participant in type 2 because she constructed the professional future in her field as highly alternative and incompatible with a normal biography. Both regarding Skone and Maduixa we have to say that considering their plans "alternative", because of pursuing economic activities that are little related to fixed working hours and regular incomes is questionable, as these approaches are by no means new and have always been popular among certain sectors of society – mainly the upper 5% regarding Skone's plan and artists regarding Maduixa's plan. However, the concept

¹⁷³ The expression used in the Catalan original was: "*em fa una mandra pensar en això 35*".

of a normal biography does not pay special attention to these alternatives (see *Youth Research and Transitions*), so it seems adequate to categorise them this way.

No, right now I already know for sure what I want. I want to dedicate myself to investing money, my own money, and to making more money [Interviewer: On the stock market?]
Yes, yes yes (Int5 Skone, l.442-445)

Maduixa expected a certain waiting period before obtaining a first paid employment, but rather than a real waiting, she was convinced that she would have to work full-time in her field without any remuneration in order to achieve one day a salary for her work in her highly competitive field. Rather than to the economic crisis, Maduixa ascribed labour insecurity and precariousness to the innate characteristics of her field, arguing that it was normal not to receive any payment in years, as you first have to learn and make contacts. Moreover, the work on temporal projects automatically included long working hours, high temporary work and repeated changes in location, leading her to consider such a life as incompatible with motherhood and deciding against becoming a mother (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). In a way, Maduixa came to embrace the alternative lifestyle of an artist, dreaming of travelling the world and having a home base to relax and calm down in Lleida. However, her ideals had also sobered towards the last-year interview, where she openly reflected on the difficulty to become one of the best in her field, the little chances to win international awards and the high costs of living in the city of her dreams, London (see *Mobility*), assuming that those who did not become the best were continuously affected by high precariousness. Though she then considered the illusions of her younger self as naïve, she continued to pursue this way, indicating that she considered working in her field as more important than economic security – or that she still had a hope to be among the best. N., on the contrary, repeatedly decided against a professional future as a dancer, highlighting her interest in achieving economic security and, consequently, favouring a normal biography over artistic ambitions. Similarly, Floreta mentioned at one point to have decided against studying photography, saying that only the best photographers were able to make a living of this work (see *Study-Choice Narratives under Construction*). Interestingly, none of the participants from social class A mentioned to have considered artistic careers, while Floreta, N. and Maduixa were all three assigned to social class D. Their decisions against this path may have been influenced by the economic crisis, but can also be the result of a lack of role models, while Maduixa had an uncle working in her field. Furthermore, both Floreta and N. indicated rather low economic and cultural capitals for their grandparents, indicating that their families might have experienced a social ascension in the generation of their parents. Maduixa's grandfathers, on the other hand, were both ascribed to high economic capital, though she indicated rather low cultural capitals for them too. As the habitus has been described as rather slow in its adaptation to changes in the social positioning (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Reay, 2004), this might also explain why they did not pursue their artistic ambitions, especially as Floreta directly mentioned that her parents advised her against this path. However, it has to be said that Spain experienced an important growth in education participation ever since the generation of the participants' grandparents (Perez Garcia et al., 2015; Strecker & Fondevilla, 2017) (see *Demographics and University participation*), so that low cultural capital might not mean too much here, even if the participants indicated the details correctly (see also *Measuring Social Class*).

In type 3, "openness", we encounter only two participants at the end of the follow-up: Nadia and Nic. Nic was about to finish his degree and continued to construct a rather alternative future, as he dreamed of living in the USA. However, considering him type 2 just because of this foreign location for his future development would not seem to be right in the current context of globalisation and ideals of international labour markets (Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016). Apart from his first attempts to find a job offer abroad and an application for a scholarship that would allow him to study a master in the US and hence to enter with a first visa and then search for work *in situ*, the outcomes of these attempts were still completely open and he did not make any clear plans. Several participants showed a strategy to cope with high future insecurity by setting a clear priority and allowing that everything else could adapt to this priority. In Nic's case the priority was his moving to the US, so he had to leave all other aspects of his future life in abeyance to favour the achievement of priority 1. Sara showed a similar tendency, putting her wish to become a young mother above all, sacrificing clear objectives for her professional future and highlighting that she would work in any field she could get a job in (see *Labour-market perceptions*). In both cases, the anxiety not to achieve the main priority was the main drive to sacrifice everything else. In spite of these similarities, it is significant that Sara pursued with her main priority a normal biography, only opening up her field of work, but not indicating that she would not work or would not have children at some point. Nic, on the contrary, was willing to work and gain economic autonomy, but did not mind as what and where exactly – within the USA or even abroad, as he reduced his priority at one point to leaving Spain and mentioned having considered a job offer from Greece in Int 5 (see *Mobility*). Furthermore, he highlighted that he had no idea if he would find a life partner at some point and argued that he was not a big friend of children, but not discarding parenthood completely out of this either (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*).

Nadia talked mainly about options for continued studying and some daydreams, but continued to highlight the future insecurity and blankness in her last interview – still over a year before graduation. She indirectly blocked my questions for her future, reflecting on the many intervening aspects that were not yet decided – among others her boyfriend's graduation and plans for the future – and focused on her professional future only, not mentioning her private life at all, though repeatedly relating her decisions to her boyfriend. Here she resembled the case of N., who was still several years from graduation and planned on studying along afterwards, though not yet knowing for sure either what exactly. It is in both cases possible that the expected moment of graduation beyond the extended present favoured the participants to maintain diverse paths into their future open and discuss so many intervening aspects and considerations regarding their professional future, that they already invested their whole energy on this and did not come to consider other aspects of their future life as interesting to describe. Their plans A already included several plans B, as they had different options in mind, added new when encountering them (see *Professional profiles and the labour market*) or discarded others. Especially before graduation and first labour-market experiences, the participants' future equations contained so many unknown elements that it was cumbersome or even impossible to consider all possible outcomes and, as Woodman¹⁷⁴ (2011) argues, many

¹⁷⁴ Though it is possible that Woodman had encountered his participants before as they all came from a bigger sample of the 'Life Patterns Project', he does not mention any special relationship or follow-up. In

might prefer to actively avoid to think or talk about their future, especially in an interview with a stranger. Rather than a lack of future, we may interpret this as an excess of futures, impossible to embrace with words in all its complexity. Rather than attempting to do this, the participants might then choose a priority in the sense of a long-term goal and build their future prospect around it. The long-term goal may be to live in a certain place (Nic), to work in a certain field (Maduixa) or with a certain stability (Sara), but the concrete result is quite open and the way to get there includes so many steps that any step may lead to a change in direction. However, N. daydreamed about having a family and a fulfilling job, showing a much closer orientation towards the normal biography than Nadia, who only spoke about the openness and insecurity regarding her professional future, though her degree in veterinary medicine includes a very clear professional profile. Similarly to Nic and Sara, Nadia might have chosen this openness to ensure an ideal pursuit of her main priority: building her future around her boyfriend (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*).

Interviewer: Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?

Nadia: I don't know (.) I have no idea, I don't know.

Interviewer: What about 5 years from now, is it easier to picture it?

Nadia: No, because I don't know.

Interviewer: But, do you have any dream that you would say "I'd love to be doing that 10 years from now"? Something you want to accomplish? Not really?

Nadia: It's because I have no idea, I don't know what I will be doing next year, I don't know, I don't know, I can't picture it. (Int5 Nadia, l.465-470)

Nic: Yes, it's really overwhelming right now being at University, because everyone has made up their mind about what they will be doing with their life. But then, some of us, we still have no idea, we are a bit... you know? Truly overwhelmed.

Interviewer: Well, but, actually, you already know what you want to do, the thing is that you don't know...

Nic: it's another thing if it really works out, you know?

Interviewer: I guess other people also don't know it for sure either.

Nic: Well, yes (--) I hope so, otherwise...

Interviewer: Yes, they have an idea, but they also don't know for sure.

Nic: Yes, yes, but it's that I see people like... "Oh look, I've already...", or "I already have...", or "I've already registered for the master's degree", or "I already have this". And I'm like (.) "well, I'm translating from a dialect of Japanese (.) I keep going (.) slowly"

Interviewer: Well, the master's degree is also a way to extend everything a little bit.

Nic: Yes, that's it (.) I see it like that. If you are studying another degree, it might be useful to specialize in something. But in our case, I think it's rather to extend your studies for a year and give yourself more time, (.) so that you don't have to face reality, do you know what I mean? [laughs] Like: "No, no, no, I'll keep studying, I'll keep studying". (.) Because, that's another thing, with this degree, once you finish it (.) you can already start working, (.) you know? (Int5 Nic, l.352-369)

When comparing the described types, we see that especially economic security was a crucial element in many narratives, though with opposite signs: While some worried so much about economic security that they adapted their study choice (N.), their professional aspirations

this sense, I might have had a certain advantage here as I already knew quite a lot about my participants and their plans for the future, so they did not have to construct their plans from zero and could – possibly – enter into more complexities.

(Sara) or their geographical scope (see *Mobility*); others expected that they would achieve it anyway over the years (Peter, Cara), or supposed that they would be at least able to make a living (Maduixa, Margarita). Regarding parenthood we have, furthermore, seen that several of the female participants felt that they had to develop a wish to become a mother (Irina, Floreta) and achieve certain living conditions that were compatible with a family life (Maduixa) in order to be a good mother (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). This conflict with motherhood may therefore explain why more of the female participants were ascribed to having an alternative biography than their male peers.

Regarding social class, it is interesting to observe that the female participants who embraced motherhood and dreamed of achieving it rather soon (Sara, Piruleta) belonged to social class A, indicating once again that the lower social classes pursue an earlier completion of the development tasks (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). Though Sara and Piruleta pursued university studies successfully and with good academic outcomes (see *Academic success*), their labour prospects at the end of the follow-up were to accept any job to maintain their economic autonomy. If graduates from lower social classes of origin are more likely to face precariousness, underemployment and overqualification because they are less able to translate their HE titles into corresponding labour-market positions (see *The precarious generation in Catalonia* and *Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation*), this may also contribute to their deciding in favour of motherhood and against their careers, leading to a further reproduction of social inequality in the long run. Though Peter did not mention children, he highlighted the importance of his well-being in his last interview, arguing that he would study with another attitude, taking things easier, if he could change the past. Similarly, Piruleta mentioned in her last-year interview a decision to make fewer things at once to be calmer and happier. This may indicate that these participants from social class A had already started to adapt their aspirations and activities to their 'opportunity structure' (Reay, 2004), favouring happiness over academic excellence (Peter) or a CV rich in extra-curricular activities (Piruleta). As both these criteria are crucial for the employability and positioning on the labour market (Bathmaker et al., 2013), a certain feedback between possibilities and attitudes may reduce the possibilities further – once again reproducing social inequality (see also the following section).

6.4.6. *Happiness*

"Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth / (Because I'm happy) / Clap along if you know what happiness is to you / (Because I'm happy) / Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do"

"Happy" (2013), written and performed by Pharrell Williams

"I got that summertime, summertime sadness / S-s-summertime, summertime sadness / Got that summertime, summertime sadness"

"Summertime Sadness" (2012) by Lana Del Rey

Happiness research has turned from an almost unknown field in the 1990s (Levit & Linder, 2008) into a hot subject in recent years and is no longer confined to the works of psychologists and economists, but increasingly interdisciplinary (Frey & Gallus, 2016). Especially economic

and work-related factors and the influences of public policies in this fields are studied, but increasing attention is also paid towards leisure time (Tachibanaki, 2016). Happiness is thereby understood as "the more long-term state of good feelings as one is going through life, a sense of well-being or contentment, satisfaction and meaning—that the good times outweigh the bad" and is supposed to have a positive influence on the individual's performance, e.g. at work (Levit & Linder, 2008). Some researchers highlight especially the genetic component that can be understood as setting a person's "baseline of happiness", while "the highs and lows of relationships, changing financial situations, good health (or lack of it)" etc. lead to temporal "emotional fluctuations" (Levit & Linder, 2008). Others focus on how external factors come to influence happiness. While economic hardship has a negative influence on happiness, economically affluent are not necessarily happier than people who live just above the poverty level (Levit & Linder, 2008), an observation that might be partly explainable through unhappiness at work, as adults in working age spend a significant part of their time at work (Tachibanaki, 2016). We can therefore suppose that the HE experience might be similar important for full-time students happiness and that the observed deterioration of the (youth) labour market and labour quality (Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016) should influence happiness negatively in Spain and might already influence students independently of their employment status, as they are preparing to enter the labour market and fears in this regard might influence their happiness negatively (see *Future ideals and fears*). Moreover, certain professions seem to be more affected by unhappiness than others and studies indicate that variables related to unhappiness – "the prevalence of depression, alcoholism, and suicide"; "mental and physical ailments and chemical addictions" – are often already increased among the student population of a certain degree, as is the case of law students (Levit & Linder, 2008). Work-related variables like "employment status (full-time or part-time), wages, working hours, and work–life balance" (Tachibanaki, 2016, p. viii) are supposed to be relevant for happiness and Levit and Linder (Levit & Linder, 2008) believe that "rigid billable hour expectations, law firm hierarchies, competition against colleagues within firms, and the absence of opportunities for creativity" may influence happiness negatively in law graduates. Furthermore high percentages of graduates who claim that they would not study this degree again and attorney attrition in the first years of practice contribute to the picture of unhappiness in this field. "Control, connections, creative challenge (or flow), and downward comparisons", on the other hand, are supposed to improve happiness in any field (Levit & Linder, 2008). Control can be thereby understood as a feeling to matter that can be either achieved through allowing individuals to take or to help taking important choices or by recognising their contribution as important (see also *Lack of control* and *The 'good' lecturer*). "Connections" refers to social connectedness or "social bonds", a topic that also appeared as crucial in this thesis and is analysed in a different axis (see *Social success*). While friends and family were identified as "the greatest source of satisfaction", the "extent of people's social connections" is considered one of the best predictors of individual happiness (Levit & Linder, 2008). This gives further weight to the argument that supporting students to "create strong and supportive personal relationships" (Archer & Yamashita, 2003; Levit & Linder, 2008) is a better strategy than to favour competition and isolation. These authors do furthermore consider the social relationships with lecturers and other staff as an aspect of social connectedness and give recommendations how to favour and institutionalise these. "Creative Challenge" is supposed to provoke "flow", "the

sense of time flying by when people are engaged in activities they like—the interest in the activity is the end itself” (Levit & Linder, 2008). In a way, flow is related to pedagogical concepts like the zone of proximal development described by Vygotsky (Vygotskij, Lloyd, & Fernyhough, 1999) and consists in presenting individuals with challenges that are challenging enough to not be boring, but achievable enough to not provoke anxiety and frustration (Levit & Linder, 2008). “Downward comparison” refers to a human tendency to feel happier when they are relatively better off than the peers they compare with. In this sense, bronze medallists are often happier than silver medallists, because they compare themselves with the athletes that did not medal at all, while the latter compare to the gold winners (Levit & Linder, 2008). As especially the middle classes are said to show a strong orientation towards the upper classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007), this continuous upward comparison could lead to lower levels of happiness among them. A way to increase downward comparison among students is voluntary engagement to help people in need and this favours additionally the sense of mattering, improving as well control (Levit & Linder, 2008). In spite of these interesting ideas, happiness is still a rather understudied topic in HE research and especially qualitative research approaches that study in-depth how young people construct happiness and relate to it and what “subjective theories” (Latour, 2005) they formulate are still missing. The thesis at hand can help to shed some light on student happiness, as attitude and happiness appeared as of such importance in the longitudinal analysis, that it was turned into an axis of longitudinal analysis.

In a longitudinal project like this, it is impossible not to notice if the participants are in a good mood or going through a difficult time, even if they do not directly mention this. Moreover, different perspectives on life and differences at the happiness baseline become visible in the comparison of different interviews, as they allow us to ensure that an observed negative tendency was not just a temporal fluctuation. As several participants moreover came to comment on whatever was happening to them, I had occasion to notice that their attitudes and happiness or the lack of it had a very direct influence on their narratives. As several of the changes observable in the other axes of longitudinal analyses might be partly explainable with these changes in attitude and happiness, I decided to add an additional axis to focus these issues directly. Towards the end of the follow-up, Skone suggested as a further question I could use in my project if the participants were happy or not. Though I considered this question as rather problematic for my research, risking to leave the impression to be judgemental or shallow as attempts to approach happiness as a guiding principle is often considered “self-help fluff” (Levit & Linder, 2008), I opted to include it at the very end of the interview guideline and highlighting that another participant had come up with it. None of the participants refrained from an answer and many showed in their comments that they had been thinking about their happiness too or even mentioned discussions about this topic they had had with acquaintances. Maduixa for example told me that she had just had a discussion with a fellow student who had claimed that she had to be either happy or unhappy and that she was unhappy if she did not identify as happy. Maduixa had insisted on a less dichotomist comprehension of happiness, arguing that there was always a reason to be not completely happy – for example a cousin in the hospital – though it does not necessarily damn you to complete unhappiness either. Similarly to Maduixa, other participants relativized their happiness in the face of flaws. Floreta distinguished in Int5 everyday-happiness (*felicidad*

cotidiana) from complete happiness (*felicidad completa*), arguing that she was not currently feeling complete happiness because she did not comply all three steps she considered inherent to this happiness: being happy with oneself, finding ones place/s and finding a balance between everything. As she did not like her current place (see *Mobility*), she could not consider herself completely happy, but felt everyday-happiness.

Are you happy? Well, I think that is a question which is impossible to answer, because I think that one is never happy, we have so many things in our head that... (.) it's like a weighing scale, you know? And you keep having issues, but, I don't know... For example, I now have a cousin who's in hospital, because he received a blow to his head, [Interviewer: Oh, sorry] and he got, well, he has... I mean, I can't say that I'm happy because of that, I'm worried because my cousin is there, I'm worried because of that but it's not like I start crying at home. (...) I think it's impossible to answer if you're happy, (.) because there are so many things that... When you're a kid, yes, like: "Hey, someone gave me a sticker", very good. But now, when you're more grownup, happiness is not only whether you feel happy or not, it's rather feeling good about oneself, or actually, when... (.) You start being happy when you accept yourself, when you (.) are happy with yourself, (.) with what you are doing and what you are not doing. Now I'm not happy with what I'm doing, because I want to finish, but I'm happy with myself. (...) Professionally speaking? No, because I don't have a... my professional career hasn't started yet, so... ((2sec)) Happy about how society is? No, I'm not at all happy with how society is (.) but I think that answering: "Are you happy?" (.) is complicated, because... I don't know, that boy said that if you can't answer "yes", it means that you aren't happy. That's not true, and you can see when someone is happy and when that someone is not (.) I mean, you see it in the face (...) I am quite demonstrative, and I don't know... I think you feel it in the way someone speaks, in the way someone is. You don't have to ask that question directly. But I don't know, and that's it, I believe one can't really answer that question. (Int5 Maduixa, l.1180-1200)

Floreta: yes but it's just as with the passion, I believe that it's related there, it's about knowing', the thing is there are there three things, that is to say, there's the finding oneself, right? As a person, to feel complete with yourself, feel good as yourself, eh find a place where those two things are good that is to say, [a place] where you can be right, this location doesn't have to be always the same, you may be a nomadic person saying "come on, now I'm going here, now...", you know? well, as a traveller or whatever it is, it doesn't matter, I don't know yet what I am, that's something that you figure out with the time, and then, happiness is when you find the balance between everything, I believe, right? I don't know, it's very difficult huh?

Interviewer: and this still needs to arrive for you?

Floreta: yes but a lot of time is missing, but well, I'm happy with what I have now in my day to day, I'm happy, I'm happy

Interviewer: very well, also maybe precisely as you know that it's temporary ...

Floreta: yes, yes because I have an open mind and that makes me see that I have no borders, right? Of, well, any kind, what do I know? I go ahead and that's it (Int5 Floreta, l.1048-1060)

Other participants showed an approach closer to the happiness researchers' concept of a happiness baseline (Levit & Linder, 2008), arguing for example that temporal sad or happy moments do not achieve the overall happiness (Sara). Piruleta explained her not being completely happy in Int5 with still healing from the bad experiences she made in the last year (see *Change and Continuity*), so here a certain recovery time is expected to be necessary to return to the baseline after an important collapse, but the final return to the baseline is not

questioned. This may indicate different levels of exigency regarding happiness, as some to require being almost euphoric, while others consider feeling happy in spite of severe anxieties. In line with previous research on comparisons (Levit & Linder, 2008), social class may be highly influential here, as Sara might feel happier than others, because as a student from a working-class background she might compare downwards and be aware to be better off than many others. Maduixa and Floreta, on the other hand, were identified as social class D and considered themselves middle class. As differences within each class exist, we can say that no matter if they are middle or upper class themselves, they might compare upwards and therefore feel at disadvantage. As both of them furthermore mention private universities as better alternatives to their studied degrees but highlighted that they could not afford studying there (see *The Transition from University to the Labour Market*), this impression is corroborated and may furthermore explain why the participants who were identified in my approach as social class D, did not identify as upper class (see *Measuring Social Class*), as their tendency to compare upwards always makes them feel that they could be yet better off. Apart from these 'sophisticated subjective theories' (Latour, 2005) about happiness, it was interesting to see if and when the participants seemed to be happy at the different moments of the interviews, if their general attitude was rather positive or negative, and how these facets related to other axes of analyses.

Thanks to the question about their happiness included into the last interview round, it is possible to ascribe almost all participants to a type regarding their self-definition of happiness at this point, differentiating between: 1) happy (Skone, Andrés, Willy, Irina, Margarita, Nadia, Sara); 2) unhappy (Nic, Xenia, Koala), and 3) somewhere in between (Maduixa, Floreta, Piruleta). Even more interesting is, however, to see how the participants spoke about happiness, how they explained their current answer and what importance they ascribed to happiness in the life course. Here we see that several participants felt unable to be happy for now, as they first needed to achieve their objectives for the future and were afraid not to achieve them (Nic, Xenia). These participants projected happiness towards their future and constructed it in direct relation to their objectives. Nic was afraid not to have the guts to move abroad in the end. Xenia, on the contrary, ascribed her current unhappiness to the daily conflict with her mother and therefore expected to be happier once she moved to Barcelona. Sara said to be happy when I asked the question in Int 5, but spent most of her interviews worrying about her future. In Int1 she mentioned to be calmer now that she had entered into her aspired degree, arguing that she had been worried not to make it in High School. However, she already worried that it might not be easy to find work in her field after her studies; a topic that gained even more importance from Int3 on and in Int4 she even described herself as overwrought (*agobiada*). In her third interview she spoke of nightmares and insomnia due to the stress and especially once she began to work as an English teacher in parallel to her studies, she described herself repeatedly as tired, maintaining until her last interview that she did not continue studying a master, because of this fatigue (see also *Health*). Though Sara reproduced quite accurately the baseline approach of happiness researchers (Levit & Linder, 2008), her continuous anxiety and the mentioning of indicators of mental health issues (see *Health*), might lead us to wonder if her baseline was not already a little low or had lowered with her entrance in HE, though she would not assume to be unhappy.

Yes, I'm happy, yes, I am, yes. [Interviewer: Very good] Yes, I'm happy, I am, but the thing is, let's see... There are certain things that make you feel better or worse. I mean, happiness is the basis, and then from there you have mood swings. But it's the same for everyone, sometimes you have a good day, sometimes you have a bad day. Sometimes you spend one week feeling sad, and that doesn't mean you're not happy, only that that week was bad. Therefore yes, yes, I'm happy. So, answering the last question: I feel good, because I'm happy. (Int5 Sara, I.603-607)

Andrés mentioned happiness repeatedly as an objective for life and even called it his "dream" in Int5, when he confirmed my question for his happiness. He highlighted, however, that he would not be happy if his current situation did not change in a future and he started to achieve his further objectives. In this sense, he differentiated between present and future happiness and highlighted that he could be happy with his current situation, but his future happiness required a certain progress – an idea that is also in line with the repeated use of the metaphor of a "life path" that appeared in many interviews. In his case, his high orientation towards the normal biography (see *Future ideals and fears*), came, however, with a certain risk of failure, as especially fatherhood continues to be rather difficult to achieve for homosexual men, though high economic capital may facilitate things, e.g. through surrogate motherhood. His third-year interview represented in many senses an exception from his general line, as he showed a different argumentation, focusing on the things he would still like to experience before becoming a father, dreaming of international experiences and criticising his degree and his boyfriend in unprecedented ways. Rather than continuous progress, he seemed to be seeking a certain break in this year, but in his fourth-year interview he had already overcome this need. Though he did not give much importance to it, he also mentioned a fight with his boyfriend about his wish to do an Erasmus and, furthermore, ascribed difficulties with a friend to his boyfriend's not getting along with him. This might indicate that his relationship was experiencing a crisis at this point and explain his unconscious wish to escape temporarily. As he said in Int3 that they had just had a fight yesterday, it is conceivable that he only mentioned the fight because of this temporal proximity, though the observed difference might have been highly situational and the whole wish for a break might have been highly momentary, indicating that even participants who seemed to have a very clear plan and follow its steps systematically, experienced certain moments of doubt. In this sense, Andrés happiness baseline seemed to be rather high and we might have witnessed a temporal fluctuation in Int3.

I believe that my dream is to be happy (.) that is to say, I think that I want to be happy, do what I like, to be with a person I love, surrounded by people who love me, and above all to work on what I like, and to have a family, and to be happy [Interviewer: yes] in that way, and grow as a person, not to get stuck, I mean, it would frustrate me to stay stuck somewhere and I don't progress, and I don't get married and... you understand? [Interviewer: yes] I would be very very sad if that happened to me [Interviewer: very well] I don't want to get stagnated, I would like to make progress (Int5 Andrés, I.427-432)

Willy, on the contrary, constructed his attitude and happiness throughout the whole follow-up in regard to his past, arguing that he felt much better than back in school. Even within the follow-up, he constructed a certain progress, arguing each time he changed his housing, that he felt much better afterwards and highlighting that his social network kept growing and growing. When asked in Int5 if he was happy, he confirmed this considering the improvements regarding his past as enough to be happy about in the present. Apart from the temporal

orientation, this is again in line with the importance of downward comparison, as Willy compared, after all, to his own unhappy past, when constructing his current happiness.

Five years ago, when I was in [[small town name]], when we met in [[small town name]] when you came to my high school, I was someone who wasn't, I think maybe I wasn't happy, because I felt quite alone. I felt quite alone er I didn't have a group of friends with whom to share my thoughts, my interests, my worries or whatever it was. And sure, I might have been more solitary. (.) Well, this has changed me for the good, we could say. (Int5 Willy, l.613-618)

Another interesting change regarding the follow-up appeared regarding the labour market transition, as all participants who had entered into a full-time job routine somewhat before the last interview (Floreta, Koala, Andrés), were highly dissatisfied with their current routines (see *Labour-market entrance*). When comparing Floreta's attitudes in the different interviews, I noticed a quite significant decrease in happiness towards her last interview, as Floreta even came to feel trapped in a routine that was not to her liking, but felt unable to change it. After years of being a happy fighter, she seemed to have tired down and turned into an unhappy victim, unable to fight along. As she was one of the few participants who had already finished her degree and passed on to a new working-life routine, this may be highly influential here. Regarding the aspects fostering happiness (Levit & Linder, 2008), Floreta seemed to be missing out especially regarding connections, as her social life was highly reduced, she lived further apart from her family and friends and did not feel comfortable with several of her colleagues. However, she constructed a strong sense of mattering with her argumentation to be a much better speech therapist than her colleagues who had not studied speech therapy (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*) and had repeated occasion to compare downward in her daily work with deaf people, though we have already mentioned above (see *Labour-market entrance*) that the helping professions are less likely to profit from such comparisons, assuming an irrational responsibility for the difficulties of others, rather than feeling to be helpful and to matter (Schmidbauer, 1992).

I don't have a big social life, I mean... Because I am almost only working, working, working. I'm in a phase where I don't find anything that could be my hobby. I need a hobby, because before I used to do a lot of sport. (...) And now I don't have that there, because I have been dedicating my time to other things. I mean, I've started little by little and, well, I don't have that place. Now, this year I've joined a municipal gym, (...) but that's because I go by myself, and I'm more of a team person, and I still haven't found a football team or anything, and I'm not feeling quite good about that, you know? [Interviewer: You miss that] And also, socially speaking, it's like I'm telling you, sometimes I go out for a drink with someone from work, but not so often. I've also signed up for salsa lessons, (...) since September until now I must have done... (.) I don't know, 8 lessons at most. (Int5 Floreta, l.144-158)

Similarly to Floreta, Koala saw his current happiness affected by a lack of social life and explained his dissatisfaction at work with the mentality of his colleagues and bosses to leave things for the last moment (see *Labour-market entrance*). However, all participants assumed to still have time to achieve happiness and especially the participants who were unhappy in their current work, seemed to turn their temporal contracts into a positive aspect as they allowed them to hope for an improvement and better conditions in their next job. Though the follow-up did not study further ahead how the participants' perceptions changed in this regard, we can assume that temporality stops to be an advantage when it turns into a permanent

situation itself and negative experiences with change, e.g. difficult transitions from one employment to the next or worse conditions after a change, diminish the hopes for improvement through change.

Interviewer: Another question that one of the participants asked was (.) if you're happy (.) right now? [Koala: No] You aren't?

Koala: No, because I'm missing something. (.) Because of the master's degree and because my job is not a hundred per cent what I'd want... I mean, it's nice, but there's a lot of disarray, and it's not a hundred per cent what I'd like. And I also feel lonely, with regards to my personal and sentimental life, so all those things make me not quite happy.

Interviewer: But do you feel lonely because you aren't with your family anymore, or because you don't have a partner?

Koala: I feel lonely because I don't have a partner but, of course, the family part is also affecting me. (...) It's more like I feel alone in the sense that I don't have friends there. Sure, those people, I've met them recently, so all the process of building one's confidence and saying: "Ok, now I feel confident to talk about private matters, and such", that process has not finished yet. And I feel lonely because I don't have a partner, of course it gets to me, at least I'm like that. There are a lot of people who wouldn't mind and that [would say]: "I don't care, I can live without that, and that's not a problem". (Int5 Koala, I.890-904)

Following these comments, we can suspect a certain change in tendency as well for Willy's life, as his social network should start to decrease and his worries about not finding a life partner should gain more and more importance over time (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*), overshadowing his happiness. Especially the development task to establish a stable partnership has a certain potential to undermine happiness and well-being, as it is less easy to identify sub-ordinate targets and to feel to be progressing towards this aim, so young people may feel to be lagging behind and question their relationship capability rather quickly¹⁷⁵. As research suggest an important genetic influence and claims that the best predictor of future happiness is current happiness (Levit & Linder, 2008), we may furthermore wonder in Willy's case if his happiness in HE constituted a change to his baseline or was a – somewhat prolonged – temporal fluctuation in itself. If Piruleta assumed a certain recovery time to return to her baseline after the temporal collapse in the last year, we may furthermore wonder if a similar recovery time applies to positive bursts in happiness regarding the baseline, so Willy's continuous assumption of happiness in comparison to his past may be the result of a slow return to the baseline. However, if participants are happier when they consider current difficulties temporal, they might also be happier if they consider current happiness as a permanent facet of their lives. Deterministic predictions about future happiness make hence little sense and future research is needed to study these tendencies, in particular the effect of the labour market transition and the durability of student happiness after graduation, further.

¹⁷⁵ As this press article reports, many young people worry that there might be something wrong with them when they turn 18 and have never had a romantic relationship; especially because most public discourse on young people highlights that they are younger and younger when they experience their first sexual intercourse (Nassoufis, 2008): <https://www.mz-web.de/leben/volljaehrig-ohne-freund-18-jahre-alt-und-ungekuesst-8313860> [last access: 10.06.2018] and diverse others comment on young people's worries to be incapable of a relationship or directly discuss if the Generation Y (the so-called "Millenials") is generally incapable of relationships: <https://www.evidero.de/generation-beziehungsunfaehig> [last access: 10.06.2018].

Further changes that appeared in the happiness-narratives of the participants in the course of the follow-up indicate that these were developing their subjective theories on happiness in the same time; so the negotiation of personal happiness, especially regarding work-life balance, might be an important facet of current youth transitions and a development task in this sense. Skone, the participant who suggested the question for happiness in Int5, identified as happy in the same interview, but had shown quite different tendencies in the course of the follow-up. In his first year, he had said that he would be happy once studying in the UAB. Apart from the clear future orientation, this corroborates that his decision against studying in the UAB after completing his degree in the UdL marked an important change in his life (see *Change and Continuity*). In Int4, he said to be happy and argued that you should not change anything about your path, when life took you to a point where you feel content. Though this indicated a much stronger orientation towards present happiness, he turned to value the future in his last interview, arguing that a person needs to have clear objectives to be happy. A person without objectives or without the impression to be achieving them is unhappy. He had an objective and felt better than ever. Apart from combining present and future happiness here, this is also related to the philosophy of life he came to describe in his last interview (see *Change and Continuity*).

Differently to all these participants who used the question for happiness to share their subjective theories, Nadia just confirmed to be happy in Int5. Here it is interesting to note that Nadia used in many previous interviews the wording to be “content” or “very content” (*molt contenta* – Int1, 2, 3, 4) or even directly “happy” (Int4). While her reasons for happiness were in Int1 to have entered into the aspired degree course, in Int2 she felt happy because she noticed that she was being more successful with her learning than in her first year, in Int3 she was happy about her academic success and in Int4 she even felt proud of her marks and described herself as a content and active person. Her wording here was, however, that she was happy now, indicating that she had not always been this happy, though she did not specify this. I confirmed in the interview that I perceived her as very happy and joked that this might be because of her now being in a relationship – a suggestion she did not comment on, but that also made sense in the longitudinal analyses, as she had insinuated in Int3 that she might never find a life partner, having to live alone in a house full of animals (see *Degree of completion of development tasks* and footnote 175). In conclusion, Nadia would have probably always answered with “yes” to the question for her happiness, but her happiness did still increase towards the end of the follow-up, showing that the perception of happiness was highly influenced by the participants’ attitude towards happiness and whether they believed to have reason to be happy or not. In this sense, her repeated claims to be content might even function as a mantra, convincing her progressively that this is true. However, it is also possible that Nadia did not wish to talk to me about problems and feared that if mentioning certain unhappiness, I might start to ask her for the reasons etc. Or she could simply remain in a stage prior to actively reflecting and negotiating happiness, using happiness-related terms thoughtlessly and answering the question without giving it much thought. Similarly as regarding independence in a relationship, it is possible that the participants perceived it as a social norm to be happy or to pursue happiness, distinguishing themselves from unhappy grumblers. Happiness is then a personal choice or an individual achievement and lies, as health, physical appearance, age and almost everything in life (Winker & Degele, 2009), in the responsibility of the individual.

It was not possible to ascribe N., Cara and Ariel a clear type, as N's and Cara's last-year interviews were held before Skone proposed the question for happiness and Ariel did not take part in a fifth-year interview. While Cara had a quite dry way to explain herself, making it often difficult to decipher her feelings, N. and Ariel did repeatedly leave the impression to be rather unhappy. N. spoke in Int1 about the bad time she had experienced in High School, ascribing it to her choice of the technical branch and argued to have chosen a different degree for the sake of her well-being (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*). In Int3, she mentioned to have suffered a lot in her second year because of her insecurity and indecisiveness, and said to have decided not to decide for now and to let things flow and see what they bring. In Int5, she spent more time speaking about the diverse difficulties she encountered throughout her Erasmus than about the good parts (see *Change and Continuity*). So in general, she showed a tendency to focus on the hard times and obstacles she faced, though usually claiming that these lay by now in the past and showing much optimism regarding her future and describing her own personality in rather positive terms, constructing a successful learner identity even in the face of repeated academic failure (see *Academic success*). Her continuous focus on difficulties may, however, indicate that she did not achieve more happiness or well-being through the revision of her study choice. If well-being would have been her first priority, she should have abandoned her degree, especially once she had realised that it was not her cup of tea (see *Family affairs*). That she continued her studies may then be an indicator that her reference to well-being in Interview 1, was merely a narrative strategy to justify her changed study choice without assuming academic limitations (see *Becoming a professional*) - just as her reference to a low self-efficacy belief in a MST degree (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*).

Ariel seemed to be negatively affected by her lack of social integration, but her situation seemed to have improved in Int4, as she mentioned more friends, less conflicts and a boyfriend. In spite of this improvement, it is impossible to know if she herself would have confirmed to be happy or not. Margarita, on the contrary, did clearly appear as a happy participant, though I did not ask her for happiness either. In a way, Margarita seemed to be wearing exactly the rose-coloured glasses, Maduixa believed that someone had to be seeing the world through in order to claim to be completely happy. Apart from always appearing happy and content in the interviews, Margarita herself argued that her philosophy of life included to be happy and optimistic and to stop thinking as quick as possible about anything negative that happened to her, as for example a subject she failed due to the fault of a fellow student. In Int3 she claimed to be so optimistic that she always told her parents and friends that she would live 100 years and be rich in the sense of working in a field she liked and using the money she earned on other things she liked. Sometimes she was almost too easy-going and did not seem to think things through. In Int5 she planned, for example, to study a master in France within months after the interview and had just started to study an A1 course of French in the EOI. One could have serious doubts if she was going to learn enough French to successfully study a master imparted in this language after only one year of French, but Margarita did not worry about this at all. She left the impression to be very enthusiastic, but to not worry too much if one of her plans would actually work out or not, giving us maybe also an explanation why she had ended up failing her TFG. This may put in doubt whether higher levels of happiness do necessarily create better professionals, as Levit and Linder assume (Levit & Linder, 2008), though prolonging her studies or failing at a French master do not tell us

anything about Margarita's abilities at work either and from the ways she described her different jobs, her satisfaction seemed to be very high and, apart from having a good time herself, she seemed to transmit this to the participants of the activities she offered.

The thing is, I'm truly optimistic, you know? And I think that, I always tell my parents and my friends, that I'll live until I'm 100 years old and that I will be rich, I tell them I will be rich but I don't mean rich in that sense, I mean that as I'll be working and I'll have a job that I like, I'll love to work and I'll like to do things with the money earned while working, you know? Like travelling, or... Yes, mostly travelling. (Int3 Margarita, l.556-560)

Well, that's what I meant with what I said before, it has happened to me and well, come on, away with it. I don't know but what are we supposed to do? Because, in the end, I'd only hurt myself [if I continued thinking about it] (Int5 Margarita, l.467f.)

Peter showed towards the end of the follow-up a similar tendency to take life easy, though not speaking of happiness but about well-being. Similarly to Willy, he related his current well-being to the past, arguing that he had had hard times, especially in his second year in University, because he worried and stressed himself too much regarding his academic performance. Knowing what he knew at the end of the follow-up, he would have worried less and taken things easier. This is especially noteworthy as several participants showed the opposite tendency to assume that they would have studied more if they could return and Skone even criticised the question, supposing that everybody would just jump to this conclusion. Peter, on the contrary, seemed to feel more confident now that he knew that he was going to pass his degree, considering that there was no need to sacrifice well-being to achieve better academic outcomes. As happiness did also appear in other research as the priority once academic excellence had been discarded as an option (Reay, 2000), Peter might highlight the importance of happiness as a way to cope with not having met his aspirations in other fields (see *Labour-market entrance*). Similarly, he did not seem to worry too much about his future, confiding that his itinerary would follow his sister's experiences, so he only had to fill a couple of years and would then start to work as a teacher; a strategy in line with what Woodman (2011) described as an active not thinking of the future in the face of relative future security (see *Future ideals and fears*). As many participants constructed their future happiness around the achievement of certain goals that are increasingly unsecure to achieve while the myriad of possible paths to follow is laborious to imagine and describe, the coping strategy to actively not think the future while still shaping it may, then, be a key to happiness.

Apart from this typology, based on self-definitions made at the end of the follow-up, it is also interesting to observe changes in the impression the participants left on me regarding their happiness over time and how their changes in attitude and overall happiness might have influenced their narratives. Especially Xenia is a rather extreme example in this axis that requires additional attention: Not having scored the necessary result in the PAU to enter medicine right away was in her first-year interview repeatedly a reason for her to consider this year the worst year of her life (see how she had said the same about High School in her Focus Group *High School*), to speak of a depression and to say that she hated her life. She constructed her identity repeatedly in relation to this failure, arguing that she did not have much in common with her fellow students in the degree she enrolled for *pro forma* (see *The Transition from School to University* and *Social success*), because her suffering and hard time had made her mature

before her time. At the same time, she considered her own perspective as more realistic, arguing that she had discovered what life was really like, while her fellow students were still overly optimistic and naive. The only positive turn in this argumentation was her saying that once you are at the bottom, things can only get better. However, there was also a positive element in her life, her boyfriend, but even their relationship was overshadowed by the distance, as he had begun the degree of medicine in their country of origin. Xenia was convinced to feel better once she entered medicine herself and her boyfriend was accepted to continue the degree in Lleida too.

This year is the worst in my life, honestly (Int1 Xenia, l.479f.)

In Int2, she told me, however, that neither of these plans had worked out: Her boyfriend continued in the foreign country and she had not achieved the required score in her third attempt either, finally deciding against medicine. In spite of the incidence of her worst-case scenario from Int1, Xenia appeared calm in Int2 and seemed to have really moved on and been able to find a new study choice for herself she was able to pursue: biotechnology. Just as she discarded in Int1 my suggestion to study medicine in her country of origin as her boyfriend did, she rejected in Int2 the idea to study medicine after having completed another degree¹⁷⁶, arguing that she did not want to lose more time with this. Moreover, Xenia came here to construct a clear contrast between her former I, obsessed with studying medicine, crazy and sad, and her current I, calmer, more cheerful and happier. This more positive attitude became directly visible in her description of her new degree and especially her fellow students that was so ideal in her second-year interview, that Xenia was considered to have experienced the freshmen's high (see *Social success*), though she came to argue in later interviews that she had not made many real and permanent friends anyway. In this sense, her absolutely negative description of her social success in Int1, where she said that she had no friends at all and little in common with her fellow students, was likely influenced by her depressive perspective. In Int2, she actually came to value a characteristic of her fellow students from biotechnology as positive that she had directly criticised as negative regarding the students of her previous degree in Int1: their tendency to celebrate and party a lot. Though she continued to distinguish herself from these activities, saying that she did not like to go clubbing, she also mentioned to join her new fellow students anyhow occasionally. In spite of repeating her claim to have no friends, she mentioned that she maintained the contact with the small group she found in her first year in university and retook the contact with her best friend from school. Moreover, a new friend from her country of origin who had moved to Norway appeared in her accounts.

Additionally, the idea to undertake an Erasmus and to migrate after the completion of her degree were displayed as attractive future prospects, so Xenia seemed to have more illusions

¹⁷⁶ The Spanish HE system allows graduates to enter any other degree, independently of their initial score in the PAU, as every university reserves a certain number of placements for this access road, applying the criteria of the best academic result in the previous degree's academic record in case of receiving more applications than available placements. We may deduce that this access road is not the most common as I could not encounter the exact number of placements available for students from this profile anywhere, while the Catalan Statute setting the costs per credit, stipulates the multiplication of the price per credit by 1,4 in the case of students who have already completed a degree before. See for example the explanations of the UdL's website in this regard: http://www.udl.cat/es/serveis/aga/matricula/importaproximat_graus/index.html [last access: 03.06.2018].

and dreams than in Int1 (see *Mobility*). In Int3, Xenia spoke less idealistically of her fellow students, but was still content with their getting along and mentioned one friend she had made, though rather out of the necessity that they had become lab partners and had to work together a lot. Furthermore, she highlighted her academic success, constructing her learner identity as being among the high achievers of a difficult degree and described the ambition to become the best this year (see *Academic success*). She confirmed again a continued contact with her diverse acquaintances, but highlighted that she would not consider them friends and expected to lose the contact with the people from her degree after graduation, just as she lost the contact to her fellows from school. Moreover, we see that the friend in Norway became her friend in the last year because their boyfriends were friends – a detail she had not mentioned in Int3 and that highlights the centrality of her boyfriend for her (social) life even further. In Int4 she continued to build her life around her boyfriend, considering him and her mother as her two confidants and directly mentioning how the two negotiated the possible future destinations they wanted to take her to, while Xenia herself did not seem to intervene in this discussion, saying that she did not mind where they would decide to go. In all these interviews, I experienced Xenia as significantly changed regarding her first-year interview and had more difficulties to stimulate her narration, suffering sometimes the impression that she was not really interested to tell me much about her life, though she continued to participate. Int5 brought an important change in all these topics and left me with the impression that Xenia had had switched to autopilot after her final decision against medicine and turned to take command when graduation was in sight. While she had seemed to be disinterested in everything, leaving all the important decisions to her mother and her boyfriend and only dreaming of bringing some diversion into her life through an Erasmus term – that she never did in the end (see *Mobility*) – Xenia seemed to have retaken the reins of her life in Int5. This awakening out of her apathy had direct positive implications and influenced again the other axis: now she came to consider several of her fellow students friends, mentioned three of them as the VIP in her life and planned on moving in with them in Barcelona (see *Social success*); regarding her academic outcomes she still considered herself a high achiever and was now convinced that she could have studied much more difficult degrees if she had dared to do so (see *Academic success*), and also our relationship seemed to have improved again, leading to an interview situation that did seem to flow much easier.

However, this new attitude towards life appeared too late to make a difference in her boyfriend's and mother's negotiations about their future, as her boyfriend had already presented his application for a placement in the UK and was no longer in time to change for Barcelona. Xenia therefore came to confront her boyfriend with her decision not to follow him to his next destination. When the boyfriend reacted offering her to continue their distance relationship anyway, she came to consider that she was not up to this, feeling that she did not want this relationship as much as he did and that she was too young for so much compromise. The resulting rupture with her boyfriend, who continued to do his best to gain her back, led to another rupture with her mother, who pushed her actively back into the arms of the abandoned boyfriend and intervened in other ways in her life, Xenia did not consider adequate at all ever since her awakening. After years of considering her mother among her most important confidants and planning to take her to any country she might move in a future, Xenia now considered that her mother was too dominant and only treated her well as long as

she did exactly what she wanted, scolding and confronting her continuously and denying her any support when she did not. While her boyfriend continued in a foreign country, the conflict at home worsened her well-being and Xenia came to mention family-support as an important additional topic in Int 5, arguing that now that she had lost it, this had made her aware of how much more difficult things were without it. When I asked for her happiness, Xenia admitted not to be happy at the moment, but hoped that this would change in a matter of months, once she finished her degree and moved out of her parents' home. As she additionally mentioned the wish to be studying a master and earning her own money with paid work in parallel here, she furthermore left the impression that apart from leaving the current conflict behind, she expected to find this happiness with the completion of further development tasks (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). Of course it is possible that Xenia would have turned to leave a different impression if we had celebrated further interviews, but the 5-year follow-up, already allowed us to peek into the ups and downs of her attitude a single interview or shorter follow-up would have never made possible. Though the follow-up was still short in comparison to a whole life, Xenia's case may indicate that fluctuations regarding the happiness baseline are for some persons more normal than for others, as if the baseline in itself was sinuous rather than straight.

Interviewer: are you happy?

Xenia: now? No [Interviewer: no?] No, that is to say, until I don't see myself with my things at peace, that is to say in terms of family, in terms of sentimental life and especially of professional life, that is the most important thing at this moment for me, I will not be 100% happy

Interviewer: so that's 10 years from now? When you will have...

Xenia: no, in a few months from now, when I'll know that everything is sorted out

Interviewer: when you know what masters program you have joined, when you have found work..

Xenia: and when I'm living there and so on, when I have everything like, as, (.) sorted out and when I'll be able to go for it, already then [I'll be happy]

Interviewer: So have you been happy during these years? [Xenia: yes] (Int5 Xenia, l.531-540)

When relating the described dynamics to social inequality, we can observe, first of all, that the participants who most reflected on happiness and developed subjective theories in this regard were all from social class D (Maduixa, Skone, Floreta). Andrés, Koala, Irina and Margarita (social class C) ascribed high importance to their happiness, but did not develop such sophisticated theories around it. Sara (social class A), on the contrary, reproduced the baseline theory from happiness research by claiming to be happy because the good aspects in her life prevailed the bad, but left an impression of being rather worried and tired at the end of the follow-up. Though neither Piruleta nor Sara appeared to be very happy in their last interviews, referring as usually to many difficulties and worries, they anyway assumed to be happy, indicating that they were less exigent in their perception of happiness, possibly because of a social-class specific tendency to compare downwards. Though the impression of unhappiness was not limited to participants from social class A, we can state, secondly, that the participants who most seemed to have suffered from stress and worries in the course of their studies were Piruleta and Sara – both female and from social class A – though they had been academically much more successful than some of the other participants and had entered their aspired

degree courses (see also *Health* and *Academic success*). Both Sara and Piruleta did furthermore describe themselves as tired at the end of the follow-up and focused their energies on gaining and maintaining economic autonomy rather than improving their CVs. This fatigue seemed to be a direct result of the stress and worries they experienced throughout their time in HE and if they really took a rest or dedicated their whole time to paid work in fields with little relation to their studies, they might lose opportunities to improve their CVs with degree-course related work experience, extra-curricular activities, international experiences etc. In future job applications, they could then appear less attractive than peers who finished their degrees full of enthusiasm to tackle new challenges and used their time before finding a job to fill their résumés (see *Extra-curricular activities and work experiences*). Moreover, their ability to be happy against all odds might decrease over time if they came to compare upwardly rather than downwardly, for example considering the success of their fellow students rather than of family members and childhood friends. Though this is in line with previous research on social upward mobility claiming that this always comes with a cost (Reay, 2013) and may even turn into a curse (Grundmann et al., 2008), it has to be said, once again, that further research is needed to confirm the development of happiness over the years and that we cannot predict the participants' happiness beyond the follow-up. In this sense, we can close this section on the positive note that the participants from social class A described themselves as happy at the end of the follow-up, while several other participants did not.

6.4.7. *Mobility*

"Un sempre se'n vol anar i, si no té un nom per dir on vol anar, quan es tracta d'una cosa indeterminada i sense límits, en diu llibertat."

Elias Canetti, Bulgarian writer of Sephardic origin in German language (1905-1994)

Roda Mots 20/04/2017

Temporal stays abroad are increasingly valued as a way to improve language skills, to gain additional experiences and new perspectives and to stick out among other candidates with similar qualifications on the labour market. Public and politic discourse have come to consider 'labour mobility'¹⁷⁷ as an adequate way to reduce unemployment and improve the competitiveness of the European Union as a whole, forging the imaginary of a European labour market and diverse EU-programmes to enable temporal stays abroad, with the aim to prepare young people for future mobility (Lahusen et al., 2013). That this policy discourse did not completely converge into public discourse becomes evident when we consider press releases on 'economic migrants' or 'economic exile'¹⁷⁸ as these indicate that such a Europe-wide labour market does not exist and that countries with stronger economies are only interested in

¹⁷⁷ See for example the press release in The Economist published on the 13th of January 2014, available at: <https://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2014/01/european-labour-mobility>. [Last access: 30.03.2018]

¹⁷⁸ See for example the press releases in: The Observers published on the 25th of March 2013, available at: <http://observers.france24.com/en/20130325-spaniards-economic-exile-spain-crisis> [last access: 30.03.2018]; in NPR published on the 29th of July 2012, available at: <https://www.npr.org/2012/07/29/157547044/spains-crisis-pushes-educated-into-economic-exile> [last access: 30.03.2018]; or in The Guardian published on the 2nd of October 2014, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/oct/02/crowdsourcing-youth-migration-from-southern-europe-to-the-uk> [last access: 30.03.2018].

certain parts of the youth population while fearing others as a potential burden for their social welfare systems. This leads to an inherent contradiction that is likely to affect in one way or another young people's imaginaries regarding temporal stays abroad, emigration and continuous mobility. Bathmaker et al. (2013) argue that in times of broadened access to HE, social inequality is reproduced through stays abroad and other extra-curricular activities, as the students' possibility to participate is mediated by their capitals and ability to mobilise their capitals. In another publication, my co-author and I (Rubio & Strecker, 2016) comment on temporal stays abroad as a middle-class strategy to avoid gaps and to add value to the CV, while young people with less economic capital do not have the same possibilities to experience such stays or live them under very different conditions, facing economic hardship and social exclusion rather than a broadening of their horizon.

In this study, mobility appeared as such an important topic, that it was identified as one of the central axes for the longitudinal analyses. However, this is in part due to the fact that the term in itself was quite broad, including references to trips, exchange programmes, inner-Spanish and international labour mobility, temporal and permanent living abroad etc., including wishes, dreams and fears just as well as lived experiences. The repeated references to living abroad and the general desire to travel may be read as an indicator for an opening-up of the world or for a more global orientation of a young generation of globetrotters. However, important differences appeared between the participants, not only regarding their factual mobility in the course of the follow-up, but also regarding the options that appeared on their horizon of opportunities and their ways to construct their narratives around mobility.

While all participants considered travelling or temporal stays abroad a desirable diversion in adulthood and many mentioned exchange programmes at the beginning of the follow-up, only three came to actually participate in such programmes in the course of the follow-up (N., Nic and Irina), one interrupting his stay and returning after only one month (Nic). This indicates that though students know the offer of exchange programmes and consider them attractive, only few put this interest into practice. This is in line with previous research that encountered, for example, 55% of college-bound high school students in the USA were certain to participate in study abroad while in HE (Puntaney, 2012), though the number of students who actually do so is much lower. Several participants postponed their plans for stays abroad in the course of the follow-up, arguing that they would have further opportunities to move abroad after finishing their studies, while a stay abroad as a student was considered to be expensive and risky, especially regarding academic failure and prolonged studies (see as well *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*). Piruleta was in her last interview well aware that she was about to reach a point at which she would not leave for a temporal stay any longer, considering that she had to do so soon, in order to not miss out on this experience.

I also want to do a volunteer program, I don't know, somewhere like Africa, something related to schools. (...) If I have a partner, maybe it'll be more difficult to do it. But I think I have to do it anyway, regardless of if I am with him or not. Otherwise, I'll never do it. My sister has a partner and she has gone, and nothing happened. So, I think that even though it might be scary, if you are going to be with your partner in the end, you will be, so... (.) It's something I regret not having done before, so if I don't have a teaching job, I'm telling you, I'll do it, yes. (Int5 Piruleta, l.502-511)

Many other participants did not show such awareness for a possible change in their possibilities and likeliness to move abroad temporarily. Sara argued for example, that she could have perfectly left for a temporal stay abroad after finishing her studies, but had decided against it, because she felt more like staying and enjoying her new life together with her boyfriend, arguing that she could still move abroad later in her life. As she also planned on early motherhood and desired to find a job that facilitated her economic autonomy even before receiving an offer as a teacher, we can wonder if this idea of a permanent possibility to move abroad was realistic and if it might not provoke her to miss out on this opportunity in the end. In other words, the impression to have all the time in the world, might favour that some young people miss out on their chances to make certain experiences abroad, in the end. Floreta, on the contrary, constructed the possibility to interrupt her working life in Spain to live and work for a few years in the Netherlands as an opportunity to break with her established routine and to broaden her horizon in Int 5, an interview that was in many senses marked by her repeated complaints about her lack of social life ever since she moved for a full-time job to a Spanish island. In this sense, it is highly significant to consider that in the end only participants from social class D (N. and Nic) and C (Irina) lived temporarily abroad, while Ariel returned after her fourth-year interview to her country of origin and Floreta moved from Catalonia to one of the Spanish islands.

As mobility in the sense of travelling was rather common and several participants seemed to “forget” to tell me about some of their trips, so we cannot really know how much travelling they did, we can reduce our considerations to temporal or permanent living abroad. In this, we can furthermore focus on plans for the future, as the factual mobility in the course of the follow-up was limited to very few participants. We can therefore differentiate types, parting from the different grades of projected mobility on a scale from zero (no wish to move, or even fear) to 100% (a desire to live on the move). 1) those who would like to stay or return to their place of origin (Sara, Piruleta, Peter) or to Catalonia in general (Floreta) and have their lives there, though they could also imagine to live temporal stays abroad at some point; 2) those who would leave if they had to, but only within the EU and only temporarily (Andrés); 3) those who did not discard to leave temporarily or permanently, but neither the leaving nor the place to go was very important (Nadia); 4) those who wanted to leave temporarily but had no clear plans for the future (Margarita); 5) those who wanted to leave permanently, but did not know yet where to move (Koala); 6) those who wanted to move to another country and stay there permanently (Nic); 7) those who wanted to live on the move, travelling the world (Irina).

Considering the development in the course of the follow-up, we may notice – apart from the already mentioned tendency to postpone temporal stays abroad further and further – that several participants changed their narratives and gave in some interviews much more importance to stays abroad than in others. Andrés, for example, did not mention any plan or desire to live abroad in his first-year interview and argued in Int2 that he had decided against doing an Erasmus, because he would have done so in order to improve his English, but only very few English-speaking countries were on the list of offered destinations. He spoke, however, of the idea to do his fourth-year internship abroad and as the Erasmus programme includes a programme for internships – Erasmus placements – it is possible that he did not use the terminology correctly here and only referred to discarding Erasmus studies but not placements (see also *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*). In Int3, Andrés was decided to apply

for an exchange programme to study in Mexico, as he had befriended an exchange student from Mexico who had by now returned to his country. As he consistently called this programme “Erasmus” and referred to his Mexican friend as an “Erasmus”, this confirms again that he did not have a too clear idea of the programmes yet and used the terminology in a little adequate way. However, already in Int3 Andrés commented on his boyfriend’s opposition to his plans and even mentioned a fight, though he usually never mentioned fights and described himself as very pacific (see *Happiness*). Andrés mentioned that his boyfriend was afraid that they might break up due to such a prolonged separation and said, at another point, that the Mexican friend had been in a relationship with a Portuguese friend who he was no longer seeing either, because he did not get along with his boyfriend. This might also indicate that his boyfriend was jealous here and did not only fear a breakup because of the distance, but also because of the Mexican friend Andrés planned to visit. Andrés himself did not mention any thoughts in this line. Though he would be speaking Spanish in Mexico, Andrés was also convinced that he would improve his English in the contact with “American¹⁷⁹ tourists”. In the same interview, he mentioned that his boyfriend was generally against moving abroad and would not join him if he found a job elsewhere. When asked in Int4 for his Erasmus application, Andrés represented, however, that the calls opened almost a year before the actual stay abroad and that he had been busy with other things and missed the deadline. As the call had not yet been published when we held Int3, we can interpret this change in argumentation as an indicator that Andrés had finally – subconsciously – adapted to his boyfriend, but did not admit to this dependence. Though it is possible that he just forgot about having mentioned the conflict in the previous year and therefore believing that he could just tell me the new official version, it is also possible that he himself “forgot” about this episode or that his missing of the deadline was a subconscious strategy to avoid the conflict with his boyfriend, without giving in officially. Just as many other participants, Andrés argued, moreover, that it did not matter that he missed this occasion as there would be plenty of others to leave. Here he also represented that Erasmus students do not really study and that he had only wanted to apply for the sake of travelling. Here he was indirectly comforting himself, arguing that an Erasmus is anyway just an excuse for travelling and that he could still travel, so he did not miss anything. In Int5, he confirmed that a temporal stay abroad might still be a possibility, if he lost his job, but limited the options to EU-countries and highlighted the temporal character of the stay and the objective to improve his English abroad. In this sense, temporal stays appeared again as an option he would not discard completely, but did not seek actively either, keeping it rather like a plan C, in case his other plans did not work out. As he repeatedly related to his boyfriend’s dislike for living abroad and also highlighted that his studies at law school would not allow him to work in another country even if he wanted to, Andrés left a bit the impression to adapt his geographical scope (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*) – apart from a certain “escape” in Int3 – to his boyfriend.

¹⁷⁹ It is noteworthy that Andrés used the term “Americans” in this sense. As he himself was born in a Latin American country and planned to travel to Mexico, having a friend there, we could expect him to be more aware of the imperialistic reduction implicit in this use of the term for citizens of the USA only. Even USA (United States of America) is a critical term from this perspective as Mexico is also called *Estados Unidos Mexicanos* and is situated in America.

Andrés: My partner doesn't like it, he's very serious, the relationship is serious, because we've been together for a long time, we've been together for seven years, he doesn't like the idea that I could leave. We were talking about that and he got angry, because he doesn't like me to leave, he's afraid that we might separate... he doesn't understand it. I told him that I want to go to Mexico. I really like Mexico ...

Interviewer: As an exchange student?

Andrés: Yes, like... mobility, you know? [Interviewer: Yes ...] he got very angry with me, he doesn't understand it.

Interviewer: It's the fame that Erasmus has

Andrés: Yeah, he thinks I'm going to meet people, but no, I'm going to work, to get acquainted, I like Mexico and the Mexican culture

Interviewer: And he couldn't go with you?

Andrés: No, he doesn't like it

Interviewer: Ah, it's because he doesn't like it, it's not because he works and he can't

Andrés: he likes it a lot to travel, going on vacation, but not living in another place that is not here. (Int3 Andrés, I.352-367)

Another case of such an adaptation, though with opposite signs was Nadia. Though she considered the possibility to do an Erasmus in Finland in her second interview, already then she mentioned the doubt whether to do it or not. In Int3 I mentioned Finland again and Nadia confirmed that she liked it, but only for a temporal stay as she considered the winters too cold. She still doubted whether to do an Erasmus there, mentioning as well the polemic about Wert's announcement to abolish the scholarships (see *Scholarship programmes*). Asked where she would be living if she could live anywhere in the world she mentioned London, arguing that she always liked the city, or Holland, mentioning that she liked tulips. In Int4, I asked again for the Erasmus and she highlighted the many ways she had used to inform herself and that she would really like to do an Erasmus (*tinc moltes ganes*), especially as many people told her that it was a great experience, but she was also afraid to fail academically, considering that an Erasmus would be a waste of money in this case (see *Internationalisation*). Though she already had her boyfriend in Int4, she did not mention him at any point of our rather long conversation about the Erasmus programme. In Int5, she did not mention any Erasmus at all and I did not ask for it either. As the interview took place in May 2016, she was already finishing the fourth year of her five-year degree course, so she would have had to apply for an Erasmus already, if she wanted to do one in her last year and would have mentioned this. Here it seems that she finally decided against the international experience, at least in the course of her studies.

However, she spoke in her last interview about diverse possibilities to move abroad after finishing her studies, highlighting that she was interested in a speciality that was not offered in Spain. She had already informed herself about concrete programmes offered in the UK and talked to lecturers about this. However, she had still another year of studies and the final internships in front of her and could not take any decision yet. This time she also mentioned her boyfriend in this regard, commenting that he was also willing to leave and it was not yet clear if he would finish his studies with her or need another year, so she already mentioned the possibility to wait for him if this happened (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). As she had never been to interested in a permanent stay abroad and only mentioned the possibility to do an Erasmus in Finland repeatedly, but wanted to return to Lleida and live close to her family in a future, her ideas in Int5 felt like a rather sudden change. As she furthermore suggested as an additional question that I should ask my participants up to which extent they consider their life

partners in their future plans and decisions and answered that she did when I returned the question, it seems that her sudden orientation towards permanent mobility was in many ways influenced by her boyfriend, who had already completed several stays abroad himself. There is a certain irony in the coincidence that a participant who had been from the beginning on highly convinced to stay close to Lleida and her family came to find a boyfriend who wanted to move abroad, while others came to discard such plans because of their less mobile boyfriends.

Nadia: Finishing my degree, coming back here, doing a master's degree or... I don't know (.) looking for a job.

Interviewer: And then, would you look for a flat here in Lleida? [Nadia: yes] You'd look for one here, and start working...? You won't be living with your family anymore?

Nadia: Close to them, but, I don't know...

Interviewer: But with your own door (.) (Int4 Nadia, l.244-249)

Interviewer: So, in September 2017 you could leave. [Nadia: Yes] (2) Well, there's still time, right? (.) Very well.

Nadia: I don't know, because, of course, I also have to know what my boyfriend will do, because in theory he also wants to leave... (.) But we'll see if he's done with his studies or not. (...) But yes, he also wants to leave. (.) I mean, in theory we agree on that, so. (Int5 Nadia, l.189-193)

It is interesting to see how different participants referred to their life partners when talking about stays abroad. While Irina mentioned in Int1 that her future ideal to change every couple of years the country did not seem too compatible with a stable partnership, Skone said that he had decided to study in Lleida because of his girlfriend, among others, and mentioned her again as one of the reasons why he might not move to the USA after finishing his degree as he had always wanted. After their break-up he kept mentioning this desire to live for 2 or 3 years in the USA in the interviews 3, 4 and 5. However, he did not leave after graduation as he had envisioned in Int1 and did not show a much clearer idea when to leave in Int5, considering studying a master etc. As he was again in a relationship, I asked for his girlfriend's plans and Skone highlighted that she also liked the USA, but that this was a lucky coincidence he did not depend on, arguing that a relationship cannot work if one of the partners abandons a dream for the other. As we have seen above (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*), several participants showed a tendency to highlight their independence within their relationship, especially after a negative experience with a previous relationship, so Skone might be another example of this. Sara, on the contrary, highlighted that her boyfriend would have given her complete support if she had decided to leave temporarily after finishing her studies, but argued that her priorities had changed and that she felt more like staying and enjoying their new life after moving in. However, it is also possible that Skone valued his independence in his last interview, but still desisted – subconsciously – from moving abroad (to Barcelona or the USA), because of his girlfriend. That Sara felt a need to highlight that she could have left if she wanted to, that Nadia modified her specialization slightly, arguing that she had to leave if she wanted to work in her newest choice and that Skone did not move anywhere in spite of his conviction that this had nothing to do with his girlfriend, might then indicate that the participants followed – subconsciously – strategies to justify their decisions as their own and deny their partners' importance for aspects they believed to be too crucial as to allow such a partner-dependence.

I've been looking (.) and the two things I like are in the United Kingdom, and both are offered at the same University. (.) (...) Because here, in Spain, they don't offer anything about welfare, I mean, they offer animal welfare but for dogs and cats, like ethology, like the typical TV shows [Interviewer: Yes] where the dog is not behaving correctly, and problems like that. But they don't offer anything about wild animals, and there are no residential schools for feline medicine, there is nothing in feline medicine in Spain, (.) so one needs to leave. I talked with my internal medicine lecturers to ask them about feline medicine, and they were the ones who told me that, that the only thing that was possible, that people leave to go either to [[UK's city]] (.) or to Australia, because apparently, it's the best. They've got the latest technologies and all that, but (.) it's really a lot more expensive in there, and the entry requirements are very high, or to the United States, where they also do a lot of things. (Int5 Nadia, l.158-173)

Another participant who changed his narrative regarding mobility rather extremely in the course of the follow-up, was Willy. In his first-year interview he spoke of the plan to move to Belgium and work for the EU (see *Future ideals and fears*) and represented his rural origin as a condition that had condemned him for years to isolation and unhappiness, discarding the possibility to return to live there. He spoke in Int1, 2 and 3 about plans for an Erasmus in Germany (Int1 and 2) or France, England or Belgium (Int2). In Int3 he mentioned again Belgium and Germany and discarded Italy, saying that it appeared to him to be less serious. Already in Int2 he mentioned the possible abolishment of the Erasmus financial aids (see *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*) and in Int3 he mentioned furthermore the requirement to demonstrate a certain level in English and though he had been coursing English in his second and third year, he would not yet have the required certificate before the established deadline for presenting the applications. He explained that the required level depended on the locations and that some places requested even higher levels of English, so it is possible that he reduced his list because of this. In Int4 he explained that he had wanted to do an Erasmus in Germany, but that his chosen university gave the classes in German so he would not have been able to understand anything. Moreover, he commented on the cutbacks shortening the financial aids to the half (sic! see *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*) and that he did not want to burden his parents with the additional costs of an expensive Erasmus. In Int5 he said that he lacked a title to do an Erasmus – probably the English certificate – and mentioned again the additional costs of such a term. So in the end he did not do an Erasmus, though he had had a quite concrete idea of doing one throughout most of the follow-up.

In the course of the follow-up, possibly related to the death of his grandparents and his mother's health problems (see *Change and Continuity*), he showed a growing family orientation and started to worry about finding a girlfriend and starting a family of his own (see *Degree of completion of development tasks* and *Future ideals and fears*). In Int3, he said directly that he would like to leave Spain but also had his family here and wanted to stay close. When I mentioned in Int 5 his previous plan to work for the EU, he explained that this was not easy to achieve and though he never discarded completely that he might move abroad, I had to bring the topic up as in several previous interviews. As he repeatedly related the possibility to move abroad to a lack of job opportunities in Spain, it is also possible that his perspective changed once he found a first job (see *The Transition from University to the Labour Market*). After completing his degree, he began to study a two-year master that was partly imparted in Italy – the country he had earlier on considered little serious – but just before the term in Italy he abandoned the master to accept

a job in his field of studies. As this job was at a driving distance from his parents' residence, he returned to live with them, commuting on a daily basis to his new full-time job. Though the job was a temporal substitution for only few months, he had already been told that there was a chance that he could stay longer and when I spoke to him after several years via Facebook, he told me that he was still working in the same place so in another position. The mobility-orientation was therefore, in a certain sense, rather the exception than the overall trend and apart from the growing wish to be close to his family when gaining awareness of the possibility to lose his mother, it is possible that his whole enthusiasm for a job in the EU was just another aspect of his freshmen's high, as this was in his case highly intertwined with mobility, due to his move from the rural periphery to the big metropolis (see *Social success*).

A similar change happened to Maduixa, though without the increasing family orientation. She had already in her focus group highlighted her wish to move to London, but postponed this dream until after her degree, arguing that it would be easier for her to establish herself with a degree certificate. In the course of the follow-up, she discarded to participate in student exchange programmes, saying that she would get the international experience after her degree anyway and planned on studying a master in London. In her fourth-year interview, she considered to first move as an *au pair* to London, to situate herself in the city and select an adequate master, but in Int 5 she had postponed the departure again, arguing that she did not know what master to study and that the English sector was so different from the Spanish sector that it was better to first get to know the Spanish sector well before leaving. Just as Nadia she did not mention her boyfriend in her change of plans regarding London (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). Though she had postponed the plans in the past repeatedly, in Int5 it almost seemed little likely that she might ever leave.

Yes, because I said that I wanted to go to London, (.) but what's the matter? That (.) of course, I wanted to study a master's degree in London, but now I don't want to do a master anymore. (.) I've decided not to do it, because I still don't know a hundred per cent sure in which area I want to specialize in, and rather than doing a master's degree that afterwards won't be useful to me or that I won't like... I'd rather take things slowly. (.) And it's like that, (.) it's like that. (.) I'm taking things slowly, if I want, I can go in a few years, or not. Also, because (.) if I go to London I will have to know another... London's film sector. (...) We've been taught that Spain is really different from France, from England, of course, it's an economic sector and it works differently (.) Therefore, rather than going to London and start all over again, to know how it works there, it's better if I stay here for a while, so I learn how it works here, and then if I go there I will at least know how is it in here and I'll be able to... ((1sec)) you know? (...) I checked the rentals in there and everything is so expensive. So, I will wait and if I want to go, I'll go, and if I don't, I can also go on holidays and that's it. [Interviewer: So, for now you're staying here...] Yes, I'll stay here in Barcelona. In Barcelona, because I can't come back to Lleida, because I wouldn't be doing anything, I wouldn't be working, there is no work, nothing related to what I want to do. So, I have to stay in Barcelona, but I'm not going farther. (Int5 Maduixa, l.13-28)

Irina was in many senses the most mobility-oriented participant in this study, as mobility appeared in all her interviews as a central topic. She argued in Int1 that her ideal future would be to change her country of residence every 6 years or so. However, she also anticipated missing her family abroad and commented on the difficulty to reconcile such a life with a stable partnership, considering it an impossible dream. In Int2, she mentioned her country of

origin as a concrete possibility to return to for work – in other interviews she usually spoke of Latin America in general – but highlighted her wish to work there with indigenous communities, arguing that she could only do so while not having a family of her own, as it would be too dangerous with children. In later interviews, she relativized this stance arguing that she was not sure if she wanted to become a mother and considering that taking children with her on ethnographic fieldwork could be a great experience for them and that they might learn much more than in school through this. Here it is also interesting to notice her change from a terminology related to social work, to speaking of “ethnographic fieldwork”, as this reflects the changing construction of her study choice, in which anthropology gained importance over time, though she never actually studied it (see *Study-Choice Narratives under Construction*). In her last interview, she mentioned furthermore that she had first felt attracted to Africa and that her mother convinced her to consider Latin America instead, though she continued to dream of travelling Africa as well. Though she had stopped to see the start of a family of her own as the necessary end of her life with indigenous communities, she still considered that she might tire of this life and thought of studying a master that would facilitate her access to work in a NGO. Though she had many dreams for her future, she considered it most important to change her life as soon as it stopped to be to her liking and, consequently, did not limit her future at all. At the end of the follow-up, Irina had begun to live this ideal of a permanent globetrotter and thrived under these conditions in spite of a certain difficulty to maintain her economic autonomy. In her case, it is interesting to see that she did not only enjoy mobility in her present and projected it towards her future, but furthermore highlighted that she had been mobile in her past. Though she said to have moved several times in her country of origin before moving to the Catalan town where her family settled down, she had arrived there at the age of 7 and did not move again until her second year of university, when she came to move to Lleida. Nevertheless, she represented that she never lived for long in the same place and did not want to do so in the future either. In this sense, we can appreciate an important continuity not only from one interview to the next, but also in the construction of her life story around mobility.

(breathes) the thing is that (3) well, it's that I don't know, I had (-) well in my imagination (-) thought like (-) being able to work there (-) but not having my whole life over there (.) [Interviewer: um] because I would also like to have a connection here, that is to say, to say it somehow, to work there and when I don't work (-) holidays here (.) that is like having a parallel life (.) [Interviewer: um] because to live live neither, I don't see myself neither living there all my life nor living here (.) so fifty-fifty (...) what I want is (-) to work in a country (-) where, well, my studies, to say it somehow, (-) can help (.) and I don't have a country in mind (.) [Interviewer: um] and if it's possible to change every 6 years, well, I'd change every 6 years (.) [Interviewer: hmm] but of course that's not, it's not...(-) it's not compatible with a life (-) well, organized (-) I mean being in a relationship or so [Interviewer: um] no, so I don't know, we will see, let's say that we will see (.) (Int1 Irina, I.309-321)

Just as Irina, Nic and N. – the two other participants who completed a stay abroad in the course of the follow-up – showed strong tendencies towards globetrotting. This is in line with previous research in Norway that found that mobile students were more likely to have had previous international experiences before their mobility and to seek further international experiences after their stay abroad, speaking of an “accumulated effect of living abroad” (Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). However, Nic and Irina had been willing to move abroad from the first

interview on and N.'s plans for future stays abroad were rather vague in Int5, so she might not have come to pursue them in the end.

Nic mentioned a wish to live abroad and to leave Spain from the first interview on and considered student exchange programmes as a possibility to make first contacts and facilitate the process after completing his studies. In Int2, just after changing for a degree in the UAB, he was decided to make an optimal use of all exchange programmes and also mentioned the possibility to take a gap year after completing his studies to travel. Speaking about the current crisis, he represented that it would cease over time, so the later he entered the labour market the better. He strategically befriended people from the USA online and visited them in the summer before our third-year interview. In this interview, he was enchanted with the USA and the amiability of the people and from this moment on the USA appeared repeatedly on his list of favourite destinations or even as the one and only destination he wanted to move to. Having a passion for drawing, he even showed me a self-portrait displaying him in front of a US-American flag. He constructed a certain ranking of places to live at with the USA as the best option, other English-speaking destinations as coming with the possibility to not require him to learn another new language and finally any country that would allow him to leave Spain. However, he repeatedly worried about poisonous animals in Australia, indirectly discarding this option. Here it is interesting to see that he did not refer to any of the many other countries with poisonous animals and plants, as this may indicate that he never really considered them an option, despite his wording that he would move anywhere. As all countries that appeared on his list (USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Japan...) were characterised by a rather potent economy, he either filtered for economic power or, unconsciously or not, believed that in other countries he would not find work anyway and therefore did not consider them as an option. As we see in Int 5 that he was rather surprised to find job offers in his field of study online, it seems that he had conceived the labour market situation as such desperate that he had not expected to encounter any vacancy at all – an impression that appeared also in the comments of other participants (see *Labour-market perceptions*). In this sense, it is conceivable that he had reduced job opportunities to economically potent countries and therefore never mentioned other options.

Japan played a quite interesting role in his narratives, as he had studied Japanese for years before entering University and based his study choice – translation – on this interest in Japanese and the recommendation of his Japanese teacher who had studied the same degree and in the same university (see also *Dream or Nightmare*). In Int3 – one year after beginning the degree in translation – he was however convinced that he would never achieve the necessary level in Japanese to be able to live there and in Int5 he argued that he would have fared better with another third language. After his stay in Japan, this impression of a lack of preparation did disappear temporarily and he spoke of feeling certain nostalgia and a wish to return. However, he also argued that it is quite easy to find a job, though bad, in the USA, while it is much more difficult for a foreigner in Japan. In Int5 he claimed that the USA had always been his plan A regarding immigration – though this was not at all this clear in his narratives in his first and second interview – but worried that he might be too afraid to move there in the end. This idea of fear already appeared earlier in the follow-up, as he mentioned for example that in his university a stay abroad was not obligatory as in some other universities and claimed to envy the students who knew that they had to do it. As he did not do any exchange in the end, apart

from the month in Japan, it is possible that he really refrained from these possibilities out of fear, though he never came to articulate his decision like this. His official reasons against exchange programmes were in Int5: costs, no real possibility to improve his English further, the risk to lose out in Japanese because of not being able to study it in the USA and the risk to prolong his studies against his plan to live abroad as soon as possible and so still get the international experience anyway. These reasons appeared repeatedly in the accounts of very different participants who did not participate in an exchange programme and Cara added that her lecturers had advised them against doing an Erasmus in their last year as the chances were high to fail a subject and therefore prolong the studies. Piruleta reflected in Int5 on her decision against an international experience before completing her degree, saying that she had claimed that she first wanted to finish her degree, but that it had been in reality a certain fear that had discouraged her. This may indicate that Nic only reproduced the common counter-arguments here, though his real reason not to move was his fear and that he was not alone with this fear, though it did not seem to be among the recognised reasons to refrain from international experiences, leading the participants to justify their decision differently, hiding their fears and, if ever, confronting them alone.

Nic: I'm a bit scared of living on my own, but well, (.) other than that... (.) Ehmm, (.) I don't know, I'd like to think that once I'm done with my degree, if I have an opportunity to leave, I will. You know? I will jump and do it. (.) But until something comes up, I don't know, you know?

Interviewer: Are you scared you won't leave in the end?

Nic: It's... frightening. (.) I'm frightened, because when I think about it... you know what happens? That some relatives from my father side, we don't... we don't get along very well, you know? (.) And most of them are forty or fifty years old, and they still live with their mom, you know? And that's something that... when I picture myself being like that, I'm scared, (.) I'm so scared. (.) I mean, if I feel remorse living with my family at 23, that means that I want to leave, right? Because I panic and think... Failing... Because, I mean, I've been saying for almost six years: "Ok, once I'm done, I'm leaving. Once I'm done, I'm leaving. Once I'm done, I'm leaving". And now that I'm almost done it's like... "Shoot, I need to leave", you know? I don't know, I start to panic like: "Shoot¹⁸⁰, I need to do (--)", I mean, because I want to, you know? But if I don't succeed it's like "Jeez, I've failed", do you know what I mean? (Int5 Nic, l.961-974).

N. showed from the beginning on a strong orientation towards mobility, speaking a lot about her sister's experience as an Erasmus and her wish to do the same. The sister came to move in the course of the follow-up to Germany and lived there, while N. did her Erasmus, though not in the same city. In spite of her high expectations, N. seemed a bit insecure in the preparations and her Erasmus did seem to go a bit different in the end (see *Change and Continuity*). After the year in Germany, she mentioned several ideas to leave again in a future, but as she situated all after graduation and still had several years to go to finish her degree, none of them was really elaborated yet.

The truth is that after having left [in the sense of living abroad temporarily], I'd love to leave again (Int5 N., l.87)

¹⁸⁰ The word used in the Catalan original was "*ostia*", just as in the next line where it was translated with "Jeez".

Another topic of interest in this axis were the participants' countries of origin and their plans and desires to visit them or to even return permanently. Distance played of course an important role in this, as the participants who came from countries in Latin America did not visit these countries in the course of the follow-up and mentioned to not having visited them in years. While Andrés mentioned in 4 out of 5 interviews (2-5) the plan to travel to his country of origin and finally bought the tickets for the trip in his last-year interview, he discarded in Int3 the possibility to live there again, even if it was only for a temporal stay as an exchange student. Irina attempted to set up an exchange programme with her country of origin, but then did her exchange with another country as it resulted to be too difficult and tedious to achieve while she was still a student. In spite of travelling quite a lot already in the course of the follow-up and to different countries, she did not mention any trip to her country of origin. However, it appeared repeatedly as a possible country to return to, arguing that her whole family had come to Spain with the idea of a temporal stay and that her parents were still decided to return for their retirement. The option of return formed hence an important part of her thinking about the world and never disappeared completely, though she also showed a certain tendency to speak of Latin America in general and idealised Latin Americans arguing that they were fighters and that ailments like depressions did not exist in Latin America. After her return from Mexico, she repeated several of her positive ideas about people in Latin America, but appeared much less idealistic and also mentioned negative aspects like a stronger machismo.

Irina: there is no time off due to depression, which is something very common here

Interviewer: But it doesn't exist as a concept or really there's no [depression]?

Irina: It doesn't even exist as a concept, no one thinks about stopping work because he is sad. No one. Not because your partner has died, or because they left you, or because they detected cancer. No. Over there, no matter what happens, you continue the day to day, you continue working and you continue forward¹⁸¹, at least that is what I have seen and what my family has also shown me and what they told me about the difference to here, because, as I tell you, a lot of perspective from there I don't have either, because I left when I was eight years old (...) well, I believe that the people there are very forward, a very big fighting spirit, because of course, if you stop working, you stop having an income, and there is no welfare state that gives you time off for depression for example (...) people have to fight more to survive. It is known that these are countries with economic difficulties, and for that reason, let's say, that like they are more prepared for strong blows and there is none ... and the minimum thing doesn't make them feel bad, so, whenever they speak of Latin America, apart from bad things, there is also talk that people are very happy there, very cheerful. Listening to music all day, dancing on the street if necessary. You go down the street and people greet you. Here if you say "hello good morning", you look at them weird and say: "do you know me? You don't know me, don't greet me, don't look at me." That's strange here, right? If someone says hello to me, it's like ... mmm how weird. Instead over there, you enter a place, they open the door, they greet you. If you go to a restaurant, whatever it is, even if it's a bar, they serve you super well. Thanks, please ... you know? A lot of education, a whole lot. Here, I don't know, I find a lot of differences, and the climate affects things a lot, the colder [it is], the people, they are more reserved, right? Not that they aren't educated, because there's education too, but they are very reserved. Maybe there they exceed confidence, which also creates as a bit of discomfort for you, doesn't it?

¹⁸¹ The expression used in the Spanish original was: "*echada para adelante*"

But it's like very uncomplicated. I think the people there are like that, very happy, very uncomplicated, and that's also what I'm looking for (Int4_1 Irina, l.212-236)

Irina: For example, male chauvinism¹⁸² is commonly observed there. Here, there's obviously male chauvinism too; we were educated under its influence, but there it persists. Then, of course, there are things that bother you, that impact you, like the standard of living but, then, there is the ambience, people's warmth, there they are like... I tell you that people there are warmer, more open, very welcoming and that is different from what can be observed here. I'm not saying that everybody is like this here, but in general, people here are colder, harder; there, on the contrary, people meet you and open their houses' door regardless of who you are.

Interviewer: Very well, and about male chauvinism, have you encountered any specific situation or something?

Irina: Yes. Well, I think it's the everyday life. For example, you can see that most people who drive are men and, then, if you are riding a bicycle for example, they always shout at you, tell you things. If you walk down the street, a man walks by and tells you unnecessary things, that you don't even listen to; so, as a woman you feel uncomfortable in the street, whether you are or not nice, tall, young, beautiful. It doesn't matter how you are, by the mere fact of being a woman they feel with the right to tell you things. I didn't like that, walking down the street and listening to those things; the way men and women interact is really different. And it's true there is a lot of male chauvinism, that means ideologies are unconsciously sexist. It's given for granted that men are unfaithful, that women should stay at home, that taking care of children is women's obligation and not men's, those things affect you. However, here things are still like that too, they are not very different from that. But here gradual changes are starting, while there everything is more traditional and that's annoying. (Int4_2 Irina, l.105-125)

The participants whose countries of origin were situated in Europe showed a different behaviour. Though Koala did also mention to not have travelled to his country in years, he did so in the course of the follow-up, joining his parents on their trip. He did not consider the possibility to return to live in his country of origin, but spoke of a wish to move to yet another country, as Spain was not to his liking either, and live there in the same neighbourhood with a friend from his country of origin. In the course of the follow-up he mentioned several options in this sense: Canada, Switzerland, Iceland and Germany. He represented repeatedly that the place in itself did not matter as much as being comfortable there and did not discard to stay permanently in a place, if he felt good there. Though he spoke very well of Lleida in his second interview, saying that once you have lived in Lleida it will always be your home, he discarded the possibility to be happy in Spain in his fifth-year interview, relating his future happiness to moving abroad again and setting himself the aim to have moved in 5 years. We spoke about the possibility to do an Erasmus, in his second-year interview when he said that he had had discarded to do an Erasmus to avoid the separation from N., but after their breakup he could now think of such possibilities. When I asked in Int3 if he did apply in the end, he answered that he had discarded the option, as none of the countries on the list appealed to him. He never did an Erasmus in the end, so N. was possibly not his only reason not to leave. His argumentation here is especially curious and may tell us something about the difficulties they encountered in their relationship, as she was convinced to do an Erasmus from the beginning on, leaving on occasion the impression that she only kept studying in order to do an Erasmus.

¹⁸² The expression used in the Spanish original was "*machismo*".

Xenia visited her country of origin repeatedly throughout the follow-up, leaving the impression that she already did so before becoming the girlfriend of a compatriot who had been living in Lleida, but returned to his country with his mother shortly before becoming her girlfriend. Though she had realistic possibilities to study medicine there as he did, she discarded this option from the beginning on, representing that the whole University system there was highly corrupt and you had to pay to pass an exam, achieving a higher or lower grade depending on how much you pay. However, just as Koala, she did not like Spain either and talked repeatedly about a wish to move abroad, mentioning Norway as an option in her second-year interview and Switzerland in her third. In Int4 she was decided to move with her boyfriend wherever he would achieve a placement to complete his practical training as a physician. However, she changed her mind completely and told me in Int5 that she had left her boyfriend and was decided to study and live for now in Barcelona, not yet knowing what she would do afterwards (see also *Happiness*). Here she left the impression that the whole desire for mobility had been more the desire of her boyfriend than her own and that she refrained from it, once she awoke from her lethargy and started to wonder what she really wanted (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). As we cannot know how these desires developed, it seemed to be more adequate not to include her into any of the above-mentioned types, acknowledging that she had not yet made up her mind in this regard.

Ariel had a similar tendency to speak negatively of her country of origin, saying in Int1 that she would not want to live there again. She mentioned a desire to travel there in her first-year interview and did such a trip in the course of the follow-up, but did not seem to travel there as frequently as Xenia. Nevertheless, she mentioned the possibility to study Medicine in her country of origin after finishing her current degree already in Int1, discarded it in Int4 arguing that she would be already 32 when finally finishing her studies and finally told me in Facebook messages that she had moved to her country of origin and began to study medicine after graduation. In several other interviews, she also mentioned possibilities to return to her country of origin, mentioning the possibility to open a travel agency there when she was around 40. Such contradictions were quite typical in Ariel's interviews and though they might be in part an effect of her language difficulties, in particular her ability to highlight possibilities and hypotheses as such rather than statements, it is also possible that she was in many ways still making up her mind and kept therefore showing rather abrupt changes in direction. Just as Koala and Xenia she did not like Spain and was decided to leave again, though she kept discarding countries in the course of the follow-up. In a way, it seemed that all the participants with a migration history had another migration directly on their horizon of opportunities and felt a certain need to decide whether or not to stay in Spain, homogenising Spain and other countries indirectly as if no regional differences existed. However, it has to be said that they all came from countries of origin with more economic difficulties than Spain – especially at the moment of their immigrations – so this might mark their profile here and a person from an economically more potent country might have another perspective. Another important and related point in this line is nationality. While Irina had dual citizenship from the beginning on, Koala and Xenia mentioned their applications for Spanish citizenship towards the end of the follow-up. Both of them highlighted that their families had lived for 10 years in Spain and were therefore now eligible for the citizenship, so we can suppose that Ariel could not apply yet as she had arrived much later. While Koala's family needed the Spanish nationality to have a EU

nationality and be allowed to move freely in the EU, Xenia already had a EU nationality but told me stories of acquaintances who had faced discriminations because of this nationality, in concrete a friend who had been told directly in Germany that they would not give her a job as a teacher, because the children's parents would not accept a teacher from her country of origin (see *Becoming a professional*). Migration histories are, in conclusion, an important dimension of difference in this axis.

Regarding other social dimensions, it is eye-catching that the participants from social class A (Sara, Piruleta and Peter) did all prefer to live in Catalonia, while only one of the participants from social class D showed the same tendency (Floreta). Neither of the three mentioned the possibility to do an Erasmus, though they all knew people who had temporarily lived abroad or were still living abroad and considered other types of temporal stays abroad. Piruleta argued when I asked her for it that she preferred to do an *au pair*, representing that like this she would earn money rather than spending it on parties – as her sister did throughout her Erasmus. When I asked Peter in Int3 if he wanted to do an Erasmus, he only said that it was nothing he had in mind. This might indicate that though these participants knew about the Erasmus programme, they did not consider it an option for themselves and did not even think about the possibility to apply. This may partly explain the underrepresentation from students from lower social classes in the Erasmus programme (Ballatore & Ferede, 2013) and represents an additional risk to miss out on temporal stays abroad.

Piruleta: especially over there, because it's much more college oriented, there are more parties... I went there for two days and, phew...

Interviewer: And is she involved in everything?

PIRULETA: She's everywhere, I didn't get into this world. When I just arrived, I was very tired, and she went partying. I told her: "You should go, I should go to sleep". But it was very nice. Last year, I told you that I wanted to study abroad, but I didn't want to do an Erasmus program, no?

Interviewer: Yes, you said that you didn't want to go on Erasmus but that you would like to do an *au pair*, or something like that.

Piruleta: Exactly, just not on Erasmus. Now I've been there, and I see that it's somewhere you go to have fun as well, at least she goes out a lot, and it would be nice. But I would rather be an *au pair*, I would be with children and I would learn English. I have some friends who've done it and they've liked it... But I don't want to go on Erasmus. (Int2 Piruleta, l.370-378)

Interviewer: and have you thought of doing something like an Erasmus?

Peter: no, actually no, it's not on my mind

Interviewer: it's not interesting for you?

Peter: for now I don't see it (Int3 Peter, l.418-421)

As Bathmaker et al. (2013) showed that temporal stays abroad are, among others, the new distinctive markers of employability on the labour market, social inequality is directly reproduced. In another publication (Rubio & Strecker, 2016), I have argued that the middle classes seem to use temporal stays in London as a way to construct an attractive CV and avoid gaps. London appeared repeatedly in the participants' accounts as many of them had visited London, knew people who were living there or had been living there for a while or considered moving there themselves. Peter, for example, had several friends who moved to London in the course of the follow-up. Even before this, he mentioned a temporal stay abroad as a thing he

could have done, but postponed for after his graduation. In Int2, he confirmed that he would leave, but hoped that Spain would get by (*arreglar-se*) avoiding him the leave. After this indirect reference to economic crisis and the possibility to move into an economic exile, he mentioned in Int3 that several of his friends had moved to London and invited him to join them, saying that the ideas was attractive (*fa gracia*), but not before his graduation. However, he also said at another point that he would first try to find a job and only leave after a while after graduation, when he did not find any. Asked if leaving was for him a dream or a necessity, he answered that neither of the two, considering it an experience and arguing that it was a good alternative to feeling useless and suffering economic problems because of unemployment. However, he also cautioned that this is only true if nothing holds you back and that he would only leave temporarily. In the course of the follow-up, his accounts changed as his perceptions of his labour-market opportunities and of his friends' stay in London changed. In concrete, he came to believe that he would have to wait a couple of years for a first call from the substitution-teacher list and then start to work as a teacher, as this was what happened to his sister. In the meantime, he perceived his friends' stay in London as a way to waste their time, as they did not improve their English as they had planned to and a friend, who had first wanted to improve his English and then take a course to be able to work in the field he had taken a vocational training in, kept working in a restaurant after all these years and had not advanced at all in this direction. In Peter's opinion his friends were having a good time, as they lived together and spent the money they earned on parties, but in the end they were not advancing anywhere and the day they would decide to return, they would neither have further studies, nor savings, nor an English title. He still considered joining them temporarily, but following the example of another friend who left with a return ticket in his bag, setting like this a clear limit to this life-style and avoiding to get stuck.

Social class seems to be, in conclusion, a highly important division regarding mobility. Tendencies of (auto-)exclusion from student exchange programmes favour that young students from social class A are less likely to participate in these and may miss out on the experience of a temporal stay and hence its attraction on their CVs. As Peter's friends seemed to be from a similar class of origin as he was, their experience working abroad might furthermore indicate that temporal stays abroad with the aim to work do not work well for young people with little economic capital, as they end up working many hours to pay the rent and get stuck in a routine that does not allow them to advance, rather than turning their stay abroad in an asset after returning or constructing themselves a comfortable life in the new location. This is also in line with the participants' complaint about their monotonous routines once in full-time employment (see *Labour-market entrance*) and may indicate that young people underestimate the effect of full-time employment on their time management, leisure and social life, believing that it does not make a big difference to go abroad as a student or as a worker, though it does. In every case, social inequality is reproduced on the labour market.

6.4.8. *Change and Continuity*

"Tots els amics de joventesa que he retrobat són, si fa no fa, com ja eren als vint anys. En aquesta edat ja som comeditats. Després, l'únic que fem són reedicions."

ArturBladé i Desumvila (Benissanet, Ribera d'Ebre 1907-Barcelona 1995)

Roda Mots 15.01.2014

Change and continuity are obviously elements to consider when comparing several interviews conducted with the same persons over several years. In youth research, they gain additional importance as the concept of youth builds on the idea of a transition (see *Youth Research and Transitions*), so that change – from childhood to adulthood – is a main characteristic. At the same time, continuity is crucial from an educational perspective as the whole educational system is designed to form a future generation of citizens, provoking and accompanying small changes that are meant to last throughout their adult life. However, longitudinal research on the University transition is rather rare and little is known about how, for instance, vocational interests change in the course of the years (Hoff et al., 2018). Previous research on changes in adolescence and young adulthood encountered an increase in maturity in the sense that "people become more agreeable, conscientious, and emotionally stable" and "suggests that cognitive and academic development is progressive and cumulative, whereas personality development progresses in the context of ever shifting social circumstances" (Hoff et al., 2018, p. 10;13). This means that we should expect to observe differences regarding personality development, including interest traits, depending on the different circumstances and trajectories of the participants, while an overall increase in maturity levels and academic skills should apply to all similarly.

In a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies considering vocational interests, it was observed that "interest scores generally decreased during early adolescence, but then increased during late adolescence. During young adulthood, (...) interests involving People tended to increase (...), whereas interests involving Things either decreased (...) or remained constant (...). Gender differences associated with occupational stereotypes reached a lifetime peak during early adolescence, then tended to decrease in all subsequent age periods" (Hoff et al., 2018). The authors did hereby build on a theoretical framework differentiating realistic ("working with hands, tools, and materials"), investigative ("scientific and research activities"), artistic ("self-expression and creativity typically associated with the performing, written, and visual arts"), social ("helping and nurturing"), enterprising ("selling, managing, and social influence typically in a business context"), and conventional ("ordered and systematic manipulation of data with clear standards") interests (Hoff et al., 2018), which are furthermore understood as an expression of "the person's motivation, knowledge, personality, and ability" (Holland, 1958) (see also *Study-Choice Narratives under Construction*). The meta-analysis showed that artistic, social and enterprising interests increased with time, while conventional interests decreased and realistic and investigative interests remained stable (Hoff et al., 2018). Previous research encountered gender differences, describing men to be more likely to show realistic and investigative and women to show social, artistic and conventional interests (Hoff et al., 2018). Regarding age, high consistency in the order of interest rankings has been observed, though adolescence (12-18 years) has been identified as the least stable time span in this regard, while a peak in stability is observed for 25-30 years (Hoff et al., 2018). Theories explaining interest changes have highlighted the importance of an initial trigger, while different approaches explain the maintenance and reinforcement of this initial interest differently (Hoff et al., 2018).

In this sense, change and continuity form the core of this thesis and appear repeatedly in the diverse sections and, in particular, in all axes of longitudinal analysis. The focus of this axis is therefore different, treating their own beliefs to have experienced an important change in the course of the follow-up and life-changing experiences, as far as these appeared in their narratives.

Summarising the most important changes we have seen so far, we can say that many participants showed a tendency to postpone their plans for mobility in the course of the follow-up and came to discard options like exchange programmes (Nic, Cara) or master degrees (Sara) or moving abroad (Maduixa), they had considered interesting at the beginning of the follow up (see *Mobility*). We have also observed changes regarding the way to express themselves and take control in the interview situation (see *Interview characteristics*) and a general adaptation to the profession, especially among the participants who had already found work in their field at the end of the follow-up (see *Becoming a professional*). Though most participants advanced towards the completion of development tasks, some remained rather static (N., Skone) or exchanged advancements in one development task with regressions in another (Willy) (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). We have seen how the participants' attitude and their happiness changed – or not – in the course of the follow-up (see *Happiness*) and how their ideas regarding relationships changed after breakups (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). Moreover, the longitudinal approach has made it possible to compare the different constructions of crucial elements of their life stories over time, especially regarding their study choices (see *Study-Choice Narratives under Construction*) and their future (see *Future ideals and fears*).

Regarding the expectation of a dramatic change when entering HE that turned out to be much less dramatic in most cases, it was interesting to observe how the participants claimed to have changed in their first and in their last year: While we have seen above (see *Change and Locality*) that many participants did not consider the change as dramatic as they had expected, several came to believe to have changed in the course of the years, though not necessarily as a direct effect of HE, but also of the pass of time. However, the wording these participants used was often very similar to the things they had already said in their first year: they spoke of an opening up towards new people, of a taking care for themselves, being more responsible and organised or even mature. This may indicate that the changes caused by the University transition happen, predominantly, on entrance, though they may become more inscribed and enduring over the years. When I mentioned this observation to Cara, she expressed its normality, arguing that if you do not 'wake up' (espavilar) at the beginning, it is bad. However, as Piruleta's quotes and her comment regarding her ex-boyfriend show, especially further life events may intervene after the change experienced at the beginning of University, leading to further changes.

This highlights once again the importance of the moment of data construction, as young people seem to be more likely to perceive their HE experience as provoking personal change towards the end of their studies or after graduation. Though we can say only little about the transition to the labour market, given that only few participants achieved it before their last interview, we have already seen above that this transition seemed to provoke yet another change in their lives (see *Becoming a professional*), as they tended to value things differently, for example their leisure time.

Interviewer: Do you think you've changed since you started University?

Piruleta: I think I've changed (.) because: (--) at the beginning I was kind of inhibited (...) and I do think I've changed (.) I'm more committed to everything (.) as well in the shared flat (.) I had to change (-) my mentality (.) and tell myself "you're in the University". I need to do more things to get good results (.) and I have changed in that sense (.) (Int1 Piruleta, l.127-135)

Interviewer: Very well, and do you think that you've changed during the time you've been in University?

Piruleta: Yes, of course. (.) Yes, and to a large extent it was due to that relationship I had which really, really, really ate me up.

Interviewer: So, have you changed more because of this relationship than because of the University?

Piruleta: Yes, of course, yes, yes, yes. Also because of university, I've grown up, I've learnt more things, I've met other people, I've opened myself and changed a lot. But I had this on the side, this relationship that restricted me so much, because of the jealousy and the obsession. Oh, no, no, no. (Int5 Piruleta, l.670-677)

Interviewer: And do you think that University has changed you in any way, or... [Cara: Yes] or do you think it's mostly due to the fact that time goes by?

Cara: No, University as well, because I was rather shy, and while studying I found that (.) they were all quite the extrovert type, very outgoing, truly expressive, and I adjusted well, I opened up and yes, that has changed me.

Interviewer: I seem to recall that you said that during your first year, that it had already happened back then, so it was at the very beginning [Cara: yes, yes] that this change happened...

Cara: If you don't get your act together in the beginning, it's not good¹⁸³. [[laughing]] (Int5 Cara, l.461-468)

In the longitudinal analyses, I started to notice that several participants mentioned incisive events in their lives that seemed to influence their decisions and attitudes significantly. Most of these life-changing experiences were already mentioned in other axes, so here I would simply like to focus on the type of events and experiences that appeared in the different interviews with a special potential to change the participants' lives, though it is of course difficult to say if an experience would be, in the long run, life-changing or if its effects would wear off with the time.

An example that has already appeared repeatedly is the end of a love relationship. As we have seen in several of the previous axes, the participants suffered from such separations and came to change their whole perspective regarding relationships and themselves afterwards (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*, *Future ideals and fears*, *Happiness* and *Mobility*). In Piruleta's case, the separation coincided in time with the death of several of her grandparents, so the effects of all the losses melted into one big wound, she claimed to still be healing from in her last interview (see *Happiness*).

Piruleta: I'm happy but... but I think that everything that has happened to me during these last few years has worn me out quite a lot. (.) My past relationship, losing so many people I love that has really affected me, but it has nothing to do with my degree. University has brought me very good things, so it has been more all that has been on the side rather than... I mean, now, I've got a family who gives me everything, I have friends who are a 10

¹⁸³ The expression used in the Catalan original was: "si no t'espaviles al principi malament".

[out of 10], and a partner who as well, so yes, it could be said that yes [I'm happy], but now I need to focus on myself and do things for myself, and that's the part that's missing.

Interviewer: To heal a little bit.

Piruleta: Yes, to heal myself. (Int5 Piruleta, I.693-701)

Death was in this sense another example of life-changing experiences several participants faced in one way or another. Especially many grandparents died in the course of the follow-up, several after a prolonged ailment the participants often experienced at close range and also had to cope with. Sara cohabited with her grandfather until his death, but focused on her mother's sacrifices when talking about him, as she had come to attend him 24/7. Piruleta lived in Lleida when her grandparents got sick, but attempted to spend as much time as possible with them and suffered severely when her biggest confident and referent in the world died in the form of her grandmother. Apart from three grandparents, Piruleta had already lost people in her surroundings and already told me in her first interview that she felt uncomfortable when the topic came up in class. I preferred not to ask her for reasons, but as she told me in her second interview that a 16-year-old girl from her *esplai* (see footnote 141) had died from cancer, we can suppose that she already referred to this (upcoming) death in her first interview. In Int5, she mentioned, moreover, another dead friend from her village and as she referred this time to a male friend, it must be yet another friend than the girl from Int2. Piruleta herself considered that all these experiences changed her and suggested the effects of emotions for the studies as an additional topic I should treat in my project. Here she introduced the concept of emotional well-being and mentioned as another example bullying, saying that several of her friends had suffered bullying in school and were still suffering its effects. Her own experiences changed her in the sense that she felt much closer to her hometown and the rest of her family and was now decided to move back to raise her future children there. Moreover, she mentioned the fear to lose someone else, but highlighted that she did not want to live in fear as this was not good either. As she had survived this very bad time, she believed that she would be able to survive anything and felt stronger, in this sense, or better acquainted with her own strength. Additionally to her new independence in her relationship, she had no problems to set the rules for their future, leaving him the choice to either join her on her way back to her town or leave her life. However, as she was still working in Lleida and had just signed a one-year contract, there was still a certain margin of time to consider. Moreover, Piruleta was in her last-year interview aware that all her experiences of loss had changed her, but as she also spoke of an incomplete healing process, it seems that she did not yet know how constant this change was going to be.

Willy experienced, at the beginning of the follow-up, a similar encounter with death regarding his grandparents and mentioned furthermore that his mother had been diagnosed with cancer. Though his mother seemed to get better with the treatment and only had to go to regular check-ups to ensure that the cancer did not come back towards the end of the follow-up, the possibility of death was surely a topic for Willy to think about. Similarly to Piruleta he became much more family-oriented in the course of the follow-up and kept mentioning his mother with much more frequency than in his first-year interview, though not in order to speak about her health, but to highlight, for example, that he was more like his mother, while his younger brother was more like his father etc. These comments may indicate that he had thought a lot about his mother, identifying with her and even assuming her role in the family

and the family-owned rural tourism, helping her with the work as much as he could and moving in with his younger brother when this first moved to Barcelona to begin his studies. This new family orientation came to countervail the positive effects of his moving to Barcelona. Just after experiencing this move as a liberation in Int1 and dreaming of a conquest of the world, he saw his home base crumbling and preferred to stay close (see *Mobility*). However, he still experienced yet another event as highly important, telling me in a Facebook message before our third-year interview about an important change. When we met, I asked him for this message and he told me right away that he had referred to a change in his housing situation, as he had now moved into a shared flat with fellow students, among others his best friend. This change might not appear too important as many participants kept changing flats and flatmates and Willy had already changed his housing once before, but it was certainly important for Willy. Apart from his big announcement, we can also deduce this importance from his comments about his housing in Int 5, saying that he had been very lonely in his first housing arrangements as a subtenant and his well-being increased significantly when moving in with friends. Moreover, he described their search for a flat in a style typical for love stories, highlighting that he saw the flat and knew that it was the right flat for them, swooning over its many advantages.

Bad moments also talking about flats, because I had been renting rooms, right? And at first, I was with a family, well, an older couple, and then I lived with a widow. (.) And then of course, sometimes you think there's a certain amount of trust or reliance and then you realize it's not there. Which things...? Nothing important, but once I moved out and started sharing a flat with students, obviously there are some conflicts, but something like that...

Interviewer: Did you feel better with the students?

Willy: Yes yes, I especially didn't feel so lonely. In the beginning, I spent a lot of hours by myself, and then, well, in the end you trust them more than some other person who is not studying the same as you, does not have the same interests nor the same ideas about the world, etc., etc., etc. (Int5 Willy, l.478-488)

In his last-year interview, Willy continued to give crucial importance to having moved from his rural village to the metropolis (see *Happiness*), but turned to live with his parents, as their residence was at a commutable distance from his new job. Though this arrangement might have been temporary, it is also possible that his time as a HE student was only a temporal escape from rurality in the end, though the years in Barcelona may continue to influence his life as a memory.

Several other participants mentioned events as life-changing other participants might not have given a second thought about. Xenia, for example, considered her not entering into medicine as a life-changing experience, in her first-year interview. She even believed that this bad experience had made her mature before her time and turned much more realistic about the sad realities of life, distinguishing herself from her fellow students. While she spoke in Int1 of a depression, she seemed to be coping quite well in Int2, after having finally abandoned the plan to study medicine and enrolled in biotechnology instead. However, as we have analysed above (see *Happiness*), Xenia seemed to have fallen into a certain lethargy, ceding the reign of her life to her boyfriend and mother, accepting their future plans as hers. Her upcoming graduation and the imminent move to the UK to join her boyfriend made her wake up and realise that this was not the life she wanted. However, she basically limited herself here to resisting her

boyfriend and mother, leaving the first and being about to leave the second at least physically by moving to Barcelona, and did not plan further than a one-year master into the future. As the follow-up ended at this point, we cannot know if her decision against the UK was not, in the end, a simple sign of cold feet facing the upcoming commitment and a temporal flight. Though moving to Barcelona also included a physical movement, we can furthermore consider it much more a staying, as she had already lived several months in Barcelona for an internship and planned on moving in with friends from her degree who also moved to Barcelona to study master degrees. So in this sense, it is also possible that she continued in her lethargy avoiding big moves and possibly fearing the big change it would represent to move to the UK and live with her boyfriend. Depending on the interpretation, her exclusion from medicine becomes a central experience, marking her life over years, or a temporal downside she quickly adapted to.

Xenia: (--) Look (-) when compared with other people, I feel more mature (.) (-) as if I experienced (--) more difficulties than them, I don't know (.) (...) I am more mature (.)

Interviewer: What do you mean when you say "more difficulties than them"?

Xenia: (--) Well, the fact that (...) I did not enter medicine and I really had a bad time (-), I felt depressed, I cried everyday, get it? [Interviewer: hmhm] And (-) and in this short time (.) that are more or less two months, or how much? from June to September, from September to the present (.) That is (-) just a short time and I feel I grew a lot (Int1 Xenia, I.202-212)

Differently to these participants, Skone and N. were convinced in their last-year interviews to have experienced important changes with permanent effects. The life-changing event was in N.'s case her participation in the Erasmus programme. Regarding Skone, we may identify a talk by Josef Ajram¹⁸⁴, a Barcelonan athlete, writer and trader, as the trigger of his internal change as it led him to consider the stock market as a way to become rich and live the life he envisioned. He read one of Ajram's books but did not soon overcome this initial master, turning towards others that were even more successful – in particular Bill Gates and Warren Buffett. In the last interview, he referred to Ajram even a bit derogative, saying that if this guy had been able to this, he could do the same or more. So in a certain way Ajram's talk was just a first impulse in a direction towards which he then started to develop quickly, first reading biographies and then through his autodidactic studying of the stock-market dynamics.

Regarding Skone and N. it is therefore interesting to analyse up to which point there was also continuity in their narratives. According to his last interview, Skone came to question his study choice in his last year before graduation and noticed that he did not envision himself in the occupations his fellow students had in mind. This led him to wonder whether he should continue to study veterinary medicine in Barcelona though this had been his plan from the beginning on. After attending the talk by Josef Ajram, he revised his negative image of brokers and decided to invest on the stock market himself and decided not to continue in the UAB as he had planned. Though he mentioned at another point of the interview that people who study degrees they do not really want to work in lose their time, Skone considered that his degree had been important for his itinerary as it allowed him to find his way. If it had not been for meeting the fellow student who took him to Ajram's talk, he might have never discovered

¹⁸⁴ For more information on Josef Ajram see his personal website: <https://www.josefajram.es/josef-ajram/> [last access: 07.06.2018].

this possibility for himself. Once decided to become a trader himself, Skone refrained from continuing his studies in Barcelona and graduated from his degree rather than prolonging his studies to be able to complete the newly opened degree in veterinary medicine in the UdL (see *Sudden changes of the rules: Veterinary Medicine and the UdL*). This decision was momentous as the Agreement with the UAB ended the same year, so he did no longer have the possibility to complete the studies in veterinary medicine there in another year. As this left him with the degree certificate in CSA only, it is furthermore important to mention that the UdL changed the title of the degree substituting “*Salut*” (Health) by “*Producció*” (Production), so that CSA turned into CPA and ceased to exist as such. As Skone himself considered, this decision devalued his studies, given that they had only been offered for very few years and most of the graduates had made use of the agreement with the UAB to complete the studies in veterinary medicine and did therefore not enter the labour market with this degree certificate only. Though Skone was, at least at the moment of the interview, aware of these implications, he kept his decision up, arguing that it made no sense to follow the path to become a vet once he knew that he did not want to work in this field anyway. Here he developed a sophisticated subjective theory (Latour, 2005) about the importance of detecting and correcting errors and blamed the educational system for teaching its pupils to avoid committing mistakes, rather than showing them how to learn from them. As the crucial change in his itinerary was the main topic of his last interview, Skone also shared several subjective theories about life and society in general, referring to diverse celebrities from different fields. Another new element he mentioned in Int 5 was the practice of meditation.

In spite of his strong belief in his dramatic internal change and without abnegating its importance, in the longitudinal analyses appeared diverse continuities to previous interviews. Though he had always said to continue his studies in the UAB, he kept changing the professional profile he had in mind from interview to interview, starting with vet in Int1 and mentioning inspector, lecturer and researcher in the course of the follow-up (see *Study-Choice Narratives under Construction*). Furthermore, he gave repeatedly importance to earning a high salary, arguing for example that inspectors earn more than vets etc. In this sense, the process of doubt what exactly to do after his studies may have been his constant companion throughout his degree course, leading him to seek out the best of the possible careers. Similarly, Skone had been developing subjective theories about society and education in previous interviews and had already quoted celebrities like Mark Zuckerberg and Will Smith in his third and fourth year interview, respectively. Especially his interpretation of the quote from Smith appeared as highly interesting, as I noticed a certain modification of the quotation when I looked it up.

Interviewer: That would be 2024 then

Skone: I don't have the least idea and, sincerely, I don't like thinking so far ahead

Interviewer: So far ahead

Skone: Yes, because that generates, or may generate, a feeling of nervousness. If you set yourself long-term goals, then the time comes and perhaps you haven't reached them. I believe in setting daily goals.

Interviewer: But do you have any dreams? Something you would like? Besides you clear goals (-) No

Skone: Not at all. There is this saying from... do you know who Will Smith is?

Interviewer: Will Smith? The actor?

Skone: Yes. There is this sentence he said one day, and stayed in my memory, that goes “...don’t say I’m going to build the greatest wall that’s ever been built...But say ‘I’m going to lay this brick as perfectly as a brick can be laid’. You do that every single day. And soon you have a wall”.

Interviewer: A brick every single day...

Skone: So, I believe it’s better if you set small goals ... (Skone, Int4, l.610-624)

"You don't set out to build a wall. You don't say 'I'm going to build the biggest, baddest, greatest wall that's ever been built.' You don't start there. You say, 'I'm going to lay this brick as perfectly as a brick can be laid. You do that every single day. And soon you have a wall."¹⁸⁵

He slightly retells the quote of Smith in a way, as if he would not value long-term objectives, as it serves him to justify in the context of the interview why he did not think further in his future yet and had no dream to follow. The real quote could just as well highlight the importance of doing every step and part perfectly to achieve the overall aim of a perfect end-product and does, hence, not necessarily support Skone’s lack of a dream. Even more interesting is here that he claimed in Int4 not to have a dream and considered this an ideal philosophy of life, while he pitied in Int5 Cara, as I mentioned her comment on not having a dream unlike her friends.

I feel so sorry for this girl (-) because this happens all the time, doesn’t it? Probably, we always put people above us (...) what I propose this girl is to take a sheet of paper and consider... (...) let’s say, we people are what we think, aren’t we? If you don’t think about anything, you don’t go anywhere, that is probably what is happening to the girl, if everything goes well perhaps it’s not relevant for her to think about where she is going to, because everything is all right. (Int5 Skone, l.990-1003)

Here we see that Skone had his own issues to identify his dream and a clear objective and seemed to have taken his study choice much more out of opportunistic (good employment opportunities and salaries) and practical (offered in Lleida, *numerus clausus*) considerations than out of vocation. Though he sold his study choice in each interview quite well and also defended his lack of a dream in his fourth year interview, once he had identified a dream, he changed his discourse, highlighting the importance of having a dream and spoke with an air of superiority of those who did not have a dream, rather than saying that he had been in a similar situation not too long ago. Moreover, he continued to act with certain superiority, though his eloquence and discursive abilities seemed to improve continuously, as the number of direct contradictions and incomprehensibilities lowered (see *Interview characteristics*). Nevertheless, I had severe difficulties to envision his daily routine in Int5 and only came to develop a clearer idea when we turned to talk about some aspects in more detail later in the interview.

Further continuity appears regarding Skone’s life, as observed from the outside. Though he already highlighted that his change was mainly internal, it is important to consider that the external repercussions were – at least at the moment of the last interview – virtually 0, as he kept living with his mother, continued without earnings and organised his social activity quite similarly to previous years, having the same girlfriend etc. Though we might imagine that he spent now more time at home as his autodidactic studies did not require him to attend classes

¹⁸⁵ The original quote as published here: <https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-1488/Will-Smith-on-Building-a-Wall.html> [last access: 08.06.2018]

physically, the computer had always played an important role in his daily activities. There is, furthermore, an important continuity observable in his decision to stay in Lleida, as he had argued in his first interview to have decided against moving to Barcelona or to Madrid, forecasting the later move to Barcelona. In Int1 he had directly mentioned his friends and girlfriend as a reason to stay, but after the separation he highlighted the importance of not making your decisions dependent on your life partner, if you want a relationship to work. Nevertheless, he continued to live in the city where his new girlfriend lived and studied, so it is also possible that he highlighted that the decision had been independent from her, though he (subconsciously) wanted to stay close to his life partner (see *Mobility*). He also mentioned a wish to live for a couple of years in the USA and considered at the beginning of the follow-up that just after his graduation would be a good moment for it. In Int5 he kept mentioning this wish, but did not mention any clear plans to move there soon, so he also postponed this plan, avoiding another move. Though he represented in his last interview that his future work as a trader would allow him to work from any place in the world with a computer and an internet connection, he did not change his housing and city of residence in the course of the follow-up, though this option had obviously come to mind repeatedly. From this perspective, Skone might also leave the impression to have avoided change – in the sense of moving to Barcelona – rather than experiencing the immense change he considered. And if he – even subconsciously – turned to stay in Lleida because of a woman, this would also be a continuity in his narratives, though it is also possible that he exaggerated the importance of his girlfriend in Int1, in order to not say, for example, that the idea to move out had scared him. As the follow-up ended at this point, we cannot know if and how Skone came to implement his internal change into his life. That he abandoned a plan he had been upholding over four years is in every case very significant.

Similarly to Skone, N. spoke of a crucial change in her life in her last interview, ascribing it in her case to her Erasmus in Germany. N. was convinced to have changed as a person, to have a different perspective on life and the world and believed to have finally encountered the necessary motivation to complete her degree.

Well, I think that, I don't know, I have like defined my principles, and with all those things, I'm reflecting a lot lately. I have defined my principles as a person, I would say, these last two years, the things that I think are more important. I don't know, this year I honestly feel much different from who I was two years ago, like a lot, I feel like a different person. And when I came back people told me so: "Wow, you really see that you've been abroad". My mom was telling me: "I perceive you're more mature". And I was thinking: "I don't feel anything different", you know? At that time, when I had just come back, I thought: "I feel the same". And over time yes, I've realized it, and I don't know if it's because I've changed afterwards or I don't know, but what is true is that I've come to realize that, in a way or another, I really am a different person, you know? The experience and many other things that, I don't know... (.) I've changed for the better, I think, and I don't know, I'm happy with how things are going, I really am. (Int5 N., l.1154-1163)

Just as in Skone's case, most of these ideas were not at all new in N.'s accounts. In concrete, she had explained her academic difficulties from her third year on with a lack of motivation, claiming every year that she was now motivated and would finish her studies. And just as in all previous interviews, as well in her last year, N. did not claim to finally like her degree and to envision herself working in it, but continued to base her new motivation to finish it on the wish

to finally do something else that was more to her liking. Similarly, she continued to identify dancing as her big passion, but did not dare to commit herself completely to this field, preferring a profession with more economic stability. As her last-year interview took place later in the academic course than usually, she could already relate to first academic results when constructing her learner identity, but basically continued to construct this identity as successful, explaining all difficulties away with her lack of motivation and language difficulties in the case of her Erasmus abroad etc. (see *Academic success*).

Regarding her theories and perspectives, we can notice a certain internationalisation in her last year as she repeatedly compared her observations and experiences from different countries – mainly Germany and France, where she had been on a holiday after her Erasmus in Germany. However, she had already had a more international perspective before, as she repeatedly referred to her sister, who had done an Erasmus in France, encountered a German life partner and moved with him to Germany in the course of the follow-up. Even when talking about her Erasmus, she repeated many of the ideas she had mentioned before doing the Erasmus, arguing that she had opened up, excelled herself and learned to manage her life all alone, apart from highlighting the great experience in itself. In spite of all these claims, she also mentioned certain difficulties to meet and spend time with other Erasmus students due to living in another student residence – a residence she had chosen on purpose and did not change once she noticed that it limited her participation in the Erasmus life –, her dedication to her studies that left her less time to travel and party and her attempt to not spend more money than necessary. Though these explanations sound logical, contradictions appear when we consider that she also mentioned to have travelled almost every second month to Spain and that her boyfriend visited her in the months she did not travel. Moreover, her parents and her sister visited her and especially her sister came to be an important back-up when she had to move her flat just before the final exams, though we can also wonder if she really came to manage her life all alone with all this support. Rather than making many international friends to visit, she basically mentioned one Erasmus from Spain with whom she maintained the contact after her return, commenting on the difficulties they had to visit each other. Though her Erasmus might have still been a great experience, N. seemed to have limited her experience repeatedly through her decisions, losing out on an important part of what she considered constituent of an Erasmus. In many senses, she seemed to reproduce in Int5 the expectations she had had before the Erasmus, affirming that she had made the great experience she had expected to find, though her diverse explanations of difficulties lead to a different impression.

I had exams and with those difficulties on top of that, well, it's complicated, and one must be realistic and understand it, but well, it was a bit... it crushed me a little bit, you know? Because I dedicated a lot of hours to studying, I had Erasmus mates who were saying: "Hey, we are visiting Budapest, come!" you know? And no, I was like: "I (.) can't come", you know? And also, it costed money, because I thought: "Jeez, I'm already spending a lot just by being here", right? The student housing and everything, and all, and I have to study (...) and then I thought: "Oh, in a way, I've missed some things", right? (...) So that saddened me, but well, I also think that that was what I needed to do, so it's done, and it's fine, I enjoyed it as well and now it's done. (Int5 N., I.916-924)

My sister came to help me with the flat change, because like this I could study a bit in the meantime. (...) well as I had been coming here [repeatedly], I kept bringing things as well, you know? I kept returning things and taking others with me (Int5 N., l.998-1003)

Most people on Erasmus were staying in other dorms, you know? There was practically no one on Erasmus in my residence. (...) Therefore, I was all day like, I mean, when I was at class I was at class, but when I came back home, I was alone often. And sometimes, just being on a different country makes you feel lonely enough, right? (Int5 N., l.1497-1505)

I thought: "you don't really know what you'll find in there, maybe you'll get along with the flatmates, but maybe not, and then it's for a whole year", right? (...) I think that was a mistake. But well, I thought it would be for the best, that way I would have my own space and my privacy, you know? And I thought: "Well, if I need to meet someone, I will meet them outside", right? Actually, people started getting to know each other in the flats, you know? They formed groups and also in the other student residences and all, and then if I wanted to meet an Erasmus friend or whatever, any other friend, I had to travel each time and they were living together, you know? And of course, relationships are much stronger when you share a living space, because you see each other a lot more, I had to travel just for that. (Int5 N., l.1530-1541)

It does not make much sense to develop a typology here, given that so few participants related to the idea of having experienced an important change. However, it is eye-catching that both, Skone and N., were identified as from social class D. Though it was foreseeable that we would encounter continuities even in the most changed participants' interviews, the analyses showed here that the construction of a profound change may also work as a discursive strategy that allowed the participants to justify a change in their decisions (Skone) or their belief in upcoming academic success (N.). In other words, it might have been easier or looked much better to refer to dramatic changes than to explain more profane reasons or to admit to have no reason at all to anticipate such improvements. That none of the participants from social class A displayed such a discursive strategy may then, once again, indicate that their ability to leave a good impression was more limited (see *Interview characteristics*). Apart from a less effective coping with their own doubts, this might leave them in a disadvantage in job interviews, conversations with lecturers or any type of oral presentation that requires them to display security and confidence in their own abilities while justifying their decisions convincingly.

6.5. *Criticism & Ideas for Improvement*

In this chapter, the focus is laid on the participants' criticism, ideas for improvement and recommendations. Apart from the presentation of their accounts, these are analysed like other interview contents and additional reflections are added. The aim is to achieve a deeper comprehension of the weak points of the Catalan HE system, why these tend to persist and how these could be improved. Hereby, I do not limit the scope to social inequality, as it is conceivable that at least some of my participants kept their participation up because they hoped to find in my thesis a channel to share their ideas and complaints (see *Insider/Outsider Status & Unconditional Love*). In this sense, I consider it part of my responsibility and compromise with them to actually grant their voices this visibility.

The tone of this chapter is due to the orientation towards the practical application slightly different from the rest of the findings, though a dialogue with different theories and other sections of the thesis is continuously fostered – and it is not without irony that the tendency to prefer practical applications to the ‘game of free intelligence’ is among the discussions that arise in this section. In this sense, diverse starting points for future research are identified and a non-exhaustive list of ideas for improvement is developed, giving for example recommendations how the current scholarship system could be improved to overcome the tendency to allocate aids in a way that disadvantages students with less economic capital directly through the requirements and indirectly through the proliferation of misconceptions.

"No deploris el que és irremeiable, i busca remeis a allò que lamentes."

William Shakespeare, English writer (1564-1616)

Roda Mots 16/05/2017)

This section stands out in this thesis for its focus on practical applications. Many participants used our encounters to share their ideas and subjective theories about the problems of their degrees and universities and to give recommendations how these could be improved. In the last interviews, I asked them, moreover, for recommendations they would give to younger students who consider studying their degree. Their very rich and detailed comments have an important value in themselves and I consider it part of my reciprocity commitment towards the participants to transmit their ideas for improvement, making their voices been heard. However, these subjective theories (Latour, 2005) and recommendations do also have a value for the analyses, as we can study how they changed over the years of the follow-up, what underlying imaginaries are implicit in the narratives and what structural constraints difficult the improvement of the Spanish HE system. In order to best meet both aims in this section, I organized the students' complaints and recommendations in seven categories developed from the narratives: Direct and indirect costs; ignorance and misinformation; organizational problems; injustice and powerlessness; practical and content issues; work, and, finally, lecturers. The last section focuses on positive comments the participants made regarding persons they considered 'good' lecturers, so we follow, just as regarding the participants, the approach to overcome the deficit perspective and to focus on positive aspects and success stories in order to facilitate future improvement. Closing this chapter with a positive note is, moreover, only just, as most participants combined their criticism with positive anecdotes and aspects of their HE experience, so a sole focus on the negative side would leave a wrong impression.

6.5.1. *Direct and indirect costs*

We have already seen above (see *Education and degree course organisation*) that the study fees increased significantly in Catalonia in the course of the follow-up and that Spain is now among the eight most-expensive HE systems in the EU (Eurydice, 2017; Sacristán & França, 2013). We have seen how, on occasion, living costs, especially rental prices, appeared as a reason for some students to limit their study choice to Lleida, as living in Barcelona, for example, would have been much more expensive (see Irina in *What I was born for - or not* and Piruleta in *Degree of completion of development tasks*). In the students' complaints, we can identify further costs of studying, not only monetary but as well regarding time, health and general well-being. Beyond an attempt to calculate the 'real' overall costs of a degree course in Catalonia, the participants' remarks in this regard give us an idea of how they perceived their studies as an investment and if and to what extent they felt entitled to receive a certain service or treatment in turn. Especially feelings of entitlement - given in upper classes - have been related in previous research to a higher readiness to question and intervene with institutional authorities (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014), so this may be closely related to criticism. A maladjustment between the perception of costs and earnings might easily be related to criticism and explain, partly, attrition. It is, moreover, interesting to compare which students seem to lose and which seem to win more, as this might be key to understanding how social inequality is reproduced in HE.

Time and Money

N. criticized in Int1 that she had to buy books for several subjects and Skone argued in a similar line in his first-year interview that the payments for books offered by some scholarships were hardly enough to buy one book, given the high costs of academic publications. Nadia said in Int3 that in the wake of the economic crisis, practical lessons in her degree were now imparted in bigger groups and that the students had to buy the expandable materials themselves. However, she argued at another moment that the group sizes varied widely because some students had changed their groups (see *Practical and content issues*), so even in her argumentation the big groups were not consistently ascribed to the crisis. Other extra-costs that appeared in Nadia's account were time and money spent on transport and its organization. In Int5 she explained that in her degree, veterinary medicine, visits to farms were organized from the first-year on, but the university only informed the students at what time they should be where. Farms were not usually connected through public transport and many students, as Nadia herself, were still too young to possess a driver licence when they began to study. Indeed, many participants acquired their driver licences after several years of having the legal age to drive, usually commenting on it as a great achievement. This means that even if most students should turn 18 soon after beginning their University studies (see *Demographics and University participation*), they may not necessarily be able to drive and have access to a car. Nadia had to spend time identifying fellow students who would drive to the farms and had a spare seat in their vehicle, so they could take her along. These carpools usually met on the university campus so, as she moved in the course of the follow-up to the city, she had to spend additional time to first reach the campus before starting the actual displacement to the farm in question. Though her living in a family-owned flat decreased her costs of studying significantly, the flat was in Barcelona and hence at a significant distance of the UAB campus, so she mentioned repeatedly spending vast amounts of time and money on transport, having to calculate even more time, as the trains and metros in her connection were often delayed or cancelled. Here it was eye-catching, that Nadia focused on her disadvantage – the time and money spent on transport – rather than on the enormous savings the family-owned flat represented for her and her family. When speaking about the carpools, she focused on the inconveniences and blamed the University for not offering a feasible alternative. Peter, on the other hand, did not mention his difficulties with transport until Int5, when he spoke as the proud owner of a car who was finally able to take others instead of being the eternal passenger. Though he referred especially to his football training, he confirmed difficulties with getting to schools, when I remembered his internships in village schools. Apart from being much less critical and not ascribing any responsibility for student transport to the university, his general attitude was much more submissive, feeling sorry for the troubles he caused rather than demanding what Nadia considered if not her right so at least a noteworthy deficit. However, Nadia did not mention the issue with the farm-visits until the last interview, indicating that she developed this feeling for what she was entitled to receive and where university should facilitate things further over time.

While the issues with transport and access to a car seemed to be rather common, other costs, like the acquisition of expandable materials, were highly degree-course specific. Maduixa commented in Int4 that her degree on audiovisual communication required her to have a

potent personal computer and certain software. Moreover, she had to buy equipment and material for her works, because the university did not possess or rent these things and the lendable equipment was often old, broken and heavy. Though she and her fellow students found a way to reduce these extra costs by working in groups and sharing their personal equipment, certain expenses were unavoidable, increasing the monetary costs of these studies.

Health

Maduixa was also one of the participants who mentioned a negative impact of her studies for her health. As such effects can be understood as a way how social conditions become inscribed into individual bodies but may furthermore constitute a social dimension of difference of its own, it is especially interesting to see how the participants relate to their health (see *Intersectionality*). Though Maduixa had already mentioned to suffer from migraine in Int2_2, she related her head-, back- and eye-problems in Int5 to spending too much time working with the computer and to the weight of the equipment she had to carry around with public transport. She argued that it was unavoidable in her degree to spend much time in front of a screen, as much of the work consisted in editing and visual effects, e.g. 3D. She attempted to work as much time as possible without a computer, by printing her reading materials and realizing first drafts on paper, though this increased, in turn, her monetary costs. Especially in Int4 and Int5 she seemed extremely stressed and in Int5 she argued that the stress was affecting her health, as she suffered insomnia and had to set herself the limit not to work after 9 pm, so she had some time to disconnect before going to bed. Here she argued, moreover, that several of her fellow students suffered mental health problems, induced or at least worsened by the continuous stress and pressure HE put them under. That she had not ascribed her migraine that directly to the University before, relating it to her nerves rather than the conditions in University, may be a sign that her sense of entitlement increased in the course of the follow-up and she turned more critical and exigent with the University.

Yes, yes, that day was quite... because afterwards, I started having a headache just from being nervous and because I hadn't slept the night before. (-) Yes, because I was nervous and all. (.) Then, I had to go back home really quickly because I had a migraine... (--)[Interviewer: Ouch] and then that day, ((or well,)) that week ((belly)), because, of course, (-) it's your first day and you get a headache... (-) For me, well, I have a lot of migraines, so that was like: "Oh, no, no way". (.) But then, that was it. (.) (-) Afterwards it was better. (-) ((so)) (Int2_2 Maduixa, I.506-511)

Lecturers don't realize it, but it's like that, they ask for everything to be done in the computer, and they ask to have everything at the same time. So, what's the problem then? That you are for a whole month (.) in the computer, in the computer, and then obviously you end up with headaches, your eyes hurt, your back hurts... Well, people at our University have horrible backs because (.) you're like this, (--)) you start getting tense, and tense... and you get here¹⁸⁶, right? It's horrible, it's all blocked, all of this, and what's the problem then? That you sleep poorly. It doesn't matter how much you want to sleep, you sleep poorly [Interviewer: Yes], because your eyes are hurting, your head is hurting, your

¹⁸⁶ Here Maduixa is describing how the students successively adopt a curved position, bringing their heads closer to the computer screen.

back is hurting... And no, they don't realize it but I... [Interviewer: It's not healthy at all] No, it's not, it's horrible, it's not healthy at all. (Int5 Maduixa, 1.548-555)

Nadia mentioned in Int3 backache and nausea, because of which she went to a doctor who told her that these problems were caused by contractions in her back and neck and sent her to physiotherapy. She explained these contractions with carrying too much weight on her way to the campus and with the bad position she was forced to adopt when writing on the inclined tables in university. In the interview, she mentioned her attempts to carry less weight and to adopt a healthier position, but there were certain heavy things, e.g. the computer, she had to carry with her anyway. She bought a new battery that lasted the double so she did not need to bring the charger, but her computer was already old and therefore heavy and she did not want to ask her parents to buy her a new one while it still functioned. As she used the computer to take notes in class, I suggested using a recorder instead, but Nadia argued that this would make her lose time as she would have to listen to the audios to transcribe her notes at home. She knew that some fellow students used recorders and they had to put the recorder close to the lecturer to achieve a good recording quality and that some lecturers told them not to record them. At another point she mentioned that she would have to undergo a CT as she suffered migraines and that she had problems with her kneecap that tended to get dislocated, but did not explain these issues with university. The only direct link between these health issues and university appeared, when she argued that a surgery could fix her kneecap and avoid future dislocations, but as the recovery of this surgery was said to be long, she postponed it until after finishing her studies. Her last dislocation forced her to quit running, but she was already off pain-killers in Int3 and participated in footraces in later interviews, so the limitation seems to have been temporal.

Mental health was also repeatedly a topic in the follow-up, though not for the participants from higher social classes who, even when mentioning migraine and insomnia (as both Nadia and Maduixa do), focussed on corporeal difficulties related to physical effort and little-healthy positions and did not use mental-health concepts like 'anxiety' or 'depression' in their accounts. Moreover, they blamed university for obliging them to show such unhealthy practices, while the participants mentioning mental-health issues related to university as a cause of their problems, but without directly claiming that this was a generalized problem or that university should change. We have already seen that Xenia believed to have suffered from a depression when she did not enter in Medicine and have commented on the possibility that her sudden change in plans at the end of the follow-up may have been a final waking-up from the shock and recovering the reign of her life (see *Change and Continuity*).

Sara mentioned in Int3 that she had a very bad time at the end of her second year, suffering from anxiety and insomnia. However, she did not see a doctor and felt better in her third year, which she perceived as less demanding – an impression corroborated by the other participants who studied, like she did, teacher training. Piruleta mentioned in Int2 that she had suffered anxiety attacks in her first year, fearing that she might fail subjects. She highlighted that her parents did not have much money and that she could not afford failing a subject, but she also added further issues that influenced here, namely the death of a friend from her village, her grandparents' health problems and her sister's Erasmus that encompassed a bigger physical distance and made her miss her. It was not until Int5 that she mentioned a lecturer who had

made her cry in class, though this had happened at the beginning of the follow-up (see *The 'good' lecturers*). Though she argued in Int2 that she overcame the anxiety attacks after her first year, in Int3 she mentioned again having passed a very bad time in the second term of her second year and in Int5 she commented on her fourth-year in university saying that it was terrible, as the relationship with her then-boyfriend ended and several of her grandparents died after prolonged suffering. Despite her claiming in each interview that the difficulties belonged to the past and that she felt much better now, the longitudinal analyses showed, hence, certain continuity in her psychological distress (see *Happiness*). Similarly, Sara argued in several of the follow-up interviews how important it was for her to rest and to disconnect and how tired she felt at the end of her degree, deciding therefore not to study a master for now, though she did not mention anxiety attacks again. The immense distress associated to the possibility of academic failure is especially noteworthy if we consider that both Sara and Piruleta completed their studies successfully and with high academic outcomes (see *Academic success*). This may indicate that, though some authors relate low self-efficacy beliefs among the lower social classes to a coping strategy to avoid frustration if the academic performance lies below the expected (Torrents, 2017), self-efficacy beliefs may be so low and insecurity so high that they lead to existential fears of academic failure, even if the academic performance gives no reason to doubt the possibility to pass. Furlong et al. (2011) argue that mental health issues are more likely to affect young people with less control over their time, that is to say, young people from the lower classes, who lack economic capital and therefore have to work more hours. It is noteworthy that Sara and Piruleta were both female, from a working-class background and studying teacher training, so their problems were in line with Reay's (2013, p. 667) comments that social mobility is 'always painful' and her own health problems when first entering HE as a student. Moreover, it is another example of the female tendency to subordinate well-being to educational success developed in the literature review (Ovink, 2014; Reay, 2000; Soong et al., 2017) (see *Social divisions*), indicating that the intersection with gender might be important in this regard.

Last year I had a really hard time with the work I had to do for the University, and (she laughs) the last days, the last months, I had nightmares, I couldn't sleep at night. [Interviewer: Wow] I mean because of the stress, because I'm someone who's truly nervous and I tend to panic quickly with anything. And last year, there was a lot of work, and the last days I couldn't stand it anymore. (Int3 Sara, l.393-397)

[I've been] Worrying in general about this academic course, because it's been hard for me, because of all the things that have happened, and I am quite sensitive... So that's what worries me, failing, because if I fail anything, next year I'll have to pay for it again, and I'll have to take the subject again... (...) Sometimes I think about this girl... It might be because, I don't know, because my sister is far away, and whenever I'm having a bad time, I've always been very close with her, or with my grandparents who have been sick. All that had been building up and I had to say "enough", because I started to have panic attacks. And I was lucky with my flatmates, with my friends from *marracos*¹⁸⁷ and my boyfriend, because they've helped me a lot. (Int2 Piruleta, l.423-430)

Peter, a male participant from a similar class background who studied teacher training as well, also considered in Int5 that the second year had been the worst of the whole degree, but

¹⁸⁷ *Marracos* is the name of the UdL's *Castellers* (human towers, see footnote: 120) group.

solved his difficulties through the prolongation of his studies and believed that he would suffer less, if he could go back and relive his studies. In line with this different approach, he recommended younger students to take things easy. Piruleta and Sara argued in their last interviews that a problem of their degree course was that passing the assignments was too easy and that it produced teachers without vocation or talent. Sara directly mentioned fellow students who prolonged their studies because they had to repeat several assignments but finally managed to pass everything anyway, while she finished her studies in time, with good results and working part-time. Here we notice an important change regarding the first interviews, not only in the mentioning and remembering of their anxieties but also regarding the criticism of an unfair evaluation system that deliberately avoided the offer of makeup exams while still requesting students to pass each partial exam (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*). Rather than emphasizing with other students as Peter, who had not yet finished his degree in Int5, did, Sara and Piruleta took a position of professionals who required a closure of the access to their career and hence less competition on the labour market (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*). Moreover, they ennobled their own itineraries by constructing their identities as opposed to those who only passed prolonging their studies and with low grades, as they passed their degree in time, with good scores and, in Sara's case, despite combining work and study. In conclusion, it seems that in the intersection of a working-class background and gender, young women are more likely to jeopardize their well-being but achieve academic excellence, while young men are able to maintain their well-being and still achieve a degree, though not necessarily as one of the best of their year and prolonging their studies. If similar tendencies already happen in school, this may also explain why especially working-class males are little likely to enter HE.

Just as Nadia's migraine and kneecap issues, other participants mentioned certain health problems without directly relating them to university. Koala commented in Int2 and 3 on his high blood pressure and in Int3 on the effects of an accident in which he broke his collarbone several years earlier. Sara mentioned a knee injury when she was 12 in Int2, as it had forced her to abandon her big passion for dancing. Though her knee represented a risk for future illnesses and she had sometimes difficulties to get up and was in pain, she did not consider that it might affect her studies. Similarly, she did not reflect on additional difficulties in university or with her part-time job as a language teacher when she contracted mononucleosis in her second year, though she was forced to miss classes because of it (Int3).

Given that many participants did not mention any health issues in their interviews, the aim of this section is by no means to create a satiric image of ill-looking students carrying heavy bags, sitting on archaic and contracture-provoking furniture and spending long hours staring at a screen. The mentioned accounts may indicate that health issues are relatively common among HE students, especially as these appeared in several interviews with different participants though none of the interview questions directly asked for health. Further research with university students could focus on health and study the relations between social class, gender and health issues and coping with them further.

Social life

Another indirect cost of HE that appeared in some interviews was related to a negative impact on the social life. Some participants argued that university did not allow them to meet their friends, either because of the workload (Maduixa, Nadia) or because of the lecture-shifts that did not coincide (Koala). As I have argued in this thesis, both well-being and academic success are related to social success, so such difficulties are momentous (see *Social success*). However, as we have seen in the description of the axis on social success, most participants lived the beginning of university as an enormous push for their social life and reduced this activity after a temporal 'high'. Maduixa was not an exception to this trend and it is, hence, possible that she only perceived that the university limited her social life towards the end of the follow-up, because she compared her current social life with the high level of social activity she had experienced in her first-years in HE. Moreover, some participants seemed to use university as an excuse for having lost friends, though the contradictions that appeared in the longitudinal analyse indicate that they never made many friends in the first place. Moreover, the few participants who did already finish their studies and entered the labour market at the end of the follow-up showed much severer problems to maintain their friendships and an active social life. So rather than prejudicing social life, HE seemed to first push social activity and then confronted students with additional difficulties of time organization as their social networks expanded significantly while much of the academic workload was not limited to fixed working hours, so they had to find a way to both meet the academic demands and live the social life they aspired.

Interestingly, none of the participants criticised their University for not engaging in the processes of befriending fellow students. Nic (Int2) mentioned the intervention of some lecturers who require group works and works with changing partners directly in the classroom¹⁸⁸ as positive in this regard, but did not criticise those who did not act in this sense. Further below (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*) we will see several examples of lecturer behaviour that may likely influence student-student relationships negatively, e.g. lecturers who discourage student solidarity, pass some students after talking to them about a copied assignment but failing others without even talking to them first etc. However, a review of literature from other countries (Brooman & Darwent, 2014; Gibney et al., 2011) shows us that a contrary approach is possible and probably useful, as helping students to bond with their fellows may improve their well-being in class, their knowledge acquisition and their academic performance, lowering the risk of attrition and prolonged studies. In this sense it seems that Catalan HE is currently missing out on this aspect, but this is accepted by the students, who do not expect their universities to intervene in their social relationships and only bring the topic up when lecturers directly difficult the student-student relationship.

¹⁸⁸ Though he is the only participant to mention in-class group works, it is conceivable that much of the criticism regarding group works we have seen above (see *Academic success*) – especially regarding the difficult time organisation and the dependence on the compromise and dedication of fellow students – are not applicable when the work is completed within the class room. In this sense, in-class group works could be a good alternative.

6.5.2. *Ignorance and misinformation*

Some of the participants criticized their universities for not informing them well about certain aspects and diverse knowledge gaps and misconceptions became visible in the course of the follow-up, thanks to including steps from the intersectional approach proposed by Winker and Degele (2009) within the documentary method by Bohnsack (2010), in this case, the step to search for additional information on mentioned structures (see *Analyses*). In the following, it is therefore possible to approach the detected misinformation and knowledge gaps from different perspectives, leading to recommendations that go beyond the participants' criticism in this case.

As we have seen above (see *Information preferences and silence*), knowledge gaps and misinformation were already common in the focus groups, as in almost all focus group appeared confusions and misunderstandings about aspects like the PAU, degree courses, university entry etc. Once in university, these issues were not usually mentioned again, but other topics appeared important, some until the very end of the follow-up. Apart from the change in topics, we observe several continuities between focus groups and interviews, in concrete regarding a preference for personal information sources (fellow students, staff...), a lack in information literacy and a tendency to live with misconceptions and knowledge gaps, rather than to search for relevant information as soon as possible. However, the impression of urgency with which the issues were presented in the focus groups, disappeared in most interviews where participants displayed a particularly strong lack of knowledge regarding aspects that were either not central to their academic success (e.g. exchange programmes) or lay in a remote future (e.g. third-language requirements to obtain the degree certificate). When these issues became more pressing, the participants seemed to be able to solve them as they either mentioned the solution in the interview or did not mention the topic at all, but achieved their degree certificate or whatever else had depended on this, showing that they had been able to overcome the issue as well. This may indicate that knowledge gaps and misconceptions were either temporal or not crucial to the participants' itineraries, but as they had a potential to influence the students' well-being negatively, to prolong their studies or to favour attrition, it should still be in the interest of the university to reduce them.

In the following, we will comment on several examples, omitting those that appear in posterior sections of this chapter again, as misinformation and a lack of transparency influenced in almost all of the remaining difficulties. In concrete, we comment on the Disposition regarding third-language requirements in degree courses and scholarship programmes. Less common difficulties are summarised in a miscellaneous subsection. The final subsection presents reflections on what certain complaints tell us about student habits and skills and how the system could be improved to avoid the shown difficulties.

Third-language accreditation

Several participants did not know until they actually finished their degree course, if they had to accredit a certain level in a foreign language to obtain their degree and if so which. The 'B2-

law, as the *Disposition for Third Languages in Degree Courses*¹⁸⁹ (Universitat de Lleida, 2018) calls it in footnote 1, was adopted by the *Generalitat de Catalunya* through the law 2/2014, establishing in Article 211 that all students of Catalan universities beginning their studies of a degree course in the academic year 2014-15 or later had to accredit the B2¹⁹⁰ level of either English, German, French or Italian when finishing their degree. The different Catalan Universities, among others the UdL, subsequently modified their Dispositions for Third Languages in Degree Courses, including the new requirement (Universitat de Lleida, 2018). After diverse complaints by university rectors, the *Inter-University Council of Catalonia*¹⁹¹ (CIC) decided a first modification in 2017, when the first group of B2-law students coursed their last year, allowing a four-year moratorium in the application of the law (EFE, 2017b)¹⁹². Throughout this moratorium, only the B1 level is required and the corresponding Disposition explains the diverse possibilities to accredit the level, differentiating between students who began their degree before the academic course 2014-2015 (like the participants in this project) and those beginning their studies then or later (Universitat de Lleida, 2018). In the case of our participants, the Disposition accepts the following ways to accredit the required B1 level: a) the presentation of a recognized certificate, b) the accomplishment of a language test organized by the *Language Institute*¹⁹³ of the UdL, c) the accomplishment of at least 6 ECTS in a subject imparted in the third language, d) the accomplishment of subjects that according to the degree's study plan achieve the required level or more, e) the elaboration and presentation of the final degree work in the third language whereat the evaluators have to assess the language competence, f) the completion of external internships in an international context where the use of the third language is obligatory, elaborating and presenting the report on the internship in the third language and g) the participation in mobility programmes in the course of which the student has accomplished at least 12 ECTS in the third language.

Knowledge gaps and misinformation that became apparent in the interviews showed that many participants tended to either not know anything about third-language accreditation, expected to need a B2-level, though they had started their studies before 2014-2015 so that only a B1 level was required for them even before the moratorium or believed that they had achieved the required level through their High School English classes – though this is not contemplated in the Disposition. Just as the above cited press note about the moratorium in its title, the participants only referred to the accreditation of their level in English whenever

¹⁸⁹ Normativa de Terceres Llengües als Estudis de Grau. Aprovada per l'acord 13/2015 del Consell de Govern de 29 de gener de 2015, modificada per l'acord 215/2017 del Consell de Govern de 19 de juliol de 2017 i modificada per l'acord 46/2018 del Consell de Govern de 21 de febrer de 2018. Retrieved from: http://www.udl.cat/export/sites/universitat-lleida/ca/udl/norma/.galleries/docs/Ordenacio_academica/Acord-46-2018-CG-Modificacio-Normativa-terceres-llengues-als-graus-CG-21.2.2018.pdf [last access: 15.03.2018]. Translations of the title, content and quotations were realized by TS.

¹⁹⁰ Level according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. See as well footnote 110.

¹⁹¹ Consejo Interuniversitario de Cataluña (CIC). Translation retrieved from the Council's website: http://universitatsirecerca.gencat.cat/en/01_secretaria_duniversitats_i_recerca/la_secretaria/organismes/consell_interuniversitari_de_catalunya_cic/index.html [last access: 15.03.2018].

¹⁹² https://elpais.com/ccaa/2017/06/22/catalunya/1498123638_665245.html [last access: 13.08.2018].

¹⁹³ Institut de Llengües. Translation retrieved from the Nomenclator de la UdL.

they mentioned the law, completely omitting the possibility to accredit any of the other recognized third languages.

Floreta: A thing that makes me feel ashamed is that there are people who go there and need a translator while in University they require a level in English from you and the politicians don't know that I love English but I see things like this and I think that it's a shame and that it's normal then that they treat us like stupid

Interviewer: they require you a B2 level, don't they? In a language to achieve your degree certificate?

Floreta: I believe yes

Interviewer: and do you have it?

Floreta: theoretically they give you this title with High School, don't they? But I'm very far gone from this topic, with the English I'm worried and sad, this summer I'll have to take care of this (Int3 Floreta, l.249-257)

Andrés: After High School, one is supposed to have level B1 and, now, I do English in my career and it's more focused on tourism.

Interviewer: Are you required B1 to start (...)

Interviewer: And then an English certificate is asked for by the end of the career?

Andrés: I don't think so, but I will get it on my own anyway (Int3 Andrés, l.232-249)

Interviewer: And what about that idea of improving your English level? Is it to obtain a certain degree or... ...?

Ariel: No, it's just for myself

Interviewer: All right, since it isn't a requirement to obtain your degree, is it?

Ariel: I'm not sure. I should ask the coordinator about it, I don't know whether they ask for it.

Interviewer: But would you have it, if you were asked for it?

Ariel: Yes, I will have it if I took the exam (Int4 Ariel, l.29-34)

Skone: Also, I'm preparing for the First

Interviewer: Is it required?

Skone: Yes.

Interviewer: To get the diploma or to enrol [for veterinary medicine]?

Skone: In fact, they don't require it for none of them. They just require the lowest level. The thing is I completed the level test and asked myself why I would get B1 if I can obtain this one. Besides, it's true that in Veterinary the First is required, so I get it and that's it ...

Interviewer: ok, to enrol yourself?

Skone: Yes, and I don't discard to get higher... that is to say, to go on with further levels. (Int4 Skone, l.93-102)

From the participants' accounts in the follow-up, we can deduce that they did not consult the affected Disposition or the corresponding laws directly. Rather they seemed to base their ideas on rumours, press releases or answers they received from university staff when deciding to ascertain what they needed to do towards the end of their studies. Here we notice that the participants maintained their preference for personal information sources – here the university staff – though they either summarised the answers and indications they received incorrectly, or the staff did not inform them about all options either. Once informed that their A-levels did not automatically certify their level in English, the participants expected to need an official certificate and several inscribed for courses or for official exams, while nobody mentioned any other of the possibilities to accredit their level until the last interview round.

Some participants, except the ones who already possessed recognized language certificates, experienced a certain crisis at some point of the follow-up, worrying if they might be unable to complete their degree and apply for a master because of this requirement. However, none of the participants who finished their degree course in the course of the follow-up did actually encounter problems in the recognition of their language levels in the end. Even Andrés who had presented for a language exam to achieve the B1 level in English and failed it, was able to accredit his level as he had coursed 6 ECTS in a subject imparted in the third language in the course of his degree. However, even this representation might be wrong, as Andrés study plan does not mention any subjects imparted in English, apart from the English classes themselves, so it seems more likely that his level of English was recognised because the English classes were supposed to allow him to achieve this or a higher level in English (option d) and not because any of his subjects was imparted in English (option c). This leads to the rather contradictory situation that the degree courses that consider language abilities as so important to include subjects to learn languages into their study plan, do not require their students to prove that they achieved the required level as long as they passed the subjects, while degree courses that are less related to languages, do not offer this alternative recognition to their students.

Summing up, it seems that the accreditation of the third language was in the end rather easy, because the university actively attempted to facilitate things, though several participants employed time, money and nerves attempting to achieve an official certificate in the course of the follow-up. Though it is true that the participants could have avoided this suffering by being more attentive to the topic and reading the University dispositions and their amendments, it has to be said that the rather sudden implementation of the B2-law, the continuous polemic about its validity and the repeated changes did not facilitate this process. Moreover, the concrete interpretation and application of Dispositions is not always clear and students might be right not to trust that their level of English would be recognised automatically if they only passed certain English-subjects of their degree, as the rules might change or not apply to their degree course after all¹⁹⁴. In this sense, the strategy to ask the staff rather than relying on the Disposition might also be useful, as in the end it is more important how the staff interprets the Disposition than the exact wording of the Disposition itself. If University staff assumed the task to inform students about the rules and their changes through e-mails or information sessions, none of the participants made use of this offer as they all came to seek support individually from staff members when they were about to finish their degree. The variety of contacted staff, ranging from degree coordinators to secretaries, indicates furthermore that several

¹⁹⁴ Something similar happened to me when I pretended to inscribe for a PhD programme for the first time, as the affected Disposition mentioned that students with a minimum of 300 ECTS coursed in their degree courses could inscribe without a master, but when I attempted to use this route, I was told that this only referred to students from the faculty of medicine, though this was not specified at any point of the Disposition and forced me to first study a master. Several years later, new PhD students were told in an informative session that they did not need a master if they had studied at least 300 ECTS in their degree courses, independently of the field of studies. This may indicate that the application of Dispositions depends more on the individual readings by the staff members in charge than the actual wording. Directly asking the staff members for their interpretation of the Disposition is then, in the end, a valuable strategy and as staff members and their readings may change over time, asking when the paperwork is due rather than in advance may also make sense.

participants did not even know where to ask – a difficulty that might also explain why they did not consult the dispositions and other information available on the university website.

Scholarship programmes

Several of the participants received scholarships at some point of the follow-up. As the scholarships were usually resolved after the annual interview rounds, the participants were at the moment of the interview only able to comment on their applications for scholarships and their outcome in previous years. In this sense, the moments of interview completion were not the most adequate to comment on scholarships, as the topic was not of direct relevance for their current daily life and often only appeared because I brought it up. When comparing the different years, we notice that several participants changed their narrations and some did suddenly indicate that they always had received a scholarship, though they had mentioned in a previous year that they did not receive the scholarship for some reason. We can read this as an example of how the memory blurs over time and how itineraries are simplified, though it is also possible that they did not explain themselves well in previous interviews or referred to a concrete scholarship only while omitting another etc. In future research, a system, for example a smartphone app¹⁹⁵, that requires students to indicate shortly after the resolution if they received a scholarship and if so which could minimize such effects. Even if it is difficult to be sure which participants received which scholarship in which years, we can draw in this qualitative study on the participants' accounts in order to see how they represent and construct the different scholarship programmes and relate to them, identifying main issues and potential for improvement.

Scholarships are an important topic in the literature on the transition to HE and on working-class students in HE, especially in times of increasing study fees. In a report by the *Observatory University System*¹⁹⁶ from 2016, the authors argue that increasing study fees in combination with scholarship requirements may explain a decrease in the university participation of students from the middle and higher classes, as the matriculation fees and indirect costs affect them completely, given their lower chances to achieve scholarships and reductions. At the same time, these authors argue that the requirements to show a certain academic performance may lead students to select 'easy' degree courses, explaining the decrease¹⁹⁷ in students in engineering degrees (Troiano, Torrents, & Sánchez-Gelabert, 2016). However, as Cooper (2013) showed, the difficulty lies not only in the lack of financial support, but also in

¹⁹⁵ An exemple for such apps is Electo-KAS, an app to simulate votes in elections and hence predict possible outcomes. For more information see: the <https://semanariouniversidad.com/ultima-hora/aplicacion-movil-electo-kas-realizara-simulacion-elecciones-nacionales/> [last access: 09.04.2018]

¹⁹⁶ This is the official translation of 'Observatori del Sistema universitari' given on their website: <http://www.observatoriuniversitari.org/en/>. [Last access: 27.03.2018]

¹⁹⁷ The quoted authors base their observations on absolute student numbers. As shown above (see *Demographics and University participation*), the enrolment numbers did actually only decrease slightly in 2009 if we consider the proportion over the total age group. Even considering absolute numbers, a continuous increase in participation was observable in all study fields from 2011-2012 to 2015-16 (the time of data construction), though engineering and architecture degrees showed a slight decrease in 2016-2017 in comparison to the two previous years (see

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the knowledge gaps and misconceptions regarding offered helps, so a direct connection between eligibility and factual access to a scholarship is not necessarily given.

In our study, many participants mentioned that they did not receive scholarships at some point, because they had not presented the application in time. Moreover, several had severe difficulties to even name the scholarship programme they had applied for in the second-year interview, though I was often able to identify a programme by inquiring the organizing institution, as there are mainly two important options that the participants usually either referred to as “*la del ministeri*” (the one from the Ministry – referring to the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports) and “*la de la Generalitat*” (the one from the *Generalitat* – the Catalan Government)¹⁹⁸.

The 'scholarships of general character'¹⁹⁹, offered by the Spanish Ministry, include in one call diverse scholarships for all types of post-obligatory studies²⁰⁰. When the participants of this study began their university degrees, in the academic year 2011-2012, the law 1721/2007²⁰¹ had already established a new system of scholarships and financial helps. In 2013, just after the participants' second year, the law 609/2013²⁰² established a new way to consider family income and academic performance of the applicants. Posterior modifications did no longer affect in the follow-up, so we can say that these two laws set the legal frame for the scholarship programmes.

In spite of modifications from one annual call to the next²⁰³, the Ministry's call differentiates between an 'enrolment scholarship', a 'fixed amount linked to the student's income', a 'fixed amount linked to the student's residence during the school year' and a 'variable amount' that depends on the family income and the student's academic performance. Apart from the income, immobile properties are considered. As one of the participants, Piruleta, showed us, it is important to note that though the law considers the number of family members when specifying the income thresholds for receiving certain scholarships or partial reductions, a unique fixed value is given regarding the maximal worth of immobile property, different from the family's usual residence and students whose families exceed this limit of 42.900 € are not eligible for the scholarship no matter how much or little their parents earn (see Article 11, law 609/2013). In order to make us an idea of this amount of money, I have searched on the website of an estate agent from Lleida²⁰⁴ for offers of any kind up to this price. 3 out of the 7 results I obtained on the 27th of March 2018 were parking lots and the remaining four offered housing in villages or rural zones ranging from 8 to 100 m². Nevertheless, the 42.900 € limit

¹⁹⁸ Diverse other scholarship programmes exist but are usually limited to a certain subgroup of the student population, for example students with high scores in indicators of academic excellence. For a full list of scholarship programmes current undergraduate students may apply for, see for example: http://udl.cat/ca/estudis/estudis_centres/ [last access: 26.05.2018].

¹⁹⁹ These and the following titles extracted from the cited laws were translated by the author.

²⁰⁰ For more information on the latest calls, see: <https://www.mecd.gob.es/mecd/servicios-al-ciudadano-mecd/catalogo/general/educacion/050130/u/050130-u-2016#dg>. [last access: 27.03.2018]

²⁰¹ The law was published in the BOE number 15, from 17/01/2008, accessible online at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2008-821>. [last access: 27.03.2018]

²⁰² The law was published in the BOE number 185, from 03/08/2013, accessible online at: <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2013/08/03/pdfs/BOE-A-2013-8559.pdf> [last access: 27.03.2018]

²⁰³ All these scholarships require a new application per academic year.

²⁰⁴ <https://www.inmobiliariajuanmarti.com/index.php#buscador> [last access: 27.03.2018]

refers to the worth of a property according to the official register of real estate, which is usually much lower than the price of the property if it was on sale. Further analysis would be necessary to determine if this limit is realistic or not, but it is eye-catching, in every case, that families owning such a second residence are forced to sell it if they wish to receive financial aids even if they meet all other requirements, in particular the reception of a low income. Though it is true that an important part of the Spanish population does not possess any housing and is more in need of financial aids, this rule excludes all other families equally, without differentiating between different situations, for example those who use an important part of their income to maintain a house in a village they inherited from their parents and those who make a living from renting their diverse houses and flats or from speculation on the property market. In this study, Piruleta for example was identified as from a family of origin with rather low economic and cultural capital, as both parents only achieved elementary studies, her father worked as an employee and the mother was unemployed at the beginning of the follow-up, finding later on work as a cleaner. Moreover, she had two sisters and though this led to certain reductions, the family lost the categorization as '*família nombrosa*' (see footnote 165), when her older sister finished her degree, so the reduction was only applied temporarily and was in every case inferior to the reductions the scholarships would have offered, if the family did not possess a second housing. The rule that the advantages for a '*família nombrosa*' expire once the oldest child finishes his or her degree comes with the direct consequence that these families do not usually receive any reduction while the youngest two children continue their studies and as a certain age difference between the oldest and the youngest child is rather expectable, this may mean for many that reductions only apply to the oldest child and only if this attends University. As public education is free of charge but University fees have increased significantly, this means that these families lose their advantages just when these start to be biggest. The idea behind the limitation of the reductions to the time when the children are still in education and formation is, probably, that these will start to earn their own money after completing their studies, but as this is not usually the case in Catalonia, where prolonged youth transitions are the rule (Serracant, 2012) (see *The precarious generation in Catalonia*), families may face important economic difficulties once their oldest child has graduated but continues to depend economically on the parents. That Piruleta was so well-informed about the property- limitation for scholarships is probably related to her older sister who likely attempted to apply for these scholarships before Piruleta entered HE.

Talking about society, I'm scared about the crisis, like everyone else, because my mom isn't working, my father is, but it's been months since he got paid because his boss can't pay him. And I'm scared that one day my parents won't be able to pay for my studies and that I won't be able to find a job to pay for my studies myself. That I want to but can't. Because, yes, we are 3 kids, so we are considered a *família nombrosa*, but we have a really small piece of land and they have told us that if we want to get a scholarship we need to sell it, and we don't want to, it's really small but it has a lot of sentimental value to us, and we don't want to sell it. But yes, we pay only for half of the enrolment fees, but that's all we get. But still, we have to be thankful because we can get along²⁰⁵, also because my grandparents help us a lot financially and with this we're fine, but well. (Int2 Piruleta, I.446-452)

²⁰⁵ The expression used in the Catalan original was "encara gràcies que anem fent".

The law 609/2013 defines in its article 24 the requirements regarding academic performance. In all branches except '*enseñanzas técnicas*' (in other words, engineering degrees and architecture) students are required to have either passed 100% of the matriculated credits of the previous course or a minimum of 80% in Sciences and Health Sciences and 90% in Arts and Humanities, and Social and Legal Sciences, respectively, with a minimum grade point average of 6.5²⁰⁶, except in Sciences where 6.0 is required. The rules are less strict for engineering degrees, as these students only have to have passed a minimum of 85% of the credits or of 65% while achieving a grade point average of 6.0. Similarly, these students may receive a scholarship for two years longer than the stipulated duration of their degree courses, while the students from other branches lose their eligibility after one year of prolonging their studies (article 24). Students who only apply for the 'enrolment scholarship' are only required to have passed between 65 and 90% of the matriculated credits, depending on the field of studies.

Though one could argue that the academic requirements are not especially high at least for the enrolment scholarships, we see in the participants' accounts that several believed to be not eligible for a scholarship because they did not pass a subject in the previous year. Sara, for example, argued that she did not apply for a scholarship, because she missed the deadline, but that she would not have been eligible anyway as she had failed a subject, though her grade point average was above the required minimum. In her degree, teacher training, she would be eligible for a scholarship if she passed 90% of the matriculated credits and achieved a grade point average above 6.5. If the subject she failed accounted for 6 ECTS, she still passed 90% of the 60 annual credits. However, she did not know this, arguing moreover that her previous application had been rejected because she failed one subject in her first year. In her case it is possible that the reason for the rejection had not been academic performance, but that she did not understand the real reason and ascribed the rejection automatically to academic performance, adding up to the representation that the academic requirements are too high. As Sara's mother was from a village and her father and several grandparents had died before she entered HE, it is for example possible that the family had inherited housing in the village and was therefore not eligible for the scholarships – just as Piruleta. In this case, Sara would not be eligible for a scholarship by the *Generalitat* either, so it makes sense that she did not mention these other scholarships at any moment. However, if the reason for her rejection had really been academic performance, she could have received at least an enrolment fee reduction if she applied for the scholarships by the *Generalitat*, so she was missing out on this option as well.

Interviewer: And do you get a scholarship?

Sara: I haven't applied for it this year (laughs), I haven't applied because I missed the deadline, but, anyway, I wouldn't have gotten it because of Catalan. [Interviewer: Ah] Because it's in the record like a failed subject, when actually I only need to have an assignment corrected... Therefore, as you don't get a scholarship if you have failed one subject, that's why.

Interviewer: Because the requirements had changed?

²⁰⁶ These scores refer to a system from 0 to 10, in which 10 is the best score and 5 is usually the minimum necessary to pass, though some lecturers require students to achieve an even better result to pass. 0-10 is the most usual marking system in Spain, though in certain aspects different systems are used – for example a system from 0 to 14 in the PAU.

Sara: Yes, exactly. Because actually, they ask for an average of 6.5 out of 10 to grant you the scholarship, and I have a higher average, but yes, there's a failed subject... And it's a shame, because I only need to correct the mistakes on an assignment, but they don't know that, they just see "Catalan: failed", and it's actually not like that. I've passed everything, I only need to correct the mistakes on that assignment and hand it back. So yes, it's a shame that just because of that I can't get the scholarship, but well. (Int3 Sara, l.338-348)

Similarly as Piruleta, Sara was identified in our project as a student with little economic capital. Her father died when she was a little kid and her mother did care for a sick grandfather and her two children until the third year of the follow-up, so the whole family lived from the widow's and orphans' pensions and savings. The father had been a car repair shop holder and her mother found work as an employee in a retirement home after the grandfather's death, but as an untrained worker she probably earned very little. Sara explained that she received an enrolment fee reduction in her first year, because of counting as a '*familia nombrosa*' after her father's death (see footnote 165), but claimed that this rule changed, so, from her second year on, she did no longer receive this reduction either.

My family is considered a *familia nombrosa especial* (see footnote 165), because it's just my mom and two children, and normally a *familia nombrosa* consists of two parents and at least three children. And yes, now they've changed it and established that if it's a single-parent family, it's also a *familia nombrosa*. And the first year of studying my degree, with this aid I got half of my fees paid, but on my second year they had already changed it again, and we got no aids. If you are a regular *familia nombrosa*, you can have all your enrolment fees paid. But because we are in this special category, we don't get any aid, so, yes. (Int3 Sara, l.400-406)

Sara: From the pension because my, my father died. So, she received a widow's pension and I received an orphan's pension and then... Well, it's really not much, not much money, but we were getting by and, I mean, we've always had everything, I mean, it's not... And we also had some savings... (...)

Interviewer: And before that, what was her job?

Sara: My mom worked... Well, mostly, my mom has taken care of everyone (laughs). She, my grandmother, I mean her mother, got sick when my mom was like 16 years old, and my mom took care of the village shop, they had a shop, so she worked at the shop and took care of my grandmother, until my grandmother died, and, well, of course, my grandfather lived by himself for a while, but not so long after that he started to feel weak and he came to live with us. And so, he spent his whole life living with us and my mother took care of him, because he was someone who needed constant attention, he couldn't do anything by himself. Therefore, you can't go to work and leave him all alone, so basically that's it. And we also had my dad's car workshop and she worked there for a while, but not...

Interviewer: Of course, when he wasn't...

Sara: Of course. (Int3 Sara, l.878-903)

So two out of the three participants with least economic capital in this project, were not eligible for scholarships and only received enrolment fee reductions while being considered '*familia nombrosa*', losing this condition in the course of the follow-up. As previous research has observed a similar 'complementary' rather than a compensatory character of scholarships (Torrents, 2017, p. 355), such tendencies in the allocation of financial aids in Spain may be highly generalizable.

Among the scholarships offered by the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, 'Equitat' (Equity) was the one that most appeared in the participants' accounts, though some of the participants were probably eligible for further scholarships²⁰⁷. Moreover, the accreditation of the family income required to apply for a suspension of the payment of the enrolment fee until the resolution of the 'enrolment scholarships' is executed by the *Generalitat*. Though this procedure was simplified in the academic course 2016-2017, our participants had to present throughout the course of the follow-up two different applications if they opted for the financial aid and the payment suspension. However, the payment suspension was only mentioned by one of the participants, Koala. This may indicate that the others did either not know about this possibility, or were able to pay the enrolment fees when they were due, so they did not feel an urge to do the additional paperwork to achieve the suspension.

The scholarship programme 'Equitat' specifies in the annex I 15 of its latest call²⁰⁸ that this scholarship is incompatible with the above mentioned scholarships offered by the Ministry or other scholarships with similar purposes. Students whose economic situation is identified as within the worst-situated group, section 1, have to present an application for the Ministry's scholarship obligatorily, according to annex I 1.2. Annex II specifies how the family-income and property thresholds are calculated. The results are 6 different sections with different proportional reductions on the enrolment fees, whereat students who achieve the enrolment scholarship by the Ministry are considered as a section 0. In section 3 of this annex, the call specifies that independently of the family-income, section 6 (the best-situated section that is not eligible for any reduction) is ascribed when the family possesses urban property worth 42.900 € or more. As the calculation follows the same rules, no differences in the family-income evaluation are expectable between the scholarships offered by the Ministry and the *Generalitat*, so regarding this criterion students are right to argue that they do not have to apply for the other scholarships if they were rejected for one. However, the *Generalitat* does not include the requirements regarding academic performance, so that students who were rejected by the Ministry due to low academic performance could achieve at least an enrolment free reduction by the *Generalitat* if they applied for it. However, with Equity they may only receive partial reductions of their enrolment fees, up to 80% for degree courses and up to 25% for master courses, depending on the calculated family-income and property section. As the costs per credit are significantly higher for master degrees, this lower reduction rates may play an additional role in the decreasing participation in masters and lower participation rates among students with lower economic capital in their families of origin.

In the course of the follow-up, especially the participants who received scholarships seemed to acquire a certain working-knowledge for their annual applications. However, even the experienced scholarship holders did not acquire a complete comprehension of the scholarship programmes, as some of their comments in the last interview round showed. Nadia explained,

²⁰⁷ For a complete list of scholarships see:

http://universitatsirecerca.gencat.cat/ca/02_serveis_i_tramits/tramits/ajuts_beques_i_subvencions/estudiants_de_grau_i_estudis_postuniversitaris/. [last access: 27.03.2018]

²⁰⁸ RESOLUCIÓ EMC/1872/2017, de 27 de juliol, per la qual s'estableix, per al curs acadèmic 2017-2018, el procediment per a l'obtenció de l'acreditació del tram de renda familiar i de les beques Equitat per a la minoració del preu dels crèdits dels estudis universitaris. (DOGC núm. 7424 publicat el 01/08/2017) [last access: 28.03.2018]

for example, in Int5 that after several years of receiving the enrolment scholarship from the Ministry, her last application had been rejected. She had no clue why this had happened and presented an appeal. At the moment of the interview, she did not receive an answer yet but had a hunch that the appeal would be rejected as well. This shows that apart from not knowing the requirements well enough to identify a change in her economic or academic situation that could influence her eligibility for the scholarship, Nadia did not understand the reasons for her rejection and preferred to present an appeal without having ascertained what had happened and if the appeal was going to have any chances of success. As she mentioned in other moments of the interview that the relative in whose Barcelonan flat she was living throughout most of the follow-up had died and that the flat had passed on into her mother's property, it seems likely that she was no longer eligible for a scholarship due to exceeding the maximal allowed worth of urban property apart from the usual residence. If she had been aware of this and willing to hide it in the interview, she would not have mentioned the heritage either, so it really seems that she had not been aware of how this death of a relative could influence here.

This year, I haven't been granted the scholarship. (.) I have appealed the decision, because I don't understand why, I don't know if they've changed the requirements or what, I used to receive it each year. [Interviewer: The scholarship given by the Ministry of Education?] Yes. [Interviewer: The general one?] Yes (.) I used to receive it each year, that's why I don't understand why I haven't this year. (.) Well, I've appealed the decision, but I still haven't got an answer, I'm not sure when is the deadline, but well, it looks like they won't be granting it to me²⁰⁹. (Int5 Nadia, l.10-14)

Willy mentioned, as well in Int5, that he had been a scholarship holder throughout his whole degree and applied for one for his master, too. However, the application for the new scholarship was rejected as he did not achieve the required minimum grade point average in his degree. According to article 27 of the law 609/2013, this minimum is of 6.5 in the case of masters that give access to a regulated profession (e.g. the master to become a teacher in secondary education) and of 7.0 in the case of all other masters. *Equitat* only applies to professionalizing masters, according to Annex I 2.1, so Willy could not apply for this scholarship either and had to achieve a 7.0 for the two-year master of his choice. If he had known about this requirement, Willy would not have needed to apply for the scholarship at all. As he decided to interrupt his master after the first year – the one for which he had paid the enrolment fee before finding out that he would not receive a scholarship – this might indicate that the economic distress played a role in his decision to rather find a job. Willy himself argued that he would have finished his master if he had not found work, so the economic distress was not so high that he would have been unable to study another year. Other students might be unable to study without financial aids and not only decide against a master, but also against a degree course when they believe or receive the confirmation that they are not eligible for financial support.

During the master's degree it already got to me²¹⁰, because I applied for the general scholarship and they didn't give me one euro, because I was missing 0.2 to have an average of 7 [out of 10]. (Int5 Willy, l.638f.)

²⁰⁹ The expression used in the Catalan original was: "*no té pinta que me la donin*".

²¹⁰ The expression used in the Catalan original was: "*al màster ja m'ha tocat la moral*".

Scholarships may be a decisive element in the access to university and in attrition for students with little economic capital, so that the effects of knowledge gaps and misinformation are much more negative in their cases. The rather long waiting time (between 3 to 6 months) between application and resolution and academic requirements to receive the Ministry's scholarship provoke additional distress among the participants who depend on this help and misconceptions or simplifications – for example the idea that all scholarships require the same, so if you were rejected for one, you will not receive the other either, ideas about the family-income sections as requiring impossibly low thresholds or considerations that the scholarship payments are anyway too low to allow you to live from it – may lead them to decide against HE. Little transparency²¹¹ in the reasons for rejections seem to foster these misconceptions further, as participants tended to explain rejections with academic performance, exaggerating the importance of academic performance beyond the official requirements and possibly preventing themselves and other students from requesting a scholarship because of one failed subject. As our participants showed a tendency to prefer personal information sources, students who do not depend on financial aids, can still play an important role in the proliferation of these misconceptions, just as university staff. In this sense, it is relevant that Maduixa explained in Int2 that she did not apply for scholarships, because she would not receive any anyway, arguing that the income limits were so ridiculously low that she did not know anybody below section 5. This may show that she was little aware of the financial restraints some people in her surroundings were suffering. However, she told us in Int5 that she finally applied for a scholarship in her last year and received the enrolment scholarship, indicating that she got the family-income sections wrong in Int2, as her family income did not change. Though she felt then sorry that she had not applied for scholarships before, she also commented on how her parents directly reinvested the saved money into a summer course in a private university she inscribed for, showing clearly that they did not need the scholarship.

We're not so rich so that I can go to a private University and (-) be well (.), but we're not so poor so that... (-) [Interviewer: Hmm] Scholarships are granted to people who (-) who are really struggling. ((well)) They can't, I don't know, because (-) they had... (-) Now they've done a thing called "the levels"²¹², (-) and depending on what level, well, (.) they are like sections, (.) so depending on which one you are, depending on how much your parents earn, (-) well, you pay more or less. (.) Of course, (.) and everyone I know (smiling) (-) is on the top level. (-) [Interviewer: Hmm] I can't find anyone who is on another one, (-) I mean there are 5 levels, yes? (-) Because (-) I mean, even if you don't get paid much, (-) it's already level 6. (.) I mean the 5th, 4th, 3rd, 2nd and 1st levels... (-) there must be people on

²¹¹ I've never seen a rejection letter for these scholarships but received such a letter myself regarding the anticipated payment of a financial aid for working mothers with children younger than 36 months. In my letter, it only said that I was not eligible for what I had applied for, because I did not work enough hours. The letter also gave a reference to a law, but when I searched the law I could not find any information on a minimum of hours, so I presented an appeal that was rejected anyway without giving further explanations. When completing my tax return, it turned out that I would receive the financial aid through the tax return anyway and that I had just not been eligible for the anticipation of the payment. If this had been clearly specified in the information for the application or at least in my rejection letter, it would have saved me and the administrative staff time we spent with the application and appeal. After this experience, I consider it rather likely that a similar lack of transparency explains the described misconceptions and the proliferation of false beliefs about scholarship requirements.

²¹² The Catalan name was "*els llindars*".

those levels, but... [Interviewer: Hmm] (-) They are being quite harsh²¹³. (Int2_1 Maduixa, l.236-245)

It costs 2,000 Euros. [Interviewer: Wow] But it's 2,000 Euros and not 10,000 Euros per year, that's like "no", and my mom told me: "Well, look, with the scholarship's money we can get to pay you this short course and that's it". (Int5 Maduixa, l.932f.)

None of the participants mentioned to have spoken to university staff about general scholarship programmes, but N. did so regarding the Erasmus-help for exchange terms we will comment on in more detail below (see *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*). As N. explained, the university staff had told her to not even consider undertaking an Erasmus if she was going to need a financial aid to do so, as the aid would never be enough. However, we see in her last-year interview that she made a Spanish friend abroad who depended on the financial aid and worked throughout her Erasmus to be able to subsist. Similarly, Irina had worked and saved money before her exchange in Mexico, indicating that it was not impossible to partake in exchange programmes even without financial support from the family of origin. The criticism that financial aids are not sufficient and the discouraging of students who most need them to even participate may similarly apply to general scholarships and play a role in the reproduction of social inequality in the access to HE and to exchange programmes. Though none of the participants mentioned regional differences regarding the cost of living when talking about scholarships, some said to have chosen the UdL because life in Lleida is much cheaper than in Barcelona, even if this limited their study choice to the degree courses at offer in the UdL (see Irina in *What I was born for - or not* and Piruleta in *Degree of completion of development tasks*). An adaptation of the financial help to the regional costs of living might therefore make sense, though it has to be said that as the current system does not allow students to study at all if they have to depend on a scholarship, those who might refrain from a degree course because it is only offered in an expensive region would not change their decision anyway, as they cannot be sure to receive the scholarship.

If [my parents] had not able to help me, I couldn't have done it. And they already told me that before leaving, when I handed in the documents and I asked for the scholarship, they told me: "If you need to live on the scholarship, don't apply". Because only with the scholarship no, you can't do anything and, well, I was very lucky that my parents were able to support me. (Int5 N., l.1621-1624)

This is again an example of how structures (scholarship programmes, requirements and payments) and social representations (critique of these programmes for helping ridiculously little or for being very difficult to achieve) may influence identity constructions ("HE is not for me") and reproduce social inequalities. Especially the academic performance requirements are critical here, as students from working-classes are more likely to experience academic difficulties, to achieve lower grades and to prolong their studies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Rubin & Wright, 2017). This seems to have happened to Peter, whose parents did not own a second housing and who received a scholarship in his first but none of the following years in HE. With this, the third of the three participants from social class A who took part in this project was excluded from receiving a scholarship, though he was still eligible for enrolment fee reductions.

²¹³ The Catalan expression used in the original was: "*se passen molt*".

Though we can argue that obviously none of the participants did really depend on the scholarships, as they would not have been able to study at all if they did, this shows that the families with least economic capital are indirectly excluded, as they cannot enrol into HE without knowing for sure that they will receive a scholarship and if they receive a scholarship to start with, are likely to lose it due to academic difficulties. Though they could still receive enrolment scholarships, in particular the participants from social class A did not meet the requirements for these either, while participants with high economic capital did. Nadia, for example, received over years an enrolment scholarship though she had the possibility to live in a family-owned flat and Maduixa did not receive the enrolment scholarship earlier, because she did not apply for it.

The current system does, hence, seem to allocate aids in a way that disadvantages students from lower social classes directly through the requirements and indirectly through the proliferation of misconceptions, while we can imagine that well-informed families may be able to achieve additional helps by choosing carefully who is indicated as the owner of certain properties. However, the high amount of paperwork necessary to achieve a scholarship comes with an important cost of time and money (certified copies etc.), so families that do not depend on financial aids at all, may not lose any time with this paperwork – as Maduixa did for years. Scholarships are then reduced to certain sections within the middle classes - contrary to the supposition by Troiano et al. (2016) that middle class *milieus* may reduce their HE participation in times of increasing fees and decreasing financial aids.

The fact that the requirements are even higher for master degrees while some reductions are directly lower or not applicable, implies furthermore a certain idea among the scholarship-offering institutions that equal access to master degrees is not that important, as these degrees are already much more expensive than degree courses. This is in line with the observations made by Bultmann and Weitkamp (1999) about the possible effects of the introduction of a differentiation between bachelor and master degrees, as bachelor degrees could then be downgraded to mass-education while masters would be reserved for the elites – facilitating again the reproduction of social inequalities by ensuring superior social positions. In the UK, a recent study indicates that this may be already happening (Wakeling & Laurison, 2017).

This situation could be improved by: 1) *Family-income dependent enrolment fees*. Certain reductions, like the enrolment fee reductions and scholarships, could be calculated automatically in the moment of enrolment, without requiring a specific application for it. Like this all students would have to present the same documentation regarding their family income, so students from families with little economic capital would not lose additional time and resources with these procedures and nobody would miss out on a reduction, because they missed the deadline or did not expect to be eligible. In the case of parents with the fiscal residence in Spain, it might be even possible to only require the permission to receive data on the parent income from the fiscal authorities, simplifying the paperwork further. Moreover, the gained data could be used for more precise statistics on the student population. 2) *Opening the application period earlier and resolving the allocation of aids quicker*. If students could apply directly after the PAU for scholarships, more young people with few economic resources might do so instead of discarding University studies because they do not expect to

receive a scholarship or certain reductions. Like this, some additional students might enter HE, because they awaited the scholarship resolutions before deciding on their entrance to HE and actually received the financial help. 3) *Offering more support in the application process*. If students were informed about all existing scholarships and received help to determine for which they are eligible and what other applications they could present, for example to suspend the matriculation fee payment until after the scholarship resolution etc., more of them might be able to apply for scholarships they are really likely to receive, saving both the applicants and the administrative staff time, as the students would apply more purposefully and quicker and the administrative staff would have to consider less applications that do not comply the requirements. 4) *Officialese language*. The whole application process could be further facilitated by using a more comprehensible language in the calls, giving clear examples or offering automatic aid calculators in the internet that tell you what amount of aid you could expect to receive or why you are not eligible for a help. Knowing for sure why a request was rejected can also help to reduce the proliferation of misconceptions. 5) *Scholarship duration*. Rather than annual renovations, biennial applications would reduce the paperwork both for applicants and administrative staff and hence reduce the time students who depend on scholarships have to invest. 6) *Revision of the requirements*. As the current requirements regarding academic performance and economic capital are likely to reproduce inequalities, these should be revised, for example, by giving more importance to family income and increasing the permitted threshold of property and lowering – or excluding – academic performance requirements. 7) *Ensuring fair evaluations*. As some lecturers do not seem to be aware of how suspended subjects influence the scholarship eligibility of their students, more information in this regard and clearer guidelines how to evaluate students in order to ensure similar outcomes for similar performance, independently of the concrete lecturer, university etc. (see *Injustice and powerlessness*), should be given.

Miscellaneous

Apart from the two examples analysed in more detail, several knowledge gaps and misconceptions appeared in the course of the interviews and may have important repercussions for the students' experiences in HE. N. argued for example in Int2 that University does not offer a second exam period to those who failed. This is simply wrong, as the regulation (Universitat de Lleida, 2016) stipulates in Article 1.2 2d that the students have a right to repeat all evaluative activities that count 30% or more of the final grade. The ignorance of these regulations favours that students do not present complaints and insist on their rights when lecturers act differently (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*).

While the regulations regarding evaluation, third-language accreditation etc. are published on the University website²¹⁴, other stipulations are less clear or less accessible. An example is the recognition of credits when changing the degree course. Maduixa, for instance, could not know for sure which credits would be recognized when she changed her degree course from audiovisual communication and journalism (UdL) to audiovisual communication (UB). The University's website specifies that: "*Son susceptibles de convalidarse aquelles assignaturas cuyo*

²¹⁴ All regulations of the UdL are published in their latest form on: <http://udl.cat/ca/udl/norma/ordenaci/> [last access: 10.04.2018]

contenido y carga lectiva sean equivalentes."²¹⁵ Here it is in the end difficult to know which subjects do coincide in content and to which extent, so the decision margin is quite big and credit recognition turns into a lottery. Maduixa did therefore argue that the trick consisted in demanding the recognition of as much as possible, expecting that some credits would not be recognized in the end. We can easily imagine that such an approach produces an important workload for the affected staff, possibly explaining the long waiting time between application and resolution.

At my University you had to go to the secretary's office and ask for the subjects you wanted to have recognized. Then, you had to read the teaching plan for each course, and if you found one that was similar in some way, there was no need for the subject to be exactly the same, you could add it. For example, if you find six subjects that could be recognized, it's better to write down those six, and to go pay. It's really important to do them all at the same time, because if you find a course that is similar afterwards, and you want to have it recognized, they will make you pay double. (.) I mean, you have to pay for each sheet that you send. I did it all at once, and I had it directly recognized. Well, I put a lot of subjects because I thought: "the more, the better". Some were denied, and some were accepted, and if they are, these subjects appear on your record saying they've been recognized, (.) and so on. (Int4 Maduixa, l.456-464)

While Maduixa spoke in her interviews of the recognition of credits – the term used on the UB website whenever two different degree courses are affected – students who want to continue the same degree course in another university can transfer (*trasladar*) their academic records through the application of an 'adaptation' (*adaptación*)²¹⁶. As Maduixa explained, she attempted to request such an adaptation to the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) and then applied for the degree course in the UB as a new student, as the application for the UPF had been rejected. This shows that she did not know for sure if the degree courses were considered the same or not. Though one might argue here that the different names of the degree courses do already indicate that they are not the same, Skone commented on a case of a fellow student from his degree Animal Health and Science (UdL) who was able to enter after her second year in the UdL into the third year of Veterinary Medicine (UAB). This decision is highly surprising, especially if we consider the general difficulties of recognition between the two degrees explained further below (see *Sudden changes of the rules: Veterinary Medicine and the UdL*). Though it is possible that either Maduixa or Skone or both mixed terms up or represented the stories otherwise altered, these contradictions indicate an impression of arbitrariness in adaptation and recognition so the existing knowledge gaps seem to be the direct result of a lack of transparency and information shared by the universities.

Skone: In fact, one of my classmates is not here anymore because she left for Barcelona, and she has started the third year [Interviewer: oh] which I don't understand quite well but she has started in third year

Interviewer: But was she doing the career here with you?

²¹⁵ <http://www.ub.edu/acad/es/grado/convalidaciones/nacionales.htm> [last access: 10.04.2018] "The subjects susceptible for recognition are those whose contents and teaching load are equivalent." (Translation by the author.)

²¹⁶ The differences between adaptation and recognition and the procedures are explained on the website of the UB: <http://www.ub.edu/acad/es/grado/normativa/convalidaciones.htm> [last access: 10.04.2018]

Skone: Yes, but she was in the second year

Interviewer: And has she been recognized everything?

Skone: I really don't know what has happened

Interviewer: Well! Ask for the transfer now

Skone: No. I don't want, that is to say, it doesn't matter to me, I prefer to have 2 degrees (...)

Interviewer: All right, what cannot be understood is how someone who is in the middle of his/her career can enter in third year, while those who have finished the career cannot

Skone: I don't have the least idea, we were all astonished, but we congratulate her for entering in third year and that's it (Int3 Skone, l.183-199)

As the final resolution of credit recognition is posterior to the beginning of the course, students whose decision to continue studying in HE depends on the recognition of their previous studies might decide against HE and many practical issues may arise for students who started to course subjects that were recognized later in the year²¹⁷ etc. It is true that a certain margin in the recognition of credits is necessary as it is impossible to consider all possible recognitions previously and would only provoke unnecessary workload as long as nobody actually applies for recognition. However, a quicker procedure resolving the applications for recognition before the beginning of the classes could facilitate things for students. Moreover, staff could elaborate and regularly update a list with all applications – without sharing any personal data of the applicants – specifying, for example, that in the academic course XXX an application was presented requesting the recognition of subject YYY in the degree course ZZZ and the University AAA as equivalent to the subject BBB and that the decision had been positive or negative. Such a list would not lead to any obligations for the deciding staff as different decisions could be taken and justified at any moment, especially if the study plans of the affected subjects had been revised, but like this the interested students could encounter a certain orientation what subjects might be recognized and impressions of arbitrariness could be overcome. Especially regarding the adaptation of degree courses, it should furthermore be possible to publish a list with the considered possibilities on the University websites.

In some cases, information gaps do not relate to official regulations but to established practices that can have even more direct effects for the students' itineraries through HE. Peter encountered a problem when he matriculated for his final degree work after having passed all other subjects and internships. Though nobody had told him so before and nothing is said in this regard in the orientations for the final degree project published on the degree's website²¹⁸, it turned out to be established practice that the students who wished to realize an

²¹⁷ Here I can introduce, once again, my own experience. As a master student in the UdL I had to insist repeatedly to receive the resolution of my application for the recognition of credits at the beginning of the course. Fellow students who had not insisted in the same way received their resolutions months later, when they had already passed several of the assignments from subjects that were finally recognised for them. Though I had always insisted on receiving the decision because I had to reconcile my master studies with a work as an English teacher in a private language school and needed to know if and which subjects I had to attend before the beginning of the classes, I was repeatedly treated like an annoying troublemaker who only insisted on the resolution to disturb rather than awaiting the natural outcome of the processes – like the others did. However, no clear dates were set for the resolution and no guarantees that could have smoothened the effects of the prolonged waiting were offered.

²¹⁸ http://www.educacionprimaria.udl.cat/export/sites/EducacioPrimaria/.content/documents/1718/orientacions_tfg_ep_1718.pdf [last access: 10.04.2018]

empirical work – the modality he considered easiest – used their last-year internships to realize a study for their final degree work. As he had already completed his internship, he was not able to combine it in this way with his final degree work and had to find another way to conduct an empirical study that required him additional effort.

In other cases, the participants displayed difficulties to find or understand information that was certainly available, indicating that in all described problems did likely intervene a certain lack of interest or underlying problems with their information literacy (see *Information literacy and institutional transparency*). Willy, for example, mentioned in Int5 that he and many of his fellow students did not know for how many credits they had to enrol in their last year to complete their degree, as almost all subjects were elective subjects and they could not find any orientation in this regard online. It is likely that this information was not published, as the staffs attending such websites do probably take it for granted that all students know that they have to pass 60 ECTS per year, so 4x60 in a degree course. In the last year, they then have to course the 60 annual credits, plus subjects from previous years they did not pass before. However, in the case of Willy an additional difficulty appeared through the recognition of language courses as credits. As he explained, he coursed more credits than required because he had not known that he could have applied for the recognition of his language courses. Though he was convinced that the problem here was a knowledge gap – caused by a lack of information – at least in the Universitat de Lleida the decision to recognize language courses as transversal credits was taken after the application of the moratorium to the B2-law, with the idea to somehow reward the students who made the effort to achieve the B2 level in the course of their degree. However, as this decision came rather late (just as the application of the moratorium itself, see *Third-language accreditation*), many students did course the credits beforehand and did not need the recognition²¹⁹. So where Willy assumed a knowledge gap and misinformation, a sudden change of rules might be the explanation – but in this case, the knowledge gap applies to the reason of the problem and holds in every case true as Willy did not know that the rules changed.

N. complained in Int3 that information is not passed on systematically, so it depends on pure chance if you find out about an interesting conference that does moreover count as transversal credits or not. Here it has to be said that a list of all activities considered for transversal credits is made available online on the University's website²²⁰. However, I have to admit that I myself was not aware of this publication until I started to search for more information on the topic. In this sense, it is possible that the dissemination of this web space is improvable. As I am by now a lecturer in the same faculty, I receive regularly e-mails on conferences, courses etc., students may recognise as transversal credits. However, these e-mails do not usually include a link to the web space and every e-mail follows a different format featuring a wide range of different subject matters. This happens, probably, because these e-mails are usually sent by the organising lecturers or research groups and meant for all members of the academic community, so that the student profile and the detail that the

²¹⁹ Explanation given in a degree meeting of the degree in Tourism, 2018.

²²⁰ See: http://www.udl.cat/export/sites/universitat-lleida/ca/serveis/upd/.galleries/docs/Materia_Transversal/CG_activitats_M.Transversal_FB_-2013-2014_modificat.pdf [last access: 29.05.2018].

course is on the list of transversal credits is not always among the most highlighted elements. Moreover, these e-mails are sent to the University e-mail address, so it is possible that some students miss out on the information because they do not consult their institutional e-mail addresses too regularly. Though we can consider it the students' task to regularly check their incoming mail to stay informed, it is also true that certain procedures could facilitate the access to this information as the current system is obviously improvable, as N.'s comment shows us.

From my own experience, the current practice at the Universitat Lleida to create a new e-mail address for each new user profile is little practical, as it is difficult to stay informed about all incoming e-mail. Though this issue can be resolved by redirecting secondary e-mail addresses to the mainly used e-mail address, students first have to find out that such a setting exists and consider the information they receive through their secondary e-mail address sufficiently important to learn how to set and eventually activate these redirections. Should it be inappropriate to use the students' private e-mail addresses for such University mailing-lists, a more user-friendly system that invites users to directly redirect their e-mails to their usual account when setting a new university account up might facilitate that more students make use of this option. However, an additional difficulty could lie in the amount of incoming mail, as students may have difficulties to differentiate messages according to the relevance for their lives, so that adding additional messages to the personal account alone is probably not a solution. Especially if messages are sent with little temporal margin, students may not read them in time to react and changing formats and little informative subject matters may difficult their ability to detect relevant e-mails.

Throughout my time in the UdL I have had occasion to experience different alternatives to this outsending of e-mails. With the adoption of a new study plan for the PhD studies, the previously existing mailing list was abolished and relevant information is now published in the *Campus Virtual*. However, as I was enrolled to a previous PhD study plan at the moment of change, I did not have access to the Campus Virtual until I changed for the new plan, missing out on many of the announcements. When I changed the study plan, a new user account was automatically created, but I had to ask my tutor for my user name to establish access, as the University had not informed me about it, answering when I presented a query that I should try again later in case there was a temporal technical problem. Once I had full access to my new PhD user profile in the Campus Virtual, I noticed that many of the announcements did also arrive to my e-mail address and came to – wrongly – assume that I did not need to connect to the Campus unless I needed to send a message myself. However, as I found out, both as a student and a lecturer, messages are only forwarded to the students' e-mail addresses if the sender ticks the corresponding box and it is not possible to change the setting so the box is usually ticked. With the current settings, I keep missing out on messages and announcements because they are not forwarded to my e-mail and I have to connect regularly to the profile, just to see if I received anything new. This is why I would not suggest the abolition of mailing lists for students, at least with the current settings and functioning of the Campus Virtual at the UdL²²¹.

²²¹ The UdL offers an app that allows students to receiver the messages sent to their profile in the Campus Virtual on their smartphones. For more information see: <http://udl.cat/ca/udlapp/index.html>

Another alternative is used in the UdL for the information on courses offered for University lecturers by the Institute of Educational Sciences – Centre of Continuing Education (ICE, for its acronym in Catalan)²²². Whenever a new course is offered, an automatic e-mail is sent to the list UdL-info, the subject matter of the e-mail is always the same, facilitating a quick recognition of the purpose of the mail and the format of the e-mails is always similar, offering a link to the ICE website and a list with the title of the newly added courses. Here the difficulty lies in inscribing for the UdL-info mailing list, as these e-mails are only sent through this list and the members have an advantage in the inscription for courses with limited places as they are sure to receive information on the new courses as soon as these are published. In my opinion, this system is a lot more efficient than the use of the Campus Virtual or of random messages, each realized in a different format and with changing subject matters. As a similar webspace for the transversal credits exists, this could be conditioned in the way the ICE courses are, including automatic and standardised messages to certain mailing lists whenever the inscription for a transversal-credits course is opened or the course is about to begin. The standardised format should include the link to the web space with all transversal credits, so that students could easily access this web space, whenever they had a doubt. In the long run, students would automatically "learn" to recognise the messages, enabling them to scan their mailbox quicker, and they would be more aware of the existence of the web space with the complete list of transversal credits. This would also lower the workload for lecturers who would not have to inform the students separately about the upcoming activities and could formulate their information messages for other target groups only.

Additionally, information sessions could be offered each year at the beginning of the academic course inviting students to receive further information on the transversal credits they have to course and where they can find the offer. These sessions should be open to all students, as the findings of this thesis indicate that students tend to worry about additional requirements for the completion of their degree course when the end is already closing in, so they might not be receptive for the offer of transversal credits when they just enrolled for the first-year. This is, in part, what happened to Xenia, a participant in this project, who contacted me after her last interview through WhatsApp, asking me if her participation in my PhD project could be recognised as transversal credits as she had missed out on taking a course and was now not able to graduate²²³.

Information literacy and institutional transparency

In this sub-section, we revisit the examples given in the previous sub-sections to identify possible causes of the described misconceptions and knowledge gaps. In concrete, we identify

[last access: 13.04.2018]. When I attempted to install the app, my smartphone informed me that I would have to deinstall whatsapp to gain sufficient space. I contacted the technical support both to solve this issue and to find out since when the App existed, as I could not find any information in this regard. The answer was that the App had been launched on the 12th of February 2016 - just before the last interview round and when several of the participants of this project had already finished their Degree.

²²² <http://www.ice.udl.cat/ca/> [last access: 10.04.2018]

²²³ I could not help her in this sense, but contacted her somewhat later to see if she found a solution and it seems that she did, taking a later course, but as we did not meet for another interview, we did not talk about any negative consequences of this difficulty.

arbitrariness, lack of transparency and little user-friendly format and structure on the side of the institutions, but also poor information literacy on the side of the students.

Information literacy is understood as the ability to identify a knowledge gap and an adequate source to close it (Hollister, 2010) and includes, in this sense, aspects of digital literacy²²⁴. From this perspective, the diverse knowledge gaps and misconceptions the participants displayed in the focus groups and in the course of the follow-up can be read as a lack of information literacy that is, at least in some cases, not completely overcome in the course of the University transition, as gaps and misconceptions continued until the end of the follow-up. Rather, HE proliferates this difficulty further as participants who were not able to identify the adequate information source and did not know either who to ask for it, seemed to depend on pure luck as some staff informed them well or redirected them to the correct contact person for their issue, while others did not answer when they received a question they considered beyond their task area. Rather than developing an understanding who they need to ask what, students 'learn' under such conditions that asking HE staff questions is a lottery and if their experience is especially negative, they might even refrain from asking the right persons their questions in order to not repeat the negative incident.

In focus group 9, I was able to observe a teacher reacting to one of her pupils requesting further information on studying abroad and the posterior recognition of credits and titles by arguing that they should search for it online. Moreover, she gave rather long answers that did not appear to actually serve the pupil who had asked how to ensure that her studies from abroad would be recognised in Spain. While the girl seemed to consider the possibility to begin the degree she aspired in another country, should she not achieve the required score to enter right away in Spain and then change after a while to continue in Spain, she did not require general information about the country. As another participant intervened, we see that she actually had family in the country and did certainly not need a lecture about passports and vaccinations. When the question for the recognition was repeated, the teacher assumed that she should ask in Universities - interestingly only referring to universities in Barcelona, not the local UdL - and then changed the topic by saying that she had not known that her pupil wanted to study abroad.

Teacher: (--) I imagine that via Internet (-) you enter the country and University you are interested in (.) Last year, there was a boy who wanted to study Medicine (-) but (.) he hadn't achieved the mark that was required here in Spain (.) so, he enrolled in Mexico (.), but in Mexico classes were going to start in summer (...)

Mona: ((2sec.)) Information about the papers needed

Teacher: Sure, first you need to prepare your passport (.) then, depending on the country you are going to (.) perhaps you need to get vaccinated (-) [class giggles] and also ask for (.) [class giggles] the time you will spend there (.) if you are going there ((as a tourist))

Virgo: [[teacher's name]], she's not going to Kongo, she's going to Argentina (at the same time) [class giggles] (.) to get vaccinated...

Teacher: well (.) I don't know where she's going to (.) [class giggles, whispering] in Argentina there may be (.) a disease which has been eradicated from here, but not from there (.) no no no

²²⁴ For more information on digital literacy see: <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2016/11/09/what-is-digital-literacy.html> [last access: 13.04.2018].

Virgo: but I think (-) (talking to Mona) you have relatives in Argentina, don't you? (-) well, talk to them (.), ask them to keep you informed

Teacher: I have

Mona: All right (at the same time) they can give me their point of view from there (.), but (.) I want to know (.) (.) if after being there, (.) I can come back ((here)) and enter the Doctorate (.)

?: Sure

Teacher: that is why you need to get informed in the University

Mona (at the same time): at the *Ensenyament*²²⁵ ((office))?

Teacher: you can ask there (.) look for a University in Barcelona (.), I didn't know you wanted to go to Argentina (.) but I...

Mona: I didn't want to, but my mark... (FG9, l.341-374)

Considering the question where to find the concrete information the pupil requested, a first difficulty lies here in the changing rules, as it is impossible to say today with certainty which credits and titles might be recognized within the years it would take the students to actually achieve a title. The second problem is that the internet is a bottomless pit where you need certain skills to find relevant information and to distinguish suitable sources from outdated and little trustworthy posts. My reading of the observed situation is that the teacher's own information literacy was not too high in this sense, as she did not recognise the difficulties of searching information online, redirecting her pupils to this solution rather than getting engaged and helping them along or at least recognizing that she did not know the answer either. If teachers do frequently redirect their students' queries in this way to the internet, it is little likely that they will acquire information literacy and much more probable that they experience frustration and refrain from certain undertakings completely, to avoid the effort to inform themselves online.

As a frequent user of the UdL's website and after analyzing the former welcome page in an assignment of my master degree, I have to say that the website could be further improved. Displayed information is often outdated, links do not longer function or lead to different contents than the selected ones and the decision where a certain content appears seems to be rather arbitrary in some cases, especially for a user who is not an expert in university structure and organization. Ironically, it is often easier to find certain contents through a google search than directly on the website, risking that the encountered content is not the latest version. Improving the University website – and other student-relevant websites, for example on scholarships or exchange programmes – could lead to improvements here.

Moreover, information literacy could be included as a skill students should acquire throughout their degree courses. Some might argue that the problem is inadequate preparation for university and that students should have acquired these skills prior to university entrance and hence be able to employ them for their study choice and throughout their studies. Though it is true that schools might also work information literacy differently to better prepare their students not only for HE, but for life, projecting the issue solely to schools cannot be in the interest of HE, if HE students are then either condemned to fail or to graduate without having

²²⁵ Here Mona refers to the *Departament d'Ensenyament de la Generalitat de Catalunya*, the Catalan public organism in charge of educational policies except tertiary education. For more information see: <http://ensenyament.gencat.cat/ca/inici> [last access: 19.08.2018]. Considering that its scope does not include university studies, the chances that she would receive help with her question are rather low.

accomplished these skills. Further research could test if information literacy is a general problem in the student population, but even if only few students were effected, offering courses to ensure its acquisition or including information literacy into the list of competences to acquire in given subjects would do no harm to anybody and could ensure that at least when graduating from HE the students possess a certain level of information literacy.

Apart from the rather obvious recommendations to improve the websites and to include training in information literacy within the study plans or through transversal credits, our study gives further ideas how to overcome and avoid knowledge gaps and misinformation. As we saw in the analyses of focus groups and first-year interviews, most students prefer personal information sources, family members, teachers/HE staff, fellow students, friends etc. In the course of the follow-up, information sources were not usually a topic, but especially regarding knowledge gaps we can observe that the participants did not use impersonal information sources – like the University website or published legal Dispositions – as they referred to wrong interpretations the direct consultation of such documents could have avoided, e.g. when believing that they already had the B2 level in English through their A-levels. As we will see further below regarding the Erasmus aids (see *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*), especially 'shocking' news are likely to make it through to the students, possibly as they are proliferated in a snowball effect, while amendments and moratoriums are usually less shocking and therefore less a topic of conversation and do not achieve the same visibility in the press. University could act as a counterweight to such tendencies, disseminating counterstatements when necessary and communicating accurate information in information sessions and through a clear organizational structure that helps students to identify the most adequate contact person for their doubts.

Some of the participants commented on 'tutor'-systems at the beginning of their studies. These lecturers were expected to function as special contact persons for their group of students, especially regarding academic doubts, like the choice of elective subjects. However, only few participants mentioned such a programme and none of them said to have ever contacted their tutor with a question. While the UAB already offered such a system in the academic year the participants began their studies, the UdL implemented the programme Nestor through an agreement of the Governing Council in June 2012 (Universitat de Lleida, 2017b), but when going through the UdL's University guides²²⁶, offered to the students every course, I did not find any reference to the programme until the academic course 2017-18, when the participants had already finished their studies. Similarly, we see in the few cases where the participants refer to such systems that they did not function too well, as the first meeting was cancelled and never repeated in some cases. As we have seen above (see *Lecturers*), contacting a lecturer represented, furthermore, a special threshold for many participants especially at the beginning of the follow-up.

Rather than a tutor-lecturer for first-year students, a broader offer of information sessions and of administrative staff informing students might be useful here, as the additional power

²²⁶ These guides are also available online at:

<http://www.udl.cat/ca/organs/vicerectors/ves/ConsellEstudiantat/> [last access: 26.05.2018]. Though it has to be said that we cannot know to what extent the students actually consult these guides, it is clear that information that is not offered here is not ideally promoted.

difference between the evaluator and students would cease to affect, making it possibly easier for the students to seek support. Similarly the Vice-rector's Office for students and the student council could become more active in offering information and orientation to students, but this might require, first of all, that the student councils are granted further visibility on the websites. In the UdL, they are currently mentioned within the web space for the Vice-rector for students²²⁷, so a certain previous knowledge on university organisation is necessary to know where to search for these councils, leading to the rather ironic situation that students may not request help from these organs to close their knowledge gaps, because their knowledge gaps do not allow them to find them. Once the list is found, further difficulties appear as many of the links to the councils' websites do not function and some do not even offer such a link.

Regarding the students in more advanced courses, their fear to meet the tutor might be a sign of a more general problem with the student-lecturer relationship in general or with this lecturer in concrete. However, more opportunities to meet lecturers in the course of the degree in less-formal settings could help even shyer students to overcome this fear and to make use of their lecturers as supporters (see *Lecturers*).

6.5.3. *Organisational problems*

In this subsection we will take a look at problems caused by the organisation of the different institutions. In concrete, we will see two examples for sudden changes of rules. In the course of the follow-up, the participants of this study and I myself, as a PhD student, became victims of sudden changes of the rules regarding University entrance, study programmes, scholarships etc. Different to my personal experience in Germany, where new rules did not apply to pupils or students who had already enrolled for a study programme, allowing them to finish their studies in the stipulated time according to the old rules, in Spain changes in the Dispositions do affect matriculated students. Already in the focus groups, my participants complained about a change in the Dispositions regarding university entrance, stipulating a relation between High School branches and degree courses they had not been informed about before choosing their High School branch. In the course of the follow-up, new rules regarding third-language requirements were approved and suspended (see *Third-language accreditation*) and the requirements for a financial aid for Spanish Erasmus students offered by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports were changed. In the following, we will focus on this example, as it is highly related to the axis 'distance and mobility' described above (see *Mobility*). Afterwards we will see another quite different example of sudden changes of rules: Veterinary Medicine in Lleida. Another example in the same line could have been the decision to return to a system of 3 + 2 (3 years of undergraduate studies and 2 years of a master degree), which had been a polemic topic throughout most of the follow-up and continued to be the reason for student protests after its completion (see *Education and degree course organisation*). As it was not implemented in the course of the follow-up and did not affect the participants directly, it was however only a secondary topic and we cannot analyse its implementation. Other examples of organizational problems considered in this section are the bad coordination between lecturers and big

²²⁷ See: <http://www.udl.cat/ca/organs/vicerectors/vest/ConsellEstudiantat/> [last access: 26.05.2018].

differences between lecturers/internship coordinators/Universities – though always from the student perspective. In a final subsection, we will consider miscellaneous organisational problems.

Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid

As we have seen above (see *Mobility*), many participants expressed in the first-year interview an interest in experiencing a stay abroad during their studies, but only 3 participants did actually participate in such programmes: N. did an annual Erasmus in Germany, Irina spent a year as an exchange student in Mexico and Nic applied for a 3-month internship in Japan, but returned after one month. It has to be said that if all students who displayed an interest in the Erasmus programme had come to partake in it, this would have indicated an atypical sample, as usually less than 10% of the students of a year do an Erasmus (European Commission, 2015). In this sense, our findings might indicate that the students know the Erasmus programme and consider it attractive, but only few pursue this option in the end. One of the reasons to decide against an Erasmus is its economic cost. As we have seen above (see *Scholarship programmes*) many misconceptions and knowledge gaps existed among the participants regarding scholarships in general and Erasmus scholarships were not an exception. Representations that financial helps are insufficient or impossible to achieve may provoke potential students to decide against HE and enrolled students to decide against a stay abroad. In the case of the Erasmus programme, we can observe how such representations proliferated in the wake of press releases on new Dispositions in 2013.

Most participants had still not begun to search for further information on Erasmus terms and none was directly affected, when José Ignacio Wert, the then Minister of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, announced severe changes in the access to the Ministry's Erasmus scholarship and cutbacks in the economic aids directly applicable for the academic year in course and hence for the students who were already abroad with the Erasmus programme (Campos, 2013)²²⁸. These announcements were soon after criticised by the European Union and the related Dispositions were modified by the Spanish government (Sanchis, 2013)²²⁹, though only for the academic year in course. Though none of our participants directly referred to any of these press releases, several mentioned important cutbacks in the Erasmus aids when explaining why they finally decided against an application, indicating that the representation that they would not receive financial help influenced their perception of the Erasmus programme and their subjective chances to participate.

In the end, no, because I wanted to go to Germany, and the University I had checked the teaching was in German... Obviously, if they do it in German, I won't understand anything. (.) And also because before there was a scholarship that was quite good, but they've cut the money in half and that's a lot of money. [Interviewer: The Erasmus' scholarship?] Yes, yes, and also because I feel bad because the ones who have to pay are my parents and, jeez, I feel bad about that. (Int4 Willy, l.72-76)

²²⁸ Press release available at: https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/erasmus-becas-universidad-educacion-wert_0_193180901.html. [last access: 30.03.2018]

²²⁹ Press release available at: https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/erasmus-becas-wert-bruselas_0_195980806.html. [last access: 30.03.2018]

According to the quoted press release, all Spanish Erasmus students received previously to Wert's decision 100 €/month from the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 185€ if they had received a scholarship by the Ministry in the previous year, in addition to the EU help paid to all Erasmus students and additional helps offered by the Spanish autonomous communities the students could apply for²³⁰. The changes stipulated that only students who were currently receiving a general scholarship by the Spanish Ministry or had received one in the previous year were to receive this help. Moreover, a cutback in "complementary aids" for students, passing from 36,84 Million to 15,29 Million € is mentioned. One of the Spanish Erasmus students quoted in the article received 450 € summing all different aids and was able to live from this money, but would not be able to do so with 100 € less. Several other examples of injustice are given, for example the exclusion from an additional aid for academic excellence if you did not receive a scholarship from the Ministry and general indignation about the sudden change, when the students were already abroad, is communicated. After the revocation, the Spanish Erasmus students from 2013-2014 did receive the monthly 100€ aid from the Ministry, but from 2014-2015 onwards, the new rules were applied, so that N., our participant who applied for an Erasmus term in Germany in 2014-2015, did not receive this aid, as she had not been a scholarship holder. As we have seen above that the requirements for the general scholarship by the Ministry may exclude families with little economic capital if these possess a second housing, these families are additionally excluded from receiving the Erasmus aid. However, working-class students were already before this change in rules little likely to participate in the Erasmus programme, which has been described as highly class selective (Ballatore & Ferede, 2013). This means that the students complaining in the above mentioned press release that they would have to live "eating rice and pasta" and only "dream of meat"²³¹ with 100€/month less did most probably belong to the middle and upper classes. While we could expect that Erasmus students with this economic profile could compensate the cutbacks with parental support, the few Erasmus students who decided to do an Erasmus without such support, did probably opt to work and save money before their stay – as Irina did for her stay in Mexico – or worked throughout their stay, as a Spanish friend N. made in her Erasmus year did, independently of the change in the Disposition.

As the financial aid I had received as a German Erasmus student in Spain had been quite different to what N. received in her year, I was interested to see how the financial aids for Spanish Erasmus students had developed over the years, in order to see if the 100€ less for non-scholarship holders marked such a sudden difference as the press releases represented. In order to assess the effect of the change on the financial aids Spanish Erasmus students received over the years, I searched for information in the diverse reports by the European Commission, the UdL's annual academic memorandums and the worldwide web in general. I

²³⁰ For a current list of the aids Catalan University students may apply for, see: <http://www.udl.cat/ca/serveis/ori/estudiantat/erasmus/ajuts3/#sectionone-tab-2>. [Last access: 30.03.2018]

²³¹ Translation by the author. The original reads: "Por Facebook Irene Solís nos cuenta que está de Erasmus en Clermont (Francia). Lo de comer arroz y pasta es la tónica general y soñar con la carne es para ella y muchos compañeros, tal y como se van contando en la red social - "comprarse filetes de carne o pescado en Francia es darse un 'caprichito excesivo' hasta en los supermecados más accesibles para un estudiante", coincide Alcázar Poza". See: https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/erasmus-becas-universidad-educacion-wert_0_193180901.html [last access: 26.05.2018].

also contacted the UdL's International Relations Unit to ask for these numbers as well as the total numbers of outgoing Erasmus students from the UdL, but after exchanging 16 e-mails in over 5 weeks I was told that these numbers were difficult to access as the economic aids for Erasmus students had changed repeatedly over the years. Regarding the total number of outgoing students, I was told to check the annual academic memorandums, a solution we will comment on in the next paragraph. Regarding the financial aid²³², I therefore decided to mobilise my own social capital and asked an ex-Erasmus student from Spain to check for me exactly how much money he had received when and from whom. The result of my efforts was that I can tell that an Erasmus student from the UdL received in the academic course 2005-06 the 100 €-aid from the Ministry plus 75 € coming from the EU per month. While some students received additional payments for academic excellence and other scholarships, the minimum amount of the financial aid all outgoing students received in 2005-06 was hence of 175€/month. Following the entries in a forum²³³, the financial aid from the EU increased before 2010 to 250€/month. N. commented in her interview in 2016 to have received this monthly sum, though only for one term and not the whole year. As the information on the current financial aid offered by the EU available on the UdL's website²³⁴ specifies that students received in the academic courses 2016-17 and 2017-18²³⁵, 200, 250 or 300€/month depending on the group of country their receiving country was assigned to, it seems likely that already in these previous years, the concrete sum depended on the receiving country, so neither the forum nor N. specified this. This would mean that Erasmus students from 2009-10 received between 300 and 400 €, depending on the receiving country, if we sum the EU help and the aid from the Ministry. We can hence say that at some point between 2006-07 and 2009-10 increased the economic help for Erasmus students significantly. With the limitation of the Ministry's 100€ per month to only a certain profile of outgoing students, we can hence argue that the total of financial helps the students who were no longer eligible for the Ministry's aid received, was with between 200 and 300 € still higher than the helps from 2006. In this sense, the change in the requirements for receiving the 100€ from the Ministry represents a change in the tendency but does not completely abolish the increase in financial aids the Erasmus students received over the years. Following the argumentation that the social representation

²³² It has to be said that the reports of the European Commission mention average sums of financial aids outgoing students from different countries receive. It is, however, not completely clear to me how these averages are calculated, as they do not coincide with what I found through other ways. The European Commission (2014b) wrote, for example, that the Spanish Erasmus students received in 2012-2013 (prior to Wert's announcement of changes) 143€ per month on average. Report available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release MEMO-14-476_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-476_en.htm) [last access: 30.03.2018] My other sources do, however, indicate that the students received between 200 and 300 € by the EU and at least 100 € by the Spanish Ministry, as I explain in the text.

²³³ See: <https://www.racocatala.cat/forums/fil/132233/anar-sen-derasmus?pag=1> [last access: 09.05.2018]

²³⁴ See: http://www.udl.cat/export/sites/universitat-lleida/ca/serveis/ori/.galleries/Documents-ORI/Fitxers_descxrrega/Erasmus/16-17/Imports-Erasmus-2016.pdf [last access: 09.05.2018].

²³⁵ At the moment of elaboration of this text, two tables are available online, specifying the same amounts for the academic year 2016-2017 and 2017-2018: http://www.udl.cat/export/sites/universitat-lleida/ca/serveis/ori/.galleries/Documents-ORI/Fitxers_descxrrega/Erasmus/17-18/taula-imports-simplificada-SMS.pdf [last access: 30.03.2018] and http://www.udl.cat/export/sites/universitat-lleida/ca/serveis/ori/.galleries/Documents-ORI/Fitxers_descxrrega/Erasmus/16-17/Imports-Erasmus-2016.pdf [last access: 30.03.2018], respectively.

of the scope of financial aids may prevent students from actually informing themselves about the real rules, the dramatic communication of this change could have provoked the impression that Erasmus students did suddenly lose all aids and lead to a significant decrease in applications.

In order to study this hypothesis, which I would like to call ‘the Wert-effect’, I searched for the official statistics on the numbers of outgoing students for Spain. The diverse reports from the European Union²³⁶ did not solve this question completely, as they usually only mention especially striking numbers and the criteria for the elaboration of the statistical annexes did obviously change over the years, so that sometimes the data refers to a call, sometimes to an academic course and sometimes to a year; sometimes they differentiated between Erasmus Studies and Erasmus Placements, a programme for internships, sometimes they add up both, sometimes they differentiate between University and other HE studies and sometimes they only offer the sum for HE in total etc. In Annex 1 to the report for 2014 they even give student and staff placements in the same table (European Commission, 2014a), so I had to make my own calculations. This was especially problematic, as my main interest was to see how the numbers had developed in 2014-2015, so I decided to search for further sources. In the course of my search, I accessed data published by the SEPIE and by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports and discovered that though the different sources gave similar numbers in some years – allowing me to determine how calls, years and academic courses were still referring to the same time spans after all – the year 2014-2015 did not follow this rule and was the most difficult to determine. So I contacted the International Relations Unit from the UdL to ask for the numbers regarding the UdL. After receiving the answer that I should search for the annual numbers in the academic memorandums, I encountered a similar problem with changing criteria in the elaboration of the statistics, sometimes mixing all outgoing programs and sometimes differentiating Erasmus from the rest, on occasion additionally separating the Erasmus internship programme from the Erasmus studies programme, etc. With the academic memorandum for the academic year 2012-2013, I was able to retrace the development for the Erasmus placements from 2002-03 to 2012-13, but from the following year on the reports did change their format again. Unfortunately, especially the academic memorandum from 2014-2015 – the year after Wert’s announcement of the cutbacks – was not at all clear regarding the total numbers of outgoing Erasmus students as it mixed all mobility programmes and only offered a list by receiving countries. As the number I was able to achieve when summing up the receiving countries that from part of the Erasmus programme seemed very low, I contacted International Relations once again, this time only requesting help with the concrete academic year in question and explaining my difficulty with the memorandum. This time, I received the information that according to their software, in this year 93 students from the UdL had participated in the Erasmus studies programme and 27 in Erasmus internships. With this, I was able to elaborate the following table (Table 11) that may give the reader an idea of, on the one hand, the severe contradictions and lack of transparency in the official statistics regarding such a simple question as the total number of outgoing Erasmus students and, on the other hand, of a certain downward fluctuation in the academic course 2014-15 in the data offered by the EU for Spain and by the UdL for the UdL that might corroborate the suggested

²³⁶ The reports and their statistical annexes are available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/statistics_en [last access: 09.05.2018].

‘Wert-effect’. However, that the UdL sent 36 students less might be a ‘normal’ fluctuation, given the small numbers, especially if we observe that the differences from one year to another were on occasion even bigger. The EU numbers do indicate with more than 6000 students less a severe loss in 2014-15 and an almost immediate recovery in the following years, but as the numbers for 2014-15 had to be calculated by myself from the given numbers and the posterior recovery may only be the effect of a change from Erasmus to Erasmus plus, doubts how to interpret these figures remain. Moreover, other explanations for the fluctuations have to be considered, for example the effects of the economic crisis²³⁷. What is especially eye-catching and peculiar is that the numbers from the Spanish Ministry show a complete different trend, though, at the moment of the elaboration of this text, the only available numbers for the course 2014-15 are still only ‘provisional’ and might be revised in the end²³⁸. As the Ministry only considers the granted aids, I would have expected to find lower numbers in their data as students may become Erasmus students without receiving any aid – like N. in the second term of her year abroad. That the Ministry indicates that more students received aids than according to the EU took part in the programme, shows once again that something is amiss with this data and the tendency is negative, as the numbers of all sources did coincide in 2011 and were highly similar in the following years, so it seems that the academic course 2014-15 really marked some kind of point of inflection in the Erasmus programme and the elaboration of related statistics – though this is not the ‘Wert-Effect’ we were searching for.

²³⁷ EAIE commented, for example, on the slight reduction in the number of Spanish outgoing Erasmus students in the academic course 2013-14 (10% less than in 2012-13) that this first might be an effect of the ‘worsened financial situation’. See: <https://www.eaie.org/blog/europe-in-crisis.html> [last access: 09.05.2018].

²³⁸ This indicates furthermore an important delay in the publication of these statistics, given that these words are written in 2018, 3 years after the academic course in question.

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Table 11: Absolute numbers of Outgoing Erasmus students (total)

Year	call	academic course	Spain			UdL
			Source			
			EU	SEPIE	MECD	UdL
2006		2006-07		*	22.322	92
2007		2007-08		24.984	24.984	97
2008		2008-09		27.405	27.405	109
2009		2009-10		31.158	31.158	95
2010		2010-11		36.183	36.183	163
2011		2011-12	39.545	39.545	39.545	126
2012		2012-13	39.249	39.255	39.249	159
2013		2013-14	37.235	37.235	37.230	156
2014		2014-15	31.220	**	39.883	120
	2014	2015-16	36.842	36.842		201
	2015	2016-17	39.445			214

* The download of the PDF is not possible and the interactive map and table do not indicate the total for 2006. The data available on the SEPIE website reaches in the interactive map until 2013-14. For the call 2014 access to a table from EducaBase is given.

** As this call refers to the academic course 2015-16, the data for 2014-15 is hence missing.

Sources:

EU: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/statistics_en
<http://sepie.es/comunicacion/publicaciones/estadisticas.html> (2006-2013);
http://estadisticas.mecd.gob.es/EducaJaxiPx/Tabla.htm?path=/Relconexerior/ProgramasEuropeos/Superior/Conv2014//I0/&file=Conv_1_02.px

SEPIE: (2014)

<http://www.mecd.gob.es/servicios-al-ciudadano-mecd/estadisticas/educacion/universitaria/datos-cifras.html>; report 2015-16, p.105 (but: the

MECD: data for 2014-15 is only preliminary)

UdL: <http://www.udl.cat/ca/organs/secretaria/memoria/> (2006-07 - 2013-14 and 2015-16 - 2016-17); information from ORI (2014-15)

Future research could study the hypothesis of a possible 'Wert-effect' further, though without improved statistics it will be difficult to study this question. A common criterion, employed with consistency over the years, could easily overcome this difficulty.

Sudden changes of the rules: Veterinary Medicine and the UdL

Though the following example of a sudden change of rules did only affect one of the participants directly, the case may be paradigmatic for the functioning of the Catalan HE system and is hence of a special interest here. In the recent past, only one Catalan University offered a degree in Veterinary Medicine, the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* (UAB). In 2008, the UdL and the UAB signed an agreement, according to which annually 30 graduates of the newly created Degree Animal Health and Science (CSA, for its acronym in Catalan) would be admitted to complete the studies of veterinary medicine in the UAB. According to clause 1, sentence 2 of this agreement the UAB would recognize 180 ECTS of the students entering from the UdL (Universitat de Lleida, 2008). As the five-year degree of veterinary medicine imparts a total of 300 ECTS, these students would have to course another 120 ECTS in the UAB, or, in other words, 2 years – a detail which was also communicated through the related press releases²³⁹. The agreement stipulated a prolongable duration of 7 years, but as CSA would not reach its first promotion until 4 years after the signature, we can say that only the promotions 2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 would be able to apply for it.

In Spring 2012, only months after Skone, the participant who had chosen to study CSA, had explained the advantages of this choice in his first-year interview, highlighting his plan to complete the degree in veterinary medicine afterwards in the UAB, press releases commented on first difficulties with the agreement now that the first CSA promotion was about to graduate. According to *La Vanguardia*²⁴⁰, the UAB argued with differences in the study plans – that according to clause 1, sentence 2 of the original agreement had to be the same (Universitat de Lleida, 2008) – to justify that the first promotion of students from the UdL would have to complete 3 years in the UAB, rather than the stipulated two. The UdL reacted, according to the article in *La Vanguardia*, with additional courses the students of the first promotion studied before completing their degree. Skone, however, represented from the first interview on that he would have to study another 3 years in the UAB, so it is possible that the students had been informed about these rules before, though the signed treaty was not modified.

If we compare the signed agreement (Universitat de Lleida, 2008), the mentioned press releases (see footnotes 239 and 240) and the details given in a petition launched on change.org to request the finalization of the agreement²⁴¹ – another sign of the increasing polemic around the agreement – we notice that the number of credits the UAB was supposed

²³⁹ <https://www.20minutos.es/noticia/336890/0/udl/uab/veterinaria/> [Last access: 15.04.2018]

²⁴⁰ 'El acuerdo entre UdL y UAB por Veterinaria podría implicar la realización de un año "extra"', written by Albert Lijarcio and published in *La Vanguardia* on the 31st of May 2012: <http://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20120531/54301103139/posible-acuerdo-udl-uab-veterinaria-curso-extra.html> [last access: 15.04.2018].

²⁴¹ "Romper el convenio UAB-UdL sobre los estudios de veterinaria": <https://www.change.org/p/universidad-autonoma-bellaterra-romper-el-convenio-uab-udl-sobre-los-estudios-de-veterinaria> [last access: 15.04.2018].

to recognise varies over time. While *20minuts* mentioned in 2008 the 180 ECTS stipulated in the agreement, the article in *La Vanguardia* from 2012 spoke of a minimum of 122 ECTS and the petition from change.org of 138 ECTS. The petition mentioned moreover a prelude to the agreement, commenting that the UdL had been about to create a Faculty in Veterinary Medicine in 2007, a venture impeded by the UAB²⁴². Similarly, *La Vanguardia* spoke of the first promotion of students (2011-2012) and the four posterior promotions, though the original agreement stipulated a duration of 7 years, counting from 2008-2009, so only 4 promotions were included to start with – a detail the creator of the petition on change.org did probably ignore, as she opened the petition in 2015, when the agreement was anyway about to finalize.

Skone reassured me in his third-year interview that I did not need to worry, because the agreement was still active and he would be able to enter. Moreover, he told me about a fellow student who had requested a University change from the UdL to the UAB and had been admitted to the third year of Veterinary Medicine right away after having studied the first two years in the UdL in CSA (see also *Other organisational problems*). We considered in the interview that this was rather strange and did not make much sense considering all the obstacles the UAB built to accept the UdL's students after completing their four-year degree course to study another 2 years in the UAB. I suggested Skone could follow his fellow's example and ask for a similar university change, but Skone continued with his conviction that it would be positive to have studied first in the UdL, as he would finish with two titles rather than one. Moreover, he predicted the opening of a Degree in Veterinary Medicine in Lleida, arguing that this would be an additional alternative for him.

Interviewer: Because [the problem with] admission to Barcelona has been solved, hasn't it? (...)

Skone: ph (at the same time) no, nono, in reality it's said Veterinary will be given here, that's it

Interviewer: Then, you'd receive the recognition here, wouldn't you?

Skone: In fact, they want to do Veterinary here because they've had some problems with those from Barcelona and they are kind of tired of all this mess. They want to do Veterinary here and, then, those from Barcelona don't want that; however, it seems the *Generalitat*²⁴³ has already said yes, so... (Int3 Skone, l.149-156)

Skone commented in his Int4, in October 2014, that he already completed the last-year internship in the previous summer, as he could not apply for the entrance in the UAB if he left the internship for the summer after his last year. Though this detail is not directly related to the polemic around the Agreement between UdL and UAB, it may be noteworthy as another example of organisational problems that could have been avoided – for example by passing the internship from the fourth to the third year in the study plan. Only days after the interview, in October 2014, the decision to offer a new double degree including Veterinary

²⁴² I could not find anything in this regard online, but in the BOU number 39 from December 2002, the UdL mentioned Veterinary Medicine on a list of degree courses they would like to integrate into their offer. The BOU is available online at: <https://seuelectronica.udl.cat/pdf/BOU/2002-12-31-BOU039.pdf> [last access: 17.04.2018].

²⁴³ Catalan government.

Medicine in Lleida was made public and soon turned into a polemic about public costs for this new degree and the labour market for veterinarians²⁴⁴.

In the BOU number 168, published in June 2015, the new double degree in Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science and Production was approved by the UdL. The new degree started the academic year 2015-2016, one academic course after Skone's graduation – and just after the end of the 7-year agreement with the UAB. In his last year of studies, the academic course 2014-2015, Skone did still have the opportunity to pass on to the UAB, but was also informed by his lecturers that he could 'fail' a subject and pass directly on to the new degree in veterinary medicine in the UdL in the following academic course, if he wanted to complete his studies in the UdL. Rather than following any of these ways²⁴⁵, Skone decided to graduate and to not continue studying in this field. Though he was at the point of Int5 very convinced that this was the right decision for his life and that he was looking for another kind of work than these studies could offer him, he was also aware that his degree – CSA – had been from the beginning on unique in Spain and had only lasted for four promotions, in the course of which most graduates had passed on to complete the Degree in Veterinary Medicine in the UAB, so that only very few people entered as graduates in CSA only the labour market. With the change in names – the double degree in veterinary medicine substituted 'Health' by 'Production' – he considered that his Degree had ceased to exist and criticised the decision-makers for their arbitrariness and disinterest in the affected graduates.

Skone: Exactly, as Veterinary is available here now, they've included it in the degree so to speak, because it's six years, like a double degree; for some bureaucratic reason, they've changed one letter. They've changed one word out of curiosity, so, now people who were doing CSA, Animal Health and Science, well no, it's as if it wasn't related to Animal Science and Production that is CPA now. Then, all the people who we're coming from', we were the last promotion of SA, we don't know very well where we are and, besides, there isn't an official college for the career, as it happens with many other degree careers

Interviewer: Sure, moreover, it's a relatively new career, just a few years old ...

Skone: Sure, and they've changed its name now... we're left in the limbo. And it seems to me everything is decided by people who have more power than they deserve, since they don't think too much, and I'm talking about common sense not being a bright mind (Int5 Skone, l.231-241)

From how Skone described the process in Int5, the invention of the new Degree was not completely smooth either, or at least the students of CSA were not fully informed about the upcoming changes. From what he said, they were not told about the possibility to pass on to the new Degree by failing a subject, until they had matriculated for all subjects in the last course – so they really had to fail a subject and could not just matriculate for a subject less. As Skone had been much calmer in the previous interviews and always confident that things would turn out well, blaming the UAB as the responsible for the whole commotion, it seems to

²⁴⁴ See for example the article 'Polémica por el nuevo grado de veterinaria en la Universidad de Lleida', published on the 31st of October 2014 in *El País*; available online at: https://elpais.com/ccaa/2014/10/30/catalunya/1414702871_544561.html. [last access: 17.04.2018].

²⁴⁵ As the number of places in the UAB was limited to 30, I have checked if Skone might have been not among the 30 best academic records, but in this last year less than 30 persons graduated from CSA, so he would have entered if this had been his wish. See: <http://www.csa.udl.cat/es/titulacio-xifres.html> [last access: 17.05.2018].

me that the UdL had been able to make the CSA students feel secure throughout their studies, letting them down in the moment of graduation. In the longitudinal analysis, the whole narration about the Agreement and the affected degrees appear a rollercoaster ride. Apart from the sudden changes of rules, a main problem here was certainly the sudden non-applicability of rules, the lack of reliable information and the general confrontation that turned the topic into a polemic worth several press notes.

Lack of coordination between lecturers

Many participants mentioned in their interviews contents they considered redundant or little relevant, often arguing that these contents were added or had passed from elective subjects to obligatory credits with the amplification of their degree courses from 3 to 4 years. Others ascribed the lack of interest of certain subjects with lecturers who explained too many details (e.g. Andrés), focused on contents that were little relevant for the concrete degree course (e.g. Irina) or in general so obvious that they did not require explanation (e.g. Ariel) or were unmotivated and badly prepared for their task as lecturers (e.g. Irina).

Irina: I think that in order to be a lecturer (-) at University (-) before that, it should (-) yes, it should be suggested differently (.) because there aren't many people who know how to convey a message. Neither they know how to teach (.), very few. [Interviewer: Hmm] There are great lecturers, but like 3 or 4 at most, and the other ones... leave you unsatisfied, and you don't learn much. (.) [Interviewer: Hmm] I mean, I'm really glad about last year, but there are a few courses that disappointed me, because we didn't learn anything. [Interviewer: Hmm] Because, no (--) of course, if the lecturer comes with a sheet (-) that has been copied from the internet and reads it to me, (-) they aren't teaching anything to me. [Interviewer: Hmm] You know?

Interviewer: Hmm. (.) And do you have... well (.), how would you do it?

Irina: (3) I don't know how I would do it, because I don't know how... [Interviewer: Hmm] how... what you have to do. But what we should do is proposing a different educational system for Universities. I mean, (-) not only passing the *oposicions* or whatever you need to do, because I have no idea, but training the ones who want to be lecturers (...) how to teach, how to be lecturers. [Interviewer: Hmm] Train them to give lectures, to connect²⁴⁶, [Interviewer: Hmm] (3) to ((achieve)) the goals. Not only to read, because (-) that's something you already do in your home. (.)

Interviewer: Hmm. (--) Ok, ok, and are there a lot of lecturers like that? It's not one lecturer, but several of them?

Irina: More than half are like that. (Int2 Irina, I.90-107)

Though this criticism may tell us a lot about teaching quality, it is also true that it is difficult to satisfy everybody and that opinions might be more diverse than the participant reflected, as N. argued in her defence of a lecturer she felt was a victim of excessive criticism for being a bit strange.

There is another lecturer (-) there is one that (-) most people don't like him (-) because he's someone quite (-) peculiar (-) we could say that (-) he's a bit strange (-) in the way he talks and his gestures, (-) well, he's a peculiar man, right? (laughs) [Interviewer: (laughs)] He uses weird expressions and people say that they don't understand him when he explains anything. (-) Not because of the way he talks, but because the way he explains himself, the way he teaches, they don't follow him. [Interviewer: Hmm] And I had this lecturer during

²⁴⁶ The expression used in the Catalan original was "*com donar una matèria com transmetre*".

my first year too, (-) and that year I felt it a bit too, I didn't understand him and couldn't follow him. [Interviewer: Hmm (smiling)] But at some point, I started to understand him a bit more, (-) and now I get everything he says. (.) (-) And some people... (-) Some people say that they don't go to his lectures, not because they don't understand him, but because they say this man is... (-) that he is weird and that they don't like him much, right? (-) But I actually find him (-) [Interviewer: You like him?] even funny, right? I mean, I don't know... (laughs) (-) I find him quite peculiar and, (-) I don't know... (.) it doesn't bother me, you know? That he's like that. (Int2 N., l.653-667)

Some of the participants found, however, a different access to the explanation of some of the redundancies or badly-structured study plans of their degrees that might be a more generally agreed on issue in HE: bad coordination between lecturers. Floreta argued, for example, in Int3 that some contents in her degree were repeated over and over again, because the lecturers did not talk to each other and in Int5 she mentioned that lecturers had told her that the 'errors' in the study plan were the result of the lecturers not getting along. Similarly, Koala told me in Int3 that he and his fellow students considered a third-year subject as little relevant for their degree and asked a lecturer why it was imparted and why not at least in the first year. The lecturer answered that they had tried to do their best when reforming the study plan, but that it was very difficult, because every Department required that their competences had to be considered, meaning in concrete that their subjects had to be included, so it was impossible to avoid certain disparities.

Yes, subjects must be changed because you don't learn anything from some of them (...) lecturers repeat the same content 500 times because they don't communicate among themselves and teach the same again and again (Int3 Floreta, l.424-427)

Many lecturers told us, that is to say, many lecturers told us directly that it [the study plan] wasn't organised, because they didn't get along well with each other [Interviewer: uff] you know? (Int5 Floreta, l.278-280)

The answers to all the questions were in bold, I mean, like the exam was already answered. [Interviewer: Wow] That happened twice, maybe the first page was all good, I mean, there were no answers in bold, and then on the second page you could see two or three questions, one after the other, with the answers. (...) It hadn't been checked before printing, that's very crass, that can't be happening. Of course, this subject was one of those that got the most complaints, there was a complete lack of organization between lecturers. Because there are several subjects in this degree that are taught by several lecturers. I think that's great, because you get different points of view [Interviewer: Of course], so I think that's splendid, but, come on, if you have to write an exam you should agree upon it before printing it, you should check it... It's not so complicated, I don't know, it's a public University, it's really quite something²⁴⁷ ... But well, those things are... Well, little by little we started complaining, we explained that and well... let's see what happens. (Int5 Floreta, l.295-305)

Koala: There is one, the incomprehensible one, that is business and production management ...

Interviewer: (giggles) So, you don't know what it has to do with the rest?

Koala: That's it. We don't know why it has been placed in third year. I have talked about that with many classmates and we all agree, we don't understand why we have that subject in third year; it should have been placed in first or even second year because it has nothing

²⁴⁷ The expression used in the Catalan original was: "*és que és vamos una cosa*".

to do with the rest of the syllabus. In second year, subjects were more or less related to each other; but this one has practically nothing to do with the rest. But, apart from that, well...

Interviewer: And what do the lecturers say? Or didn't you ask them? (...)

Koala: We told one of them and he answered that well, that they had tried to design, when they were designing the degree, because there was a change in the syllabus. Well, he said that they tried to develop it the best they could, but it is a mess because when developing a new syllabus, each department asks for its own discipline. For example, those from Physics require two Physics subjects to be included in the syllabus, those from Maths ask for a certain number of Maths subjects, those from Economy want Economy subjects and so on... In the end, they did what they could and it's ok, though there are small failings like this one; it's a bit strange that this subject is in third year but, apart from that, it's ok ... (Int3 Koala, l.162-182)

While we can read Floreta's comment as a way some lecturers transmit internal difficulties between lecturers towards the students, Koala's lecturer answered in a different line. When confronted with the students' questioning of a subject and the suggestion to pass it from the third to the first year, he reacted defensively, commenting on the difficulties of elaborating a study plan rather than acknowledging the feedback as useful and welcome. As we will see below (see *Lack of control*), the students' possibilities to offer feedback and to intervene in University procedures affecting their studies are either not very clear to them or very limited, so this answer may be an example of an institutional regime discouraging student engagement.

On the contrary, some lecturers might transfer internal discussions they lost against their colleagues or heads to their students with the hope that student protests might change the decision. Nadia, for example, commented on a first-year subject that caused her severe academic difficulties that the lecturers themselves told them that this subject was too difficult for first-year students, as it had been previously imparted in the second year and throughout the whole course rather than in one term only. This reference to a change in the study plan may also indicate internal discussion in the professorate as obviously at least some of the affected lecturers did not agree with the decision. Passing this disagreement on towards the first-year students might easily discourage and frustrate students, worsening the risks of academic difficulty and attrition further. As Nadia was the proverbial exception to the rule regarding lack of student control (see *Lack of control*), it is however possible that the lecturers actively chose to mobilise the students, knowing that the faculty would attend their complaints and change the study plan again. Though Nadia repeated the subject in the end 3 times, she never mentioned a change in the study plan or repeated this first-year explanation of her failure (see *Academic success*). In Int4, Nadia turned to mention a similar transference of an internal problem to the students. She explained that many of the lecturers imparting the internships in the hospital were associate lecturers who usually worked in the hospital and that these were complaining about their low salaries as associates. Here she explained that these lecturers turned the students' internships this year into mere observations, so the students presented complaints. While she left in Int4 the impression that this behaviour of the lecturers had been related to their low salaries and could hence be read as a partial strike, Nadia argued in Int5 that their complaints about the internships had provoked a change in the sense that now even first-year students were allowed to do more things from a beginning on –

not a revocation of the strike. Though the interviews were contradictory in this sense, it is possible that Nadia had in Int4 just heard about the associate lecturers' position and did therefore bring it up, while the incident already laid in the further past in Int5. No matter if the students had been victims of a partial strike or if they had never been allowed to touch things in the internships as the newer promotions are, this might have important consequences for their learning outcomes and lead to severe differences in the competences of students graduating from the same degree and university in one year or another. In degrees like veterinary medicine, medicine etc. a sudden change towards more student activity on living patients would be rather strange, in every case, as patients' rights and ethical questions have to be considered.

Nadia: Well, there was an upheaval²⁴⁸ because a lot of lecturers work at the hospital and teach at the same time. And because they're not getting paid enough, when we were doing internships at their hospitals for their course, we could only watch, we didn't do anything. In previous years yes, the student was actively participating, doing things, but this year is like: "No, no, don't touch anything, just watch". Therefore, we were there for the whole morning only watching them, without doing anything, and that's what we have been complaining about this year. We're paying for an internship where we're not doing anything.

Interviewer: And that's because they are not getting paid?

Nadia: Because they say they are not getting paid enough. [Interviewer: Ok] They are really angry.

Interviewer: And up until now you could? That's bad luck.

Nadia: The truth is that yes, you could. This year I still haven't done the hospital module yet, because I have it during the second semester. But the students that have already done it are saying that no, they don't let you do anything. (Int4 Nadia, I.272-282)

Some lecturers might turn their students into tools in their personal confrontation with colleagues. Piruleta commented on a lecturer who was very peculiar and requested students to do things exactly the way she wanted them and how other lecturers told them to do things differently anyway. Though we could interpret this intervention by the other lecturers benevolently as in the interest of learning quality, it is also possible that they were – additionally – implicating the students into a conflict between the lecturers by encouraging them to confront the lecturer, too.

She wanted... We had to do a final degree project (...) for the specialization, and we were the only group who didn't... we weren't agreeing with her all the time. But we had clearly defined ideas and we wanted to do something spectacular and we did it but she didn't, she wasn't convinced at all, she ignored us a bit, well... not exactly like that, but nothing seemed good for her, nothing. And we were firm, and some lecturers from the degree told us: "Hey, you shouldn't do what she wants, each group is making it her way, and you are really personalizing it, so keep going in that direction and don't listen to her". And then, on her side she was like: "Oh, you're not listening to me" and so on. Come on, we ended up doing something spectacular, and she had to grade us greatly, because we deserved it. (Int5 Piruleta, I.267-275)

Another sign of a lack of coordination were the diverse complaints of participants that several assignments of different subjects coincided in the same week. So this could be the result of

²⁴⁸ The expression used in the Catalan original was: "*hi va haver follón*".

direct planning by the university, opting to block a week for assignments, the participants' comments indicate that this was either not the idea or, if it was the idea, the lecturers noticed that it had not been the best approach as several expanded a deadline or allowed for other changes when the students approached them with a complaint. Piruleta told me for example in Int2 that they had to present 5 group works in the same week and each group work was to be realized with another group of people, so it was impossible for them to actually meet and get the works done. Here it has to be said that a similar deadline does not mean that the students had to prepare their group works in the last week only, so a better time management might have allowed them to finish all groups works anyway. However, some participants anticipated this argument and explained that they had not been able to prepare the group works before, because even if they knew that they would have to do a group work, the lecturers had not told them the concrete contents they would have to prepare in time, so they could not organise their time better. This is also in line with results from happiness research, as a good distribution of assignments over the course of the academic year is considered a way to achieve that students do not feel overstrained, permitting them to experience their assignments as creative challenges and hence improving their happiness and performance (Levit & Linder, 2008). When Piruleta and her fellow students complained about the coincidence of the deadlines, the lecturers allowed them to complete all group works with the same group to facilitate their time management. As we have seen above (see *Academic success*), group works were for many participants rather problematic and jeopardized their academic success. Requiring the release of 5 group works in the same week does not necessarily facilitate that the students develop positive group dynamics and that the students come to improve their abilities in team work, time management and communication as they already have to have perfected these skills to organise themselves well enough to finish all works in time. Rather it seems to favour that students feel stressed and panic, experiencing confrontations with their group members that may affect academic and social success negatively and opt to turn group works into individual works that are then compiled and presented as a group work. In this sense, a lack of coordination might explain why the group work activities did not work too well for many participants and questions the sense of group works as a learning technique. Better coordination not only regarding deadlines, but also regarding the number of group works required per term, the configuration of groups and their supervision to favour 'actual' group work and the learning of team-work abilities could hence help to overcome several of the difficulties and problems we have described above.

On a complete different level, but also affecting University-internal organisation, Maduixa criticised in Int4 that her degree and another degree of the same university that required similar equipment belonged to different faculties and were situated in different buildings. In her opinion, joining the degrees at least in the same building could lower costs as the students could have access to the equipment from both degrees and installations could be shared. Rather than following this pragmatism approach, her University had changed the building of her Degree at the very beginning of her studies and did not construct a set for audiovisual production until her last year, so the building change left the Degree for several years in under-equipped conditions. As in Koala's example, Maduixa described that when the students complained about these circumstances, the coordinator in charge told them that he was doing what he could and that the resources were limited – again warding off the criticism rather than

promoting student engagement in the continuous improvement of the Degree. In Maduixa's opinion, the equipment was a severe problem in her studies as not only the installations were missing, but also the fungible items were old, heavy and often broken – if they existed at all. In Int4 she argued that University should not offer a degree under such conditions. Considering that she had first difficulties to enter the degree and told us in her second year interview that she would not have entered with her score from the PAU the previous year if she had tried, we can also interpret this rather strong opinion as a sign of change, passing from the worry to enter and criticising entrance limitations to favouring a certain closure by reducing the number of places in the degree if it was no longer offered in one of the universities (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*).

Two Universities that are detached, one is in the city centre and the other one at Sants. They could merge the two of them and create one faculty that would have better facilities, because ours is terrible, I mean, even the equipment, it's... we don't use the cameras anymore, we use our own, because they're better than the ones the University offers. The sound equipment is still good, I can't complain, but there's a lot of equipment that's broken and, ok, I get that the budget is tight and the last thing they'll do is to buy equipment that costs 200 or 300 euros each... But, of course our equipment is expensive, but well, if they can't offer it, they shouldn't be offering this course or the degree, right? (Int4 Maduixa, I.294-300)

In summary, coordination within a university and even within the professorate of a concrete degree seems to be rather difficult. Apart from conflicts, different interests seem to lead to reforms that focus on defending the lecturers' interests, rather than considering student opinions and input.

Big differences between and within universities

Several participants commented on differences between their degree in their university and other universities – referring to the experiences of friends, relatives or fellow students who had spent a term abroad with the SICUE programme²⁴⁹. Though it is difficult to know how big the differences are in reality and to which extent they affect the students' learning outcomes and skills at graduation, an impression of vast differences might indicate little comparability of study programmes. Moreover, on occasion, important differences did appear within the same university and degree – another sign of a lack of coordination and again a warning sign for important differences in the skills and knowledge acquired at graduation.

Margarita compared her sports degree in the UdL with the one offered in Barcelona, arguing that her friends studying in Barcelona told her that they did not have to complete as many works as she did. She relativized, however, that the number of works does not represent the quality of the degree and that these might still be similar and argued at another point that in her degree especially the 'easy' subjects flood the students with work, as if they wanted to

²⁴⁹ None of the participants took part in this programme and those who referred to it, usually called it "Séneca", though according to the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, Séneca is the name of the scholarship students who received a SICUE placement may apply for. SICUE consists in spending a term studying the same degree in another Spanish University. See for example: <https://www.mecd.gob.es/dctm/sede/catalogo-tramites/becas-ayudas-subvenciones/movilidad/de-estudiantes/seneca/2012-preguntas-frecuentes-seneca-2012-2013.pdf?documentId=0901e72b8128049d> [last access: 19.04.2018].

compensate the lack of difficulty with the quantity of work. Regarding teacher training, both Peter (Int4) and Piruleta (Int5) believed that the degree was offered differently in other universities. While Peter considered it better not to study it in the UdL, Piruleta showed the contrary argument, saying that the Degree was better in the UdL, because the more challenging lecturers favour that the students learn more (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*).

Interviewer: Ok, then you have the direct comparison between INEFC (see footnote 121) in Barcelona and..., right? [Margarita: very direct, yes] and what can you see?

Margarita: That we have to work much more in here. [Interviewer: Oh, yes?] Much more.

Interviewer: They are more demanding?

Margarita: Yes, they give us more assignments. Over there it's more like University, and here it's more like a school, I'm not sure if I'm explaining myself... [Interviewer: More homework] And the relationship with the lecturers, over there, they don't get along as well with some lecturers as we do here. And they also don't have so many work to do, especially during the first year they weren't doing anything, and I had a lot of work to do. Now, well, they are starting to have a bit more work, but even then... (Int3 Margarita, l.438-445)

Big differences appeared within the Degree in the UdL regarding the internships. While Sara directly imparted classes and supervised group works in her first internship, Peter only observed and, moreover, always within the same class, while Sara saw different classes and, hence, pupil age groups. However, Sara mainly saw English lessons, as she had shown an interest in this specialization, missing out on other subjects. Piruleta also spent her whole second-year internship with the same class, but passed from observing to a more active role in the course of the internship. As there was a girl with an intellectual deficiency in the class, she came to focus on helping this girl. Piruleta chose later on the specialization in special education and Sara the one in English, so it has to be said that their first internships were already related to these specializations. The question is, however, if this is the sense of these very first internships and if the students might not miss out on other contents. As the concrete arrangements of the internships seemed to depend on the schools, it is possible that some schools capitalised more on their trainees than others, burdening them with the workload from teachers and other staff rather than offering the internships they had enrolled for. Just as in the previous section regarding veterinary medicine and first-year students realizing procedures on living patients, it has to be asked if these second-year students were already prepared to impart classes, supervise group works or help a child with an intellectual deficiency and if it is ethical to let them do so at this stage of their education. As a mother, I would like to add that when visiting preschools in Lleida to pick a school for our son, all schools told us about their collaboration with the UdL and that thanks to the trainees they received, the time one teacher alone had to attend 25 3-year olds was reduced significantly. In this sense, the functioning and resources of the school system have to be considered, as within its logic it might be only natural that trainees are wanted to take an active part in the classes from the beginning on, as a counterweight to disparities in the teacher-pupil ratio. Though the participants were generally content with their internships, we have to ask once again if it is ethical that students come to attend pupils in the described ways, if it is in the students' and pupils' best interest and if alternatives could ensure their interests better – for example lower pupil ratios per class or team-teaching approaches.

Interviewer: And how about the internship? Are you there watching, or...?

Sara: No, ehmm... we do like interactive groups, there are 4 groups and for each group there is an intern. There are 5 or 6 children per group, and you ask them to do something, and then they change the children and you get new children to whom you ask the same thing. And the children rotate around the classes.

Interviewer: So, for each class there are several people who are doing their internship and so on?

Sara: Yes, well, at our school it's like that. In some other schools, I have friends who are only doing observation. It depends on the school or on what they make you do.

Interviewer: So, the school's coordination is what determines it? Or the...?

Sara: Yes, yes, they decided to do it like this because, actually, the 2nd year internship is just an observation internship. But, of course, when you arrive at a school they might ask you to do something and well, for us it's better like this, because the more you do, the better. (Int2 Sara, l.31-41)

Interviewer: And what do you do in there? Are you observing?

Peter: Yes, I just observe, and at some point, if there was a teacher missing, I could do some exercises, but basically you mostly observe.

Interviewer: What levels are you with?

Peter: No, I'm with the second group of second year, with children who are 7 and 8 years old, they are really quiet, it's really good. (Int2 Peter, l.377-381)

Interviewer: And what are you doing in your internship? Watching?

Piruleta: Yes, I'm in a sixth-year elementary school class. At first, I was only observing, and whenever a teacher asked me "give this out, do this", I did it. Each time is better now, I'm already giving some classes, and I help a girl that has, a girl that has an intellectual disability, she's having trouble learning and I help her in everything she needs. (Int2 Piruleta, l.175-178)

Another degree course with vast internal differences regarding the internships was speech therapy. According to Floreta (Int4), several of her fellow students realized their internships in placements where no trained speech therapists were working and some spent their time helping pupils with their homework or giving extra tuitions in English. The quality of internships is always likely to depend on the concrete institution where they take place and other participants presented similar complaints (see for example Maduixa), indicating that they learned little and felt rather abused as cheap workers than trained. This leads to the absurd situation that the internship systems allows certain enterprises or institutions to contract fewer workers, burdening the workload instead on trainees who are furthermore paying an enrolment fee for their internship in a public university and realise the internship in the hope to gain first working experience and therefore improve their chances on the labour market. However, there is another crucial aspect to consider in Floreta's criticism: some students graduate from her degree without having ever seen a speech therapist at work, so this questions again the quality of their training. If what Floreta described was common in other degree courses and universities as well, this would put in doubt the whole internship system. At least for her degree, we can argue that an in-depth revision of the internships is needed, ensuring that students are able to collaborate in their internships with trained speech therapists. The ideal solution would be of course to maintain the current duration, as we may suppose that it was selected following the careful consideration of experts. If the number of possible placements decreases, however, significantly after applying more exigent selection

criteria, it may be better to reduce the total amount or duration of internships per student but guaranteeing a high-quality placement.

Many people were sent to centres where there weren't speech therapists. In those centres, there were only teachers specialized in speech and hearing. That's an occupational intrusion in a certain domain as it's called, since a speech and hearing teacher hasn't done a 4-year degree, but just 3 subjects from the last year of the teaching profession degree. Then, of course, many people found themselves in a place where they didn't learn, where they spent hours and hours without seeing any speech and hearing case; they just gave English tuitions, those are things where you say "I've paid to make practices in a centre where I can learn and then put my knowledge into practice", and it wasn't like that (Int5 Floreta, l.317-324)

Other important internal differences appeared when different lecturers attended different groups of students of the same subject. Nic mentioned in several interviews important differences between the subgroups of a subject. In Int4_1 he explained that he failed a subject because he had enrolled in the group of the 'difficult' lecturer. While half his group had to repeat the subject, nobody from the other group failed and in his re-enrolment, he subsequently chose the other group. In Int5, Nic commented on how he had passed a subject due to a 'lucky' lecturer change. After several rather badly graded assignments, the lecturer attending his group retired and a new lecturer appeared, informing the group right away that she had no interest in this subject and was going to make things easy for them – passing at the end everybody and with rather good grades.

It's very ironic, because we had a lecturer who was the strictest of all of them, you know? One of those lecturers that should have been retired for a while, and I was doing quite badly in his course and I was like: "Oh my god, I'll fail". And just one month before the end of the term, he arrives in class one day and says: "Well, I have to tell you that I'm retiring". [Interviewer: Ah!] And we were like: "Ah, hallelujah". And for the next class, a woman arrived (...) and said: "Well, I don't like at all how this subject is being taught, and on top of that... they have forced me to teach it, so I will be doing it my way. And I'll do everything I can so that you pass". [Interviewer: Wow! Very good] And she gave us exams that were really a piece of cake²⁵⁰. (Int5 Nic, l.769-778)

Koala commented in his fourth-year interview on a change he observed when comparing his own third-year experience with what fellow students who were repeating the third year told him. According to Koala, the same lecturers offered now less help and made the exams more difficult because the number of students had increased significantly, from 20 to more than 40, but the fourth year subjects were stipulated for groups of 10 students maximum. In other words, he insinuated that in order to maintain the small groups in the fourth year without offering additional subjects or groups, the lecturers had to actively fail more students in the third year. Though this argumentation might not completely convince from the lecturer perspective, the key idea that the number of students influences how these are treated has been proven by other studies and is highly related to social inequality, as we will see further below.

While the previous examples might be, to some extent, the result of certain exaggeration on the side of the students, in some cases, it seems that lecturers did actively attempt to bypass

²⁵⁰ The expression used in the Catalan original was: "*exàmens que estaven xupats*".

the existing rules. Koala, for example, told me that a lecturer had offered him to complete his external internship with him, though the degree did only admit University-external internships and forced him to interrupt and search for a new placement when they found out after 6 weeks of working for the lecturer. Floreta realized a TFG that was according to her degree's TFG coordinator beyond the scope of the subject. Though she mentioned an incredible amount of work, she did not mind to work more and was very happy with the outcome as she and her co-authors even published an article with their findings in a scientific journal. Though she lived the experience in conclusion as positive, it has to be said that her group worked in the specialist field of her tutor and with him as a co-author of the publication, so it is at least conceivable that he could have treated them like employees rather than TFG students, improving his own CV and abusing their unpaid work, instead of teaching them what the Degree stipulated adequate for a TFG. Floreta mentioned, moreover, certain legal issues with a training course they designed and offered in the course of their TFG, as the University did not allow them to use their logo and refused to issue certificates for the participants. The indirect devaluation of the students' work is even more striking in comparison to its valuation by the scientific community, expressed through the publication of their article and the reception of a presentation they gave in the course of a scientific conference. My impression is that the University did not wish to appear, because it was not legal or ethical to allow these students to impart such a course. Maybe it happened for the first time that students designed a TFG that included an intervention in this sense and the University or Department did not dispose of a protocol how to treat such cases. If this was the case, the chosen solution to let them do their course anyway just without a direct implication of the university in the logo or through the issuing of certificates is, however, not ethical at all. If students should not impart courses, this course should have been impeded too and if students may impart courses under certain conditions, they should receive full support and recognition for their work from their University. If ethic commissions (see *Ethics*) existed in these Universities, TFGs could be easily included into the list of projects that require ethics approval and a qualified commission could decide in the concrete case whether or not to allow the students to realise their TFG in this way and if so, under which conditions.

In summary, though we cannot be sure about the real extent of differences within and between degree courses, we can read the participants' comments as a sign for important differences that might question the quality and comparability of the studies if they are not controlled. Apart from the general implications of such a finding, there is an indirect relation to the reproduction of social inequality given, as we have seen that economic capital limits the institutional choice of some participants (see *Study-Choice Narratives under Construction*). Moreover, we can consider knowledge about the reputation of a degree as easier in one university or another or as one lecturer as more likely to pass a subgroup than another as 'hot knowledge' (Davey, 2009), students with social contacts who have been through HE or currently attend HE themselves are more likely to access. In this sense, economic and social capital may allow some students to choose an "easier" way or to study at an institution with a better reputation, while others are excluded from such choices, so social inequality is reproduced.

While some of the examples given in this section may be mere symptoms of the lack of coordination between lecturers we have seen in the previous section, others indicate that the student experience in HE might depend to a certain extent on coincidences the students

themselves cannot control, for example, the number of students matriculated. Though this appeals to our feeling for justice (Bessant et al., 2011), the finding in itself is not surprising as other studies have indicated similar conditions. Gomolla and Radtke (2007) mentioned, for example, that in their study the chances of a child to receive a recommendation for one type of school or another depended on the total number of children in the year: If there were many children, the schools showed a tendency to send especially children with migration backgrounds to the *Hauptschule*, distributing the students between the different school types and hence ensuring their continuity. If there were few children, the schools preferred to send a similar number of pupils to the *Gymnasium* as in other years, reducing the number of children sent to the other schools and hence improving the chances of the children with migration backgrounds to receive a recommendation for the *Gymnasium*. The authors explained this tendency with a wish to maintain the local offer of schools, favouring the *Gymnasium* in times of a small student population. Though further research is needed to study these issues in HE, we can say for now that it is possible that external conditions like the number of enrolled students influence in the way these students are treated and mark their HE experience – especially if Catalan legislation contemplates the closure of degree courses if these do not achieve certain enrolment rates²⁵¹. Moreover, we can observe that the system of accreditation of teaching staff through the AQU²⁵² may favour certain injustices. Though teaching is a rather insignificant criterion in the different accreditation processes – for lecturers in humanities and social sciences teaching experiences is weighted with 25%; in engineering and architecture 20%, and in sciences, life sciences and medical and health sciences 15%, respectively²⁵³; for full professors only training activities regarding master, postgraduate and PhD students are considered, weighting 20% in Architecture; 15% in Sciences; 10% in Life Sciences, Medical and Health Sciences and Engineering, and 7,5% in Humanities and Social Sciences²⁵⁴ – the AQU also conducts a teaching assessment and issues teacher certification that may, according to the website, turn into “a requirement [in their calls for application] if the university so requires”. The AQU developed in collaboration with the Universities models for assessing teaching competence that are used for the Universities’ teaching assessment handbooks. The UdL’s teaching assessment handbook specifies in its Article 2.6. five criteria (Universitat de Lleida, 2013). According to Article 3, criterion 4 “Academic Results²⁵⁵” consider the academic performance rate and the success rate, both referring to the number of enrolled students or of students who presented to the call, respectively, who passed. If the mean rates indicate that more than 75% of students passed, the lecturer receives at least 5 points; if between 50 and 75% of students passed, the lecturer receives at least 2,5 point and if less than 50% of the

²⁵¹ See for example this press release about the closure of a Degree in Romance Philology (UB) in 2014 that refers to an agreement of the *Inter-University Council of Catalonia* (CIC) that stipulates the closure of Degrees that do not achieve 40 or, exceptionally, 20 enrolled students in three consecutive years: <http://diarieducacio.cat/reaccions-al-tancament-de-filologia-romanica-no-hi-haura-possibilitat-de-fabricar-mes-martins-de-riquer/> [last access: 26.04.2018]. The press release does not specify the name of the Agreement and I was not able to find it either.

²⁵² The *Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya* (AQU) is, according to its website, “the main instrument for the promotion and assurance of quality in the Catalan higher education System”. See: http://www.aqu.cat/aqu/index_en.html#.Wubjxi5ua1s [last access: 30.04.2018].

²⁵³ For more information see: http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_73631557_1.pdf [last access: 30.04.2018].

²⁵⁴ For more information see: http://www.aqu.cat/doc/doc_10621905_1.pdf [last access: 30.04.2018].

²⁵⁵ As the handbook is not available in English, I have translated this and the following terms myself.

students passed, the lecturer receives at least 1 point. Criterion 5 “Student satisfaction” is directly assessed through the annual opinion polls, the surveys on teaching satisfaction distributed to the students for each of their subjects. As both criteria are minimum requirements for a favourable assessment, we can say that lecturers are encouraged to pass students and that the students’ opinion polls influence their career directly, at least if they have not yet achieved the highest level on the academic job ladder. Additionally, academic failure is related to attrition and attrition rates are considered a sign of little efficiency (Lassibille & Navarro Gomez, 2009) and especially Degrees with few enrolling students are at risk of being closed if we consider the above mentioned agreement of the Inter-University Council of Catalonia (CIC) that stipulates that Degrees with less than 40 or 20 students, respectively, enrolling in 3 consecutive years should be closed. All these structures favour, in consequence, that lecturers avoid suspending students, especially if their Degree does not usually fill its places.

Other organisational problems

Several participants criticised in the course of the follow-up difficulties to reconcile their studies with other activities, due to the timetable. We will focus on the possibilities to combine work and studies in another section (see *The reconciliation of work and studies*), but here we can already see that especially the students who studied in the evening shift felt that this impeded their participation in many activities, as Extra-curricular activities (ECA) and social activities are usually offered in the afternoon. Skone criticised furthermore a tendency in his degree to occupy free spots on the timetable temporarily with additional practical lessons etc., arguing that one cannot really plan for anything else. Floreta explained that in her degree it did even happen that their subjects coincided with the time they had to spend in their external internships, so it was impossible for them to attend class.

Floreta: In many occasions, we had to lose classes to attend practices and that cannot be right

Interviewer: Are they on the same day?

Floreta: Yes, because you must go at the time the centre assigns to you. If you go to a private centre and you are told “you have to come on Mondays and Wednesdays from 12.30 to 14.30” and you have classes at the same time, you have to go and that’s it

Interviewer: I see it’s not well coordinated

Floreta: No, it’s fatal. (Int4 Floreta, l.271-278)

Another kind of problem appeared in the access to certain specializations. As Sara told me, in her year, another student who had enrolled for the specialization in English was told, at the beginning of the course, that she did not have the necessary level to pass the specialization. The lecturers encouraged her to take the year off and improve her English before coursing the specialization and the student did subsequently disappear from class. Sara did not know for sure what she had decided to do, but we can suppose that she prolonged her studies for another year, as she could not change the chosen specialization at this point. Though it is true that the student herself could have sought orientation from her lecturers before choosing this specialization, a general orientation at the end of the third year could guide students which specializations to apply for and which not and, hence, avoid such problems. In the concrete case of the specialization in English, it could be even possible to require a certain minimum grade point average in the previous subjects in English to be allowed to access this

specialization. The current system is, moreover, not recommendable as it leaves furthermore the impression that all the others who were not advised at the beginning of the course that their level was not high enough were going to pass for sure.

Sara: In English or Music. There were some people who knew English, yes, but only some basic knowledge and when they had to speak and develop an idea, they were having difficulties and you think: "It's the last step, after this, this person will be an English teacher, how is that even possible?" And you can think: "Well, when it's the first year of your degree... there's still three years to keep learning", but when this person is in his fourth year... either you know English, or you don't, I mean, there's no other way. I saw some people who worked a lot, but who didn't reach the level that was being asked, well, at least, a level that I understand that an English teacher should have.

Interviewer: And did they pass anyway? [Sara: Sorry?] Did they pass anyway?

Sara: Yes, yes, most of them, yes. There was a girl, for example, who was told: "You can't go on with this level". And I think that's really good, I mean, it's not like you'll never be an English teacher, it's just that right now you haven't reached the level you're supposed to, you can go to an language school, do anything that helps you so that next year you'll be able to pass. It's easy, you don't have to close doors for anyone, it's just that if we want the education system to be working well and if we want the children to speak English, because the English level in schools is really low, the first thing we need are teachers who have a high level. But well, that's not something that's up to me²⁵⁶. (Int5 Sara, l.219-233)

As English was such a recurrent issue in this project, I would also like to share the comments some of the participants made regarding the UdL's Institute of Languages (IL), as these include hints that could be used for general improvements, beyond the scope of social inequalities. Both, Cara and Skone, attempted to course English courses in the IL at some point. Cara encountered the difficulty that she had been informed about the timetable for a placement test, but when she arrived half an hour before the end of this time for the test, the staff told her that the test took an hour and that she would not be able to do it any longer. Skone, on the other hand, took the placement test and received an e-mail with the result. So he took his time to check the courses on offer, chose one that fitted best his time table and went several days later to the IL to enrol for the course. When he arrived, all courses were full, so he had to wait a year to enrol in the next enrolment period. Cara and Skone reacted highly frustrated and though Skone studied the course a year later, his first reaction was similar to Cara's to discard a course in the IL for the future. Here it would be easy to avoid frustration and negative experiences with the institute, by offering hints on the enrolment process, highlighting that the test takes an hour, so candidates should not appear too late for it and that the placements are limited and given in the order of arrival and not – as Skone assumed – according to the score achieved in the placement test. Moreover, the University might consider an amplification of the number of courses offered if many students are each year unable to inscribe but are required to present a certain level in a third language to obtain their degree certificate (see *Third-language accreditation*).

²⁵⁶ The expression used in the Catalan original was "*això ja se'm escapa de les mans*".

6.5.4. *Injustice and powerlessness*

In this section, we will focus on injustices and a sense of powerlessness against lecturers that was directly or indirectly expressed in many interviews. We will start with aspects the participants considered injustices and that do directly transgress university Dispositions regarding evaluation or contradict the spirit of these Dispositions. Afterwards, we will see the case of the assignation of tutors for the final degree projects (TFG) as some lecturers do not seem to play according to the rules. In a final section, we comment on the students' possibility to intervene in University, their legal representation and instruments to collect their opinion and complaints. Here we will see that most participants did not know much about their possibilities to actively intervene or did not believe that their intervention would really make a difference.

Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes

Several participants mentioned in the course of the follow-up events or lecturer decisions that were not in line with the Dispositions on evaluation issued by the Universities. Others followed the Dispositions to an extreme that perverts the intention of continuous evaluation. The Disposition of the UdL stipulates, for example, in article 1.2 sentence 2d that for any assignment that weights 30% or more of the final mark the students have the right of a repetition (Universitat de Lleida, 2016). As several participants explained, some lecturers did then stipulate assignments with a maximal weight of 29%, adding the condition that the students had to pass each assignment to pass the subject. Rather than ensuring academic quality, this turns continuous evaluation into continuous stress, as students may fail the whole subject with the last assignment, no matter how well they fared in all previous works. As we have seen that the fear to fail was especially hard for students with little economic capital (see *Health*), such an approach is likely to jeopardize the well-being of female students from lower social classes, favouring their drop-out and contributing to the reproduction of social inequality.

Interviewer: And something that you would say that could be improved? In your degree? What could be...?

Sara: Mostly organization. Like, for example, the thing with Catalan, it's not normal that things like these are happening. Hmm, a lot of things. There are a lot of things. The way of doing, like, if an exam is not worth 30% of the whole course, there is no opportunity to retake it... so they put exams that are worth 29%.

Interviewer: Yes, that's what you were saying last year.

Sara: Of course, because you can think: "They are laughing at us". And many things like that, it makes you realize that this degree is not well organized. Like this year, for the internships. We didn't know anything until like, one or two weeks ago, and we start in two weeks. Well, hmm, that needs to be known in advance.

Interviewer: You didn't know that you would have an internship?

Sara: I knew I would have an internship, but not in which school I would be. The school selection hadn't been made yet. (Int3 Sara, I.1010-1022)

Examples of transgressions against Dispositions appeared regarding the time limit for the publication of results, according to Article 4.1 sentence 1, 20 natural days (Universitat de Lleida, 2016). The lecturer has to offer a possibility for revisions at least 2 workdays and at

most 5 workdays after the publication of the results (Article 5.1. Sentence 2) and only after this the official record with the final scores may be signed. Several participants told me, however, different stories. Piruleta mentioned in her first interview that her class brought a complaint before the Dean and the study coordinator, because a lecturer had corrected arbitrarily and had taken half a year to publish their grades. Similarly, Koala mentioned in his first interview that some lecturers took so long to correct exams that the students could not learn from their mistakes. Moreover, he said that several lecturers told them that it was not possible to show them their exams when they asked for it, though according to the Disposition a date for revisions has to be offered and announced publically even without the students requesting it. Margarita told me about a subject for which she had to hand in a group work every week, though they did not receive the scores of these group works until the very end of the academic course. In her case, this system was especially fatal, as she came to fail the subject because the lecturer suspended her first group work, when noticing that the same work had been presented by two groups. She and another affected student who came to fail the whole subject because of this went to see the lecturer when they saw their results published, but they had either missed the official period for reclamations or the lecturer had not respected this either, as he told them that it was too late to revise the scores. The injustice in his procedure lay in the fact that he had talked with other affected students and passed them in the end and only suspended the members of Margarita's group he had not talked to. Moreover, the late publication of the qualifications of the practices is likely a transgression of the norm that establishes a time limit of 20 natural days for the publication of the results of presented assignments, though the lecturer might have found an exception here by considering all practices parts of the same assignment. In every case, it seems that he noticed that his approach had not been completely just, as he promised Margarita and her fellow student to assign them the '*matricula*' (a distinctive addition to the final grade that comes with a reduced matriculation fee for the following course) in another subject, should they achieve at least a 9 as the final score – an attempt to make-up for the additional costs of the re-matriculation. Margarita did not score this minimum and hence never received this compensation, but her story shows us how the whole process was rather opaque and unfair. In order to achieve a revision of the results after the official presentation of the record, Margarita could have presented an official complaint following the rules stipulated in the UdL's Disposition in Article 5.2 (Universitat de Lleida, 2016). She probably did not even know about this possibility and the lecturer prevented her from doing so by offering the rather strange solution with the compensatory *matricula* in another subject.

Margarita: It's a practice we did on a Friday, and next Friday we finished it. So, at first, the first Friday she was with them [other group], and next Friday she was with us. What's the problem? That she volunteered to finish it with both groups.

Interviewer: She did the same one for both groups?

Margarita: Exactly. That, we realized at the end of the academic course, when we already had a 0, and what did the lecturer do? He went to the other group and asked them: "Hey, what happened here?". And he also went to [[girl's name]] and he told her: "you have the same practice", (...) then the lecturer talked with a guy from the other group and told him: "You have the same practice than [[girl's name]], who is in another group". So, of course, the guy told everyone in his group, but [[girl's name]] didn't tell us anything, you know? [Interviewer: Oh] (.) And then, they were able to fix it, because they told the lecturer: "Ok,

we'll do a new one, but you must know that she's the one who messed up". And the lecturer said "Ok". But he was also a jerk, because he didn't warn us. And that's why I got angry with [[girl's name]] and with the lecturer. [Interviewer: Of course] And even more, she went to cry to the lecturer [Interviewer: And she didn't fail], and she didn't fail, but we did, even though we didn't know any of this until the very end.

Interviewer: And if it was the first practice of all, couldn't he have published it [earlier]?

Margarita: No, they're published at the end. That's also something that could be different, but it isn't. Well, it was a dirty trick²⁵⁷ and we went to talk with the lecturer to ask him if we could do an essay or whatever, because we didn't know anything, we didn't know, at all. [Interviewer: Obviously] And no, he gave us a fail and that's it. And we told him: "Come on", but that's not it, because on top of that, he told us: "Well, now, stop worrying. Next year I won't bother you, you can do an essay on the first week of the year, I will grade you with a pass, and you can forget about my course". And we were like: "Yes, but we will have paid already". And he goes like: "Ah". And just so you understand how thug he is, he tries to racket, he told us that this essay would only take one week of our time during our 3rd year, we were in our 2nd year at that time, and because we also had another course taught by him, he told us: "Well, to compensate financially speaking, if you get a 7 or higher out of 10 in [[name of other course]], I will write 'Honours'²⁵⁸ and then you won't have to pay, and in that way it's balanced". Oh my god, I didn't get a 7, so I paid and that was the end of the story, it's fine, I got a 5 and I'm thankful for that.

Interviewer: But why was that, because he had already given you a fail and could not change it, or...?

Margarita: Because he didn't feel like it. (Int5 Margarita, l.429-457)

The most extreme example regarding the belated publication of results came, however, from the UAB and the corresponding Disposition of the UAB only specifies in its article 6.1 that the results of an evaluation have to be published according to the rules stipulated in each centre (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2010). This makes it more difficult to know the exact rule – and to present an official complaint against a transgression of the rule – but as Floreta commented in February 2015 (Int4) that she still did not receive an evaluation from the first term, though the term and second exam period had already passed at the moment of the interview, we can be sure that this was against the rules. Floreta explained the situation with the sudden sick leave of the lecturer and her belated substitution, supposing that the substitute would pass everybody in order to avoid complaints because of the delay in the evaluation. However, she was not content with this solution either, considering that it was not fair and affected academic quality negatively.

Floreta: Now we have the problem that we are not given marks, we haven't been given any marks for a month, or those of the assignments we handed in before Christmas, hello??

Interviewer: Isn't there a deadline?

Floreta: February 19th, but we would need to know it before. It's really bad handing in an assignment, like a worksheet, that is not hard work, in October and we still don't know the marks, it's February, hey?

²⁵⁷ The expression used in the Catalan original was "*putada*".

²⁵⁸ In Spain, lecturers have the possibility to award a distinctive remark to at most 5% of the students of a class and only if these students have scored at least a 9 out of 10. This distinctive mark, *la matrícula d'honor*, leads to a discount of the price paid for the subject from the following year's enrollment fee. Here it is either possible that Margarita is mixing things up saying that he offered them this distinction with a 7 only or that the lecturer was not aware of the rules himself, as a 7 is not enough to receive the distinctive remark according to the statute (Universitat de Lleida, 2016).

Interviewer: And if you have failed, do you have to make it up on that same semester or wait until the next year?

Floreta: I have no idea. In theory, we can't fail since the make-up weeks have already passed

Interviewer: So, shouldn't the marks be given before the make-up date?

Flor: That's it. But we haven't been given them yet (3) very crass

Interviewer: What can you do then?

Floreta: A claim. If we are not listened to at the Dean's Office, we can go to the Rector's Office. But do you know what they are going to do?

Interviewer: Approve everyone to avoid problems

Florets: That's it, they are going to approve everyone and give some approximate marks and they will complicate matters further²⁵⁹, because people want their mark and their work corrected, we are in fourth year, this is a joke²⁶⁰, you know? (Int4 Floreta, l.300-318)

The UdL's Disposition stipulates in Article 1.2, sentence 5 that the lecturer may change the evaluation system explained in the teaching guide only at the very beginning of the term and following certain rules, including the direct information of the students (Universitat de Lleida, 2016). Estanteria, a participant who dropped out after the second-year interview and is hence not included into the longitudinal analyses of this thesis, explained, however, in her Int2 how a lecturer changed the evaluation rules in the course of the academic year as a reaction to the low assistance to his class. Less dramatically but in a similar line, argued Skone who represented that his lecturers did often tell him on Thursday to present an assignment at the beginning of the next week and N. mentioned a lecturer who told them that they might have an exam the next week or the week after, but could not tell them for sure the date as she had not yet fixed it. Nadia mentioned in Int3 that it was impossible to organise her time and to avoid to have to prepare assignments and exams in parallel, because the deadline for the works coincided with the exams and the lecturers did not tell them early enough what they had to do the works about. So even if they knew from the beginning of the course on when they had to present which assignment, they could not organise their time and prepare the assignments earlier, because they did not receive the indications what to do earlier. Though it is true that the Disposition does not mention that lecturers have to indicate the exact date and/or content of each assignment in their evaluation system, such sudden changes or rather short-term announcements of assignments and exams do not seem to be in line with the idea of a transparent evaluation system that allows the students to know what they will have to do for the subject at the beginning of the course and to organise their time. As Nadia mentioned that some of the lecturers were 'nice' and changed their deadlines when the students told them about their problems, it is moreover possible that the lecturers had not been aware that all assignments and exams coincided and did readily accept that this was not ideal – another sign of a lack of coordination in the first place, as such coincidences could be easily avoided from the beginning on if this was what the lecturers wanted (see *Lack of coordination between lecturers*). However, it is also possible that those who changed the date were actually violating an agreement that set this week as the universal deadline for these assignments²⁶¹.

²⁵⁹ The expression used in the Spanish original was "la van a liar parda".

²⁶⁰ The expression used in the Spanish original was "esto es un cachondeo".

²⁶¹ The UAB's Disposition in this regard (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2010) remits the Reader to the academic calendars and agreements of the concrete centre and as the agreements for previous

Estanteria: The lecturer told us since the beginning of the year that we wouldn't do an exam, that we would do only essays. (-) And we did like (-) 8 essays, or something like that. And... [Interviewer: (coughing)] and at the middle of, no, at the end of the term, he got angry because people weren't attending his course, but that's normal, [Mabe: (laughs)] (-) because we weren't learning anything. (-) And people weren't attending his course, and he got angrier, and he said that he was giving us an exam (...) and even if you had passing marks on all your essays (-) because I had like 8, 9, maybe some 5 or 6 on my essays (-) and (-) he gave us the exam and if we didn't get passing grades on the exam we couldn't pass the course. (.) [Interviewer: Hmm (.) and was he...] But that's also not normal. (Int2 Mabe + Estanteria, l.422-432)

I think the organization could be improved. The other day, a lecturer told us that we might have an exam next week or the week after that. And we told her: "tell us the date", so she said that she would let us know by the next week. But maybe then she will let us know just two days before the exam, and we need to know it in advance, so we can prepare. I think that's a lack of organization from some lecturers. (Int3 N., l.638-641)

Another related complaint that did not directly violate the Disposition was the lack of time between the publication of obtained results and the make-up exam. As several participants told me that they had only received their results days before the recovery exam, I suspected a transgression of the 20-day rule, but when I checked the academic calendars of diverse faculties of the UdL, I noticed that in several centres the recovery period starts directly after the exam period. For example, in the academic calendar 2017-2018 of the Degrees offered in the Faculty of Law, Economics and Tourism the final exam period was stipulated to last two weeks, from the 4th until the 15th of June and the recovery period started directly afterwards and lasted one week, from the 18th to the 22nd of June²⁶². Similarly, the academic calendar of the ETSEA²⁶³, Skone's faculty, from the academic course 2017-2018 stipulated an exam period of 8 workdays, from the 11th to the 20th of June, and a recovery period of 7 workdays, beginning directly on the 21st of June and lasting until the 29th. This means that the lecturers cannot actually wait 20 natural days to publish the results of their exams, as 20 natural days even after the first day of the exam period would be already after the recovery exam period. So if Skone, for example, criticised that he received the results of an exam just a week before the recovery exam, the affected lecturer did probably make a special effort to be able to publish the results this timely. A revision of these academic calendars could easily avoid this situation, enabling the students to actually learn from their mistakes in the first exam and to study for the second exam period and lowering the pressure on the lecturers to publish the obtained results in a rush.

courses are either no longer available or were never published online, it is difficult to tell if such an agreement existed in this case or not. Once again the difference between the UAB's (2010) and the UdL's (Universitat de Lleida, 2016) Dispositions are here interesting, as the frequent remission to other centre-specific norms in the UAB's Disposition might also difficult the lecturers' ability to be informed about all rules and apply them correctly, especially if they work in several centres.

²⁶² The academic calendars differ from faculty to faculty and sometimes within a faculty between master and bachelor degrees, as in the case of the Faculty of Law, Economics and Tourism. The mentioned calendar is available at: http://www.fdet.udl.cat/export/sites/Fdet/ca/.galleries/Calendari-academic/Calendari-Academic-2017-18-1_graus.pdf [last access: 27.04.2018].

²⁶³ Available online at: <http://www.etsea.udl.cat/export/sites/Etsea/ca/.galleries/Calendari-Academic/2017-18/Calendari-Academic-ETSEA-2017-18.pdf> [last access: 27.04.2018].

We had make-up tests during the third week of June. The second week of June came, and we didn't know our marks yet, and we thought "how am I going to study?". Sometimes you must prepare the entire year of a subject; every lecturer makes it differently, but there are some who do mid-term exams and you are told "you sit for this module and that's it". But other people tell you "no, no, if you fail you sit for the entire subject". Of course, if you don't know whether you have passed or not, you think that only one week ((is not enough)) to study the entire subject (Int3 Skone, I.635-642)

Skone commented on a further issue with the recovery-exam period, explaining that in his degree there was only one for all partial exams of the year, but some lecturers made their students repeat all partial exams of their subject in the recovery period if they suspended one of them, while others only made them recover the suspended exam. This meant that if you suspended the last partial exam, you might well find out days before the recovery exam that you would have to repeat this and all other partial exam of the subject you had passed months earlier, plus any other exam you might have to repeat. It has to be said that the practice to make students repeat all partial exams if they only suspended one, does not seem to be the idea of the Disposition, though it is not directly prohibited either. If students have a right to recover any assignment or exam that accounts for 30% or more of their final score, the implicit idea or "spirit" of the Disposition is, at least in my reading, that they recover this assignment or exam and not all assignments of the subject, passed or not. However, in the concrete case of a fellow student Skone mentioned, it is possible that the lecturer offered him the possibility to recover all partial exams, in order to improve his overall average and pass, as he did not achieve the necessary average to pass with one suspended partial. The lecturer might have thought here, that if another topic – treated in one of the partials he passed – was easier for the student, he could improve his average by improving in this partial, rather than having to decide his final score with the suspended partial only. However, according to Skone, it was very difficult for his fellow to recover all partial exams on one day and he missed the required average by decimal points, having to re-matriculate to the whole subject for the next year and so his perception of the case is one of injustice, rather than appreciating that the lecturer might have attempted to help his fellow.

Further injustices appeared regarding exigencies that are not directly contemplated in the Dispositions. Xenia distinguished in her last interview different types of lecturers and when I asked her what is characteristic of an exigent lecturer, she gave me the example of a lecturer who had not allowed some of his students to take an exam, arguing that they did not earn the right to take the exam because they had not attended class regularly. Though it is possible that the lecturer had specified this requirement in his teaching guide, the UdL's Disposition does not mention anything in this line, highlighting in Article 1.2 that the students have the right to be evaluated in the subjects they enrolled for (Universitat de Lleida, 2016). Floreta told me about a lecturer who directly failed her in an assignment, because she had not attended the class on the day of the work's delivery, entering the room at the end of the class to join the line of fellow students who were handing their works in at this moment. So in this case, rather than the deadline, the lecturer did additionally require the students to have attended the class though this could hardly affect on the already printed work and Floreta had obviously not known about this requirement, waiting in front of the class for its end after arriving late, as the lecturer had warned them not to disturb her by entering the class room in the middle of the lecture.

For example this year he has failed five persons or so who are now in their third year, who did not attend the classes, that is to say, he said, well, no, you repeat it [the subject], you don't have the right to take the exam (Int5 Xenia, l.218-221)

I arrived very late and I did not attend class because that lecturer won't let you in if you arrive late. When the class finished, I handed in the assignment and she saw me and gave me a zero. I didn't go to talk to her because I knew she was going to tell me "you have a zero because you didn't attend class", you know? Even if the assignment were perfect, well, what are we going to do about it? it's my fault, I understand it (Int4 Floreta, l.346-350)

Interviewer: That was the day and the time, it couldn't be later (.) well...

Floreta: I went in at the time we were supposed to hand in, the thing is I didn't go to class. I mean, I waited for the class to finish, because I arrived when half of the class had already gone by, and when everyone was handing in the assignment and going out from the classroom, I went in and handed it in

Interviewer: So, you handed in the assignment together with your classmates, didn't you?

Floreta: Yes, at the same time; the thing is I hadn't gone to class and that was why I was given a zero (Int4 Floreta, l.359-364)

The same lecturer required the students to present their notes taken throughout the classes as an assignment. This type of assignment is not directly considered within the examples of assignments offered in Article 1.3 sentence 1 of the Disposition of the UdL (Universitat de Lleida, 2016), but the Disposition of the UAB, the University where Floreta studied her Degree, does not specify any examples in this sense (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2010). Floreta commented on a friend of hers who had taken and prepared her notes very carefully and scored a 10 – the maximum score – at first, but was then suspended because another student had presented exactly the same notes just translated into another language. Floreta argued here that the lecturer had to know that her friend had been the one to elaborate the notes, as she had never missed a class, while the other student had hardly ever attended. Suspending both was, in Floreta's eyes, a way to discourage and punish student solidarity as her friend could only 'learn' from the incident not to pass her notes to fellow students. Just as Floreta felt that an assignment assessing the notes taken in class was little adequate beyond primary school, N. expressed in her first-year interview her surprise about lecturers who gave her homework and then took their time to check in class who had done the homework. While she considered such controls normal in school, in University she had expected to be treated like an adult and that it was her own responsibility if she did the assignments and passed or not (see *Workload*). Here it seems that the lecturers' perception and subsequent treatment of students and the students' expectations regarding the lecturers' behaviour towards them may enter into conflict and cause contradictions that can difficult the students' adaptation to HE, especially at the beginning of their studies.

Floreta: I tell you what happened to a friend of mine, a heavier situation, but I also understand it. We had to hand in a portfolio of a subject. It consisted in going to class, taking notes and, later, handing in all those notes. You may think "this is done in primary school", but we are in fourth year, it has to do with... how is it called? [Interviewer: continuous assessment?] yes, that's it, thank you and (...) and a friend of my friend hadn't been able to attend classes for some days and asked her for the notes. So, in the end, they had the same notes, one of them in Spanish and the other one in Catalan. But my friend had attended the classes, taken the notes and she had worked hard, while the other girl hadn't attended anything, nothing was known about her and both got a zero. First, the

lecturer marked my friend's work and gave her a 10 and, then, when she read the other one, she realized it was the same but in Catalan and gave them both a zero

Interviewer: Didn't she go and talk to her either?

Floreta: Yes, she went and talked to her but the zero is still there. I told her to go because, look, I arrived late to class and the lecturer was absolutely right, I had nothing to say. I know it's my fault and I have no excuses to give so that she changes my mark, but in the case of my friend it was different, she had done all the work and simply had made a favour to a friend who hadn't been able to attend classes (Int4 Floreta, l.366-383)

An incident in a similar line happened in Willy's Degree in the UPF, where a lecturer directly told his class at the beginning of an exam, that they were all going to fail, because the exam was very difficult. According to the lecturer, the students should thank two fellow students who had come to see him after the first partial exam, that had not gone to well for them, and had asked him to fail them in the further exams, as they preferred to re-matriculate and complete the subject with a good overall score rather than to attempt to pass it right away. That the lecturer did then turn this plea – admittedly a bit strange, as they could have not presented for the further exams instead – into a reason to provoke the majority of the class to fail was highly unjust and obviously not in the interest of the affected students. With his comment that they should 'thank' the two students, he did furthermore encourage conflict among the students, prejudicing social success and student well-being.

Then we also had another one, it was a man, who gave us a very difficult exam. Apparently, there were two girls in the other group that passed the exam, and they went to ask him if he could put a fail for them, so they could retake it and get a better grade. Well, the normal thing would have been to say: "No, you've passed, I can't write a fail for you". Well, that wasn't the case, he graded them with a fail. And on the final exam day, he said to all of us: "Well, I've done a very hard exam for you, because these two girls asked me to grade them with a fail", and we ended up paying all of us for the two of them. (Int4 Willy, l.150-155)

All these examples have in common that the perceived injustices tell us more about the lecturers' attitudes towards their students than the relation between evaluation and knowledge and skill acquisition. From a lecturer perspective, student complaints about the evaluation system are often easily explained with the simple observation that the students who complain failed the subject and are therefore discontent. Interestingly, in this project, several participants also mentioned the opposite complaint, though they never came to present official complaints in this line: As we have seen above, Floreta did not like the practice to pass all enrolled students in order to avoid their complaints because of organizational difficulties with the evaluation of a subject. Both Sara and Piruleta criticised that in their degree, teacher training, everybody who enrolled achieved graduation, though in some cases after prolonging their studies significantly (see *Health*). According to these participants, their degree had the reputation to be easy, so many High School students chose it in order to study something in university. In the interviews, they called for an aptitude test, possibly because they had heard talks about such a test before its – by now achieved – application²⁶⁴. They also criticised the evaluation system throughout the degree, representing that it was mainly based on effort and workload, so the difficulty consisted in completing all assignments in parallel but not in completing them at all. Many assignments were, moreover, group works, so that less

²⁶⁴ For more information on the aptitude test see for example:
<http://graus.unportal.net/wb/unportal/ca/newsletter/NL179.html> [last access: 27.04.2018]

prepared students could still pass thanks to the other members of their group. In consequence, students with academic difficulties only had to prolong their studies, reducing the number of assignments to prepare in parallel by coursing fewer subjects at once, but had no real difficulty to pass them finally. Apart from the terrible implications for the school system that does then receive teachers without any guarantee of their aptitude and preparedness, the very fact that these students were still able to graduate helped, in the eyes of Sara and Piruleta, to reproduce the reputation of teacher training as 'easy' and encouraged further little apt students to choose this degree, reproducing the negative tendency over the years. From what Sara and Piruleta said, we can deduce that their evaluation system was based on workload and inflicted continuous stress on them, especially as they attempted to reconcile their studies with work. But workload is not equivalent to quality, as Margarita noted above. This shows that student complaints are not reducible to a pure wish to pass, but do request justice, in the sense that students receive a fair evaluation of their competence and suspend if they did not show it (see *Academic success*). However, presenting a complaint about lecturers who pass everybody would be little solidary and negatively affect fellow students, so it is comprehensible that the students do not present complaints in this line. In this sense, the official complaints only reflect a part of the reality and lecturers should not base their impression of student interests regarding evaluation solely on these complaints.

Several participants do also mention how they themselves (see Piruleta in *The 'good' lecturer*) or their fellow students (Willy) came to cry in class, because of the piercing questions or even insults of lecturers. While one might argue that the crying students might have been overly sensible or crying for other reasons, Willy, who did not cry himself, directly blamed the lecturer for making the students cry, making clear that his observation was not of a hysterical student who cries out of no reason. Skone described a tendency of his lecturers to pick students to answer questions by identifying them with an outstanding characteristic of their looks, for example a number on their clothes. Though Skone did not worry about this way to address students and focused in his comment on the students who turned all red and were unable to answer, we can easily imagine how such a treatment, especially when used on first-year students, might provoke unnecessary stress and lead to nasty nicknames rather than facilitating learning and social integration.

Interviewer: and a situation where you felt insecure at some point? [Skone: (-) in university?] yes

Skone: (4) (laughs) I believe that no... [Interviewer: always secure] hm yes I don't (-) I don't usually (-) tz I want to say that I' there are (-) many people tz (.) the fact that a lecturer asks you something (.) a lecturer who you don't know because moreover we it's that tz there are' the classes (-) in the same class you can have 8 lecturers without any problem (.) [Interviewer: hmhm] then (-) there are people who when' when, when they find themselves suddenly in the focus of attention of of the other 59 persons (-) tz (-) it's a bit like that it makes you flinch backwards, but I believe that no (-) you don't have to, that is to say, the lecturer is a person just like you and me' (-) there is nothing that (-) you know? and if you don't hear something you don't understand something you ask him it's not' no not in this sense...

Interviewer: so you ask in class things and you don't have any problem?

Skone: yes, or for example I believe it was just yesterday eh (-) a lecturer told me, well of course he doesn't know my name, does he? so he told me "you" and because I wore a 35

here at the [points to the front of his shirt] (-) number [Interviewer: 35 (laughing)] he says "you, the 35" he says, I don't know what he asked me (-) going back to a previous class (-) and I didn't understand very well what he wanted to tell me, I said "pardon? could you...? could you give me a bit of an orientation? because I don't understand what you want to tell me" (.) just 5 minutes later he asked another fellow who (-) who was seated at my side and (.) and the guy turned completely red and I tz, in that sense, I didn't understand either why, it's not that the lecturer is going to eat you. [Interviewer: hmhm] so (-) insecurity (-) for the moment I think no (.) (--) tz because of this fact, no? when you arrive (.) nothing (.) that is to say no' it's as I say I got there I presented myself and (-) and with the lecturers neither" (Int1 Skone, l.460-479)

Interviewer: And how is the relationship with your lecturers?

Willy: It depends on the lecturer. Last year, I had two of them who were... Well, for one of them I'll only tell you that on the first day of his course, he didn't come. He's one of those *catedráticos*²⁶⁵ who, well, they are very famous and I'm not saying anything, when they have to research they are excellent, but it's one thing to do research and it's another one to teach. That's something you can see, this man didn't come on the first day of his course, he didn't let anyone know or anything, and when he was lecturing he was full of himself, right? I remember a girl that was doing a presentation and he told her: "This presentation is shit", like that eh? [Interviewer: He was insulting?] Yes, even saying bad words, yes, and of course... that girl started crying, well, it's not surprising. (Int4 Willy, l.135-143)

Other lecturers did not directly attack their students, but we can interpret the participants' anecdotes about lecturers who forget about a meeting with a student (Skone) or miss repeatedly their classes without prior notice (Nadia) as a sign for a lack of respect for their students. Nadia told me, for example, that one of her lecturers had already missed three classes and as the students were then forced to recover the class on another day, they had come to actively search the lecturer in his office if he did not show up at the beginning of the class. Rather than apologising for his mistake – like another lecturer who missed a class did – this lecturer only said that he had not noted down that he had class on this day. Similarly, Skone believed that teaching was for many lecturers a secondary activity, an obligation they realized when they had to but attempted not to give too much thought about. Other signs of a lack of interest and commitment appeared when, for example, Xenia asked the first lecturer she saw in university after enrolling belatedly for a degree that had not been her first choice for literature recommendations. Rather than showing an interest in the student or at least informing her about the list of recommended literature that is usually included within the study guide, the lecturer only answered "that's up to you" (*això tu*).

The first day I I got there, they had biology and well, and I go to ask the lecturer and "could you recommend us a book? or what we have' what will enter into the exam? or similar so we can study for it?" and she said "ah, that's up to you" (2) and I stood there "well" (.) [Interviewer: hmhm] and in the end, the thing is I didn't dare to ask any other lecturer anything (laughing) you know? [Interviewer: hm] no. You have to seek things for yourself (Int1 Xenia, l.188-192)

Nadia: Some lecturers are late to class, or they forget to come.

Interviewer: They forget to come?

²⁶⁵ This term may be translated as 'full professor' and refers to the highest academic rank available in the Spanish system.

Nadia: They forget to come. That has happened like four or five times. We are in class, the class starts at o'clock and the lecturer is not there. The clock ticks past 10, quarter past... and if it's quarter past and the lecturer is not there, we can leave. So, the lecturer is not there, and we have no explanation for it, and then, I mean, the next day (...) we have that class, we go looking for him [the lecturer] at his office, or we go to the academic administration to ask for the lecturer because he's not in the faculty and we have a class, right? And they forget: "Ah, I didn't know, I hadn't written down that we had a class today" and you've been there for a whole hour, you know? Or whatever, you're there waiting because, of course, you don't know if the lecturer is late or is not coming... (...) Some people leave, but then some lecturers are indeed late, for example... (...) it's always the same one who forgets, well, once, it was someone else, but normally, like three times, it was the same one, and one time it was someone else, who came and apologized like: "I am really sorry, so and so..." I mean, that one OK. But the other one nothing, he's like: "The other day I hadn't written down that we had class, which day works best for you to arrange a new date?". Because, of course, afterwards we have to arrange a new date and some days, instead of having four hours we have five hours, or we have 2 following hours of the same course, you know? They put the hours we haven't done there, because the lecturer didn't come. (Int4 Nadia, l.293-309)

Skone: I did the TFG with a lecturer and I always had to go and look for him. For example, I arrived at the University to work with him and he used to tell me that he had to leave, that he had a meeting

Interviewer: He used to arrange with you and forget it...

Skone: Yes, and he left. He went to have breakfast, or he didn't remember we had arranged. I mean, nowadays sending a WhatsApp message is easy and not expensive at all. And there are many other ways of... (Int5 Skone, l.196-202)

Though of course not all lecturers behaved in this way, one possible effect of these inconsistencies, injustices and on occasion even affronts, especially but not only regarding the evaluation, is that the students come to perceive the evaluation in general as something arbitrary and believe that it is in the interest of the lecturers to fail a number of students in order to cash the higher re-matriculation fee. Margarita expressed this idea clearly, arguing moreover that the lecturers chose the 'difficult' subjects to show their 'bitchiness' (*putadas*), as it would call the attention if too many students failed an 'easy' subject. When I asked her for examples for the 'bitchiness', she mentioned multiple-choice questions with double negative, suspending a subject because you failed one assignment, though your average is sufficiently high to pass, failing a subject with a 4,9 when a 5 would have been passed, etc. Though it is of course true that a 4,9 is not a 5 and hence suspended, most evaluation systems include a certain margin so that lecturers can avoid such narrow failure, as this facilitates that students perceive their lecturers as opponents instead of developing a common interest in improvement. Their beliefs regarding evaluation, no matter how false from a lecturer perspective, are moreover an important sign that things are not going well in this field and that transparency and justice are lacking. Moreover, Margarita's examples do all point into a direction where failure is not related to not having achieved the required knowledge and skills, but to having fallen into a carefully prepared trap or having become the victim of injustice.

Cara: Well, that, I failed the subject, for not much, because in the records it's written 4.9 out of 10. [Interviewer: Wow] But well.

Interviewer: Is that possible?

Cara: Yes, because (...) I mean, the average mark was a pass, (...) I had two [partial exams] that were a pass, right? You had to get more than 4.5 out of 10 in each one, and the average of the three exams was a pass for me — but then I got less than 4.5 in one of the exams, so... (Int4 Cara, l.168-178)

There was this one time when they failed, well, I passed, I once passed an exam that only 7 out of 120 passed. [Interviewer: What? How is that so? Only 7 passed, then?] And they don't care, they're like: "Go to the make-up exam", so they all went. So, from 120 students in that course, 110 went to the make-up exam, and maybe 20 of them passed. So, there is like 90 students enrolling for the second time next year. It shouldn't be like that, I don't know, something is not working... Because I think that's because each course has a set percentage of how many people will fail, you know what I mean? For each course there is a set percentage of how many people will fail, and because these are difficult courses, there's no big difference in how many people fail, you know? One more person is not much.

Interviewer: Do you think that they make it harder on purpose?

Margarita: Yes, yes, because the course, the theory part, you understand it, you do some exercises, you can do it (.) you can do it well, you understand that, you can explain it... and then the question is like "yes and no" for like 30 times, and it's very ambiguous. [Interviewer: Like a multiple-choice test that you don't...] Yes, yes, exactly, exactly. And sometimes there are some answers that you think (.) "you're doing it on purpose". [Interviewer: There are some questions there to trick you?] Yes, yes, a lot, or also the way they grade... There is a course that is being taught by three lecturers. There are three lecturers, so we do three exams. The first part of the course is taught by a lecturer, once we're done, the lecturer gives us an exam. The second part of the course is taught by another lecturer, once we're done, the lecturer gives us an exam that covers the second part of the course. And the third lecturer does exactly the same. Then, if you have an average that is more than 5 out of 10 [Interviewer: You have passed.], no, because if one of the exams is not 5 or more, even if it's 4.999, you can't pass the course. That's quite ridiculous. It should be like: "You must get a 4 or higher for each exam, and then the average should be 5 or more [out of ten]." Then, yes, if the average was calculated like that, it would be more coherent.

Interviewer: Yes, because if you have a 4.9 out of 10, then that's it, they grade you with a 4.9?

Margarita: Yes, and you have a fail. (.) Some lecturers do it. (Int5 Margarita, l.322-342)

The impression of injustice is here also related to the differences the students observe between lecturers. Probably, if all lecturers required repeating all assignments of a failed subject rather than preserving the results of the assignments the students passed, this would not result unjust in their eyes. However, as each lecturer takes his or her own decisions regarding the evaluation system, some offer makeup exams, preserve partial results, extend deadlines and round up scores and others do not. Understanding that each lecturer comes with a different evaluation system was moreover one of the differences some of the participants observed in their first-year interviews regarding school. Apart from having to adapt to different ways of evaluation and needing some time to adjust their learning to multiple-choice exams, the participants had difficulties to integrate the different evaluation systems and teaching styles of lecturers and perceived it as chaotic to have several different lecturers in the same subject. In this sense, we can say that their relating differences between lecturers' evaluation systems to arbitrariness – rather than to expect that the systems are different but equally valid – is a continuity of their perceiving the increase in lecturers and their different approaches as a chaos at the beginning of their studies in HE. In some degrees,

appeared additionally an idea of double standards, as the participants criticised that their lecturers expected them to do things better than they themselves. Sara, for example, criticised a lecturer who failed students who had made more than 8 spelling mistakes in a written work, highlighting that this lecturer did write things incorrectly in her own power point presentation. Similarly, the students from teacher training and social work criticised repeatedly a contradiction between the contents of their lectures – telling them how to teach, with which techniques etc. – and the teaching techniques employed by the lecturer. The participants seemed to be saying here that the lecturers themselves would not pass their own evaluation systems – another sign of their perception of injustice.

It has happened to me that I studied really, but really hard (she laughs) (.), and I got a 6 in the exam (-) and I thought "really!" (she laughs) "if I studied a lot, but well" (she laughs) [Interviewer: you passed] a six (-) yes, well, but it's of course multiple choice as well, we are given like a form to complete. And, then, it is marked by a machine (.) (-) you know? [Interviewer: hmhm] It isn't even proof read by the lecturer (.) It's read by a machine that, then tells you "your mark" (she laughs) Well (.) It's different but (-), I don't know (.) Let's say you get used to it(.) You adapt to what you're faced with (.) And that's it (Int1 Floreta, l.164-173)

Sara: No, they didn't allow it, and this year they do. This year, they said: "Well, we'll do a make-up examination". Last year we didn't do it. Well, yes, everything is a bit like this...

Interviewer: But is that the result of your complaints? Or...?

Sara: I guess so, because we complained a lot, extensively, a great deal. And we wrote some letters to the newspaper, we were on the news (laughing). [Interviewer: Oh, really?] It was on the news, "70 or 80% —something like that— of second year's primary education students have failed Catalan in the University of Lleida". [Interviewer: (laughs)]. Of course, we sent a letter, the 3rd year students sent a letter to the newspaper, stating that yes, it's true, we think that tackling spelling mistakes is important, and that we think it's a good thing there is such a strict grading guideline, but that lecturers should not be telling us that when we have seen some lecturer's PowerPoints where it was written egg with an "h", hegg²⁶⁶, then, well...

Interviewer: Was that the same lecturer who gave Catalan?

Sara: No, it was another one, but it's the same, you know? And even the Catalan lecturer, she wrote words like *protagonista*²⁶⁷, not ending with an "a" but with an "e". [Interviewer: (laughs)] Well, things like that. (Int3 Sara, l.351-366)

In summary, injustices seem to be quite common in the perception of the students and may be, in part, explained by their difficulties to adapt to new and much more diverse evaluation systems. However, in many cases the lecturers transgress the official Dispositions and some even show a hostile attitude towards the students, favouring that these come to perceive their evaluation as arbitrary and unjust. Here it seems that many lecturers do not know the Disposition or take decisions that do not seem to coincide with the ideas behind the Disposition even if they do not directly violate it. Nobody seems to actually control their

²⁶⁶ In Catalan the word "ou" is written without an "h", while the Spanish word "huevo" is written with an h, so the mistake may hint at an inference with Spanish and is more likely to happen than in English, especially as the h is not usually pronounced neither in Catalan nor in Spanish.

²⁶⁷ This Catalan word means "main character" and was not translated because of the reference to the spelling mistake to end the word in e rather than in a. As in the area of Lleida the spoken Catalan tends to pronounce several words as if they were written with e, though the standard writing requires an a, this mistake may be related to the local variant of Catalan.

evaluation systems, though these are published in the teaching guides, unless the students present a complaint – usually at the end of the course, when they failed the subject (see *Lack of control*).

TFG Tutor assignation

With the law 1393/2007²⁶⁸ a 'trabajo final de grado (TFG)' (final degree work) came to form an obligatory part of all degree-course study plans in Spain. As a staff member of the University of Lleida, I was able to participate in a course about TFGs offered by the Institute of Educational Sciences – Centre of Continuing Education of the University of Lleida. The lecturer of this course highlighted the severe effects of this rather sudden implementation, as TFGs had previously mainly existed in engineering degrees, and described several severe problems that arouse for students, staff and institutions. Several years after its implementation, the concrete way to tutor TFGs differs from one University Centre to another and concrete guidelines for tutors are mostly missing. Moreover, the fact that tutoring a TFG only accounts for very few credits favours that lecturers are not too interested in tutoring TFGs or reduce their tutoring activity in order to adjust their real workload to the hours they are officially expected to do. The margin for tutor engagement is vast, as the very comprehension of TFGs varies widely: some consider it a final work in which the students show that they achieved all the required knowledge to elaborate such a work on their own – logically with very little tutorisation – while others see in the TFG another subject and hence an opportunity to teach students how to elaborate such a work and to learn more about the concrete topic – requiring much more tutor engagement. These structures (credit recognition for TFG tutors) and representations regarding the role of the tutor (supervisor versus teacher) lead to a broad variety of tutor approaches that becomes visible in the participants' comments. Willy, for example, had a tutor who celebrated biweekly group meetings, animating her different students to help and learn from each other and bringing coffee and snacks to create a pleasant atmosphere. Maduixa, on the contrary, had to contact her tutor to agree with him on the dates for the 3 obligatory meetings stipulated for her degree and complained about his lack of expertise in her topic. Floreta elaborated a TFG that was described as beyond the scope of a TFG by the TFG coordinator of her degree and came to present her results at a conference and in an article, co-authored by her tutor.

When we had to do the TFG, depending on the topic we chose we had a certain lecturer assigned as a tutor. I was a bit scared at the beginning, because I was assigned a lecturer I had in my first year and that I hadn't liked much. She was a young woman, but she was quite strict, you know? She was really... let's say she wasn't very friendly. She was very, very strict and very authoritarian, and I thought: "Oh, you'll see, now I have this one assigned to me and..." and actually, contrary to my belief, it went well. Because it's normal, we were less people, so her attitude towards us wasn't the same that she had with a group of 70 or 80 people. Then if we talk about the TFG, we had a much more accurate supervision than the other groups that had another tutor. I mean, my topic was Political Theory, and every

²⁶⁸ The law 1393/2007 was published in the BOE number 260 on the 30th of October 2007 and is available online at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2007/BOE-A-2007-18770-consolidado.pdf>. [last access: 02.04.2018]. It was modified through the law 861/2010, published in the BOE number 161 on the 3rd of July 2010, available at: <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2010/07/03/pdfs/BOE-A-2010-10542.pdf>. [last access: 02.04.2018].

15 days she told us: "Hey, we need to meet to check how you're doing" or "We should meet this day, come to my office and we'll have a look at it". And the ones that were doing a TFG on International Relations were a bit more abandoned. In contrast, this woman was like: "Hey let's meet all of us one day and we'll have breakfast, I will bring coffee, that way all of us can discuss and you can give feedback to each other's on your thesis". And actually, yes, the relationship was much better. I thought she was different and, actually, she wasn't like that. [Interviewer: She surprised you] Yes, yes, and I was also surprised by the mark, I got an 8 and a half [out of ten], I mean, that's very good. (Int5 Willy, l.384-399)

I've said it a million times, but it's not well organized at all, because ehmm, I don't know on which basis tutors have been assigned. I mean, I chose certain tutors and I got, I mean, you had to choose three and put them in a list. [[Interviewer: ((1sec))]] Of course, I didn't want the third one, but I wrote him on the list because... and I got that third one. It's not because he's not a good lecturer, he's a great lecturer, but he's not specialized in my subject area. But there are only two lecturers specialized in my subject area, the ones I wrote as the first two options, and they could only tutor one person and it wasn't me. Then I went to ask the coordinator and she told me that they assigned them depending on the subject area of the TFG. But that's not logical, because no, my subject area was that one, I should have had one of those tutors. But well, so once the tutor was assigned, he was a bit lost with the subject area, and a few weeks ago he told me: "You should be doing this" and it's something... well, something that is a lot of work. And I told him: "Couldn't you have told me before?" (...) I was guessing that I had to do that, but as he had told me not to, well, I thought "I'll trust my tutor", right? (Int5 Maduixa, l.118-130)

Interviewer: Very well. And this course you're doing for the TFG... is it a team work? Or then you must complete an individual part?

Floreta: No, it's team work and we are three. As usually this work is done by one or two persons, our work will be longer. Even the TFG coordinator, that is the subject coordinator, has told us that we're exceeding the limits of the subject, but it doesn't matter to us, our tutor is a crack (Int4 Floreta, l.160-165)

In some degrees, the final grade is directly assigned by the tutor, in others, the final work has to be defended before a tribunal. The first approach is especially common in degrees with many students and systems of random second evaluations are used to hinder tutors from awarding works with too good grades. In both systems, tutors are crucial for the elaboration of the TFG and their assignation is hence highly relevant for students' academic outcomes in the TFG. Tutor assignation is therefore a crucial process and became repeatedly a topic in the last follow-up interviews.

Most participants described some kind of system in which all students were required to either indicate 3 concrete topics or to choose 3 areas of interest from a list of areas²⁶⁹ and claimed that the tutor assignation would follow the list of preferences beginning with the students with the best academic records. However, the participants' comments give us reason to doubt the official objectivity of this system. Maduixa claimed, for example, that she indicated topics knowing concrete lecturers who are experts for them, but ended up with a different tutor anyway. We cannot know if she happened to have a worse academic record than the students

²⁶⁹ Though participation in important choices may improve student happiness by increasing their feeling of control, especially people attempting to take the "perfect choice" may feel overwhelmed by the number of options or choices and lose important time until taking a choice they anyway come to regret later on (Levit & Linder, 2008). This might have happened to Peter who seemed to have lost quite some time trying to define his topic once the tutor and the area of interest were ascribed.

who were assigned to the tutors she had had in mind, but when considering the comments of some other participants, we see that the tutor assignment might actually work in a quite different way: Nic commented on his approaching a lecturer he considered a personal friend and agreeing with her on a topic for his TFG long before the actual inscription. Like this he knew already before the summer preceding his last year the topic of his TFG and was sure to have a benevolent tutor. N. mentioned, in a similar line, that she was approached by a lecturer who asked her if she had considered elaborating a TFG in his area of study and Koala explained how a lecturer convinced him to realize his TFG with him, arguing that he would be able to combine the last-year internship and TFG, though this was officially prohibited in his degree and did not end too well in his case, as he had to search for a new internship when the University found out.

I went to a Japanese lecturer that I have, we're quite familiar with each other (...) I had her in my third year (...) we get along truly well, sometimes we went out to eat with friends and all, you know? This lecturer has really good vibes²⁷⁰, she also has our age and all. So as soon as the tutors' list was up, I went to her and told her: "Hey, come here with me, I want to... " you know...? And I wanted to do something with Japanese, so she told me that we had three options. (Int5 Nic, l.50-56)

The lecturer who gave us the budgeting course had already told me, well, I did a budgeting course last term, and one day I told her that I'd like, one of the options I had for the TFG. And she told me that I could have her as a tutor, if I wanted to, because she was in that specific department. And after that I also ran into my English lecturer from my first year, we did some Business English courses during our first year, (...) and he asked me if I had thought about doing the TFG in English, well, with him as a tutor. So very well, I get along very well with him and the English, I'm good at languages, and he knows that I've a good level in English, so he asked me if I had thought about it, and to be honest, I hadn't but... [Interviewer: It's also an option] Yes, it's an option that would be good too. (Int5 N., l.470-480)

Koala: We are doing our degree's internships and this year there's been some trouble, because last year we had a robotics course and the lecturer told us that we might be able to do the internship at the University, with him in robotics. Well, it was what we knew when we finished the academic course. So I sent him an email to know how that was advancing, because he said he had to ask the school first, to see if the school would allow it. He told me that we couldn't do it like that, and that we would try to do it in partnership with a company. So what happened after that? That the University didn't like that at all, so I had already started, the University noticed that and told me they didn't like it, that I should stop it and that I should go do my internship in a company like everyone else.

Interviewer: Ah, so in order to do it with this lecturer, he explained it like it was something else than what it was?

Koala: Yes, exactly, so the University didn't like that, and they told me to do it in another company. Right now, I'm waiting, because I want to do go do it in a certain company, but they have to get it touch and ask the company if they want a student for an internship, etc. So, I'm waiting for that, and that's why there's been some... some trouble, but well. [Interviewer: how problematic²⁷¹] Yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: Because you had already started and everything.

Koala: Yes, I was already into my 6th week. (Int4 Koala, l.34-51)

²⁷⁰ The expression used in the Catalan original was: "*molt bon rollo*".

²⁷¹ The expression used in the Catalan original was "*quin mal rollo*".

Koala: the final degree project is in the second [term]

Interviewer: and do you know already what you will do? about what you will do the project? not with that lecturer, will you?

Koala: I've got no idea, no idea, the thing is, of course, the idea was, the idea was to do the internship with him, do the internship and use the material for the project, but what's the matter? as it's in the end not possible to do the part of the first term [the internship], I don't know how it will go (Int4 Koala, l.75-79)

All these examples, from different degree courses and Universities, indicate that the official tutor assignation is only one part of the process. In reality, it seems that tutors agree with selected students on a topic they know would enter into their field of knowledge, so when these indicate the topic/interest area afterwards in the official survey used for tutor assignation, the lecturers claim these TFGs for themselves in the meeting with their colleagues. As there is usually more than one possible tutor in an interest area, the concrete distribution of the TFGs among the lecturers of the same area is still perfectly possible, as long as only the worst academic records are rejected and forwarded to the second area of interest they indicated. And even when the students present concrete self-chosen topics, like in Maduixa's degree, expertise is a broad and debatable term.

In the course about TFGs, I was told that similarly to the tutor ideal as a supervisor versus a teacher, some institutions consider that any lecturer could be a good tutor for any topic, arguing that their tasks consist mainly in supervising the students' work or teaching general aspects of TFG elaboration and autonomous work that do not require expertise content knowledge. If the students are free to choose a topic of interest, it is possible that no lecturer considers himself an expert in this concrete topic anyway, so the very fact that the institution allows students in Maduixa's degree to choose their topics prior to tutor assignation may indicate that they do not believe that content expertise is crucial for the supervision. So even in this case the margin in tutor assignation remains big and it is relatively easy to justify almost any outcome. This means that, though Maduixa's tutor assignation might have been compromised due to her academic record or she was wrong to consider certain lecturers experts in her topic, it is quite conceivable that the tutors she had had in mind when choosing her topic were bigger experts in her field, but did not choose her TFG because they had already agreed with other students to tutor their works. In this sense, we could argue with Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) that Maduixa did not have 'a feel for the game', believing too much in the official version of tutor assignation. When she attempted to fix her topic before the summer preceding her last year to be able to work on her TFG throughout the summer, she asked the TFG coordinator if her topic would be feasible or not, receiving the answer that she could not confirm her anything at this point. If Maduixa had chosen to talk to the lecturer she obviously had in mind as a possible tutor, things might have gone quite differently – though it is also possible that this lecturer would have still preferred to tutor other students, sending Maduixa away with the argument that she would have to wait for the official assignation. The advantage of the students with 'a feel for the game' is obvious, as they cannot only achieve the tutors they consider best, but know months before the official assignation the topic they will work on, gaining time to prepare their TFG. Future research might investigate how widespread this alternative tutor assignation is in reality and focus on the tutors' perspectives and discourses in this regard. For now, we can argue that the lack of transparency seems to be in the interest of the institutions as it allows tutors to 'pick' students they can expect to elaborate

their TFGs successfully. More transparency in the assignment process and a direct indication not only of the topic/interest area but also the preferred tutor could limit such 'abuse', as students could present official complaints if they saw that another student with a worse academic record was assigned to the tutor they had applied for. However, even in such a system students from lower social classes are likely to remain disadvantaged, as they are more likely to face academic difficulties (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007). Moreover, it has to be said that, as we will see below, the participants in this study knew rather little about their possibilities to present complaints and many were convinced that complaints were useless anyway (see *Lack of control*). As a certain administrative discretion is, moreover, unavoidable, it seems to be likely that whenever there is an interest in avoiding the rule, a possibility to do so exists. The current advantages of advancing the tutor assignment lie in having more time to work on the topic, especially throughout the summer and in selecting a lecturer with whom they already established a good relationship and know to receive high levels of support. We can, therefore, argue that assigning all tutors at the end of the third year rather than at the beginning of the fourth year and giving clearer instructions how tutors are expected to support their students – and what they are not expected to do – could decrease the advantages of this behaviour and, in consequence, improve equality.

Interestingly, the participants who mentioned practices related to alternative tutor assignment were mainly from higher social classes and though Maduixa, as well from a higher class background, did not get her way when attempting to advance things, this may be an example of their 'feel for the game', as they intuitively knew how to decide their tutor assignment and were not afraid to speak to lecturers about this. Though most participants described improvements in their student-lecturer relationships in the course of the follow-up, students from higher social classes did mention much more contact with the lecturers, showed more initiative in contacting them and directly used them to achieve advantages beyond their degree course, for example, requiring a recommendation for the acquisition of equipment (Maduixa) or post-graduate study courses (Nadia). The students from lower social backgrounds did tell me, on the contrary, usually about interactions initiated by the lecturers, for example when they happened to meet on Campus (Peter) or through an e-mail (Koala). These findings are in line with the assumptions offered by Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) that students from lower social classes experience additional difficulties in relating to their lecturers as their habitus do not fit, given that lecturers are usually from higher social classes – in the sense developed in this thesis (see *Measuring Social Class*) – themselves. In consequence, students from lower social classes are doubly disadvantaged as they are less likely to achieve excellent academic records and less able to convert lecturers into social capital they can mobilise when needed and social inequality is reproduced.

Lack of control

In Luhmann's (1984) approach to system theory, any system has a tendency to reproduce itself but may change and adapt whenever this is needed to ensure its subsistence. In line with Pfeilstetter's (2012) comparison of the theories of Luhmann and Bourdieu, 'system' has much in common with the concept of 'field', so we can assume that the tendency to reproduce itself is key to the understanding of reproduction mechanisms of social inequality. Higher Education systems are especially interesting from this perspective because they experience, on the one

hand, a constant change of members as different student populations pass through their study programmes, and construct, on the other, their purpose around ideas of collaborating in society's improvement, progress and social change with their research and teachings, so we could expect a bigger disposition to promote change as well within the system. Control, in the sense of taking direct choices and feeling that one's decisions and contributions matter, is furthermore related to student happiness and happiness has a positive effect on work performance (Levit & Linder, 2008), apart from being of interest to the individual (see *Happiness*). However, diverse power imbalances and fixed hierarchies intervene and it is questionable that the systems accept input regarding their own improvement by members with little power and only a rather temporal membership, especially if these are considered to be still in training and hence not yet seen to take part in the transformation of society. In times of neoliberal HE policies, students are, nevertheless, increasingly considered as clients that have to be satisfied (Tavares & Cardoso, 2013), so their criticism might gain importance, while they might be, at the same time, excluded from its application and turned into mere users of the system rather than active members. In this sense, observing how HE institutions handle their students' criticism, may tell us a lot about the functioning of the system, the predominant perception of students – as clients, as incomplete learners, as future colleagues etc. – and, possibly, society as a whole.

Regarding complaints, we can differentiate between formal complaints participants mentioned to have presented and rather informal conversations with lecturers, in the course of which the students expressed criticism or made suggestions for improvement. For most of the examples of criticism we have seen in the previous sections, the participants did not mention to have presented a formal complaint or to have talked to a lecturer. In the few examples we have already seen of informal conversations we have observed that the reaction by the addressed lecturers was defensive, arguing that things were more complicated than the students could know and highlighting that the lecturers were doing their best (see *Lack of coordination between lecturers*). While these reactions set an end to the student proposals rather than favouring their further development, the described dynamic also shows that most degrees did not offer or did not support a system to recollect student proposals and ideas for improvement, as the affected lecturers could have redirected their students to these systems otherwise. As many participants did not mention anything in this line, we cannot know if their degrees/faculties offered a system to recollect student proposals or not, as the problem might also be the dissemination of the existing systems – necessary condition for their functioning – rather than their existence. Theoretically, a student council exists in each of the University's faculties and student representatives are convoked for the official meetings of all decision-taking organs, ranging from the diverse Departments' boards to the University Senate (Universitat de Lleida, 2003)²⁷². However, when I went through the list of Student Councils of the University of Lleida²⁷³, I noticed that for two of the council's the indication of a website was missing, while from the links of the remaining 6 student councils, only one was operative; all the others, including the general student council, showed error messages on clicking. We can read these

²⁷² For a summary, see:

http://opencms3.udl.es/export/sites/UdL/organs/vicerectors/vest/Curs_Representacio/pdf_representacio_gemma.pdf [last access: 28.05.2018].

²⁷³ Available at: <http://udl.cat/ca/organs/vicerectors/vest/ConsellEstudiantat/> [last access: 28.05.2018].

difficulties to access information on the councils, together with the few comments the participants made about student councils and their usually critical tone as a sign that this theoretical representation is not working too well at the moment. This may explain why many participants mentioned the use of other paths when presenting a complaint, but this avoidance of the officially established and formalised way is likely among the reasons why they did not receive formal official feedback on their complaints either.

Interestingly, the participants who mentioned systems to recollect student proposals mentioned quite different approaches, indicating that no common guideline existed and that every degree/faculty found its own way to recollect these proposals if they were interested to access them. Margarita commented on having participated in a meeting with selected students where external evaluators had asked them about their degree and how to improve it. Though she had no idea who had organised this meeting, from her description it was probably one of the activities the AQU (see footnote 252) uses in their assessment of degree courses. Moreover, she explained that the new executive staff organised a meeting with the students to introduce themselves and listened to their proposals and complaints. However, she did not know how the collected ideas were treated afterwards and never mentioned an implementation of the suggestions. The pure fact that the staff had listened to their ideas was positive for her. Another student who mentioned to have participated in a focus group with other students about the quality of their degree was Willy, though he did not specify if this formed part of an internal or external evaluation system or of an independent research on student satisfaction etc. Nadia argued that in her faculty, the delegates recollected every course student complaints and proposals and then presented those in a meeting to the lecturers and study coordinator. She never was a delegate and did not know how the university evaluated a complaint, but in her experience they sometimes paid attention to the students' complaints and sometimes did not (Int3). In Int4 she was convinced that her degree had improved thanks to this system and her complaints. She gave several positive examples of a prompt reaction to a complaint and showed herself optimistic regarding other complaints, supposing that the university would apply them in the next course. It has to be said that several of these examples were also full of arbitrariness, for example when the lecturer decision to change a deadline in reaction to the students' complaints about assignments being due in the same week, was described as depending on their being nice or not. Here it is moreover strange that the assignments and exams coincided in the first place, as this was rather a lot of coincidence unless the Faculty or Centre had directly stipulated this week for the release of assignments and if this was the case, the lecturers should not have changed a deadline to another week when the students complained, explaining to them the academic calendar. Above (see *Big differences between and within universities*) we have commented on contradictions regarding Nadia's description of the student activities contemplated in the internships from one interview to another. In spite of these contradictions and arbitrariness, Nadia remains an exceptionally positive example of student control as she did not only have a clear idea how to present a complaint, but could mention several examples of how these complaints had provoked a change – though she had no clue how the university decided on the complaints. Especially the prompt reactions to their complaints is rather surprising as most participants believed that change was slow in University and Floreta, who had been a delegate for years in her degree in the same university as Nadia, the UAB, commented on the long and

bureaucratic processes that made it impossible that the students who presented a proposal did actually come to see its implementation. She herself graduated after presenting a detailed list of proposals, including a complete revision of the study plan, and did not know anything about how things were going ever since she left the university. Similarly, Maduixa mentioned in Int3 a student meeting throughout which they elaborated a list with complaints and proposals for the university, suggesting among other things a change in the order of subjects and the inclusion of more elective subjects. Though she believed after its presentation that the subject order might actually be revised in the end while she had less hope for the inclusion of further subjects, she never mentioned having received a feedback on this list and no further meetings took place. In Int4 she mentioned having talked to a tutor regarding possible improvements, but he had only told them that change was slow and difficult to achieve and she did not know if any change was actually going to take place, arguing in Int5 that she would anyway not have the time to experience it as she was about to finish her studies. These may be examples of how the temporariness of the students' belonging to the system hampers their influence on it, as slow processes make it difficult for students to actually receive the fruits of their interventions or to at least see and hence control if these are finally implemented and in the sense they had proposed. However, the students' ideas about the time it takes to apply a suggestion did also show a certain arbitrariness that did not make much sense to me. Ariel argued, for example, in Int3 that the students of the first promotions of a new degree are always the guinea pigs and have the bad luck that their proposals are not applied until after their graduation, so they cannot enjoy them. As she formed part of the second promotion of her degree, she experienced a first change regarding the first promotion in a broader variety of elective subjects in the fourth-year, but the first promotion had not seen this change themselves. Nadia's example may indicate, moreover, that processes and change could probably be quicker in any degree if the necessary interest and disposition to promote them were given. However, this does also depend on the concrete change the complaint wants to promote. It is probably in many senses easier to expand a deadline (see Nadia), to change the week stipulated for evaluative activities (see Margarita), to publish timetables earlier (see Nadia) or to allow students to realize all their group works with the same group (see Piruleta) to facilitate their time management, than to reduce the number of group works (see Piruleta), revising internship placements (see Floreta and Maduixa), the evaluation system, the content of a subject or the study plan, as these are bigger changes. Though it is possible that the universities were actually working on the implementation of these changes, it is also possible that they only apply suggestions that are rather easy to realise so the effort to tell the students "no" would be bigger than to actually make the change, acting like water that flows down the way of least obstruction. This is in line with system theory, as the system changes when this is the 'easier' way – rather little changes, especially affecting the timetable and academic calendar but not the content – but reacts defensively to bigger change.

Interestingly, though Nadia mentioned the delegates, she did not refer to the student council and most participants who did, described their student councils as little useful and a way to lose time. Several participants argued that their faculties or centres were too small to even have a student council, though it seems more likely that they formed officially part of a bigger student council, including further centres, but did not practically take part in it. Several participants mentioned an interest or a direct invitation to become active in their student

councils in the course of the follow-up, but only Floreta came to actually take part in such a structure. Several others justified their decision against it, highlighting that this engagement was time-consuming and useless, whereat Andrés had the additional argument that the meetings were celebrated in the afternoon when he was in class. When I asked why Andrés had been invited to participate, Andrés explained that the student council had been searching for someone from Tourism, but after his initial acceptance, they never found time to meet him and explain to him how the council worked, so he felt that they were not really interested anyway. Skone came to describe a negative image of the 'typical' student council member, who practically lives in university but never attends any class, prolonging his or her studies and – as we may add – losing the connection to the students' practical problems as these usually arise around classes. Similarly Nic argued that student council members were a concrete type of person. Though this was not as explicit, the depreciative connotation was clear, as he excused his own participation.

Skone: I consider that an absolute loss of time. It's for the typical person who likes spending all day in the University and doesn't care; in my case, to be honest, I don't like being in the University all day long

Interviewer: if it's not necessary

Skone: exactly (.) Besides, I've seen people from my degree, in third or fourth year, who participate in the University Council, or other activities, and they're always there, are like omnipresent people, aren't they? [Interviewer: (laughs)] they are there all day long, you never see them in class, they're always ((walking around)) or in the library, you know, you never see them studying (Int3 Skone, I.306-316)

Andrés: They offered me to participate in the student's council of the UdL (-) at the faculty of Law and Economy, (-) but I declined. (.) I said no, because it's a lot of work and I don't have time.

Interviewer: Ah, they directly asked you and...?

Andrés: Yes, saying: "Do you want to be part of the council of I don't know what..." (-) And I declined because, it means a lot of work and (-) I told them: "I don't want to commit myself to do it because if I can't do it, (-) I will look bad". Right? (-) if I have a meeting and one day I can't go because I'm in class... (-) Because they always do the meetings in the afternoons. (-) I can't go, because I have [Interviewer: Of course], I'm in class (.) [Interviewer: yes] So no, it didn't work for me. (...) Last year (-) I said I would participate and everything, (.) but we never met so they could explain to me how everything worked, (-) about the meetings and all that, right? Yes, they did not show any interest, (.) and I thought: "well, then (-) I won't do it, because I don't know what I have to do anyway", right? [Interviewer: Yes] If I have to attend meetings every day, every day, with people that don't do anything... (-) I don't want to. (.) Moreover, I don't want to because (-) they do the meetings in the afternoon and I have class, you know? [Interviewer: Yes, yes] It didn't work for me (Int2 Andrés, I.332-352)

Most participants seemed to consider the student council as a useless institution and only one mentioned complaint was presented to the student council at one point, but when the student council took it to the dean and it was rejected there, the affected students took it up again and went to talk to the rector, bypassing the student council as all other mentioned complaints did. In spite of this little lucky role of the student councils, Floreta got a scholarship from the UAB to create a student council in her faculty. Scholarships for students collaborating with the student councils are common in Catalan Universities. The UdL published for example a call for

10 scholarships in the academic course 2018-2019²⁷⁴. Students who fulfilled the tasks of a student representative – with or without the scholarship – may furthermore apply for the recognition of these tasks as transversal credits. The UdL's disposition in this regard (Universitat de Lleida, 2017a) stipulates, among others, in its Article 4 the number of transversal credits students may recognise, depending on the courses they complete and the Governing body they attended in their function as student representatives and the duration of this representation (between 1 and 3 credits). Here it has to be said, however, that the Disposition insists repeatedly on diverse requirements like, for example, the attendance of all meetings of the University Senate and of 70% of the meetings of the Assembly of the University's student representatives over two years in order to receive 1 credit. Considering that several of the transversal credits offered by the University (see footnote 220) grant 1 or even 2 transversal credits for the participation in a conference or a convention, we can however argue that easier ways to achieve transversal credits exist. Floreta, the only participant who had been a delegate and, moreover, active in the student council, did not mention that she applied for the recognition of her activities as transversal credits, indicating that she might not have applied for this, either out of a lack of knowledge or because she did not need further transversal credits. We can hence say that if the Universities are considering these scholarships and credit recognition a way to promote student participation, this is obviously not functioning too well. Moreover, the dissemination of these tools seems to be rather low, as Floreta was directly encouraged by lecturers to present for the scholarship and might not have known about its existence before applying.

Floreta described her task repeatedly as having to "create" a student council, though it seems more likely that she was instructed to promote the existing council, as these structures do already exist – though several participants believed that their faculties were too small to have a student council. Any student-council promotion is, in every case, condemned to fail if the students' perception of this institution does not change. However, from the way Floreta described her intervention in the student council and the diverse conflicts she faced due to it, my impression is that there was more to the university's decision to give her this scholarship. Floreta mentioned that some students had begun to organize themselves in an assembly and reacted to Floreta's attempts to promote the student council with hostility, so this might indicate that the University was attempting to disempower this new student gremium by promoting the already existing one. If this was true, rather than favouring student participation, the University's investment into the student council would then be an attempt to reducing and regulating student participation again in the pre-established lines – and Floreta would be a victim or collateral damage of this attempt, as she turned into the target of the student resistance and even came to feel hated.

Floreta: Just as last year, this year I'm working as a student assistant again. Last year, I worked from February to June and this year I've continued, but I started in November

Interviewer: And what do you do?

Floreta: I have to create a network of Psychology representatives because the members of my Faculty's Assembly don't like this representation system and they are trying to avoid it. Of course, a lot information doesn't reach the students; so, there must be a Students Council in each Faculty and, then, there's a general one of all the UAB. Two representatives

²⁷⁴ See: file:///C:/Users/Tanja/Downloads/edictes%20(2).pdf [last access: 29.05.2018].

of each faculty go to the general one, but nobody goes from my faculty and, then, I'd have to create it since, otherwise, students are not informed about anything (...) I work as Students Council support, but as it doesn't exist, there are people from my faculty who hate me because they think "she gets paid for doing this" but I work a lot, and it takes you time, quite a lot of time (Int3 Floreta, l.141-154)

Those from the Assembly of Psychology and Speech Therapy, though there was no one from Speech Therapy, only Psychology students met, didn't want a Students Council to be established because of political ideas and so on. But at the functional level, we, the students from Speech Therapy, needed a Students Council because, in several occasions, it happened to us that we were only students from fourth year for example with the thing with the syllabus. Don't all students have to give their opinion? We considered that idea and the way we could do it. And of course, a Students Council was the answer. A place where all representatives or all members, call them as you wish, could meet. (Int5 Floreta, l.653-660)

Regarding official complaints, only very few examples appeared in the interviews. Sometimes I even asked the participants if they had not presented a complaint when they told me an especially striking anecdote of their lecturers and many answered that they did not, arguing that this would not lead anywhere anyway and that they preferred to move on and not lose their time. Floreta explained in Int3 that a friend of hers who had passed her internship doing tuition lessons rather than working as a speech therapist had not wanted to present a complaint, fearing that this could prejudice her final score. However, in Int5 she mentioned to have recollected signatures to present a complain about the internship placements. Though she did not say anything about the success of this complaint, she insinuated that previous complaints had not led anywhere, because the students had only addressed the lecturer in charge of the internships, while she had sent the list to a higher position, making it more 'legal' with the indication of the national identification numbers and signatures. As several others never seemed to present an official complaint and rather seemed to have gone to talk to a lecturer or coordinator but little more, this avoidance of the official route might indeed explain why the participants did not usually know what happened with their complaints and never received any feedback. However, the general impression that complaints are useless, did likely favour the lack of motivation to present a complaint, so the very system reproduces itself. Willy believed, for example, when I asked for a complaint after hearing about lecturers who made students cry and insulted them in class (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*), that a collective complaint had been presented, but did not show any result, arguing that this is because university covers their full lecturers.

Interviewer: And did you complain about it? Or not?

Willy: I think so, yes, I think there was a collective complaint or something like that, but I think that it didn't work, no. [Interviewer: No impact] No, none, that's what I was telling you, the University covers them, right? They are renowned and all, so, well... (Int4 Willy, l.166-169)

Interviewer: But didn't they ask anything in the previous years? The centres hadn't been assessed before?

Floreta: No, it hadn't been carried out so drastically before, to name it somehow. I guess some assessment was performed because I heard that people had been complaining for three years about a centre. Maybe they wrote a complaint letter and they gave it to the internship tutor who couldn't do much about it; that person didn't have the authority

necessary to decide whether a centre should be excluded from the practicum or not, what you have to do is to reach a higher level, to say that the syllabus is wrong, that in a certain part they have to do this, in another that

Interviewer: That had to come from the students

Floreta: Furthermore, we prepared a list with ID and signature so that what we were submitting was considered legal (Int5 Floreta, I.329-339)

Summing up, the participants were not only little informed but also little willing to get involved in the existing structures of student participation and had a negative image of students who did so. Those who presented complaints did not usually identify as their main leaders and only possessed partial information on how the complaint was presented and what reactions were achieved. In the examples, we see that the students did not usually know to whom they were to present a complaint, as some contacted their Degree's coordinator, others went to the Dean, talked to the student council or even directly the rector – on occasion without having spoken first to the affected lecturer. This can already be read as a sign that the system of student control is either not very institutionalised or not sufficiently disseminated among the students. None of the participants mentioned a meeting, in the sense of mediation between the students, the affected lecturer and mediators commissioned with the case. Though it is possible that they did not know about such meetings because their role in the complaint was rather secondary, their description of the cases caused me the impression that once the complaint was presented, the University took a rather long period of time to study if the lecturer did violate a rule expressed in a University Disposition or not. This revision did not go beyond the pure application of the rule, as we see for example in the case of the teacher training students who complained about a lecturer who suspended many students because they had failed in one of the assignments, though none weighted 30% or more so that no options for recovery were offered. As I have argued above (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*) this approach reminds me more of continuous stress than of continuous evaluation and does not seem to be the idea behind the disposition. Sara argued in Int2 that this kind of evaluation was a way to laugh about the students, showing that the formal evaluation also affected her emotionally and marked her HE experience at least temporarily. Here it has to be added, that the case of the high failure rate in her degree became even the topic of a press release and the students interpreted this publication as a way to criticise them and their lack of knowledge, leading them to react with a letter to the diary that was published as well. This shows that these students did not shy away from the work to get active, but felt humiliated and victims of injustice, especially as their failure was made public. However, the university did not pronounce itself regarding the fairness and sense of this evaluation system and only proclaimed at the end that the lecturer did not violate the Dispositions and that things were already set for this year, leaving open if they might change in the following years. It seems, moreover, that this decision was not officially announced, but the result of a conversation with the rector, the student who had went to talk to him passed on to her fellows. The rules were anyway modified for the next course, but this was not publically related to the students' complaint and the affected participants were not sure if their intervention had influenced in this decision or not. It is, of course, possible that the lecturer received a feedback in this sense without the students' knowledge and though there is no need to inform students about all conversations celebrated with staff members, this lack of feedback is again a sign of the lack of transparency and by not admitting that a complaint actually made a difference, the university

discourages further complaints again, rather than recognising the unfairness the students had suffered and offering them an apology or even compensation. To me, it seems likely that the interest the press had taken in the case influenced in the university's decision to change things in the future, but even if this was not true, the case shows clearly how the university adopted a policy of silence, not officially informing the students about the development and outcome of their complaint, possibly to silence further complaints and to hush up the initial problem.

In other cases, we see that the results of complaints differed widely depending on the affected lecturer's position. Willy argued in Int4 that full lecturers were usually worse lecturers but that there was nothing one could do against them, because the university covered them, while newer and potentially better lecturers had no chance to enter to start with. Andrés described how an associate lecturer had first received at least a heads-up and changed his evaluation system – basically facilitating that students passed his subject – when the students presented a complaint. When the third promotion of students complained again about the same lecturer, he lost his job. Xenia, on the contrary, told me about a full professor who threatened his first-year students at the beginning of the course that he was going to be especially hard, because the last first-year students had agreed on a negative evaluation of his teaching in the teaching survey²⁷⁵, indicating the comment that he probably had an arrangement with local companies offering private lessons for university students. The lecturer had obviously received this feedback from the University but only taken it as a reason to affront his new students even further. Apart from showing that the lecturer perceived the student population as homogenous, punishing the new first-year students for what their predecessors did, rather than supposing that the new first-year students were new to university and different persons and could perfectly behave differently and even evaluate his teaching differently, especially if he took the negative evaluation as a reason to revise it rather than to confront the students. At the end of the year, Xenia and her fellow students turned to indicate the same comment in the student survey, so we can only imagine how the lecturer might have begun his class with the next course. However, she did so without any hope for a change, as a belated counterstrike knowing that he would get angry when he saw it and only once she knew she would not have to face the lecturer's reaction as she had passed his subject²⁷⁶. In this interview, she argued that the University only cares if sufficient students pass a subject but does not mind if this is thanks to the lecturer or thanks to their paying private tuition lessons. As we have seen above, success rates do play an important role in the teaching staff and degree course evaluation, so in a way, Xenia showed here that she had developed a feel for the game. However, she did not mention any example of an intervention because many students had failed a subject, so we cannot know why she came to believe that this would provoke an intervention after observing that a negative student survey did not. Again, it is impossible to know if and how the lecturer was affected by the students' repeated negative evaluation, but we can see that at least in

²⁷⁵ These surveys are officially anonymous, are implemented through a lecturer-independent system towards the end of the course and are only processed if at least 3 students responded. Lecturers may consult their results on a webspace that requires their log-in and receive an e-mail whenever the latest evaluations have been included. However, in Xenia's example all students indicated the same comment, so the lecturer did not have to be able to recognise who said what and could inflict his anger on the whole group or – in the absence of an occasion – on the next promotion.

²⁷⁶ As the surveys are passed towards the end of the course, it is possible that she already knew that with her previous results in the continuous evaluation she had passed the subject for sure.

Xenia's year the effects were solely negative, worsening the situation the previous students had complained about further rather than improving it. Apart from the next round of evaluations, no mediation or supervision was employed and the lecturer's attempt to threaten the students in order to manipulate their evaluation shows – in spite of its lack of success – that these evaluations are further biased than previous research, in particular on a gender bias, indicated (Boring, 2015; MacNell, Driscoll, & Hunt, 2014).

Xenia: He was against us²⁷⁷ because last year it was said that (-) he had an arrangement with private tuition providers, that providers were paying him so that he [Interviewer: oh, yes?] I mean, because the students in that poll (-) that are anonymous and where you have to (-) say something about a lecturer [Interviewer: yes, the assessment (at the same time) you know? yes, well, they wrote this in the comments section (smiling)]

Interviewer: That he had an agreement?

Xenia: With the providers and that he receives money for not, for giving [Interviewer: (smiles)] very badly the class (laughing) (-) and the teaching curriculum so that people can't follow (smiling) and he felt really upset (...) he said so at the beginning "look (.) I don't like (-) people telling me that" and "I'm obliged to give classes whether I like it or not" (-) [Interviewer: hm] (laughs) you don't like giving classes? "no (.) but I have to, because it's my job and so on" (changes her voice) sure, he is there to investigate (-) [Interviewer: hm] and to investigate you need to teach [Interviewer: hm] you're obliged to (.) That's it (Xenia, Int2, l.134-154).

As Xenia argued in several interviews that her fellow students and her degree in general were very good students, more negative evaluations are furthermore in line with the observations by Griffioen et al. (2018) that cognitively more able students are less satisfied in vocational HE. However, as we did not assess students' cognitive abilities in this project, we cannot know if and how this influenced in student satisfaction. Student satisfaction and the presentation of complaints are furthermore two different things, as some students may feel little stimulated in HE but not present a complaint because of this or even evaluate their lecturers positively in the opinion poll and others might present complaints and evaluate the lecturers negatively, because they had faced academic failure and difficulty. Regarding the student surveys, Ariel argued that she and her fellow students used them to indicate suggestions how to improve their degree. Her example – to offer language courses throughout the whole degree and annually – is rather strange as the student survey focuses on teaching staff and not the study plan or the recollection of ideas for improvement in general. That students make such a use of it may then indicate that they make the best use of the only chance they get in the course of their studies to present their ideas, complaints and suggestions anonymously and at a moment when the evaluation is often already completed. We might, however, wonder what happens afterwards to hand-written comments on such surveys, when these are digitalised and sent to the lecturer and if they may actually come to make a difference. Once again, it has to be said that the student population is in itself heterogeneous and, on occasion, it seemed that the participants differentiated themselves from fellow students they perceived as moaners, arguing that if they organised their time better, they would not have to require deadline extensions and even alerting the lecturers that they did not agree to a complaint their fellow students had presented in class (see Nic). When comparing participants from the same degree courses, we see furthermore that within the same year and degree, some students gave much

²⁷⁷ The expression used in the Spanish original was: "*lo ha tomado con nosotros encima*".

importance to criticism and spoke of complaints their class had presented, while others hardly mentioned the topic and did not seem to have been involved in these complaints, though they formed part of the same class. Andrés, for example, was very critical in the first interview and mentioned many points for improvement. Ariel, however, did not mention any complaint at all, making it clear that though Andrés often used the first person plural (we), not all students in his course agreed on his vision of the events and if they did, they did not see a need to comment on it. In a nutshell, student satisfaction is a complex topic further research could focus on in more detail.

Nic: I complain about the ones from Japanese, in my class, they are always complaining like: "Ah, we have too much work". We all have the same amount of work, we are in our third year, and some of us have good grades and some of us don't, so, I don't know if you get me, (...) they make all of us look bad, you know? And...

Interviewer: Because then the lecturer thinks that complain comes from all the students?

Nic: Of course, because they say: "Oh, it's the whole class". But it's not the whole class, only the students that are louder, and they are the ones who are a bit like that, you know?

Interviewer: And don't you tell her [the lecturer] otherwise?

Nic: Yes, yes, we told her already: "Hey, look, they have complained but we don't agree with that", you know? (.) (Int4 Nic, l.624-634)

Xenia commented in her last interview that she had thought every year that she was facing the worst lecturer ever, just to encounter an even worse lecturer in the following year. This may indicate that, in the retrospective, she would have evaluated the first-year lecturer mentioned above differently, comparing him to other lecturers she was still to meet. It is possible that students are more likely to present official complaints or to transmit their dissatisfaction by agreeing on a negative comment in the evaluation survey when they are still at the beginning of the studies. Over the years, they seem to not only grow used to certain imperfections, but also lose the interest in presenting complaints – maybe because their experience with the complaints is that they consume an important part of their time without leading anywhere. This might explain why most of the few examples of formal complaints appeared in the second-year interview, referring to events from the first year, though the participants kept evaluating their lecturers negatively in the later interviews and tended to present their criticism much more pronouncedly and more elaborated in the course of the follow-up. Floreta, who had been very active collecting ideas to improve her degree and knew other students from posterior promotions, said in Int5 about these contacts of hers, that they were by now in their last year and just as tired as she had been at that point. Here, she leaves a bit the impression that the work to improve university is not only time-consuming, but also exhausting, so the idea of tiredness might also refer to a withdrawal from the activity in itself, as a result of the continuous frustration of their efforts and the outlook to leave university anyway soon and hence discontinuing the fight – if this is the right word – in every case. This rather sad end of their engagement might also play a role in the idea that engagement is not worth it, that appeared so frequently and with such naturalness among the participants. If we are interested in student feedback to improve the HE system, this finding indicates that we are currently losing a big potential as only few students present complaints and usually when they are still at the beginning of their studies and their criticism is not yet completely developed. In spite of her graduation and tiredness, Floreta continued to show a certain engagement even beyond her studies, mentioning in Int5 a subject that should be included into the study plan

but that she had not included in the proposal she presented when she was still in university. When I suggested that she could present it now, as the University was anyway still 'working' on her proposal, Floreta considered that she could do so, but appeared little interested in doing so. This shows that the threshold to address University with a feedback is even higher after graduation and even highly active and engaged students lose their impetus in this sense, though their perspective might be highly interesting as their first experiences on the labour market might grant them a new perspective on their studies. In this sense, HE systems might not only work on improving their student feedback system, but also to include their graduates into the feedback-lope – beyond the currently used surveys on labour market insertion of graduates that do not offer any space for these suggestions and are, moreover, and from my limited experience as a participant in such a survey, more than improvable. Here it could be furthermore interesting to encourage other members of society to participate in the continuous improvement of University, inviting for example representatives of trade unions, enterprises, organisations and associations from the civil society and secondary-school pupils to share their ideas about university and how it could be improved. Such an embedment of University within society would, however, probably require first of all a change in the HE regime, as at least in Catalonia, University seems to remain a separate sector that only offers services for a small elite, while other sectors of society do not usually set foot on the premises, even if these are situated in the city centre as in the case of the main building of the UdL²⁷⁸.

In summary, the Catalan HE system, as far as it was studied in this thesis, seems to discourage students' participation. No common system to collect students' proposals and complaints existed and most students did not know how the existing systems for student participation worked. Especially the student councils had a rather bad reputation, being considered a loss of time – probably part of the explanation of the decreasing student engagement through this entity. The only participant who mentioned active University intervention to establish a functioning student council, did also mention that some students had begun to organise through an assembly, so the support for the existing structure might be read as an attempt to end this new form of student participation rather than as an effort to increase student participation. Most participants opted to see through the diverse difficulties and injustices they experienced and observed in university without ever presenting official complaints – possibly because they felt that such complaints did not lead anywhere and only risked leaving a bad impression on staff that could worsen their future benevolence rather than improving their situation now. In the few cases where complaints were presented, the students were not involved in their evaluation and decision-making process and no mediations took place. Even in Nadia's accounts of an university that takes students' comments seriously, the students' intervention was limited to presenting a complaint or suggestion and observing – after a certain time – that changes in the sense of their complaint were implemented, though an

²⁷⁸ Here I draw on my experiences with fellow students I befriended in the course of Catalan courses I took in the CNL and who were completely amazed when I suggested to meet in the University to complete a group work and told me that they had never been in the Building before. Similarly, several of my colleagues argued in the organization of disseminative events that it was better to celebrate these outside University, as the population does not usually attend events organised in the university building. In Argentina, on the contrary, I noticed quite a different conception of University, as not only access to University degrees was much broader, but many non-students accessed the premises regularly to take part in events or courses or to just use the offered services or walk through the park.

official communication of the final decisions was hardly ever mentioned. This may indicate that the different universities in this study did not consider their students as full members of the system, but treated them as incomplete learners, who complained out of bad habits, or as clients, whose satisfaction was important but who only relate to the final product and do not intervene in its design and production.

The current system of quality control through the AQU (see footnote 252) favours this situation even further, as changes affecting the study programme require approval and hence paper work and waiting periods. Moreover, teaching quality plays such a secondary role in teaching staff accreditation – one might wonder why they even call this section of their website 'teaching staff' and not directly 'researchers' – that the indirect message lecturers receive is that they should focus on their research rather than their students. Similarly, teaching assessment operationalises the results of teaching activity through success rates and student satisfaction through the mean score achieved in the students' opinion polls on lecturers, leading through these simplifications to a situation where lecturers are encouraged to pass students rather than to evaluate their academic performance objectively. Here it seemed that universities tended to reduce the student experience to a mere passing or failing, opting for example to pass all students of a subject when this had not been evaluated within the official deadlines in order to avoid complaints (see Floreta). Such practices were not only criticised by the participants as unfair and little adequate for the learning process, but question furthermore the quality of the achieved training. In order to better manage quality in HE, the important potential of students as promoters for improvements has to be used and students, lecturers, other staff and external evaluators should intervene together, as equal vis-à-vis with a common goal rather than opponents. Future research is needed to identify effective ways to achieve such change, but from the perspective of this project, we can argue that increasing the agility of bureaucratic processes, involving student representatives in decision making processes – not only but especially regarding their formal complaints – and informing the whole student population directly about decisions and the argumentations that motivate these decisions could be a promising start. Here it seems, moreover, important to establish a general guideline how to treat complaints and what consequences to adopt when mediation fails and a fault of the lecturer is recognised, independently of the affected lecturer's status. This could not only lead to more pressure on full professors to engage in their teaching but also protect associate lecturers who seem to be for now in a rather precarious situation and may lose their work in reaction to a complaint, rather than receiving a fair mediation and evaluation of the complaint that may just as well be little funded or not shared by the whole affected student population though it was presented as such. Decentralising student representation and, hence, distributing the related tasks among more students rather than burdening few students with workload and responsibility might encourage more students to become active, especially if they see that their proposals and complaints are taken seriously. Additionally, it could be interesting to offer further compensations and acknowledgements for students who become active as student representatives, similar to the advantages staff members receive for representing their collective in an official gremium, as currently only few transversal credits are recognised for prolonged engagement. Additional measures might be furthermore useful, as students only have to course rather few transversal credits in the course of a degree and may achieve this easier in different ways. Examples with a certain potential to be attractive for

students can be deduced from the participants' worries and complaints, for example the reduction of the matriculation fee or certain privileges regarding the access to non-continuous evaluation (currently only available for students who present a work contract at the beginning of the course, see ... *and what about work?*) or to being allowed to choose subjects/groups first in the matriculation process, when a system of different phases of matriculation periods exists (see Floreta), etc. All this could, in the long run, improve the students' HE experience and facilitate quicker processes of improvement and a more active student representation that would also foster social equality and justice.

Future research on student participation in different contexts could study if and to which extent the described tendencies do also apply in HE institutions in other national contexts. An interesting hypothesis for further research could be the question if HE institutions function as a mirror of a general democratic regime of a country, so that a lack of participation, a preference for informal complaints and a strategy of silencing of complaints just as a lack of transparency might be general characteristics of the Catalan or Spanish society as a whole. Since I am living in Spain, I have experienced how persons in my circle of acquaintances suddenly received a bill for a significant sum, because some tax import had been changed retroactively for several years into the past or how they had to pay a fine for having declared a payment several years after the year they should have received it, though they could not have declared the sum before as the public administration had not realized the payment earlier. In these and similar cases I reacted usually with indignation, but when I insisted on presenting a complaint or talking to a lawyer, these acquaintances only told me that they had to pay less if they paid now and that you can never win against the state, so it made no sense to dedicate time and money to the attempt. Though I did not study these events in detail, their fatalistic approach reminded me of some of my participants, leaving me with the impression that this had more to do with the society in general than with the HE system in concrete. Moreover, I have experienced diverse episodes of difficulties with the administrative system myself, whenever I came to complain about something I considered unjust or badly realized and can tell from my own experience that rather than taking my comments seriously and attempting to improve, the affected staff treated me afterwards in a way that made me wonder if it even came to affect me negatively.

6.5.5. *Practical and content issues*

Apart from the already mentioned issues, several participants mentioned in the course of the follow-up aspects that I would not like to omit here, especially as some are highly related to the quality of their education. Though they are less relevant regarding the mechanisms that reproduce social inequality in HE, this criticism and ideas for improvement could anyway foster a general improvement of HE that would benefit all students, including those who suffer inequalities, and society as a whole.

We have already seen in previous sections and chapters that group works entail diverse practical difficulties to reconcile the group members' different timetables (see *Academic success*) and that some degrees lack necessary equipment or installations, provoking additional costs for the students and negatively influencing the quality of their training (see *Direct and indirect costs*). Other practical issues appeared regarding the preparation for University. Already in the focus

groups, some participants argued that they would not choose a degree if it included a subject they had not studied in High School, worrying that they would be badly prepared because of this (see FG10). The preparatory courses that were mentioned in this focus group did never again become a topic in the follow-up and none of the participants mentioned to have taken part in one, indicating that they might not be very common or that students refrain from inscribing into them. In the course of the follow-up, the perception of the level of difficulty changed. While several participants commented in their first-year interview on the new exigencies they were not used to, most considered towards the end of their degree that it was possible to pass it with continuity and effort or – regarding teacher training (see *Health*) – even too easy. Skone, for example, argued in his first-year interview that the subjects he had not coursed in High School were difficult for him and expected academic failure, but came to argue in his second-year interview that his first-year subjects had been rather easy and even repetitive regarding High School. Apart from highlighting, once again, the importance of the moment of data construction for a study, this may indicate that the participants underwent a process of adaptation in the course of their degree – less visible but not less important than the rather sudden adaptation we noticed regarding the participants who had entered the labour market before the end of the follow-up (see *Becoming a professional*).

This adaptation was for some participants more difficult than for others and provoked, as we have seen above (see *Health*), in some cases psychological distress and suffering. Floreta argued that she had difficulties to adapt to the evaluation systems used in HE, as these favoured multiple choice exams and she had never taken this type of exam before (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*). Nadia explained her academic difficulties in the retrospective with a lack of knowledge on learning techniques and argued that her visit to a coach had helped her to learn how to learn and, hence, adapt to university (see *Academic success*). She also mentioned difficulties in adapting to having several lecturers per subject, each with her or his own evaluation system.

Several of the participants' comments can give us hints how University as a whole and concrete lecturers could help their students in this adaptation – an aim that is likely attractive for institutions that consider attrition as a sign of a lack of efficiency and evaluate their degrees, among other criteria, with their enrolment and graduation rates (see *Big differences between and within universities*). If preparatory courses are that little attractive for High School students, their revision might change this situation. However, they could also be offered in parallel to the first-year studies or their contents could be included within the High School classes. Especially Nadia's need to visit a coach and her posterior academic improvement may indicate that it is possible to learn how to learn and that school does either not focus sufficiently on this competence or is not able to transmit it adequately to all pupils. However, many of the comments did also indicate that some institutions complicated things unnecessarily for their first-year students. Nadia mentioned for example that an especially difficult first-year subject was, furthermore, imparted in English. While Nic and Willy mentioned their lecturers' 'attempts' to give classes in English, indicating that the lecturers did not necessarily know enough English to transmit the knowledge adequately in this language, Nadia argued that she and her fellow students did not have the necessary level to follow their lecturers' explanations. Considering the whole commotion around the B2-law that was usually reduced to English only

(see *Third-language accreditation*), we can say that English was a recurrent topic in the whole follow-up, to a point that we might even speak of a certain ‘obsession’ of the Catalan HE system. Apart from improving the students’ levels in English before entering HE, a simple improvement here could be to offer – especially but not solely – first-year subjects in a language the student population and lecturers are more proficient in or to opt for the practice of ‘translanguaging’ (Gallego Balsà, 2014) – combining different languages as necessary to facilitate that all students, including international students, may follow in class. Considering that many HE institutions in English-speaking countries require their international incoming students to accredit their English proficiency to be allowed to enrol in their degrees²⁷⁹, it does not seem to make much sense that Catalan students have to study first-year subjects in English, when their lack of skills in English is an overall topic of concern in the Catalan society²⁸⁰. Rather than offering obligatory subjects in English in the first year, a good alternative could be to offer selected subjects in English in more advanced courses, when the students had time to adapt to HE and to improve their English, or to only offer elective subjects in English, when English skills are not directly related to the degree content.

Regarding the concrete content of their degree courses, several participants considered that some of their subjects were not directly relevant for their studies – at least in the way they were currently imparted – while other contents they considered important were missing. Floreta argued, for example, that the degree in Speech therapy should include a subject on myofunctional therapy. Though it was probably easier for them to tell me their criticism and they would have probably not said the same to one of their lecturers, I am not the most adequate receptor of these comments as I am not an expert in their fields of study and may hardly convince any degree coordinator to apply their suggestions. As I am in no position to assess if the participants had a point with these suggestions or not, I limit myself to recommend – once again – to consider students proposals further, to foster their participation in the elaboration and revision of study plans and to even include already graduated students into this process, as the distance to the studies and first labour market experiences provide them with a different perspective – though we will discuss the labour-market orientation their perspective might easily foster below (see *... and what about work?*).

6.5.6. *... and what about work?*

The relation between HE and work is, in many senses, peculiar and full of contradictions. As Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) argue, the HE experience is marked by a ‘game of free

²⁷⁹ See, for example, for the UK: <https://www.studying-in-uk.org/how-to-apply-at-a-university-in-uk/>; for Cambridge University: <https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/international-students/english-language-requirements>; for the US and Canada: <http://www.universitiesintheusa.com/admissions/entry-requirements>; for the University of Melbourne (Australia): <https://futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/admissions/entry-requirements/language-requirements/undergraduate-toefl-ielts> [last access each: 14.05.2018]. Interestingly, a study from the 1990s conducted in Australia had indicated that the ‘pieces of evidence accepted’ to prove language proficiency were ‘inadequate measures’ (Coley, 1999, p. 7). In this sense, it seems that these Universities faced this issue earlier and solved it with stricter entrance requirements.

²⁸⁰ See for example: https://www.ara.cat/societat/Set-obstacles-nostre-nivell-dangles_0_724127736.html [last access: 14.05.2018].

intelligence' that disconnects the studies from the professional future they should prepare for and depreciates a strong future orientation, especially when the objective chances to achieve the profession are high. As the objective chances to achieve an employment in their field of studies were in the historical context of Bourdieu and Passeron's study lower for women and for students from lower social classes, these were considered exempt from the 'game of free intelligence'. In the current neoliberal context, HE has been affected by a general orientation of the education system towards the labour market, though resistance against this tendency was more articulate than in other fields (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999), possibly allowing the maintenance of a critical stance towards future- and labour-market orientation in spite of its increasing importance in HE policies and discourse. With the 'massification' of HE (Trow, 1999) HE titles have lost in many fields the guaranteeing character they had in the past to give access to a certain work profile and the corresponding social position. Overeducation and underemployment are nowadays spreading among graduates (Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016) and the competition on the labour market is high. Bathmaker et al. (2013) comment on the importance of extra-curricular activities (ECA) and first labour experiences for the future employability of graduates, so we can argue that the illusion of a game of free intelligence is, probably in some degrees more than in others, being substituted by – or at least combined with – an openly strategic CV construction in parallel to the time in HE and possibly even before. A strategic CV construction requires, however, time, effort and – directly or indirectly – money, as students cannot dedicate their time to paid employments or have to pay for transport, accommodation and living costs while they complete an unpaid internship in a prestigious institution abroad, facilitating the reproduction of social inequalities from one generation to the next. It is therefore interesting to consider HE and work from the following perspectives: 1) the reconciliation of work and studies, 2) the preparation for the professional future in university and 3) the support offered by the HE institution in the transition to the labour market. As we have seen the third dimension above (see *Labour-market entrance*), this section focuses on the first two dimensions.

The reconciliation of work and studies

Diverse studies have indicated that paid work has a negative influence on students' academic work and limits their participation in the student experience as a whole (Cooper, 2013), though others have argued that the determining variable are the hours dedicated to the studies and that it does not make a difference if few hours are dedicated to the studies because the individual is working or out of other reasons (Gibney et al., 2011). Here it seems to be necessary to differentiate between paid work out of necessity and paid or even unpaid work to improve one's CV. As Bathmaker et al. (2013) argue, not all students may afford an unpaid internship, especially abroad, as this comes with additional costs rather than offering the students a payment for their work. Consequently, social class mediates CV construction, as students with the economic possibilities (economic capital) and the Vitamin B (social capital) achieve internships in prestigious institutions while students who lack these capitals cannot participate in this CV construction in the same ways. In times of 'mass HE' (Trow, 1999), where more students graduate from degrees than vacancies open up in their field, social inequality is reproduced on the labour market rather than in the HE system – or through the access to master degrees (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999; Wakeling & Laurison, 2017) – and this may

question, especially in contexts of high matriculation fees and little possibilities to gain a scholarship, if the investment into HE is still worthwhile for the individual (Brynin, 2012).

Though Spanish University policies have officially attempted to improve the possibilities to reconcile work and studies, we can deduce from the general offer of degrees in full-time or morning shifts that the predominant student concept is still one of – supposedly young – persons who study full time and at most dedicate a part of their spare time to earn some money in a student job. If the profile of professionals who wish to study in parallel to their professional activity was more prominent, we could expect to find more night-shift degrees, offers to study a degree at your own pace, semi-virtual and virtual courses etc. – a feature more common regarding master degrees and in countries like Argentina, where I had occasion to observe a complete different inclusion of University within the society and a public access to University and its services that I had not considered possible before. The lack of a profile of working students has been confirmed in previous research indicating that, in Spain, young people who work are 80% less likely to be studying in university or to have achieved University studies than those who do not work (Torrents, 2015). However, an increase in attempts to combine studies and work has been observed and a certain approximation of the lower-class tendency to work in parallel to their studies to the overall mean has been explained with the deterioration of certain jobs in the wake of the economic crisis and the increased exclusion of the lower classes who need to work to be able to study from University (Torrents, 2017). In the light of the observations shared in this thesis (see *Extra-curricular activities and work experiences*), another possible explanation for the increase of work experience among students who are not from the lower classes may lie in the pursuit of work experience in the field of studies in order to increase the 'employability', so, once again, it appears important to differentiate between the type of work the students realise and whether their motivation lies in achieving first work experiences or in making ends meet. Though the prominent idea in Catalonia seems to be that full-time students reconcile their studies with student jobs, we may question if even this is equally possible for everybody, as many student jobs are characterized by an especially high precariousness the current Dispositions do not seem to take into consideration, so in particular students who are forced to work in order to finance their studies may face severe difficulties to combine their activities.

The UdL's Disposition on student evaluation allows, for example, in Article 1.5 sentence 2 that students who present a working contract within a stipulated time period at the beginning of the semester may opt for a unique evaluation rather than the continuous evaluation system (Universitat de Lleida, 2016). However, the very limitation to the beginning of the term does not seem the most adequate, considering that nowadays many young people achieve very precarious labour contracts and enter and leave working status within days (Cabasés Piqué et al., 2016; MacDonald, 2011). Moreover, this possibility did not seem to be very well-known among the participants as nobody mentioned the option throughout the follow-up. On the contrary, several participants mentioned individual agreements or confrontations with lecturers that may indicate that the lecturers did not know about the Disposition either or preferred to ignore it. N., for example, convinced a lecturer to let her realize the assignments that included group works individually, arguing that it was difficult for her to meet other students due to her work in a dance academy. The lecturer agreed to this proposal, though N. did actually only work 4 hours per week and allowing her not to realize group works, excluded

her indirectly from any learning of team-work abilities and competences this learning technique could wish to promote. Skone, on the contrary, explained that several of his lecturers had told their students that their degree was incompatible with work, justifying like this that he never attempted to obtain an employment. Margarita, who joined the project belatedly, told me in her third-year that she had been working in her first year half-time but had decided to quit the job, because the sports shop did not allow her to reduce her working hours further and the amount of hours together with the timetable had made it very difficult for her to participate in the group works she had to present, apart from not leaving her much time to study. To compensate the loss in income she searched herself a job with fewer hours per week throughout the course and worked the whole summer through in order to save money. As she had completed a vocational training in sports before enrolling in the sports faculty, she was able to achieve work in a gym and also worked in sports related summer camps for children and offering sportive extra-curricular activities throughout the course. However, on occasion she received a sudden notification that the organization that had agreed to contract her in summer would not do so, so she had to search for an alternative towards the end of the semester, when time was already scarce and she had to prepare for exams. Especially these sudden notifications forced her to dedicate an important amount of her time to the search for job offers and in her last year, when she had to complete a longer internship for her degree, she had to quit her work in the Campus gym to be able to realise her chosen internship. However, the gym contracted her again in the next course, so her decision to leave did not seem to have a negative impact in this sense, though it is also possible that they did not find other candidates with her training. Several other participants mentioned, moreover, that their search for a summer job had been unfruitful, converting the time spent searching into an even bigger loss of time (see Sara). The work in the summer camps for children requires, moreover, the title '*monitor de lleure*' (leisure time monitor), that is achieved through a course and an unpaid internship, so several participants mentioned the money and time they had to invest to achieve²⁸¹. Under these conditions it is not surprising that Floreta, who had considered taking the course, never did so in the end, though it has to be said that the participants who took the course found work in summer camps every year.

Cara, who also studied sports, similarly offered sportive extra-curricular activities for pupils and began to work as a skiing instructor in winter, as she had achieved the necessary title in the course of a university subject and was able to commute towards the skiing area every weekend as Lleida is situated relatively close to the Pyrenees. Moreover, she worked occasionally and towards the end of the follow-up with a payment in her parents' shop. Nadia worked almost every summer in a family-owned tobacconist²⁸² and earned the money to pay

²⁸¹ When I searched for the course, I found diverse offers with a rather big difference in the costs, ranging from 160€ here <https://escolademonitors.com/> [last access: 04.05.2018], over 205 € here <https://fundaciocet10.org/cat/cursos-monitor-lleure/> [last access: 04.05.2018], to 250 € here: https://www.peretarres.org/wps/wcm/connect/peretarres_ca/peretarres/webs/lleure/home/monitors/programacio [last access: 04.05.2018], to mention just some examples.

²⁸² In Spain, certain goods are banned from free sale and may only be sold in mercantile establishments with special concessions, the so-called '*estancos*' that are currently the only shops in Spain where tobacco and stamps are available. As the number of concessions is state-regulated, owners of such concessions enjoy certain securities thanks to their monopole and the relative lack of competition. For more information on ways of achieving a concession, see for example:

her enrolment fees, while she argued that it was impossible to reconcile her studies with a job throughout the course. Though she proudly announced that she paid her enrolment fees herself, she also received throughout several years the enrolment scholarship from the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (see *Scholarship programmes*) and was perfectly able to spend several summers realizing unpaid internships instead of working, indicating that her decision to work was not a result of economic necessity. As Nadia's parents seemed to encourage her to work and Cara's parents preferred to pay her for her work to achieve that she took it more seriously, it is possible that parents who own a business require their children's engagement in this business. Cara argued that they preferred her because she was already trained and it was difficult to find good workers. We might add that family members are furthermore cheaper than usual workers and require less paper work, especially if the support is only occasional²⁸³. This is also in line with Irina's work in her parents' *churreria*.

Andrés told me that he had abandoned his previous degree because he had to work and earn money when his mother lost her job and mentioned changing occupations and job interviews in the course of the follow-up, apart from unpaid internships. When he returned after the interruption to his initial degree, he attempted to reconcile his studies with a daily job and soon abandoned the degree again, arguing that the job made it difficult for him to study and to meet with his fellow students to realize group works, but highlighting that the degree was no longer to his liking anyway after the reforms. When he returned to university, this time to the degree in Tourism, he did no longer work every day, but combined his studies with a weekend-job, considering that this was much more compatible. Though he mentioned a very diverse range of labour activities for the past, ranging from painter to call-centre agent, his work throughout the follow-up had usually a certain relation to his studies in tourism, as he worked in a local conference centre as a hostess and later on, after a temporal unemployment, as a car-park attendant. He also presented for a job in the elaboration of a tourist guide and believed that he would have got the offer, if the venture had not been cancelled.

Sara did first work in summer only but then found a job in a language school and started to work throughout the course in the afternoons. In her description of her daily routine, she spent the morning in university, the afternoon at work and the night meeting with her study group to realize the group works they had to present, so she ended up very tired at the end of each term and decided not to work in summer in order to rest. Peter first enrolled for the evening shift of his degree that would have forced him to quit his job as a football trainer of a children team, but was lucky to receive a notification after a couple of weeks that a placement in the morning shift had remained vacant so he could change shifts and combine his studies with his work. However, the few hours of work per week and on the weekends did not only affect his ability to meet with group works negatively, but also limited his possibilities to spend time with his girlfriend who had moved to another city for her studies and was only able to see him on the weekends. From the second year on, he did furthermore earn some money playing football in an adult team himself, so he had to make an even bigger effort to reconcile the kids'

https://cincodias.elpais.com/cincodias/2014/01/16/emprendedores/1389859117_231101.html [last access: 04.05.2018].

²⁸³ For more information on the legal practices in this regard see for example: <https://blog.anfix.com/puedo-contratar-a-un-hijo-para-trabajar-en-mi-negocio/> [last access: 04.05.2018].

training with his own training and was not always able to attend all matches on the weekend as they coincided. Irina decided in her second year to move to Lleida after having spent the first year commuting from a village and started to work in several part-time jobs at once to pay for her living costs and to save money for the stay abroad she had in mind. Among others, she worked as a children trainer in athletics – after quitting her own training due to a lack of time – a dancing bartender and shop assistant. Floreta worked on campus as a promoter of the campus gym, but her only reward was free access to the installations and courses. Later on she received the already mentioned scholarship to promote a student council and one year she realized unpaid voluntary work as a speech therapist in an association for deaf people. None of the other participants mentioned a paid employment in parallel to their studies.

When comparing the participants who mentioned employment, we can clearly differentiate the two profiles described above, as we see on the one hand students who worked a significant amount of hours, often in fields that had little or no relation to their studies and who seemed to face certain financial restraints, and, on the other hand, students who did not work or only worked few hours or in unpaid voluntary jobs or internships highly related to their studies or their personal interests, constructing their CV. Several of the working students mentioned that they had to quit other extra-curricular activities to be able to reconcile work and studies. Students working in a family business appeared as an important profile that should receive further attention in future research. Interestingly, several of the participants from families of origin with rather high economic capital, felt reluctant to use their parents' money and attempted to earn money on their own (Floreta, Nadia) or to spend as little as possible (Nic), though this was not strictly necessary. However, it has to be said that in spite of his continuous worry about spending money, Nic, for instance, paid a trip to the US and bought himself a new tablet and other expensive electronic devices in the course of the follow-up and directly used the money he had earned working in Japan to visit Tokyo, so it seems that he only restricted his daily expenses but then used the saved money for his own interests, showing in his accounts in this regard the bad conscious this provoked (see *Social success*). In summary, none of the participants seemed to face severe economic difficulties in the course of the follow-up, as they received economic support from their families and were able to compensate their lack of income lowering their costs, for example after losing a scholarship or an employment. The students who earned money, tended to use it to pay their enrolment fees and private costs, but only few paid their living costs and only Andrés mentioned to have contributed in the past to the family economy – justifying with this his study interruption. In this sense, we could not detect the gender difference Ovink (2014) observed in her study of young Latinos living in the US, in which young men tended to use their earned money for their leisure while young women collaborated in the family economy. We can, however, argue that young people who have to support their parents economically, might not enrol in HE right away or abandon their studies as Andrés did when this becomes necessary, indicating that economic capital is an important mediator of access and success in HE in Catalonia.

Apart from their factual employments, the students' conceptions of the compatibility of work and studies may tell us a lot about the Catalan HE system. Interestingly many participants agreed on a special difficulty related to reconciling work and studies and argued in favour of special privileges for working students. Especially when they denounced injustices, they attached special importance to the working students, arguing for example that it is even worse

for them to fail a subject (see Margarita) or to realize useless internships (see Floreta), given that they already face many additional difficulties and have to work to be able to pay everything. This shows that the students' general image of working students was rather negative, expecting inconveniences rather than advantages, but it was also considered a respectable choice that should give access to certain privileges. In this, we can notice a big difference between the call for privileges for working students and the depreciatory comments on students who are active in social movements or the student council we have seen before (see *Lack of control*), as these are usually considered to be losing their time and not interested in their studies. Future research should deepen into the acknowledgment and degradation of certain extra-curricular activities within the population and how this influences in the students' disposition to take part in these activities or not and how this may, in turn, refeed into the population and society, e.g. regarding democratic practices and political engagement.

Being a working student was also used as a justification of additional academic difficulty or the prolongation of studies (see Sara, N. and Irina). Though Irina herself combined her studies with diverse jobs, she did not seem to identify as a 'working student', arguing that after the latest changes in HE especially regarding timetables and the need to present works continuously, studies and work were no longer reconcilable, though the increasing enrolment fees force more people to work if they want to study, so they have to either refrain from HE or prolong their studies. While Irina seemed to consider that a student had to work at least half-time to be considered a 'working student' and subsequently differentiated herself from this profile, N. constructed her identity repeatedly as a 'working student', though she worked only 4 hours a week – probably less than Irina, though Irina changed jobs and hours repeatedly – and argued in Int4 that her salary was just enough for one night of parties or the ticket to a concert, indicating that she did not work out of economic necessity either.

Interestingly, N. achieved a special treatment because of her being a 'working student' and felt entitled to require privileges other participants who worked more hours did not require and, hence, not receive. This may be another example of a certain 'feel for the game' that enables especially upper-class students to demand privileges others do not feel entitled for. In the case of N., it is moreover interesting that before becoming a dancing teacher, she had already been a student of the dancing school and had participated in the school's company, facing difficulties to reconcile this ECA with her studies. When she asked a lecturer to be allowed to present for an exam with the afternoon-shift group in order to take part in a performance of this company, the lecturer first told her 'yes' but then forgot about their agreement and when she insisted on it, forced her to choose between the performance and the exam, so she had to miss the performance in the end. As this was in the times before her official employment, we might wonder if the lecturer would have reacted differently if she had told him that she had to attend the performance because this formed part of her work contract. Becoming a dancing teacher was, in this sense, a way to elevate her dancing activity to a status her lecturers took seriously, allowing her to enjoy privileges a pure extra-curricular activity would not have permitted. This was probably especially convenient, as N. had faced diverse academic difficulties in the past, so a special treatment for being a 'working student' might even facilitate her academic success in the long run. On the contrary, Dylan, a participant who had wished to join this project belatedly and was finally excluded from the analyses as he abandoned his degree just before his first-interview, argued that he had to quit his studies

because he could not reconcile them with his work. Given a disability of his single mother, Dylan had achieved economic autonomy early on and studied a vocational training, achieving his A-levels afterwards in a night school in parallel to his work in a hospital. In his interview, he insisted that he had to quit these studies, because a lecturer did not want to pass him without assisting his class and when he attempted to present a complaint, the study coordinator told him that there was nothing they could do against the lecturer in question, given that he was a full professor of an important reputation in research. Apart from showing once again that the students are silenced and no real control is executed towards full professors, this is also another example of the ignorance of the University's Dispositions as these stipulate the possibility to require a single evaluation in the case of working students and this does only make sense if these students are not required to assist all classes. Here it seems that neither the lecturer nor the coordinator knew this Disposition or considered the underlying ideas rather than the pure restraints and obligations this presents, as they did not inform Dylan about this possibility, explaining to him how he could apply for a unique evaluation if not for the current than for the next term. Though it is once again true that we only know Dylan's version of the story and this was not even analysed in-depth due to his exclusion from the sample, his story is in line with the accounts other participants shared regarding their friends or fellow students. Irina told me, for example, in Int3 that two of her friends explained to a lecturer that they would not be able to attend his class as they worked in the same time and the lecturer only answered "it's up to you", indicating that he would not apply any special rules to them and not mentioning the possibility to apply for a unique evaluation either. Irina argued that the lecturers do not care why students do not attend their classes, though it should make a difference if they are working and they should offer working-students a way to compensate for the lost classes. When I asked if they presented a complaint, Irina negated this, criticizing her own conformity. In summary, it seems that the adaptation of the rules for working students depended on the concrete lecturer in question rather than on institutional dispositions and guidelines, leading once again to important differences and injustice that, in this study, came to favour – unsurprisingly – a student who only worked very few hours and not out of economic necessity, while participants who worked many more hours either managed to complete their assignments following the general rules and changing their jobs if necessary, or quit their studies.

N.: During the first term we had to do a practical assignment, and it had to be done in a group, so I asked the lecturer if I could do it by myself because, well...

Interviewer: And the lecturer said no?

N.: No, he told me I could do it, because I told him I was working, and that it was complicated to meet the others to do the assignment; so I asked to do it alone. He told me: "Well, in theory it should be done in a group, but if you want to do it by yourself, do it".
(Int5 N., l.740-746)

A perspective a bit different appeared in Koala's interviews. He argued in Int5 that students can perfectly work part-time, but are little attractive for employers, as these prefer full-time workers to get as much as possible back for the investment they make in their training. As he worked half-time in parallel to his master degree, he justified that the master was different as it only lasted 1 1/2 years, in contrast to a four-year degree programme, so the employer could expect him to pass earlier on to a full-time contract. However, he participated in the selection process at another employer at the moment of his last interview, indicating that in his field of

studies it is rather easy to find work and, rather than candidates competing against each other, employers enter into a competition for good personnel. Koala also believed that it could have been interesting to first study a vocational training in his field before entering university, but highlighted the high risk that he might have received an attractive offer afterwards and refrained from a university degree – indicating once again that he perceived the labour market in his field as receptive and even considered job opportunities a danger for his academic aspirations. Though many participants showed a tendency to be more optimistic regarding their labour-market opportunities once they had started to search for a job (see *Labour-market perceptions*), it is possible that the ‘objective chances’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) to obtain work in his concrete field of studies, an engineering degree in electronics, were significantly higher than those of other participants in their fields. The idea that vocational trainings might have an effect of enticing potential university students is a topic of academic research, especially in Germany where the dual system of vocational training that offers a small payment from the first training year on is considered to attract students who could otherwise take their A-levels and move on to University (R. Becker & Hecken, 2008; Rolf Becker & Hecken, 2009). In Spain, the introduction of a dual system is just beginning and the focus of the last decades has rather been laid on a lack of students with vocational training as university students made up an exceptionally high share of the youth population (Strecker & Fondevilla, 2017). Koala’s different perspective might also be influenced by his own migration history, as the discourses of the country of origin – situated in Eastern Europe – might persist in his family. Just as Koala, Sara considered in her last-year interview that it would have been good to study a vocational training before her degree. Rather than seeing a risk of being diverted from university studies, she argued that she could have accredited several subjects and therefore saved money as the enrolment fee for vocational training courses was lower than that for university. Moreover, she considered the additional title a merit. While Koala and Sara considered vocational trainings as an interesting aperitif to university studies that improves one’s employability, most upper-class participants only mentioned vocational trainings when complaining about fellow students who entered through a vocational training rather than the PAU and none of them considered a vocational training as a valid alternative or advantage for themselves. This might indicate that the reason why working-class students are ‘diverted’ from university studies must not necessarily lie in the payments they receive earlier if they choose a vocational training. Rather they might choose a vocational training as an aperitif and then receive an attractive job offer that is incompatible with university studies, leading them to postpone and finally forget about their aspirations for university studies. In a context of economic crisis and high unemployment, these job offers are (expected to be) rarer, so several participants did furthermore argue that receiving a job offer was a great luck and showed gratitude even towards their rather precarious and badly-paid contracts.

Though it is true that young people might be less likely to receive any offer after completing a vocational training in times of crisis, it is also possible, especially in the Spanish context where students with vocational training qualifications were considered to be missing even before the crisis, that it might favour additionally that the students who receive an offer accept though they had initially planned to enter university studies afterwards. Future research on this topic could shed further light onto the intervening processes and this hypothesis. Improving the possibilities to reconcile work and studies and the consideration of the profile of ‘studying

workers' rather than of 'working students' might, in every case, improve the chances of young workers who got a job offer after completing a vocational training but are interested in undertaking university studies, to move on to University and get the best of both worlds.

Professional preparation

Regarding future work, many participants criticised a lack of professional preparation in university or argued that they did not feel prepared for work at the end of their studies, indicating that they considered the labour-market orientation a must in HE and did not pretend to play a game of free intelligence. From the comments of those who felt – even if not necessarily completely – prepared to work, we can deduce that rather than the imparted lectures, their internships or other work experience they had gained in the course of their studies had helped them to achieve this impression of their personal ability. Especially the students from teacher training praised their frequent and extensive internships in this sense and Floreta highlighted her voluntary work as a speech therapist positively, arguing that this had been very useful to gain experience - and to show it on your CV (see *Extra-curricular activities and work experiences*).

Floreta: Yes, I'm very happy with what I've done and chosen, the practices they gave me and so on, I'm happy. And I feel kind of ready to work, but just because I think that performing the volunteer work has helped me a lot, really very much

Interviewer: sure, you've already worked

Floreta: And you moreover have a CV. That's, well, something

Interviewer: Now you have work experience (Int4 Floreta, l.255-260)

The participants who did not feel prepared, often considered that their studies had been too general, attempting to treat many different topics but without deepening into any field. Moreover, several participants stated that the lecturers were not interested in the application of the theories treated in class. Floreta explained this with the observation that most of her lecturers were not speech therapists themselves and belonged to other faculties only coming to impart a subject or the part of a subject to the speech therapist students without worrying about the concrete adaptation of the theories and findings in this different field of studies. Several other participants explained the lack of practical application with a general lack of interest of the lecturers in these questions and several commented on contradictions between the contents of the presentation and the way the lecturer was explaining the contents. The teacher training students criticized, for example, that some of their lecturers told them how to prepare classes didactically, but did not apply any of their recommendations to their own teaching, doing exactly what they said was not considered correct. Andrés argued that several of his lecturers did not possess the 'training' to be a lecturer and just came to tell them things they themselves considered interesting or useful, though they were of little interest to the students (like the latest changes in museum regulations), were anyway obvious (like different types of clients one may encounter in a restaurant) or quickly outdated (like the functions of a reservation software currently used in some hotel chains). Moreover, Ariel argued that several of these lecturers seemed to have the idea that the students of tourism would work later on as bartenders, waiters or other service personal as they told them things related to these works, while the students were aspiring higher positions with more responsibility and different tasks. Similarly, Maduixa mentioned as one of the reasons for her change of degree course that

several lecturers had treated the whole group like future journalists, though she did not have the intention to become a journalist and changed from the degree course in 'audiovisual communication and journalism', to 'audiovisual communication' to shake off this tag. This shows, once again, that the professional future was more present in the participants' HE daily life than Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) suggested. Relating to a professional future the students do not consider interesting may provoke dropout and attrition. Not relating to future job opportunities may, on the other hand, favour the proliferation of wrong ideas about the professional profile a degree prepares for. Koala argued in this line in Int4 saying that he and his fellow students were surprised to discover concrete job opportunities related to their field, as they had had a different idea of their studies and future work (see *Professional profiles and specialisations*).

Ariel: For example, last year we attended a subject about restaurants and talked about the kind of client we could be faced with. As a tourism graduate, I don't aim at working as a waitress, but at something more

Interviewer: Oh, had it been thought for waiters?

Ariel: sure, well, for waiters, for restaurant employees. And this topic I'm telling you, the kind of client you are faced with, if he/she is happy, shy, or is always angry etc., and you say, well, that's rather common sense. (Int4 Ariel, l.99-107)

In summary, it seems that, at least among the participants of this project, there existed little comprehension for the academic detachment from the practical issues of the labour market and the practical application and future use of contents were important criteria in the participants' assessment of a subject and their degree as a whole. Though this must not mean that the 'game of free intelligence' has disappeared completely, it seems to lose ground. With Hurrelmann (2007), we can expect that students – just as young people in general – are seismographs of societal change, so it is possible that academia as a whole is losing its detachment from practical problems and becoming successively more labour-market oriented – possibly in the wake of its Neoliberalisation (see *Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation*). Despite the general preoccupation about the increasing heterogeneity of the student population thanks to broadened access (Scevak et al., 2015; Southgate et al., 2014; Tavares & Cardoso, 2013; Welton & Martinez, 2014), this might indicate a certain approximation between different student groups as the practical application was described as a topic for students from lower social classes only by Bourdieu and Passeron (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) and does now seem to be of interest to everybody. However, differences in how this topic is tackled and combined with the 'game of free intelligence' may persist and should be a topic for further research.

6.5.7. *The 'good' lecturer*

Though lecturers have repeatedly been a topic in the previous sections of this chapter, I would like to dedicate another section to them. This time, and in order to close this chapter with a positive tone, the aim is to treat the lecturers with the same attitude I adopted for my participants: the wish to overcome the deficit perspective and to focus on successful cases. As I did not interview any lecturers myself, all comments are again based on what the participants told me about 'good' lecturers and considered positive, highlighting once more that students can be a good source for feedback and ideas for improvement, as they are able to identify not

only negative but also positive aspects and to give best-practice examples. Many of these recommendations have the potential to improve the HE experience for all students, ensuring furthermore high quality in their academic training without jeopardizing their well-being. I would like to highlight, however, that their implementation should especially improve social equality in HE, as students from lower social classes have appeared as particularly often among those who were disadvantaged in the current situation while the participants from higher social classes were often the ones to profit from unequal treatments by lecturers. If all lecturers complied with the following characteristics of “good” lecturers, this should therefore favour social equality.

Ken Bain (2006) describes in his publication on the practices of the best college teachers how these change the lives of their students through their lectures. Among other dimensions, Bain’s team collected student opinions on their lecturers and selected only those for their study whose students made comments indicating that their teachings had really changed their lives, their ways to think etc., excluding any lecturers who did not achieved this, no matter how positively the students spoke about them. Another criterion was, moreover, the academic success of the students, as the selected lecturers’ students did usually achieve extraordinary results in objective tests of their learning outcomes. On the other hand, lecturers who harmed their students, e.g. by affecting their interest in the studied topic negatively in spite of achieving exceptional learning outcomes, were excluded.

Following these criteria, it has to be said that few, if any, of the participants in my project seem to have had one of the ‘best’ college teachers. Piruleta spoke in Int5 about a lecturer in terms that indicated that she changed her life and her way of thinking and, from what Piruleta told me, her academic outcomes were exceptionally good, though we cannot know if this was generally the case for the students. In concrete, she believed that this lecturer favoured reflections by provoking cognitive conflicts the students kept thinking about outside their classes and these reflections did turn them, in the long run, into better teachers themselves. However, the same lecturer had also made Piruleta cry in class, stressed her with high workload and an obsession that things had to be done exactly the way she wanted, reacting with anger when students contradicted (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*). Piruleta mentioned several times that she almost refrained from studying the specialization the lecturer was teaching, though she had felt attracted to it before knowing her and finally came to choose it anyway. In this sense, we can argue that this lecturer would have been excluded from Bain’s study because of the harm she inflicted on her students, though she obviously achieved to make a positive change in Piruleta’s personal and professional life²⁸⁴. Less extremely but still in the same line, Floreta’s TFG tutor (see *Lack of coordination between lecturers*) might have tired Floreta’s group with the exceptional workload they had to complete for their TFG, rather than promoting their future interest in the topic. Though Floreta’s first job as a speech therapist was determined by the job offers she could find rather than her professional interests so we should not over-interpret that it had nothing to do with her TFG, she did not mention any wish to deepen the topic in a future or to become a researcher and/or lecturer herself either.

²⁸⁴ This example is, moreover, ideal to show sceptical lecturers that students are able to produce highly productive criticism, identifying positive and negative aspects in the same person and recognizing positive traits even after confrontations.

Though she spoke highly of her tutor and solely blamed the university for any difficulties she experienced in the course of her TFG, she also mentioned the exceptional workload and how this wore her out, how she had to miss out on her social life and other ECA she had previously combined with her studies and insinuated that her three-person-group did not end completely well either, as she identified one of the other members as less engaged than herself. N. mentioned a lecturer she had occasion to meet throughout her Erasmus stay in Germany who was, according to her description, such a good lecturer and so funny that even in his 8am-lecture the students came to sit on the floor as all seats were occupied. Though N. was deeply impressed by this lecturer, she did not pass his subject in the end. Here we can argue that the additional language issues might explain her difficulties and that the lecturer might still be one of the best, but as we cannot know if other students of his obtained exceptionally good academic results, it would probably not be in Bain's sense to describe him as such based on the information we have. Nadia argued in a similar line in Int5 that several of her lecturers were very funny, but especially one turned his classes into a spectacular, so students attended his classes just to see it. However, Nadia gave no details of her own or her classmates' learning outcomes, solely focusing on the entertainment factor of the classes and she did not mention any prolonged influence on her ways of thinking of her life in general either.

She was very demanding and sometimes she went way too far with, what do I know?, she stressed you so much, she made me cry in class because I asked her things and she got angry (Int5 Piruleta, l.264-266)

There was a very hard lecturer and she is very hard and, maybe at that time I didn't notice it, but, but in reality that lecturer made me learn a lot (Int5 Piruleta, l.220f.)

That Bain's team would probably not select any of the participants' lecturers for their study is not a surprising finding. From how Bain introduces his book, his interest was to especially study the most exceptional lecturers in order to pass their 'tricks' on to a broader public, exactly because these lecturers are so rare that many other lecturers never meet any personally and cannot directly learn from them. In many senses, students all around the world are much more likely to encounter the kind of 'good' lecturers our participants referred to, than the exceptional lecturers Bain came to consider 'the best'. Though Bain's book is highly interesting for any lecturers who would like to improve their teaching further, the participants' comments about their 'good' lecturers may still tell us a lot about how a lecturer should behave to improve not only students' academic outcomes, but also their well-being and HE experience as a whole. As Bain argues, creating a positive atmosphere in class and showing a positive attitude towards the students are crucial for excellent lecturers, but from what we have seen in the previous sections, they are big issues for many of my participants. Is it not surprising – and sad – that a lecturer like the one described by Piruleta, who is so close to being among the best of the best, has to be excluded because of the stress-loaded atmosphere and continuous confrontations she used to furnish her classroom? However, creating a positive atmosphere and apparent amity was not enough to be good lecturer either, in the participants' eyes, so we can by no means reduce it to this dimension. In the following, we focus on what my participants considered the characteristics of 'good' lecturers as these, correctly combined, make the difference: motivation, accessibility and justice.

Motivation

When analysing the participants' comments about their 'good' and 'bad' lecturers, I encountered repeatedly references to a lack of preparation – among the 'bad' lecturers – and high levels of engagement – among the 'good' lecturers – that I consider to be all referring, in the end, to the level of motivation. This is of course an interpretation and I could have just as well set 'preparation' as another dimension of 'good' lecturing. However, in spite of sounding very logical, I found that the lecturers we should expect to be best prepared considering their academic trajectories were not necessarily considered 'good' lecturers by the participants. In my reading, this was because they did not show the level of motivation required to motivate their students for their lectures or even discouraged them with their candid lack of interest in their learning.

Bain argues that the best lecturers were all characterised by an exceptional knowledge in their fields and were often pioneers in research with many academic publications. As we have seen above (see *Lack of control*) this is in line with the AQU's high consideration of research in their 'teaching staff' accreditation. As the number of publications is rather directly related to the academic age of a researcher, senior researchers obtain better results in this field and should therefore be the better lecturers, though Bain already cautions that not all wise persons are able to transmit their knowledge equally well – or, in other words, not all excellent researchers are excellent lecturers. Several participants confirmed this impression, arguing that lecturers should have to undergo training before becoming lecturers (Andrés, Irina) and Ariel said specifically that they may be good researchers and know a lot, but not know how to transmit it. Irina mentioned lecturers who spent their classes reading out pages they had printed out from internet and several participants complained about lecturers who told them through boring, text-dominated or badly structured power point presentations full of spelling mistakes that teachers should be entertaining and avoid the use of power point presentations, as these silence the audience (Peter, Floreta, Sara, Piruleta, Irina). Yet others spoke about lecturers who gave them – twice – a multiple-choice test in which the correct answers were printed in bold (Floreta) and let us not forget about the examples of lecturers not showing up for classes or consultation hours we have seen in previous sections of this chapter (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*). It is not necessary to take a course or to read Bain's book to conceive that these practices are not desirable and any of these lecturers should have been able to fare better if they had dedicated a bit more time and effort to their teaching tasks. Some lecturers, especially those with little experience or with little proficiency in the use of presenter software and interactive teaching techniques, might furthermore benefit from courses, telling them, for example, the alpha and omega of preparing an oral presentation with attractive visual support, how to motivate students to partake in class or how to supervise group works to facilitate their success. In line with Bain's assumption that it is possible to 'learn' how to be an excellent lecturer and the participants' calls for lecturer training courses, together with the long list of courses offered, for example, by the UdL's Institute of Educational Sciences – Centre of Continuing Education we can assume that any lecturer should be able to improve over time. If lecturers continue to lack preparation and refrain from taking courses to improve, this may be a consequence of having too little time to prepare, as especially inexperienced lecturers are often obliged to teach many credits, while senior lecturers and full professors may apply for

reductions in their teaching load. Though lack of preparation may also be a consequence of a lack of motivation for teaching, the current structures and policies in HE may favour that the least experienced lecturers give more classes, while motivation and engagement indirectly discouraged, e.g. through the little value ascribes to lecturing in the accreditation process (see *Lack of coordination between lecturers*) or the high precarity especially associate lecturers face, making it little profitable to dedicate more hours than the strictly necessary to teaching.

Some participants directly broached the issue of motivation. Nic complained in Int5 about little motivated lecturers, arguing that these were usually old. For him, their lack of motivation did directly worsen their teaching abilities and deteriorated furthermore the student motivation, so the effects for learning were appalling. On the contrary, he described especially a young lecturer, who he came to consider a personal friend in the course of the follow-up, as highly enthusiastic and engaged and commented in Int4 on how this lecturer helped him and a fellow student to apply for a scholarship to work in Japan, though this did not form part of her work. It has to be said that as the experience in Japan did not come to comply their expectations, the lecturer might refrain from similar support in the future, leaving a less enthusiastic impression on the next student generations. Sara argued in Int3 (l. 1032-1037) that a good lecturer is able to motivate you for his or her subject, even if you are not especially interested in it and N. said in Int2 that a 'good' lecturer is able to explain even complicated relations in a comprehensible way, so that the class does not feel like a pain, no matter how long and complicated it is. Both Xenia (Int2) and Koala (Int5) mentioned lecturers who preferred to research and only gave classes out of obligation and how this prejudiced their teaching, especially as they made no secret of their lack of motivation for teaching.

A concrete example that appeared in several of the participants' accounts, mainly of those who were studying degrees with a clear professional profile – teacher training, speech therapy, social work – and that I would also consider a consequence of a lack of motivation and, hence, preparation, was the lack of practical application and 'real' examples. We have commented above (see *Professional preparation*) on the lack of professional preparation in many degree courses and questioned if this is necessarily in the interest of academic formation. However, we can also read this dimension from the perspective of preparation, as it seems to be a common practice among some lecturers to give the same lecture in different degree courses without much adaptation. Floreta believed that the practical application of the contents was missing out in her degree, because the lecturers were not trained speech therapists themselves but came from other fields of study, like medicine or education, and focused in their presentations on these without showing up connections. Floreta argued repeatedly in favour of lecturers who work outside university in the field of expertise they teach – the ideal of associate lecturers in Catalan HE, though it has to be said that this ideal has been perverted in the last years as more and more associate lecturers are 'false' associate lecturers²⁸⁵, working full-time in academia or paying the free-lancer fee in order to be allowed to be an associate lecturer, while they wait for a 'real' placement or accumulate the teaching experience they need for their first accreditation after completing a PhD. However, we may question if associate lecturers are really necessarily the best lecturers in her degree and if experts in medicine and

²⁸⁵ See for example: https://www.eldiario.es/tribunaabierta/Falsos-profesores-asociados-fraude-ley_6_740236006.html [last access: 21.05.2018].

education could not contribute newer insights and research findings to the speech therapists' training if they only knew how to connect their contents with their practical work. It is quite possible that at least some of Floreta's lecturers were convinced to tell the students relevant ideas they could apply in their professional practice. In this case, they would 'only' be missing out on the necessary empathy and engagement to help the students see these connections. Others, however, might usually give the same subjects to medical students and did not dedicate any time to adapting to the different public in the degree of speech therapy. A similar impression appeared in Xenia's second-year interview, as she argued that the lecturers from her own faculty were much better than the lecturers from the faculty of medicine who just 'visited' her campus to give their classes. In Xenia's eyes, the lecturers from another campus were less interested in the students, did not know their names and treated them in general differently. Though this might be related to different campus cultures – in line with the impression from the Sport's faculty students that especially their campus was different and much more familiar than the other university faculties – it is also possible that lecturers are more interested in students who they encounter repeatedly on their campus and who chose the same studies as they coursed in their days. Apart from the pure frequency of physical contact when sharing a campus, studying the same branch of studies could facilitate identification between students and lecturers that allows lecturers to be more empathic and accessible, apart from automatically offering more practical clues and asking 'big questions' – as Bain (2006) would put it – that the students consider interesting.

Lecturers from 'foreign' faculties²⁸⁶ may have to make a conscious effort to think of practical interests of students from a degree they themselves did not study and, as we have seen in Maduixa's example of an English lecturer who repeatedly addressed her class as future journalists ignoring that the students might have other professions in mind and not identify with this profile, lecturers might also have wrong mental concepts of these degrees and hence estimate the students' interests wrongly. Similarly, the participants who studied tourism were not happy when some of their lecturers treated them like future waiters, arguing that they were aspiring to something with more responsibility with their university studies. In spite of these difficulties in identifying the professional profile of some degrees, it may be easier to identify the 'big' questions moving students from degrees with clear professional profiles. It is, for example, easy to interest teacher training students for a topic by showing them how this will help them to solve problems they are likely to encounter in their future practice in class rooms. Rather than considering a focus on the professional future a sign of the polemic Neoliberalisation of HE (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999) or than arguing that working-class students have more difficulties with high levels of abstraction and do therefore prefer more technical teachings (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007), we can say that these participants did directly value the lecturers' ability to intrigue them in class. Consider, for example, this quote from one of the participants with least economic and cultural capital in her family of origin:

Well, that we have really loved the way some lecturers explained themselves, their methodology, the way they show you what the reality looks like. They don't cover only theory, they also explained us what we'll find at school, how will we have to act, and they

²⁸⁶ The Mexican anthropologist Rossana Reguillo used in a speech held at the UdL on the 15th of May 2018 the expression to belong to a different tribe, as she faced an audience dominated by business studies' students.

are very clear. They don't beat around the bush, they are very clear, it's their way of teaching. We have met very capable lecturers and some others who only work based on photocopies and that's it, and we prefer the first type, because it's truly positive. (Piruleta, Int2, l. 156-160).

Piruleta used here the first person plural, we, to indicate that the given ideas were shared by her fellow students. Her first comments included an indirect devaluation of theory and abstraction in the sense of Bourdieu and Passeron (2007), as the 'good' lecturers are said to show 'the reality' rather than limiting themselves to the theory and that they tell you what you will find in school and how you will have to react; moreover, they say the things very clearly and down-to-earth. With Bain (2006) we can argue that her underlying mental concept was that 'one' reality exists and she expected the lecturers to tell her the 'truth' and to give her solutions. In Int5, Piruleta spoke, on the contrary, of the importance of reflections and cognitive conflicts, showing that her mental concept of learning and of the work of the teacher had changed in the course of the degree – maybe because of the peculiar lecturer who pushed her especially into this direction, but maybe – why not? – as well as a result of the degree as a whole. However, already in the mentioned quote from Int2, Piruleta had a clear idea of a 'bad' lecturer as someone who hands out a copy and does not go beyond the given explanation. Intuitively, we could say, she already knew at this point that a lecturer had to do more than that and though her request for 'reality' and clearness did still sound after the rejection of abstraction and a wrong mental scheme of teaching, it was in many senses a first cry for treating the 'big questions' of the world, or at least of future teachers, in the classes. Comparing these two interpretations of the same quote is, furthermore, a key example of the overcoming of the deficit perspective and of coming to consider different social backgrounds as assets rather than limitations (Welton & Martinez, 2014). In this sense, we can argue that practical application is in some degrees the 'big question', so that ignoring it is against excellence in teaching. Considering the practical application does, however, by no means exclude theoretical abstraction from the classes, rather, it should be the way to access theoretical abstraction. And as Piruleta came to appreciate this abstraction in the course of her degree, we can not only assume that her lecturers were able to teach her in this sense, but moreover that similar processes of adaptation may happen throughout any degree, so the relation to the 'big questions' and the practical application is especially crucial in the first years of studies, when this process of adaptation is still beginning and students may need certain 'baits' – if this is the right word for it – to engage with theory.

Though I agree with Bain that expertise may be the element that turns a motivated lecturer into one of the best, my impression is that many 'good' lecturers are able to compensate a certain lack of expertise – in the sense of teaching experience and research excellence – through motivation, while excellent researchers are, at the end of the day, 'bad lecturers' if they lack motivation for their teachings. Regarding social inequalities, we can furthermore argue that a tendency of some researchers to consider their students' interest in practical application as a sign of less ability for abstraction, especially common among working-class students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007), may be a symptom of their deficit perspective towards these students. If we turn the focus towards the lecturers, we can just as well argue with Bain (2006) that these lecturers did not know how to intrigue their students for the subject by asking the right questions. However, as we have seen above (see *Interview characteristics*), the

participants' abilities to sell their ideas and decisions in the interview situation did depend on their social class of origin, so it is possible that working-class students are more likely to formulate their wish for more intriguing questions in a way that sounds little adequate to the lecturers, while their higher-class peers, may be able to express similar desires in a more academic and more acceptable way.

Accessibility

A dimension that I would like to differentiate from motivation, though it is as well highly related to it, is 'accessibility'. Especially in their first years in university, many of the participants mentioned difficulties to enter into a direct conversation with their lecturers and some even feared the few occasions when they had to face a lecturer directly (see also *Connections*). Cara said in Int2 that she preferred to give an oral presentation in front of her class than to face one of her lecturers alone in an oral exam. Koala told me how he asked fellow students about doubts he had with contents from class and though this approach enabled him to finally get in touch with fellow students, it is interesting to see that he did not even consider the possibility to ask the lecturer. This highlights once again how strongly social and academic success are interrelated and though the strategy to seek support from fellow students may be highly successful, we can suppose that students who have difficulties to relate with their fellows come to additionally lack this resource. Sara mentioned in Int2 how she went to her first consultation hour with a lecturer, highlighting that she went together with a friend and that they chose a highly accessible lecturer, but were still nervous about it. Maduixa, on the contrary, argued in Int5 that she never had difficulties to talk to her lecturers, but saw a necessity to highlight that this was because she had several teachers in her family and was used to talking to them, so even for her it was clear that a certain reluctance to speak to lecturers was common among students. We have argued above that this high threshold indicates that mentoring programmes with lecturers as contact persons for first-year students may not work particularly well, but now we can say that precisely because this threshold is high, lecturer accessibility is clue for students' learning outcomes and their HE experience in general.

Sara and Piruleta, for example, did not only say that some of their lecturers limited themselves to reading the text of their power point presentations out loud, they added that after finishing this 'lecture', the lecturers left the class – creating with the expression 'to go home' (*se van a casa*) an impression of complete inaccessibility that is probably false as they are little likely to know where the lecturers went after their class. The 'good' lecturers were, on the contrary, those who knew the students' names and recognized their faces even outside the classroom – an effort Levit and Linder (Levit & Linder, 2008) identified as a way to display recognition, leading students to feel that they matter and hence increasing their happiness (see *Happiness*); they favoured interaction in class or appeared otherwise accessible, so the students dared to contact them with questions or directly started to talk to them themselves. Rather than their physical permanence in the classroom beyond the class, they left just as everybody else at the end of the class, but throughout the class they were 100% dedicated to it, as Margarita put it in Int3. While several participants believed that younger lecturers were more accessible and Nic even argued that the similar age between students and lecturer facilitated the contact, Floreta differentiated between 'old-school lecturers' and 'fashionable-lecturers' (*modernillos*),

arguing that the last only think of themselves (*ir a su bola*), while the ‘old-school lecturers’ index you if you once said something well in class and remember your name etc.

Willy considered that older lecturers enjoyed a special protection by the university because of their higher status and did therefore not face any consequences if they were bad lecturers or even insulted their students, but he still acknowledged that some of his older lecturers had been very good lecturers. Academic age is hence not the explanation here. Irina mentioned in Int2 that her class had enjoyed a very accessible lecturer in their first year. Though she did not impart any class in the second year and the students were starting to gain confidence into another lecturer who was imparting subjects in the first and second year, Irina was convinced that she would still go to the very accessible lecturer from her first year, if she had a problem. This shows that some lecturers are able to lower the threshold to contact them so far that even after finishing their class, the students continue to consider them an important contact. Only few participants came to ‘mobilise’ their lecturers as social capital, asking them for advice regarding questions that were not directly related to their teachings, for example about the acquisition of equipment (Maduixa) or postgraduate studies abroad (Nadia) and Nic even came to consider one of his lecturers a personal friend – possibly another element in the reproduction of social inequality, as all mentioned students were identified as from higher social classes. However, if it was possible to improve the minimum contact especially first-year students have with their lecturers, lowering the threshold they experience to ask them questions, the immense difference between those who hardly ever talk to a lecturer and those who consider them friends would be at least smaller. Programmes where students from more advanced promotions give practical lessons to complete the lecturers’ theoretical classes could help in this regard²⁸⁷, as the threshold to access older students with questions and doubts is likely lower and these tutors can then mediate the contact between first-year students and lecturers by passing the questions on they consider worth the lecturer intervention, additionally helping the younger students to gain the necessary confidence to speak up and express a doubt. At the end of the degree, it was Xenia who told me that several of her lecturers sent e-mails to the list of graduating students, wishing them well for their future and offering themselves as contact persons and support should they need them beyond their university studies. This practice seems to be rather exceptional and it is possible that these lecturers had come to establish a unique relationship with the students from Xenia’s promotion and do not usually send such messages. Formalizing the farewell in this way might, however, also contribute to the construction of a solid ex-alumni network with a constant and rich feedback towards the faculty and – if the offered support is really granted – help the graduates in their labour-market insertion.

Accessibility should, however, not be mistaken with false amicability and a lack of professionalism. Mabe – a participant who dropped out of the project after her second-year

²⁸⁷ Bain (2006) quotes examples in this regard and as a student in Germany I took such practical seminars imparted by older students in law. As a visiting scholar in Australia, I got to know several PhD candidates who were imparting practical seminars to support theoretical lectures and was able to talk with some about their perceptions of their role and the difficulties they were facing. However, none of my participants mentioned anything similar, though this might depend on the concrete field of studies. In every case, it seems that the Catalan HE system is currently not using the whole potential such seminars could offer.

interview and was hence not included into the longitudinal analyses – argued that one of her lecturers used his classes to tell his students personal stuff rather than the subject's contents and asked them for their understanding when he had not been able to prepare an exam or to correct a work in the stipulated time. In other words, he acted like a friend rather than a lecturer, though Mabe was of course very aware that this friendship was an illusion as the students were not in the position to tell the lecturer what they really thought when he asked them for their understanding, as he was the one with the power to assess them. Cara, one of Mabe's fellow students, mentioned in the same line that the good mood she perceived as typical for her whole faculty was in some classes so dominant, that the lecturer took decisions assuming the students' approval as these did not protest, rather than understanding that the students did not dare to criticise him, but had expected a different treatment. In a similar line, argued Andrés that lecturers should not tell their students their private lives and that he, as a student, was not interested in these details either. Xenia differentiated in her last-year interview between three types of lecturers: lecturers who want to be your buddies (*colega*), who prefer a distance contact with their students and those who either do not care or directly want to harass (*joder*) their students. While she argued that the 'lecturer-buddy' is highly accessible and amicably, smoking with the students after class, she also considered him as less exigent and hence unable to lead students to new intellectual heights. However, she also believed that in her first year the students were too frightened to perceive their lecturers differently than distanced and hostile and that all lecturers became a bit more 'lecturer-buddy' over the years, as the students lost their fear and got to know them better. As the third type appeared directly negative, the distanced type seemed to have been the best in her perspective, as she did not criticise it directly. This shows that the participants did not expect their lecturers to be their friends in order to evaluate them positively, but considered a certain professional distance positive for the learning outcomes. Xenia's own TFG tutor had been among the few exigent exceptions who were not 'assholes' (*gilipollas*), allowing Xenia moreover, as we have seen above (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*), to construct her own itinerary as especially valuable as she had not chosen the easy way and still obtained exceptional results. This means that maintaining a certain professional distance does not contradict the ideas of accessibility and that lecturers should avoid overshooting the mark in their endeavours for a good student-lecturer relationship, though a special effort may be in particular useful for first-year students and is less harmful than other approaches.

Here I would like to make a short parenthesis around another possible dimension of good teaching, which I prefer not to include as a dimension on its own: entertainment. Some lecturers might believe to be entertaining – a characteristic that also according to Bain (2006) favours learning – when telling their students personal anecdotes in class, but if the students were interested in non-study related entertainment, they could probably find many better alternatives outside their classroom. Any entertainment in class, should hence directly relate to the study contents – a challenge the lecturer mentioned by N. did seem to have met perfectly, though it is likely that for her as an international student with language difficulties it was even more problematic to follow his class because of this. Other participants mentioned their lecturers' rather poor attempts at humour, but though they considered their lack of humour funnier than their actual jokes, they appreciated the attempt, as Cara put it in Int2. From what my participants told me, I would say that humour is a rather difficult element to

use in the classroom, as the heterogeneity of the students in class makes it likely that not all consider the same jokes funny and especially jokes at the expense of students or social groupings they might personally know or belong to are more than counterproductive. Moreover, we may wonder if humour is a learnable trait or not²⁸⁸. Future research could shed light on the relations of humour and learning. For now we can say that entertainment is not limited to humour and that the pure combination of different methods and the adequate use of attractive audio-visual support in class may already facilitate the level of entertainment of a class and hence the students' ability to maintain their concentration and attention throughout the whole lecture. However, we can also deduce from several of Bain's (2006) descriptions of excellent lecturers that their key to success is not necessarily the use of a short film per class but their ability to relate the issues treated in class to 'the big questions of the world' their students would feel so intrigued to answer that this very interest would maintain their attention. In this sense we can say that 'entertainment' is, rather than a dimension of its own, a by-product of good teaching.

Justice

As if to answer sceptical lecturers' objections that students mainly worry about passing a subject and not about their learning outcomes and that their opinions should therefore not be taken too seriously, another important aspect that appeared repeatedly in the description of good lecturers was their justice. Especially a fair evaluation system that acknowledged those who deserved it and failed those who did not was repeatedly requested. Floreta criticised the practice to pass everybody to avoid complaints and Piruleta and Sara did both call for more selection in their degree, considering that it was now producing teachers without vocation (see *Health*). Xenia argued that it was the continuously high level of exigencies in her degree that allowed her to grow, leading to the overall effect that she felt much more confident at its end and would have considered studying other degrees, she had thought to be too difficult for her, if she had achieved this self-efficacy belief before. Bain (2006) praises the advantages of formative assessment, allowing the students to improve their works repeatedly throughout the course following qualitative feedback offered by the lecturer – and on occasion fellow students – before the receipt of a final qualification at the very end of the term. None of the participants mentioned such an evaluation system and we can say that, apart from provoking significant additional workload for the lecturer who has to assess the same works repeatedly, such an approach is not directly considered and hardly compatible with the current Dispositions on evaluation that do not only mark 'continuous evaluation' as the norm, but also require lecturers to publish qualifications within 20 natural days after the release of an assignment, whereat no assignment should weight more than 50% of the final score (Universitat de Lleida, 2016).

In spite of these little helpful structures, we can say that even if lecturers do not follow this ideal of student assessment, they have the possibility to be more or less 'just' in their evaluations. We have seen above (see *Evaluation, Ethics and Attitudes*) that many lecturers displayed rather unfair evaluation systems and lacked justice in other senses, too, for example,

²⁸⁸ Consider for example vicar Goodfellow's attempts at humour in the movie "Keeping Mum" (2005) that turn out to be surprisingly successful.

treating their students arbitrarily or without respect. However, the participants hardly ever commented on positive examples, in the sense of completely just evaluation systems. That it is not always easy to draw the line between what is and what is not just, becomes obvious when we consider some of the cases we have seen above. Was it fair that N. was allowed to realize group works individually? Was it just that Dylan received a bad score in his oral participation in class and therefore failed a subject, because he did not attend enough classes, arguing that they coincided with his working shifts? Was it just that Nic agreed with a befriended lecturer on a topic for his TFG before even matriculating for the TFG? Justice is always a delicate topic, especially in evaluation, and it is more than likely that some of the lecturers the mentioned participants considered just, were absolutely unfair in the eyes of others. However, we can also say that several of the described issues could be avoided by giving clearer guidelines on how lecturers should acknowledge and take into consideration that some of their students are moreover workers and that for some, working is even the main activity. In Dylan's case, we can say that it was clearly unfair that the lecturer required regular assistance to his classes as the current Disposition allows working students to apply for a unique evaluation at the end of the course rather than passing the continuous evaluation (Universitat de Lleida, 2016). Though it is possible that Dylan did not apply for this unique evaluation in the stipulated time span, we cannot consider the indirect 'punishment' of his absence as just after seeing that the very Disposition allows for exceptions in cases like his. Here it seems that the Disposition stopped half-way and did not come to think the logical consequences of the attempted flexibilisation for working students to an end. Allowing students to apply at any moment of the course for the unique evaluation would probably provoke additional work for the lecturers, but might be compensated by offering combinations of continuous and (then: partially) unique evaluation systems: If a student found, for example, an employment after having completed 3 out of 5 of the assignments for the continuous evaluation, he could apply for a unique evaluation combining only the last two assignments, maintaining the achieved scores in the previous 3. Similarly, if a student had applied for continuous evaluation and lost his job after some months, he could join the group and complete the remaining assignments – within the possible – as continuous evaluation, only including the ones he missed at the beginning of the course or joined too late to complete in class in a final unique evaluation. And if a student had the possibility to attend all classes, as Margarita did in her first year, but worked all the afternoons half-time and had therefore difficulties to complete group works, she could be offered to only participate in a reduced number of group works and to realize the remaining works either individually or by presenting for an alternative partial evaluation. Justice would lie in all these cases in requesting the same level of exigencies no matter in which way the students come to perform their learning outcomes. Here seems to lie, however, the crux, as several participants believed that in their degrees the evaluation was based on workload rather than learning outcomes, so that it was likely difficult for these lecturers to substitute their easy but annoyingly extensive assignments through an unique evaluation. Some might, moreover, believe that unique evaluation means 'exam'²⁸⁹, though they could also opt to request the

²⁸⁹ As my status as a PhD scholarship holder allowed me to be a member of several staff mailing lists of the UdL, I was able to observe a vivid discussion that arose in one of these lists when a mail informing about the students' right to request a unique evaluation was sent. Several lecturers reacted with indignation, claiming that it was impossible to assess the students' learning outcomes in their concrete

students who opted for a (partial) unique evaluation to present a homework consisting of the different assignments the other students had to complete over the course. Unsurprisingly, the question which competences and concepts their students should have acquired at the end of the course, is exactly the question with which Bain's (2006) best lecturers began their preparations for their classes, so, once again, excellent lecturers should not face special difficulties to change from one evaluation system to another or to be generally just; justice is inherent to their approach to teaching. Several of the other questions – and further questions that did not appear in this work but are anyway conceivable, for example questions regarding the appropriate integration of a student with a sensorial disability in class²⁹⁰ – are in the end ethical questions that do not come with one unique solution, in the sense of a correct answer. Rather than an ethics commission with its rather long procedures and waiting times, ethical training²⁹¹ for lecturers and a teaching support specialized on ethics could help to free lecturers from their usual solitude and offer them practical support in facing ethical issues just as they arise. Sensibilizing lecturers about the unfairness of agreeing with students prior to the tutor assignment to tutor their TFGs could improve, though not necessarily erase, this practice from daily life in HE, though the above proposed measure to assign all tutors and topics earlier (see *TFG Tutor assignment*) does still seem the most feasible to reduce inequalities in this regard.

6.5.8. *List of Recommendations*

In order to facilitate the practical application of my findings, I summarise the main recommendations given in this chapter in the following list, including, within the possibility,

subject through an exam and that this whole system was unfair and against teaching quality. Being usually a rather passive though attentive reader of these mailing lists, I unintentionally came to end this discussion by sending an answer myself, in which I explained why 'unique' evaluation does not necessarily refer to an exam and gave examples of the unique assignments I had to complete as a student, usually presenting written works and how I considered that these could perfectly consist of different parts that, at the end of the day, were the same assignments the other students had to complete over the year.

²⁹⁰ This example appeared in my fieldwork in Argentina where one of my participants described diverse ethical complications affecting her due to being visually challenged. While some staff members attempted to prevent her from matriculating to a degree in the field of audio-visual communication and she had to trick them by sending her cousin to hand in her file and matriculate, nobody told her that she would not be allowed to teach in secondary education with her disability, a detail she only found out in her third year of studying a teacher training degree, when the lecturers told her that she would not have to complete the obligatory internships. While the staff members of the first degree had thought it easier to exclude her from the degree arguing that the classrooms were not adapted for visually challenged students, their colleagues from the degree in teacher training did probably suppose that the student wished to complete the degree to expand her knowledge and did not attempt to actually become a teacher, as the current legislation did not allow it. Ironically, the participant could have perfectly worked at a radio station with her disability but had to face a sever fight to be allowed to achieve this formation, while nobody excluded her from the teacher training degree, though a future employment in this field was legally impossible.

²⁹¹ Throughout the years I have had access to the courses offered by the ICE, I have seen one course focusing on ethical questions that is by now no longer offered, though there are now courses on conflict mediation and disabilities and inclusive education in university available. See: <http://www.formacioprofessorat.udl.cat/upu/activitats.php?quad=2> [last access: 22.05.2018]. We can read this as a sign of a growing sensibilization towards ethical questions concerning university teaching, though these courses are still underrepresented in the overall offer and discontinuities over the years may reduce their visibility.

further recommendations that arose in other parts of the thesis. As argued above, these recommendations would improve the HE experience of all students, improving high academic quality without jeopardizing student well-being. As the analyses showed that currently students from lower social classes are especially often among the “victims” of the dysfunctions these recommendations attempt to overcome, while students from higher social classes do often indirectly or directly benefit from them, the implementation of these recommendations should also improve social equality in HE.

... for lecturers and researchers

- Achieve a positive attitude towards your students, treating them with respect
- Adapt your teaching to the concrete public, ensuring that your conceptions of this public are correct
- Admit mistakes and assume responsibility for their consequences
- Assume responsibility for your students and do your best to help them, even if they ask you questions that lie outside your area of responsibility (e.g. by forwarding them to the most adequate contact person for their concrete question)
- Avoid paternalistic views and deficit perspectives regarding your students
- Check your recommendations and findings to ensure that they do not contribute to the reproduction of social inequality
- Collaborate and coordinate yourself with fellow lecturers, especially regarding the timing and contents of assignments, not only but in particular when attending different sub-groups of students of the same subject
- Consider social inequalities in the design and realisation of your research, even if it is not your main research interest
- Critically reflect on your own background and current role in the reproduction of social inequality
- Do not pull your students into internal fights of your department or institution
- Do not request assignments that rather than through academic quality stand out for producing a big quantity of work (e.g. the release of the notes the students took in class)
- Do not request students to comply additional requirements to accept their assignments that are not directly related to the content of the assignment (e.g. having attended the class at the end of which the printed assignment has to be released)
- Do not turn continuous evaluation into continuous stress by requiring students to pass all assignments though none of them weights 30 % or more, so no possibilities for recovery are offered
- Do not use your students or jeopardise their learning to pressure your colleagues or heads
- Employ group works as a technique to teach teamwork and supervise these groups at close range, ensuring through continuous coordination with other lecturers that the amount of works requested in parallel does not undermine the expected learning processes and following the principles described by Bain (2006) in this regard (see also *Academic success*)
- Ensure fair evaluation systems that comply with the current dispositions

- Favour the students' social integration by promoting solidarity and offering team or partner work in class
- Include information literacy on the list of competences to achieve in the course of a degree and offer direct help in its acquisition
- Seek collaborations with colleagues from different backgrounds and experiences outside your comfort zone in order to broaden your horizon and gain more awareness for different possible perspective
- Set the achieving of social equality as a main aim of your work
- Treat your students the way you expect them to act; if you expect them to act like responsible adults, treat them as such (and do not control in class if they did their homework)
- When students have to choose a specialisation, guide them before the actual choice regarding their realistic opportunities and abilities

...for degree coordinators

- Assign TFG topics and tutors at the end of the penultimate year of studies, to give all students the chance to advance their TFG throughout the summer months
- Control the teaching guides of the subjects offered in your degrees to ensure that they comply the related Dispositions
- Do not stipulate internships for the summer after the end of the last year, as students might need their degree certificate earlier to apply for subsequent studies or programmes
- Do not pull your students into internal fights of your department or institution
- Elaborate study plans considering the learning outcomes and competences the students should acquire and encourage students and graduates to participate in the elaboration and continuous improvement of the study plans
- Encourage students to share their ideas and feedback on their degrees and involve them in the discussion and decision of their proposals and complaints
- Ensure a certain quality in internships, selecting the placements critically, giving clear guidelines on what the students are expected to do throughout the internships (and what they are not expected to do) and supervise the completion of these guidelines, avoiding that internships achieve an abusive character and ensuring ethical standards, especially in fields where the students come in contact with human beings or living animals.
- Ensure fair evaluation systems that comply with the current dispositions
- Favour the students' social integration even before the beginning of their studies (e.g. through meet & greet lunches), but especially throughout their studies by promoting solidarity and offering team or partner work in class
- Guide students through their degrees and masters, informing them about degree-specific practices they should know, for example the possibility to use your last internship to complete an empirical study for your TFG in teacher training and that you lose this chance if you do not enrol for the TFG and the internship in the same course
- Identify and actively refute possible misconceptions students might develop regarding certain policies, especially if these have caused polemic press releases

- Implement positive suggestions by students as quick as possible and let them know that you did so
- Include information literacy on the list of competences to achieve in the course of a degree and offer direct help in its acquisition
- Inform students and lecturers about existing dispositions on evaluation and ensure their implementation
- Inform the affected students of upcoming changes, advocate in the best interest of your students and graduates and enable them to advocate for themselves by informing them timely and accurately about any changes that might affect them negatively
- Intervene when students present complaints about lecturers who insult them, e.g. by observing their classes for the rest of the course and offering mediation
- Leave enough time between the exam period and the recovery-exam period so that lecturers can assess the exams, publish the results and meet their students to let them see the exams and orient them in their preparation for the recovery exam, apart from leaving the students some time to prepare for the recovery exam
- Reduce the extra costs of the degree as much as possible
- Sensibilize lecturers regarding possible unfairness, e.g. by accepting TFGs prior to the official tutor assignation
- When students have to choose a specialisation, guide them before the actual choice regarding their realistic opportunities and abilities

... for HE institutions

- Acknowledge and praise your good and excellent lecturers and encourage the less excellent to improve their teaching skills
- Assume responsibility for your students and do your best to help them, even if they ask you questions that lie outside your area of responsibility (e.g. by forwarding them to the most adequate contact person for their concrete question)
- Be transparent regarding procedures like evaluation, tutor assignation, the consideration of student feedback etc.
- Comply signed agreements
- Consider the profile of studying workers (as opposed to working students) and offer more degree courses additionally in evening/night shifts or in (semi-)virtual modalities
- Create a commission for the revision of academic research, institutional legislation and public policies to ensure that they do not reproduce social inequality but actually reduce it
- Decide on certain indicators and formats in the preparation of statistics and maintain these over the years
- Distribute departments and faculties strategically on the different campus, facilitating that different degrees may use the same installations and equipment
- Encourage students to share their ideas and feedback on their degrees and involve them in the discussion and decision of their proposals and complaints

- Ensure a certain comparability of similar degrees offered in different universities and of different promotions of the same degrees, so that all graduates comply certain minimum requirements
- Favour the students' social integration even before the beginning of their studies (e.g. through meet & greet lunches), but especially throughout their studies by promoting solidarity and offering team or partner work in class
- Identify and actively refute possible misconceptions students might develop regarding certain policies, especially if these have caused polemic press releases
- Implement positive suggestions by students as quick as possible and let them know that you did so
- Inform students about the possibilities to redirect their university e-mail address to their personal e-mail address and allow them to use their personal e-mail address whenever possible
- Inform students and lecturers about existing dispositions on evaluation and ensure their implementation
- Inform the affected students of upcoming changes, advocate in the best interest of your students and graduates and enable them to advocate for themselves by informing them timely and accurately about any changes that might affect them negatively
- Install a statistical service in universities that elaborates annual statistics and analyses the development of especially interesting figures over the years, apart from contesting requests by researchers
- Intervene when students present complaints about lecturers who insult them, e.g. by observing their classes for the rest of the course and offering mediation
- Leave a moratorium for students who had matriculated under other conditions after a change of rules, so these students may complete their studies according to the rules that were valid when they matriculated, unless they wish to change for the new rules; do not abolish financial aids for a course that has already begun
- Leave enough time between the exam period and the recovery-exam period so that lecturers can assess the exams, publish the results and meet their students to let them see the exams and orient them in their preparation for the recovery exam, apart from leaving the students some time to prepare for the recovery exam
- Lower the threshold especially for first-year students to seek help, e.g. by sensibilizing their lecturers to be more accessible, by working with students from previous promotions as tutors or by offering additional services regarding issues like mental health or learning techniques
- Maintain any student-relevant websites updated, offer a user-friendly environment and intuitive structure and send alerts to students when a change is published that directly affects them
- Offer clear contact persons for study-related questions and promote their visibility on the campus and the website
- Offer ethical training courses for lecturers
- Offer ethical support for lecturers

- Offer information sessions for students from all courses regarding the requirements they will have to fulfil to be able to graduate (language certificate, transversal credits etc.)
- Offer more language courses at the IL and inform students better about the enrolment process (duration of the placement test, moment of inscription etc.)
- Promote healthy practices among students (e.g. regarding the use of electronic devices, heavy bags, etc.)
- Promote information literacy
- Promote student participation through established or alternative organs (student councils, assemblies...) and distribute the workload of student representatives more equally among more students, offering additional compensations for those who come to burden bigger parts of it
- Reduce the extra costs of degrees as much as possible
- Reduce the number of e-mails and alerts sent to the student e-mail addresses and facilitate the quick recognition of relevant e-mails through standardised formats, informative subject matters and tags
- Resolve applications (for exchange programmes, credit recognition etc.) and complaints timely, publishing a calendar of the resolutions together with the call
- Revise the current dispositions on evaluation (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2010; Universitat de Lleida, 2016), allowing working students to request at any moment of the course the combination of continuous and unique evaluation systems
- Seek diversity among your academic staff and encourage the teamwork of researchers from different backgrounds
- Sensibilize lecturers regarding possible unfairness, e.g. by accepting TFGs prior to the official tutor assignation
- Set clear guidelines for the recognition of credits and the transfer of academic records from one degree and one university to another, inform students about these guidelines and publish the decisions on any application in this regard publically (but without the applicant's personal data)
- Set the forwarding of a message sent through the *Campus Virtual* to the personal e-mail address of the user as the automatic device setting users have to deactivate if they do not wish to use it
- Stop to proliferate misconceptions about scholarships that discourage potential students from enrolling in university or from applying for an exchange programme
- Support students in their labour market insertion, e.g. through 'real' job exchange portals, collaborations with local employers or organising events that facilitate students to meet possible employers
- Treat all lecturers equally independently of their concrete status, offering supervision and mediation when conflicts with students arise
- Work with students from previous promotions as 'lecturers' for practical seminars of first-year students to lower the threshold to ask them questions and to use them as mediators between first-year students and lecturers – but do not use older students as tutors right away, as their personal recommendations might rather discourage the first-year students than help them in their way through university

... for policy maker, Quality-ensuring agencies and scholarship programmes

- Avoid officialese language
- Change the teaching-staff accreditation ascribing more importance to teaching
- Consider the profile of studying workers (as opposed to working students) and offer more degree courses additionally in evening/night shifts or in (semi-)virtual modalities
- Create a commission for the revision of legislation and public policies to ensure that they do not reproduce social inequality but actually reduce it
- Decide on certain indicators and formats in the preparation of statistics and maintain these over the years
- Ensure a certain comparability of similar degrees offered in different universities and of different promotions of the same degrees, so that all graduates comply certain minimum requirements
- Exclude academic requirements from the requirements of general scholarship programmes
- Increase the allowed value of owned property different from the family residence for scholarship programmes to a more realistic sum, facilitating that students whose families possess a second housing may still be eligible for a scholarship and not be forced to sell their property to become eligible
- Indicate the reasons for the rejection of an application, e.g. for a scholarship, clearly in the rejection letter
- Install a statistical service in universities and other institutions that elaborates annual statistics and analyses the development of especially interesting figures over the years, apart from contesting requests by researchers
- Leave a moratorium for students who had matriculated under other conditions after a change of rules, so these students may complete their studies according to the rules that were valid when they matriculated, unless they wish to change for the new rules; do not abolish financial aids for a course that has already begun
- Maintain any student-relevant websites updated, offer a user-friendly environment and intuitive structure and send alerts to students when a change is published that directly affects them
- Offer more financial aids and scholarships especially for master students
- Offer more support in the application for scholarships, exchange programmes etc.
- Open the application period for general scholarships earlier, so students whose HE participation depends on financial aids may know before the beginning of the course – and the payment of the first enrolment fee – if they will receive a scholarship or not
- Prolong scholarship durations from one to at least two years to reduce the amount of time students have to invest to receive payments
- Require all students to present the documentation regarding their family income on enrolment and apply family-income based reductions automatically whenever applicable
- Resolve applications (for scholarships, exchange programmes etc.) and complaints timely, publishing a calendar of the resolutions together with the call
- Simplify the application process for scholarship programmes
- Treat all lecturers equally independently of their concrete status

...for schools

- Approach your pupils directly with offers to help in their study choice, rather than waiting for them to approach you and create possibilities for one-on-one conversations with your students
- Disburden the pupils' study choices from the pressure to be 'ideal' and 'informed' by showing them that such choices are impossible, considering the number of unknown elements in the equation, and that they will have possibilities to reorient their itineraries in the future, as many degrees allow for more professional profiles than it might seem
- Encourage pupils to maintain their high occupational aspirations, showing them, for example, alternative ways to achieve them
- Inform yourself and your pupils about the current legislation and its changes and how these affect their HE entrance or degree course choices
- Promote Information Literacy
- Teach your students to be critical with single cases and rumours, but also indicators regarding the labour market development, showing them examples of how developments change rather suddenly and or how different indicators lead to opposed perceptions, e.g. comparing unemployment rates and indicators for work quality and precariousness

7. *Discussion*

Considering the scope of the findings presented in the previous part, I have decided to structure this discussion in several subsections. After a first methodological discussion, the core part focuses on the discussion of the findings regarding the research question how social inequality is reproduced in HE, that is to say, reproduction mechanisms. Afterwards, a further section considers the applicability of the findings and methods in other geographic contexts and fields, formulating as well hypotheses regarding the peculiarities of the Catalan and Spanish context.

"Ara que tinc vint anys, / ara que encara tinc força, / que no tinc l'ànima morta, / i em sento
bullir la sang.
Ara que tinc vint anys, / avui que el cor se m'embala, / per un moment d'estimar, / o en veure
un infant plorar...
Vull cantar a l'amor. Al primer. Al darrer. / Al que et fa patir. Al que vius un dia. / Vull plorar
amb aquells que es troben tots sols, / sense cap amor van passant pel món."
"Ara que tinc vint anys" (1967) Joan Manuel Serrat

"Fa vint anys que tinc vint anys. / Vint anys i encara tinc força, / i no tinc l'ànima morta, / i em
sento bullir la sang.
I encara em sento capaç / de cantar si un altre canta. / Avui que encara tinc veu / i encara puc
creure en déus...
(...) Fa vint anys que tinc vint anys. / i el cor, encara, s'embala, / per un moment d'estimar, / o
en veure un infant plorar...
Vull cantar l'amor. Al primer. Al darrer. / Al que et fa patir. Al que vius un dia. / Vull plorar amb
aquells que es troben tots sols / i sense cap amor van passant pel món.
(...) Vull i vull i vull cantar / avui que encara tinc veu. / Qui sap si podré demà."
"Fa vint anys que tinc vint anys" (1984) Joan Manuel Serrat²⁹²

Though it has not yet been 20 years ever since I was 20, I identify myself quite well with Serrat's two versions of the song, considering, on the one hand, that my participants were around 20 years old when we realized this project together and, on the other, that after the years I have spent on this PhD project I feel much further away from the 20 and closer to the 40 than I did when I started it. However, I also feel that many things did not change completely and just as my 20-year-old self, I still feel my blood boiling and I am still strong – but I also feel that I have to use my chance to sing today, as I have still got a voice and who knows if I will be able to do so tomorrow.

7.1. *Methodological discussion*

Though the employed methodology of a longitudinal project with initial focus groups and five years of annual semi-structured interviews has enabled the construction of very rich and, in this form, unique data, certain limitations of the employed methods and techniques have to be recognised. On the one hand, it has to be acknowledged that though any qualitative research project tends to show a certain sampling bias as persons with a disposition to become participants may not be representative for the population in general, such an effect is possibly even stronger in a longitudinal project, as it requires participants to engage repeatedly and invest an important amount of time into the project. Though dropout was ever since the first round of interviews rather low, the participants are therefore by no means representative for the whole student population. Nevertheless, the longitudinal approach proved to be ideal to study processes of change and continuity in the course of the University transition, enabling precious insights studies with single data-construction moments can impossibly achieve. Moreover, the longitudinal approach enabled methodological reflections that may be crucial

²⁹² <http://www.viasona.cat/grup/joan-manuel-serrat/fa-20-anys-que-tinc-20-anys/fa-vint-anys-que-tinc-vint-anys>. [Last access: 18.10.2017]

for the selection of moments of data construction: When comparing the participants' comments about their schools in their focus groups - before finishing school - and in their first-year interviews - after the end of school - just as their comments regarding their degrees before finishing the degree and after finishing it (in the case of the participants who graduated before the last interview), we notice a general tendency to be much more critical before completing the education in question. Apart from for research, this is crucial for evaluations, as it indicates that an evaluation after the end of a course/project etc. will likely be more positive than an evaluation realised while the activity is still in course.

The longitudinal approach allowed, furthermore, for unique insights into how students change their study-choice narratives over the years. Apart from corroborating Pais' (2007) hypothesis that people justify their choices in the retrospective, this shows that it is important to conduct research that relies on a single data-construction moment as close as possible to the moment of decision, in order to best capture the aspects considered in this process. This is, however, difficult regarding the study choice, as not everybody takes this decision at the same moment and some students knew for years what they wanted to study, while others decided shortly before the beginning of the course. Over the years, other aspects may appear or vanish in the study-choice narratives, highlighting the challenges young people face nowadays in the construction of a coherent life story to an extreme that might justify the consideration of a new development task.

As mentioned above, focus groups proved to be a very useful tool to observe group dynamics and interactions between participants, additionally to accessing individual and collective ideas and their negotiation about how the study choice should be taken and how university is imagined (see *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*). However, the observed difficulties of male participants to express worries and difficulties in the focus groups that diminished in the first-year interviews, indicate that focus groups are not the most adequate tool to speak with young males about such sensitive topics. A possible explanation lies in their construction of masculinity (Budgeon, 2014; Connell, 2005; Schippers, 2007), which is probably especially important in front of the peer group and furthermore related to the development task of this age group to construct their gender identity (Hurrelmann, 2007; Walther & Stauber, 2007). Furthermore, the moment of data construction may be highly relevant in this context, as it may be easier for young men to speak about difficulties when these lie in the past and have been solved than while they are still under progress. Both these reflections were only possible thanks to the longitudinal approach and the combination of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The latter compensated, moreover, at least in part the limitation observed regarding focus groups, as they enabled the male participants to share their worries and doubts. The observation allows for direct recommendations not only regarding future research, but also pedagogical practices and support regimes in schools, considering that young men may have severe difficulties to seek support in front of their peer group. Future research should ponder according to the concrete research interest, whether the use of focus groups makes sense or not, whereat especially mixed-method and longitudinal approaches, combining several moments of data construction, may be very useful to overcome the described limitations.

Moreover, the researchers and their attitudes towards the participants are crucial in favouring the necessary opening up to create rapport even regarding sensitive topics. Especially an acknowledging and supportive approach may help to overcome deficit perspectives and might be the key explanation for the little dropout I experienced in the course of the follow-up. As this PhD thesis shows, a respectful or even 'loving' attitude towards participants is not in conflict with rigorous research in social sciences, but may even lead to new insights, especially regarding difference as an asset, a broadened horizon and an overcoming of the limitations affecting researchers' thinking (see *Insider / Outsider Status & Unconditional Love*). In this sense, I would like to advocate an 'appreciatory turn' in social research.

In this project, I decided not to employ further indicators regarding dimensions like academic qualifications, as I expected that giving too much importance to their academic performance might make the participants feel insecure and defensive and hence hamper the interview dynamic. Due to the longitudinal character of the project and the vast array of topics treated, I was anyway able to assess the academic performance of most participants quite clearly and could compare my observations of their difficulties with their own narratives and how they constructed their learner identities (see *Academic success*). This led to highly interesting insights regarding the group-specific senses of entitlement and how these influence resilience when faced with academic difficulties. However, it has to be said that other methods would have allowed for a more accurate enquiry of academic outcomes and especially research drawing on one single moment of data construction only should not rely solely on interviews or focus groups if the research interest requires an accurate knowledge of the achieved qualifications.

In general, it has to be said that the chosen methods enabled an access to narratives, so I could study how these were constructed, but include necessarily a filter that warps realities. Though observational methods or ethnography may avoid this limitation in part, researchers are not exempt of this tendency and their perceptions transform reality just as much as participants' perceptions do. Moreover, certain aspects of the university transition that were considered in this study, namely the construction and justification of choices, are not directly observable, so rather than a limitation, this aspect has to be seen as a characteristic of this kind of research that requires the continuous reflection of the researcher. Once again the longitudinal character of the project enabled me to observe changes in the narratives that made their filtering action much more visible.

For this study, it was for example especially interesting to observe that several of the participants constructed their study choice at the beginning of the follow-up in exclusively positive lines, highlighting why they considered the chosen degree programme as their best choice. In the course of the follow-up, it became visible that several of these participants had actually preferred to study another degree or had seen their options highly reduced by their PAU score. This tendency to construct their study choice positively may be, on the one hand, healthier for the personal well-being than the continuous thought to have ended up in the plan B only and is furthermore likely to sell better as a justification in job interviews or conversations with lecturers. However, it may also be a sign of a high necessity to highlight and defend one's ability, so the ease with which some of the participants mentioned their low scores in the course of the follow-up, may indicate that they overcame this implicit fear to be detected as limitedly able once their academic performance in university allowed them to gain

security. Moreover, the habituation to the interview situation and the researcher may have enabled them to talk more easily about their shortcomings and difficulties, without the fear to be giving a negative image. Apart from the additional proof of the usefulness of longitudinal approaches, this may then indicate that the self-efficacy beliefs were in general much lower than it seemed in the first-year interviews, showing that interviews are not a good method to assess these. Low self-efficacy beliefs play moreover an important role in the reproduction mechanisms, as we will see in the next section. A false impression of a high self-efficacy belief due to displays of nonchalance could provoke for example teachers to attempt to motivate more effort among their students by highlighting the difficulty associated to the PAU and HE in general (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*), possibly contributing to the diversion of potential students from HE rather than improving their preparation.

Another methodological challenge I tackled in this project was the development of a practical, yet theoretically founded way to assess the participants' social class positioning. The four social classes - A, B, C, D - I developed from the positioning in the social field, according to a simplified enquiry of parental educational attainment and profession, allowed me to localise all follow-up participants regarding questions they were able to answer with a certain ease and hence a certain accuracy (see *Measuring Social Class*). As the diverse presented findings show, the developed approach proved to be useful in this sense. However, there are also certain shortcomings to consider: As the current profession is rather an indicator of the current socio-economic status than of social class (Rubin et al., 2014), it is more susceptible to temporal fluctuations. It is noteworthy that several parents passed in the course of the follow-up through different statuses, e.g. from employed, to unemployed to free-lancer. Especially parents who had migrated after the birth of their children to Spain showed furthermore a rather low economic capital in this categorisation, if compared to local parents with similar educational attainments. Though this is in line with previous research indicating that migration often comes with more difficulties on the receiving labour market (Soong et al., 2017; Wiers-Jensen, 2011) and it certainly has advantages that this disadvantage was reflected in the social positioning, the limitation regarding a too high dependence on the socio-economic status persists.

Though I attempted to achieve a more accurate picture by including the participants' grandparents in the socio-economic questionnaire (see Annex 4), I had to discard the use of this information, as many participants did either leave many empty spaces or directly told me to be guessing the answers, as I was present during the completion of the questionnaire. Future research could improve in this point by allowing the participants to complete the questionnaires together with their parents or by directly interviewing the parents as well. However, this would increase the threshold and might reduce the return of the questionnaires, even provoking dropout as the participants might decide to quit the project completely for not having presented the socio-economic questionnaire. A better option could be to meet the participants with their parents to complete the questionnaire together with the researcher, but this is little practical for students whose parents live in other localities and might furthermore require a certain revision of the questionnaire, as sensitive questions e.g. for the monthly income, might offend parents more than their children. Moreover, establishing direct contact to the participants' parents could influence in the relationship building with the participants and their readiness to share certain details.

Regarding the developed methodology of analysis, the findings section has shown how fruitfully the intersectional approach worked within the steps of the documentary method. Interesting insights regarding the interplay of social representations, structures and identity constructions were developed and the possibility to consider diverse social divisions without imposing any as most important facilitated the retention of complexity without provoking a data chaos. The approach to study 'narratives' rather than 'choices' in combination with the longitudinal character of the project made it, moreover, possible to observe how references to certain stereotypes regarding subordinated groups or low self-efficacy beliefs appeared at times in the retrospective to justify a change in direction regarding a previous choice (see Xenia and Andrés in *Social divisions, intersections and awareness of difference*).

As the review of some research on HE institutions and student support has shown, the non-consideration of social inequalities or a superficial consideration that ignores previous research in the field may easily lead to findings and recommendations that reproduce social inequality further rather than contributing to more social equality (see *The University Transition and Student Support*). Researchers are then accomplices of social inequality, as we will discuss in the following section. To avoid such an unlucky role, it is important that researchers consider social inequality theoretically and methodologically in their research, even if it is not their main research interest. Similar to the Hippocratic oath in medicine, social scientists could take an equality oath, committing themselves to contribute to social equality according to the best of one's knowledge. For some researchers this is already true today, as continuous reflection about their own origins and routes, just as their (tacit) ideas and the limitations of their thinking have become their second nature and inform their research and teaching. For others, such an approach may not be too appealing, but they could still follow a reduced version of the oath following the "first do no harm" principle that is sometimes - wrongly - associated to the Hippocratic oath. This requires, in my reading, at least a minimum knowledge about social inequality and a revision of research designs, findings and recommendations against this backdrop to make sure that they do not contribute to the reproduction of social inequality.

7.2. *Reproduction Mechanisms*

7.2.1. *The University Transition as a hurdle race*

According to Latour (2005, p. 35), a lack of change has to call the attention of researchers as unusual and they should study the mechanisms behind such a reproduction, rather than assuming the effects of unspecified "social forces". Bourdieu and Passeron (2007) explained the transmission of social positions from one generation to the next through 'reproduction mechanisms', arguing that the offspring of powerful groups is equipped with capitals that are generally acknowledged as valuable in the society and that include the ability to use these capitals and to feel entitled to use them and to occupy the position they grant (see *Capitals, field and habitus*). The general acceptance of their dominance is achieved through a high valuation of the capitals they naturally acquire and possess and other social groups are encouraged to seek the same capital manifestations in order to improve their social positioning. With the rise of

meritocracy, educational credentials fulfilled this requirement (Friedeburg, 1989), leading to an important expansion of the participation in HE, especially in the middle class (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004; Rahona Lopez, 2009). As even HE credentials are no longer a privilege of the dominating groups, the reproduction mechanisms have adapted (Hillmert, 2008), so now HE credentials are devalued (see *Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation*) and other capital manifestations are exalted. Under the buzzword of 'employability', especially 'soft skills' (Groppe, 2006), but also 'experiences' that can be achieved, in particular, in exchange for economic capital and through the mobilisation of social capital do now overtake this function: work experiences in renown enterprises, international experiences, language certificates or other 'impressive' extra-curricular activities (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Wiers-Jensen, 2011), postgraduate studies (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999; Wakeling & Laurison, 2017), educational credentials from elite universities or faculties (Koskinen, 2007; Reay et al., 2009a), etc. Especially 'soft skills' represent thereby a 'free pass' for subjectivity, as even candidates with an 'ideal' résumé may not be able to convince in a personal interview on a 'bad' day. Research has shown that habitus fit is crucial in this convincing, so candidates from the dominant group are always more likely to convince an employer coming from the dominant group, too (Groppe, 2006), while other candidates are less likely to even make it to the interview, as they acquire and mobilise less capitals in the course of their HE studies to construct the necessary CV (Bathmaker et al., 2013).

Following these considerations, we can describe the University transition as an obstacle course with different main hurdles out of which the job interview is only the last. The first hurdle, access to HE, is only included in the set-up for some participants, as the dominant groups and, increasingly, groups within the middle classes take the access to HE for granted and are therefore hard to divert from this path (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007; Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004). In a context of extraordinarily high HE participation, most participants in the study at hand considered HE the logical next step after High School and only very few mentioned alternatives like vocational trainings. As these few participants were identified as from social class A or displayed a migration history, the influence of social divisions in this process remains crucial (see *University - the logical next step*).

Those who consider HE as only one of their alternatives may be attracted by vocational trainings that promise an earlier labour-market entrance and, hence, economic autonomy (see *University - the logical next step* on the 'diversion' thesis). As the lack of economic capital in lower-class families favours the pursuit of early economic autonomy (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2006), this may explain why in the course of the broadened access to HE hardly any lower-class students achieved this access (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004; Rahona Lopez, 2009), though further processes of educational and societal exclusion have to be considered and explain why financial aids are not enough to overcome inequalities in the access to HE (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) (see *The University Transition and Student Support*).

Regarding financial aids and scholarships, an important potential of improvement was identified in this thesis (see *List of Recommendations*). Apart from the complex application and late resolution that do not allow potential students to first try to achieve a scholarship and then decide, based on the decision, whether to enrol in HE or not, it was especially noteworthy that the participants of this project that were identified as from social class A were often not

eligible for the scholarship or lost their eligibility in the course of the follow-up (see *Scholarship programmes*). Though the participants tended to ascribe their rejection to academic failures, they often met the academic requirements and were likely rejected because of rather strict requirements regarding parental property. As Sara's widowed mother of two was likely to have inherited a second residence after the death of her husband, parents and parents-in-law, this might explain why Sara was not eligible for a scholarship, even though her academic results were good and her mother was unemployed. Similarly, Piruleta's parents had three daughters and passed in the course of the follow-up through phases of unemployment, but were not eligible for a scholarship because of possessing a holiday residence. As many families in Spain possess second residences in a village from which the family moved to the city in the course of urbanisation processes, these families are then excluded from scholarships, even if their financial possibilities are strongly limited. However, it is also true that other families that do not possess a second or not even a first residence may have a much bigger need for financial aids, justifying this selection criteria. Ironically, such families might be eligible for a scholarship but may not be able to enrol without a confirmation to receive a scholarship, being as well for other reasons much less likely to make it to HE. This means that the current scholarship system is not a mean to opening access to HE, but rather seems to allocate rather small financial aids to families that could have paid HE anyway (e.g. Maduixa and Nadia).

Though this thesis has focused on the university transition, some of the findings shed further light on the mechanisms at work in schools: While private schools transmit the hidden message of HE as the logical next step (Donnelly & Evans, 2016) and offer a highly engaged and personalised support (Davey, 2009), public schools are less likely to effectively support their students through their 'open-door' offer, as especially male students may have difficulties to approach these (see *High School* and *Worried girls and nonchalant heroes*). Given that for many upper- and middle-class *milieus* access to HE is already 'natural' (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004), school support and messages are less likely to influence these students in their decision to move on to HE. Informing about vocational trainings or measures offered in the context of the EU Youth Guarantee²⁹³, may, however, contribute to the diversion of potential students from subordinated groups away from HE. Similarly, informing about the current labour market - a measure recommended by Archer et al. (2014) and included into a pilot programme for secondary schools by Santana et al. (2010) - may seduce young people and their families to take decisions based on quickly outdated or directly false perceptions of the labour market, years before their actual labour-market entrance. This favours half-hearted subject choices that lead to dropout once the realities of the subject are experienced or when the perception of labour opportunities is reassessed - for instance due to lecturer comments on the lack of

²⁹³ A common practice developed by private entities and also public institutions instructed to communicate the existence and offer of the EU Youth Guarantee in Spain was, indeed, to approach secondary schools and High Schools with their information material and talks. Though these entities argue that the young people might be about to leave the schools and then form part of the original target group of the EU-Youth Guarantee, the analyses my colleagues and I conducted in the course of the projects GARJUCAT and GARJUVE have shown that this practice may contribute to the diversion of young people from the regular education system, towards private courses. This is in the end a perversion of the Guarantee, as its original aim was to help young people to either encounter work or to return to education, rather than to headhunt young people from the educational system into the offered formation courses in order to cash the subvention.

opportunities (see *Job opportunities*). Once again, the offspring of dominant groups is little likely to be affected by such information, as their study choice is formed in a family context of excellent support, with parents helping them to achieve internships in their aspired profession even before completing their obligatory schooling (Archer et al., 2014) and generally higher 'objective chances' to be successful even in elitist fields (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007). The potential 'harm', in the sense of a diversion of potential HE students, of such good-intended suggestions is therefore limited to subordinated groups only, reproducing social inequality. These are examples of how research findings and recommendations may unwillingly contribute to the reproduction of social inequality. Rather than an attempt to inform about the current labour market, training in the critical assessment of such information should be taught in schools, guiding the pupils in their search and interpretation of information, highlighting especially the low life period of labour market developments and the importance of considering diverse criteria of job quality and working conditions, apart from unemployment rates.

Previous research has displayed the development of high aspirations in childhood (Archer et al., 2014), that seem to be substituted by more 'realistic' - in the sense of an adaptation to 'objective possibilities' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2007) or 'opportunity structures' (Reay, 2004) - plans towards the moment of choice (see *Mission impossible: The informed study-choice*). This means that, rather than 'pushing' young people into studies they never aspired to study, social inequality might be overcome by not diverting potential students to other subjects that are less to their liking and by not discouraging them to pursue their high aspirations.

Once in University, "mechanisms of uncertainty and dissipation" (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004, p. 162, translated by TS) lead to an early elimination of students from lower and, in part, middle class *milieus*. Considering the findings of this thesis, I would add "discouragement" to this list of mechanisms. Those who do not dropout in the face of continuous insecurity and feeling out of place are described as spending their time fighting for survival, so they arrive at graduation usually after prolonged studies and with lower qualifications and having neither participated in the power struggles of the field (Lange-Vester & Teiwes-Kügler, 2004, 2006), nor in changing it. Among the participants of this study, we could observe such a tendency, as especially the two female participants from social class A showed in their comments on anxiety and stress signs of a struggle that exhausted them (see *Health*). Peter finished his degree less exhausted, but at the price of prolonged studies and lower academic qualifications. The participants from social class D who mentioned health issues did, on the contrary, refer to physical problems - back-, head- and eye ache - but did not assume psychological effects or prolonged difficulties. Moreover, they presented their problems with a certain indignation, requesting universities to improve the working conditions and environments of students to avoid such problems. This can be read as an example of their feeling of entitlement that accompanied them through their HE experience, while the participants from social class A did not request anything from University, not even support once they developed health issues, and indirectly assumed that these were their own problem. Towards the end of the follow-up, they even came to request changes that would have increased the suffering they had experienced at the beginning of their studies, as more selection and a higher failure rate were requested. This is in line with a general tendency of

closure showed by many participants at the end of the follow-up, giving recommendations and describing their degrees in a way that ennobles their own itineraries, but would easily discourage prospective students if they heard them (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*). As almost all students seem to engage in this reproduction of social inequality, the effect of broadened access did not lead to a change in this discouraging mechanism, but increased the number of students who feel entitled for HE and are hence less susceptible to discouragement. Leading students from subordinated groups to develop a similar sense of entitlement could then contribute to overcoming social inequality.

Discouragement may be caused by a wide variety of aspects. The announcement of non-existent job opportunities, the on occasion outraging lecturer behaviour the participants described (see *Injustice and powerlessness*), unnecessary organisational and bureaucratic problems or sudden changes of the rules (see *Organisational problems*) may be examples of rather direct discouragement. Social representations and 'myths' may contribute to a more indirect discouragement. HE institutions, schools, staff and students may contribute to social representations regarding an incredible increase in the level of difficulty in HE in general or in concrete degree courses, compared to High School. Similarly, representations that scholarships are too low to actually enable the participation in HE or in exchange programmes may lead potential students to not even consider these options, without actually informing themselves about the concrete costs and financial aids they could expect to receive. As misconceptions regarding scholarship requirements and other organisational questions were rather common among the participants, institutions and staff should not only passively avoid to transmit false perceptions, but actively disseminate and communicate the real conditions, encouraging students to inform themselves and offering help in calculating their personal costs and possible payments. As the list of recommendations developed in the finding section shows (see *List of Recommendations*), the potential for improvement is rather high and pervades the whole HE experience.

Another possible source of discouragement are the study plans. While severe academic failure in the first year was not especially common among the participants, many failed at least one subject (see *Academic success*). Though a certain academic failure was by many normalised and accepted as part of the HE experience - as we have seen, academic failure appeared as much more 'normal' and 'acceptable' than social failure (see *Social success*) - especially the representation that the second year would be yet much more difficult could discourage students to continue their studies. Considering important differences between degree courses, it was especially the degree in teacher training in which the participants assumed already in their first year that their second year would be much more difficult and continued to maintain this representation until the end of the follow-up. As it seems, the study plan was organised offering a rather soft entrance for the first-year students, while allocating prolonged scholarships and specialising subjects in the third and fourth year, so the majority of 'tough' obligatory subjects were coursed in the second year. Though none of the participants abandoned their studies because of this and several even failed less subjects in their second than in their first year, the anticipation of an infernal second year may lead participants who already doubted their ability for HE and experienced some academic failure in their first year to feel unable to meet the requirements, favouring psychological distress and dropout.

Internships, on the other hand, seem to motivate students to continue, though in some cases, the participants suffered practice shocks, noticing that the professional profile was not to their liking (see Irina in *What I was born for - or not* and N. in *Family affairs*). Early internships could therefore also provoke dropout, especially if they are as badly organised as some participants claimed (see *Big differences between and within universities*), but if they are adequately accompanied by the institution, practice shocks might be overcome and an early reorientation is in the interest of individual and society, should the chosen profession not meet the student's expectations. This recommendation should solely be interpreted regarding the position of internships on the study plan, advocating an early offering of internships (e.g. in year 2, rather than in year 4, as currently in many degree courses) and does not imply an extension of unpaid internships, as this would contribute to the precarization of the labour situation and worsens the possibilities to combine work, study and other obligations (see *... and what about work?*), contributing to the reproduction of social inequality.

An "encouraging" approach could, apart from earlier internships and a more student-friendly lecturer behaviour and attitude, also ensure that the first-year study plan is not limited to theoretic basics shared with several other degrees, but includes, furthermore, a degree-course specific subject that introduces the students to their concrete field, showing them the high diversity of possible professional paths (see *Professional profiles and specialisations*) and possibilities for international experiences and the development of an international career - as mobility seems to be especially attractive among younger students, though many never come to go abroad (see *What I was born for - or not* and *Mobility*).

Ironically, the described attempt to decrease social inequality by encouraging all students to continue their studies could, as a side-effect, contribute better to the internationalisation of the institutions, than some of the practices that became visible in this thesis. In concrete, the exigency of a rather high level in a foreign language to be allowed to graduate appeared as a step towards the internationalisation of Catalan HE institutions. Though language skills are considered key in the pursuit of an international career (Punteney, 2012), it is eye-catching that the approach was based on a formal requirement for students that was furthermore implemented rather suddenly and then temporarily interrupted, as if acknowledging that it had been a too high request (see *Third-language accreditation*). Though internationalisation practices were not the focus of this work, several of the findings of the thesis hint at practices that rather discourage internationalisation. Apart from the difficulties of some participants to gain a placement in one of the on-campus language courses (see Cara and Skone in *Other organisational problems*), mobility programmes were only pursued by very few participants, though many had been interested in them at the beginning. Though their decision against mobility was certainly similarly multifaceted as their study choice, the participants' references to staff members together with certain structural requirements may explain in part the rather low participation in such programmes, compared to the high initial interest. As students need to have passed at least 60 ECTS in their degree to be allowed to apply for an exchange programme, their first chance for an application is in their second year, but for many even in the third year, as it was rather common to fail at least one subject in the first year. As applications have to be presented almost a year before the actual stay abroad, this means that students who did not pass a subject may apply in their third year for a stay abroad in their fourth year, while those

who passed everything in their first year, may apply a year earlier. The choice of the year for the stay abroad is then already limited, unless students prolong their studies, as N. did. However, Cara's lecturers told her not to do an exchange in the last year, as she would have to prolong her studies if she did not pass a subject abroad (see *Mobility*). If all students receive and follow this recommendation, the possibility to go abroad is reduced to the third year and only students who passed all subjects in the first year are eligible to apply. Further receiving-country specific requirements like language certificates may limit the list of possible destinations to less attractive options, as students are little likely to achieve the on occasion rather high requirements in only one year of studies before presenting their application (see Willy in *Mobility*). Irina's attempt to establish a new exchange partnership encountered severe difficulties she ascribed to the UdL (see *Mobility*) and N. was told by staff members that she should forget about an exchange programme if she depended on economic aids (see *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*). In this sense, internationalisation seemed to be limited to formal requirements applied to students, instead of offering them support, orientation and training in the sense Puntaney (2012) requested, showing that similar difficulties exist in the US context, for which she stated that "too few students are purposefully guided toward international careers" (Puntaney, 2012, p. 392). As international experiences are achieving an important signalling function (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Wiers-Jenssen, 2011), such discouraging tendencies reproduce, once again, social inequality, as students from subordinated groups are more likely to feel less entitled to participate in exchange programmes, apart from lacking the necessary economic resources. The lack of entitlement in this regard was especially visible, as most participants mentioned the possibility to do an Erasmus, while the participants from social class A did not even consider this an option (see *Mobility*).

The discouragement of internationalisation in the daily practices of the institutions may hint at a tacit resistance towards this rather new trend in HE policies. While internationalisation was officially embraced as a desirable aim, this was not mirrored in the practices commented in this thesis, though the existence of further practices that were not considered in this work because its focus was not laid on internationalisation is of course likely. Regarding Neoliberalisation, another trend in HE, diverse academic publications document a rather strong resistance (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999; J. C. Müller, 2011). However, the criticism of Neoliberalisation and Massification tends to connect these processes with a loss of quality (see *Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation*), contributing to the discourse on the decreasing quality of HE and hence to the justification why HE credentials are no longer enough for a successful positioning on the labour market. This reproduction of social inequality lacks a justification, as students did not seem to change too directly due to the Bologna-reforms though these were said to neoliberalise HE institutions (J. C. Müller, 2011) and a stronger practice orientation could also be interpreted in positive terms as an increased ability to interest students for the contents by showing up the relation to the big questions that move them (Bain, 2006), instead of assuming a lack of abstraction and hence quality (Bultmann & Weitkamp, 1999). Rather than advocating for Neoliberalisation, I would like to show with this example, that different perspectives on the same issue are possible and solely focussing on possible negative effects may contribute to the reproduction of social inequality. Within the metaphor of the hurdle race, we could say that HE institutions are not cutting a good figure as 'coaches', discouraging their protégés rather than pushing them to new heights.

After graduation, appears the last hurdle in the course of the university transition - but not necessarily in the *parcours* of life: 'employability' (see *The precarious generation in Catalonia*). Though this hurdle is taken after graduation, the preparation for it takes place in parallel to HE, as 'employability' is strongly related to additional experiences, knowledge and skills that require time to be achieved. In this study, all upper-class participants mentioned more exchange programmes, studied languages and achieved work experiences in their field of studies. Even if they did not pursue international experiences in the end, they considered options in this line, while the participants from lower social classes did not even consider to do an Erasmus, for instance, and seemed to end up by chance with jobs related to their field of studies, considering that they searched for jobs in a wide variety of fields. All this leads to less competitive CVs on the labour market.

The mentioned struggle for survival of the lower class may explain why the few 'surviving' students graduate with less newly acquired capitals and a less attractive *résumé*, not even participating in activities they could have afforded economically (Bathmaker et al., 2013). None of the three participants from social class A mentioned before graduation a strategic CV construction and Sara claimed in her last interview that she had not known that additional merits, like the C2 level in Catalan, would have improved her positioning on the substitution teacher list - indicating a lack of 'hot knowledge' (Davey, 2009). As she explained the importance of such merits for the list in a wrong way and none of the three mentioned any orientation towards the *oposicions* (see footnote 129) and courses or certificates that would improve their scores in these, we can say that the lack of 'hot knowledge' continued and assume that the gap between their CVs and the one's of their middle- and upper-class peers might increase over the years after graduation, if the others showed a more strategic approach to accumulating merits and points - a tendency that already appeared in the course of the follow-up among some upper class participants (see Nadia and Floreta in *Strategic preparation*). This is in line with previous research highlighting class-specific strategies in the face of low labour-market returns of academic credentials that showed how more privileged individuals strategically improved their employability or considered to move abroad, while graduates from lower classes of origin barely persevered on the labour market, attempting to not fall even further, without a strategic plan how to improve their position over time (Bogino, 2016).

Though the lower-class participants access to work over the substitution-teacher list may be anyway rather secure after a certain waiting period, the working conditions for substitution teachers are highly precarious, as they may be send for two weeks to one school, not work for a week, then get a placement of a month in another school, having to prepare for different subjects and age groups from one day to the next etc. This may mean that even in the public sector, with its rather transparent criteria and obligatory public contests, social class may influence the candidates' competitiveness, leading to prolonged phases of precariousness affecting educational climbers. This is in line with Reay's (2013) observation that, though she achieved work in a University, she worked for a prolonged period of time in a highly precarious position and other research indicating that educational climbers are more likely to suffer precariousness in their labour market entrance (Jacob et al., 2015) - an example of further hurdles in the *parcours* of life that were not specifically considered in this thesis.

Though the public sector offers more transparency regarding selection criteria and their weighting and seems to have a special attraction for social climbers who chose degrees with a high expectable return (Torrents, 2017) and consider work in the public sector their chance to overcome labour precariousness and difficult working conditions (Bogino, 2016), it has to be said that not all placements in the public sector are awarded through public contests. Especially temporary substitutions are often allocated without a public contest and not all administrative fields dispose of a functioning substitution list as the educational sector does. Gaining a job in a certain institution may then be a matter of social capital or of being in the right spot at the right time (see Willy in *Labour-market entrance*). However, such work experience is often highly valued in *oposicions* (see footnote 129) and gives furthermore access to courses and trainings only employees of the public sector may access but that do also count in *oposicions*, so even in the public sector, social capital - or connections - may be crucial to achieve a placement and improve the chances in the *oposicions*.

In some fields of the private sector, however, even connections may not be enough to achieve a smooth labour market entrance. Maduixa explained, for example, that despite of her having two relatives working in the film industry and having the money to pay an expensive summer course in a private university, she would have to spend several years working for free before being able to achieve a first paid contract. This shows that the 'objective opportunities' depend on the sector and on the candidate's capitals, explaining the persisting influence of social divisions on sector preferences even without generalised school 'support', informing about low labour-market opportunities in certain sectors.

Some of the participants affected by such lowered 'objective opportunities' and an impossibility to form part of the high achievers in their degree, reoriented their priorities in the course of the follow-up towards well-being and happiness (see *Happiness*) - a tendency that did also appear in Reay's (2000) research on maternal support of children's educational pathways and that can be interpreted as a coping strategy. However, even Piruleta and Sara, who had achieved very good qualifications in their degrees, showed this tendency to ascribe more importance to being tranquil and their general well-being towards the end of the follow-up (see *Extra-curricular activities and work experiences* and *Health*), while N., an upper-class participant with severe academic difficulties, continued to construct her learner identity positively, highlighting her abilities and justifying her difficulties with external factors. This shows that, once again, social class, a class-specific sense of entitlement and resulting self-efficacy beliefs influence in how the participants experience their University transition. It appears therefore likely that, in the current system, highly intelligent and 'able' students from lower social classes, abandon HE or only pass it sacrificing their psychological well-being, while upper-class offspring may achieve HE credentials in spite of much severer difficulties in their academic performance and without jeopardising their well-being. And as this well-being focus was, furthermore, used to justify decreased activity regarding extra-curricular activities or other actions that could improve the CV, this coping strategy does also contribute to confining educational climbers in worse labour-market positions.

Though I have argued above that such additional lines on the CV are only the latest adaptation of the reproduction mechanisms that ascribe a special value to capital manifestations only the dominant groups achieve, so they are bound to lose importance if they become common

among applicants, the first lower-class individuals to achieve such an 'elitist' CV might be able to get through the filter before it is readjusted. On a structural level, an acceleration of the adaptation of reproduction mechanisms may have the positive effect to make their 'false' importance and the underlying injustice more evident, so this could favour a social movement challenging social reproduction.

Those candidates who manage to convince with their CV sufficiently are faced with a last hurdle on their way to the job: the job interview. In line with Groppe's (2006) comments regarding habitus fit and soft skills, I observed among my participants a class difference in their ability to 'sell' themselves, leaving a good impression and justifying their decisions in a - for an upper-class interlocutor - plausible way. Though all participants gained eloquence in the course of the follow-up - possibly a training effect of the repeated interviews - a class difference in the interview characteristics persisted for example regarding the control of the interview, as the participants from social class A usually limited themselves to answering my questions, while some of the participants from social class D and the intermediate classes, appeared especially to the last interviews prepared with a narration they wanted to tell me or were more likely to turn my questions around, asking me back what I meant or directly criticising my questions (see *Interview characteristics*). Furthermore, I observed rather few changes in the study choice constructions of the participants from social class A and though this could indicate that they took their decision more reflectedly in the beginning (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015) or gave more importance to coherence over the years, it could also be a sign of less adaptability in their choice narratives, especially if they came to tell similar narratives in job interviews (see *Flashing up and vanishing alternatives* and *Interview characteristics*). Here it has to be said, that it was in the end easier for the upper-class participants to construct their life-story coherently, as their choices - e.g. access to HE - were less contested and more taken for granted, so they had to justify fewer decisions and choices than the lower class peers, making it easier to leave a good impression. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that N., a participant with severe academic difficulties, was able to turn her indecisiveness into an asset, highlighting her diverse interests and reflexivity, while other participants with a much smoother University transition than hers, struggled to defend their study choice against not completely articulated criticism - a sign that they were confronted with such doubts either in their surroundings or their own thinking (see Peter and N. in *Family affairs*). In this sense, it is even possible that the participants from the lower social classes experienced a higher pressure to construct a 'rational' study choice in the sense of an informed and secure decision, explaining why they adapted their narratives less over time. Such a defensive attitude might, furthermore, affect their ability to seek support negatively, apart from limiting their ability to redirect their trajectory into a different direction.

Though the participants might of course construct their narratives differently in job interviews than in the interview situation, their comments regarding lecturers do also confirm that the participants from social class D and in part C had a different ability to approach lecturers and turn them into social capital. While all participants described a rather distanced relationship to their lecturers at the beginning of the follow-up, several of the upper- and middle-class participants had already had personal conversations with lecturers - an achievement the participants from social class A did often only achieve towards the end of the follow-up. Though none of the participants mentioned to have contacted a lecturer when encountering

difficulties, indicating a generally high threshold when speaking about difficulties, some upper-class participants used their lecturers already in the course of the follow-up to ask for advice regarding postgraduate studies (Nadia) or the acquisition of equipment (Maduixa), contacting them proactively, while other participants only talked to lecturers when these initiated a conversation. Apart from possibly influencing their HE experience, such a different 'use' of lecturers may also influence their labour market transition as Maduixa expected, while Koala already achieved job offers through lecturers.

Moreover, once again, the feeling of entitlement may make a difference here, as I observed a tendency among the few participants who had started to search for a full-time job to be more or less exigent depending on their social class. Floreta, for example, highlighted in her description of how she ended up with a full-time job in her field of studies on a Spanish island, that she had not wanted to accept less than a full-time job, in order to earn money and experience, and had therefore discarded part-time offers she had encountered closer to her parents' residence. While Floreta actively set the criteria and selected her first employment herself, the participants from social class A did not aspire to directly find work in their field: Piruleta achieved a highly precarious job in a special-care home thanks to the recommendation of a friend and spent much time being the perfect employee, receiving in appreciation of this a one-year full-time contract just towards the end of the follow-up. Sara had undergone a job interview in a private primary school where she had completed her last internship in University, but said she had not actually expected to get the job, so she was not surprised to be told that another candidate had more experience. From how she told this story, it seems that she only got into the application process because the school knew her and encouraged her to apply. In her search for a full-time job at the end of the follow-up, she mentioned to have sent her CV to supermarket chains and retailers, but had not yet tried all private or language schools, planning to contact at least the first soon. That Piruleta and Sara chose to search for work outside their fields may indicate, on the one hand, that their first priority was to gain economic independence rather than work experience in their field of study and, on the other, that they did not feel 'entitled' to obtain a job in their field right away, searching for worse options. Though the specific characteristics of the access to becoming a teacher in a public school might influence here and justify their perception to have to spend several years working as something else before getting a first job, they could have also searched for work in private schools right away or at least search work experience with more relation to teaching, e.g. in language schools or giving private lessons etc. Floreta could also aspire to work in the public sector in the future and indirectly improved her chances to get such an offer by investing in her CV and being selective in her job search. This may indicate that though all participants seemed to develop an increased sense of entitlement in the course of the follow-up (see *Health*), the participants from social class A developed this sense retrospectively, once their success had confirmed that they had been on the right way, and did not develop the same exigencies towards their future. In this sense, the tendency is similar as regarding the contact with lecturers that did also improve for all participants in the course of the follow-up, but as the participants from social class A started from a lower level, they did not actually achieve the levels of connectedness with their lecturers some of the participants from social class D described (see *Lecturers*).

7.2.2. *Social divisions, intersections and awareness of difference*

In line with previous research (Archer et al., 2014; Connell, 2009; Kelan, 2014), the participants in this study appeared little aware of social divisions let alone their intersections. Interestingly, the few participants who reflected on social divisions, did so without assuming to be affected by this themselves. Willy (social class B) was the only participant who directly named 'social class', when I mentioned social inequality in our last interview - possibly because it had been a topic in his degree in political sciences. He argued, however, that no class differences are given in university, because only certain people enter to start with. This highlights as well that he was not aware of a different class origin possibly affecting himself. Other participants referred to economic differences, highlighting that these did only become visible when the idea of a final trip was discussed and some fellow students appeared to be much more limited economically than others. Rather than assuming that different economic possibilities could have also influenced at other aspects of the degree, though they did not notice this before, the participants seemed to believe that if they did not notice any difference before, it did not exist. As especially economic conditions are often tabooed topics and people tend to project their situation to others, especially social class differences are then concealed. Nobody ever mentioned differences in the access to knowledge, materials or equipments, for example the use of certain computer brands that might be a status symbol or anything like this. Though this may be an effect of a social desirability bias as one might appear superficial for noticing such things, it is also possible that the participants were really not aware of class differences between themselves and their fellows, just as they were little aware of their own social positioning (see *Measuring Social Class*).

Though gender does not face this difficulty of visibility, the participants did not relate to it as a social division. This is in line with previous research indicating that young professionals consider gender inequality a matter of the past and ascribe persisting differences to individual choices rather than a structural inequality (Kelan, 2014). Xenia referred to sexual orientations claiming that the homo- and bi-sexuals in her degree had not been discriminated. When I wondered if there were many, she counted several and commented on others whose sexual orientation was not completely clear. This shows that in spite of her claim, fellow students with non-heteronormative sexual orientations were perceived as different and were topic of conversation, even if they had not announced or displayed their sexual orientation, so the mere suspicion inflicted a different treatment on them. Apart from confirming that sexual orientation is an important social division (Platero Méndez, 2010), Xenia's comments do also show that the participants understand 'social inequality' in a rather violent sense, as if only direct verbal or physical aggression could be considered in this line, while more subliminal or indirect forms of discrimination were not perceived as such. Neither Andrés, who was in a same-sex relationship, nor Nic, who defined himself as bisexual in Int3, made any reference to experiences in this line or mentioned sexual orientation as a cause for social inequality. Andrés gave more importance to economic conditions when talking about fatherhood and child-rearing and additional difficulties for homosexual couples only became a topic because I brought them up. Moreover, Andrés did not construct his identity around his sexual

orientation, highlighting repeatedly that he wanted the same as most people and usually calling his boyfriend “*pareja*” (partner), so indirectly invisibilising the non-heteronormativity in his narratives (see *Language Issues*).

Something similar happened with the migration backgrounds. None of the participants who did not have a migration background mentioned it as a possible dimension of difference and those who had a migration background, related in different ways to it. Andrés did not mention the topic as a possible difference and Irina argued that ethnicity may make a difference, especially if you look and sound different, but as this was not her case, inequality in this line did not affect her. Xenia mentioned difficulties of a compatriot on the German labour market, relating them directly to a discrimination due to her citizenship, but did not seem to expect that something similar could happen to her. However, Xenia and Ariel mentioned their migration backgrounds as affecting their abilities in Catalan and Spanish, when justifying why they did not achieve the necessary PAU scores to enter medicine. Though they constructed their identities repeatedly in contrast to 'Catalans', they related their differences to befriend peers in school to their late arrival, when everybody already had their friends, rather than considering that they could have been the victims of discrimination. Regarding University, they explained their lack of social success with different interests and levels of maturity (see *Social success*). Though some of Ariel's comments could be interpreted in this line, she assumed at other moments that people were generally bad, taking the edge of racist discrimination from her negative experiences. That several of the participants with a migration background (Xenia, Ariel and Koala) had difficulties with social success in University, while Andrés repeatedly mentioned the nationalities of his friends, indicating that many of them were from abroad too and Irina was the participant with a migration background who arrived youngest to Catalonia and claimed to be not distinguishable as not-Catalan, may indicate that migration histories influence the social integration in HE significantly (see *Social success*). As another finding of this thesis was the high importance of social success for a successful HE experience and it appeared that social difficulties were especially hard to accept and to integrate due to the striking contradiction to the social representation of University students as socially hyperactive, a worse social integration of students with a migration background may lead to further difficulties, reproducing social inequality further.

Though their migration background served Xenia, Ariel and, partly, Koala²⁹⁴ as a good justification for their academic performance in the PAU, they did not assume a discrimination or generalised disadvantage either and did not repeat this idea regarding their academic performance in university. All in all, the participants tended to reproduce individualization rather than social reproduction theories (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015) and seemed to be rather blind for main social divisions (gender, class, migration) even if or precisely when these affected them directly.

An exception was the dimension of 'locality' - a social division that is not among the most considered divisions in intersectional research (see *Intersectionality*). Especially the participants from the rural surroundings referred repeatedly to this dimension of difference and so did

²⁹⁴ As Xenia and Ariel made this relation over their language proficiency, this may explain why Andrés and Irina, the two participants from Latin America and hence Native in Spanish, did not show this argumentation.

other participants if they had moved to another city in order to study and even those who did not move, expected that a change in locality caused a bigger change on entering HE, giving indirectly importance to locality, too. 'Locality' is then not limited to a difference between remote rural villages and residences at a commutable distance from a university, but also includes cities like Lleida, as the variety of degree course offered in the Universitat de Lleida is limited in comparison to Barcelona. As several participants mentioned to have limited their study choice to options that did not require them to move to Barcelona - either because they did not want to move away from their parents or because it was less expensive to move to Lleida than to Barcelona - this dimension appeared as well as significant in the study-choice narratives and intersected especially with social class, as higher economic capital could reduce the limitations imposed by locality. Irina embedded, furthermore, her migration background in a dimension of locality, highlighting her high mobility. However, none of the participants mentioned locality, when we spoke of social inequality in the last interviews, so in spite of the higher visibility of this dimension in their accounts, they did not relate it to structural inequalities.

Methodologically, it is possible that my decision to not impose any social division and to not even tell my participants at the beginning that my focus was laid on social inequality (see *Comparability & Reciprocity*), favoured their lack of awareness, as announcing that a project is about social inequality or a certain social division may likely induce a certain awareness among the participants and lead them to relate to the project's topic. Moreover, a certain selection bias is inevitable if participants are selected for identifying e.g. as working class or LGBTI, as persons who do not consider this dimension crucial to their identity would probably not agree to participate in such a project. That none of the participants happened to turn inequality into a main topic - not even when I mentioned the topic in the last interview - may, furthermore, indicate that social inequality is not an important topic for them. Especially identifying as disadvantaged may be considered little 'adequate' in the context of increased individualisation, as participants might feel to present excuses if they did so. In this sense, individualisation and meritocracy may have led to a situation where social divisions become invisible, lowering their chances to organise in groups and show solidarity. This may in turn lower the chances for social change and therefore explain why social inequality is not only successfully reproduced but even worsening in some contexts as social upward mobility is getting less likely than in the past (Collins et al., 2015) and precarization affects especially young graduates from lower social classes or origin (Jacob et al., 2015) (see *The University Transition as a hurdle race*).

In spite of this lack of awareness of social inequalities - or a high conviction of an equalitarian society -, diverse social divisions and their intersections appeared as clearly influencing the participants' possibilities and life chances. On a structural level, the influence of a migration background was especially clear in Koala's case, who could not aspire to work in the public sector unless achieving a nationality from the European Union. Though Xenia had a citizenship of a European Union member state, she related the discrimination her compatriot experienced on the German labour market to her citizenship and considered an application for the Spanish citizenship a solution, as if this was synonym to eradicating obvious traces of being from a different country. This might be true on the German labour market, as German employees may

not be able to distinguish if any visible cultural, linguistic or physiognomic difference was due to coming from Spain or from her country of origin. Repeated migrations may, in this sense, improve the chances to mimic differences in some contexts, allowing the individuals to choose which information to share with whom. So this idea is, in the end, in line with Irina's argument that migration makes a difference when it is noticeable.

All the participants with a migration background were very successful academically and even through the amplification of the sample, I could not encounter students with a migration background who belonged to social class A. Both tendencies may indicate that students with a migration background are a highly selected group, in the sense that access to HE is even less likely in the intersection of a migration background and a lower social class and even among middle- and upper class migrants, only the academically most successful may make it to HE.

In spite of their academic success in University, several of the participants with a migration background mentioned to have been limited in their study choice due to their PAU score. This may indicate, on the one hand, that they were disadvantaged in the PAU. Apart from an indirect exclusion of immigrants from prestigious professions like physicians, this would mean for society a loss of potentially excellent doctors, reproducing furthermore power relations in health care institutions where patients from subordinated groups are especially little likely to encounter physicians from a similar background. On the other hand, it is also possible that the participants with a migration background had less difficulties to mention their PAU score as a limitation, because it was easily explained through their migration background and did therefore not directly question their intelligence or abilities. Catalan participants, on the contrary, seemed to mention their PAU score limitations less, though they were also given and in some cases rather strong (see *Flashing up and vanishing alternatives*). As we are looking at study-choice narratives rather than study choices, this second explanation may be an example of how a social division - here migration - may turn into an asset in the justification of the life course.

Other examples in this line can be found in Xenia's, N.'s and Andrés' narratives, though regarding other social divisions: Xenia argued in her last interviews that she should have studied an engineering degree in informatics, but had not dared to do so, thinking that it was too difficult for her. Through this reference to a low self-efficacy belief in a male-dominated field and her posterior academic success in university, she justified her change in directions. Though she did not explicitly mention her sex in this context, the social representation of the highly masculinised informatics sector could lead an interlocutor to "understand" why a girl might feel prepared to study biotechnology but not informatics. However, in the previous interviews and her focus group, she had never mentioned anything related to informatics and constructed her self-efficacy belief as rather high, arguing that she chose biotechnology, because she wanted something difficult. N. argued, in the same line, in her first year interview to have decided against architecture or other studies from the same branch, considering them too difficult for her, but continued to construct her intellectual abilities as rather high in any other field (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*). Similarly, Andrés justified that he had not chosen Tourism when he first entered university, claiming that it had already appealed to him, but he had thought that it would be too difficult for him due to the mathematic subjects. With this argumentation, he constructed his change for Tourism after his second dropout from English

studies as something positive, as he finally inscribed into the degree that he had already wanted before but not dared to try, rather than letting it appear like a plan B, he developed when plan A did not work out (see *Preparation and self-efficacy beliefs*). This may indicate that social divisions and self-efficacy beliefs may be highlighted when this facilitates the justification of a decision, assuming a role as a discursive strategy.

Regarding gender, previous research indicates that though social inequality in the access to and success in HE has been overcome and - in particular in Spain (see *Demographics and University participation*) - in many study areas inverted, women are less likely to translate their HE credentials into corresponding labour market positions and gender segregation persists on the labour market (Alm, 2015; Camussi & Leccardi, 2005; Connell, 2009; Kelan, 2014). Academia is not an exception of this tendency and Azrini Wahidin, associate dean for research and innovation at the Teesside University (UK), explained this in an interview with *The Guardian*²⁹⁵ with women being pushed into roles related to administration and lecturing, rather than research, leaving them at a disadvantage as research merits are decisive for the further career (Tickle, 2017). The high similitude with the process I described regarding graduates from lower social classes who do not achieve as highly competitive CVs as their upper-class peers may indicate that these processes are highly similar in different fields and regarding different social divisions.

However, gender is different in its relation to reproduction and parenthood (see *Degree of completion of development tasks*). Though this project ended before any of the participants achieved parenthood, highly interesting ideas regarding relationships and parenthood appeared. While the female participants had all been in a relationship in the course of the follow-up, several male participants displayed severe difficulties to find a partner and some directly worried about the risk to never have a partner and, in consequence, a family. For the female participants, relationships were much less central to their life plans, many embraced the possibility of a sudden separation, especially if they had been through a separation before, and highlighted their independence within the relationship. Men appeared as rather dispensable, as even motherhood could be achieved without a men. Though this high trend towards independence is in line with previous research (Budgeon, 2014) and may be read as emancipation, it may also have a contrary effect: As the female participants considered men as dispensable, they indirectly assumed the whole responsible for being a good parent, strongly condemning 'bad' parents with the argument that they should not have chosen to become parents if they did not plan to have time for their children. Though the participants did not anticipate any difficulty in reconciling family life and a successful career, their high exigencies regarding parents - possibly an effect of their not (yet) adultocentric perspective - were in the end exigencies towards mothers and as such a reproduction or even exaggeration of the 'traditional mother ideal' by furthermore including the father role into their tasks. Though their perspectives may change in the following years, with such an approach difficulties in reconciling family life and an ambitious career are pre-programmed and may explain why women tend to abandon ambitious careers or set much lower targets once they had a child (Kelan, 2014). The lack of awareness regarding the difficulty of reconciling a family and an ambitious job and the belief in individualisation explanations for the change in female careers,

²⁹⁵ Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/mar/08/why-universities-cant-see-woman-as-leaders> [last access: 04.08.2018].

may lead younger or childless women to not show solidarity with their colleagues, as the critical perspective of the female participants regarding parents they know who do not spend time with their children show. This may indicate that the female tendency to criticise other women at work observed by Camussi and Leccardi (2005), may also apply to the private sphere in the sense that women criticise other women for their parenting skills and practices. However, as not all female participants showed such a tendency and several of the male participants expressed a wish to become fathers, embracing the traditionally female trait of care (Budgeon, 2014; Schippers, 2007), social change may be taking place and the current new generation may find more satisfactory ways to reconcile family and work, facilitating as well female advancement to powerful positions.

Though Hillmert (2008) assures that the mechanisms reproducing social inequality will always function, adapting to new situations, I believe that a successive change might be possible and that careful efforts to eliminate social inequality in universities may make a difference. In line with O'Shea (2016, p. 75), I advocate that "[w]hen students step into the university environment, the focus should be less on working upon the students to change or alter them in order to engender a 'sense of fit' with the institution. Rather, we need to rethink how we consider the notion of integration within higher education organisations. This reconceptualisation should consider the very strong capitals that learners arrive with, regardless of ethnicity, SES status or educational background". As my findings show, less discouragement and more general support for all students, double-checking measures regarding their potential to reproduce social inequality, together with an overcoming of the deficit perspective could help to improve the HE experience of all students and make students from underrepresented groups feel more entitled for HE - a key factor in improving equality.

7.3. *Beyond Catalonia*

Though the repeated consistency with previous research conducted in other contexts may indicate a rather high generalizability of the findings presented in this thesis, there are also some aspects to consider that may be peculiar or special of the Catalan case.

Serracant (2012) argues that considering a longer transition of prolonged youth transitions and family dependence, the European-wide change in this regard can be read as a Southern-Europeanisation of youth transitions (see *The precarious generation in Catalonia*). Change is then less significant in the Catalan transitions, that continue to opt for extension rather than for delinearisation and diversification. This tendency may also explain the rather high HE participation, as fewer young people may be diverted from HE by a wish for earlier economic autonomy. However, as the findings of this thesis suggest, class differences persist and especially women from lower class backgrounds highlight their wish to achieve economic independence as soon as possible after graduation, while several participants already worked in parallel to their studies. Moreover, the participants seemed to revise their perception of time in the course of the follow-up: While several had argued at the beginning that they could imagine to study a master or even another degree after completing their current studies, such ideas decreased in the course of the follow-up and several female participants argued that

they would not want to finish their studies too old and therefore had no time to study another degree. Nevertheless, one of the female participants did in the end choose this way and began another degree after graduation. This may indicate that young people in Catalonia are highly oriented towards education and have high aspirations in this regard - possibly beyond the mean in other European regions. If HE institutions offered more possibilities to combine work and studies, more young adults and adults might come to pursue their initial ideas of studying several degrees or masters, as it seems that many do not do so at the moment, because it is very difficult for students to achieve economic autonomy. However, towards the end of the follow-up, several participants described a certain fatigue regarding studies and a wish to at least discontinue this aspect of the student life temporarily, so it is likely that several factors intervene. Here it is then interesting to ask what provokes this developing fatigue among the students and if it is just a matter of their growing older or if the described discouraging processes active in Catalan HE institutions do also intervene here.

Regarding the discouragement it has to be said that though previous studies worked with different designs and laid a different focus, they also encountered several practices in HE institutions that could be read as discouraging tendencies. Lange-Vester and Teiwes-Kügler (2004, 2006) mentioned for example student frustration regarding lecturer behaviour, missing support in the organisation of the studies, severe differences in the requirements to pass a subject and general working conditions that hint at similar tendencies of HE institutions in Germany. Though the concrete manifestations of institutional discouragement may be context-specific, the overall trend is then possibly given in diverse contexts.

A manifestation of institutional discouragement peculiar of Catalonia or Spain in general might be the observed tendency to sudden changes of the rules (see *Organisational problems*). As we have seen, my participants and I became repeatedly the 'victims' of a sudden legislation change that was applied without a moratorium and often provoked more psychological distress than strictly implied, as the consequences of the change did often appear as less dramatic in the retrospective. Apart from only applying legislative changes to students who have not yet enrolled for the educational level in question, more support in the adaptation to this change offered through the administrative staff and lecturers appears crucial in smoothing the discouraging effects. However, the findings indicate a vast potential for improvement in this regard.

Regarding social divisions, it may be special of the Catalan case that none of the participants actually depended on a financial aid to be able to study. This may be, in part, the result of the economic crisis, affecting the household income negatively, the increasing enrolment fees and cutbacks in financial aids (see *The Context*). As I have argued above (see *Scholarship programmes* and *The University Transition as a hurdle race*), the current scholarship system does not contribute to compensate economic difficulties as it forces students to enrol before knowing with certainty if they would receive a scholarship or not, requiring a complex application process most of the participants did not seem to understand completely and not informing students adequately about the reasons for a rejection. Young people whose families are unable to pay them their studies or who have to work to support their families economically (see Andrés) are then more likely to either not enrol or to abandon HE studies. Moreover, students who limited their degree choice to those at offer at a commutable distance or in a 'cheaper' city in order to save

money, received the scholarship too late to revise their decision and as nobody seemed to trust that they would receive the scholarship year after year, especially as academic requirements were often exaggerated, a dependence on financial aids was simply impossible. This shows, furthermore, the high importance of locality in excluding young people from HE or from certain degree courses. Though locality may be important in other geographic context too, peculiarities of Spain, e.g. the concentration of Universities in metropolis and the low population density in areas of a rather wide extension may explain why young people from such areas are especially disadvantaged, even if they are eligible for further scholarships. The general lack of information and frequent misconceptions are yet another example of a tendency to discourage, in this case through bureaucratic requirements and a lack of support. However, as research in the UK did also encounter high differences in the knowledge on scholarships in different middle-class families (Cooper, 2013), such tendencies may be common in other contexts too, though maybe more extreme in the Catalan context in the sense of a little cooperative attitude towards students.

A certain lack of student orientation among staff and lecturers seems to contradict the student-client imaginary related to the Neoliberalisation of HE (Tavares & Cardoso, 2013), but may also be read as a sign that Neoliberalisation does either not evolve with a strong client orientation in Catalan HE or that the development of this orientation is still under progress, at least in the considered institutions (see *Big differences between and within universities*). This may also explain the rather little consideration that appeared to be given to student complaints (see *Lack of control*), discouraging students to present formal complaints and not integrating students within the examination of these complaints that seemed to be limited to a literal comparison with applicable norms, rather than considering the students' ideas as a chance to improve HE quality beyond the scope of legal statutes. Though it happened repeatedly that aspects the participants had complained about changed, they were often not informed if this change was a reaction to their complaint or not. Moreover, the change was often limited to a substitution of a lecturer - especially if this owned a precarious status, e.g. as an associate lecturer - rather than ensuring quality standards in teaching and student contact in general. Future research on private HE institutions would be highly interesting in this regard, as it is possible that these institutions show a much stronger student orientation, discouraging their students less and showing less resistance to their suggestions how to improve. If this was true, social inequality might be very directly reproduced through the access to private institutions, as these are very expensive and require, in consequence, high levels of economic capital.

Spanish HE has been described for its high dropout rates (Lassibille & Navarro Gomez, 2009). Apart from the mentioned institutional discouragement, the observed phenomena of *pro-forma* enrolments may explain this in part (see *Gap years and Pro-forma Enrolments*). Especially for upper-class offspring the direct transition from school to university appeared as so natural, that several of the participants enrolled into degrees already planning on abandoning them after a year. Those who can afford to spend a year in this way, gain the advantage of important insights into the functioning of Universities that may smoothen their transition when they access in the next year a degree programme with the intention to complete it. In this sense, *pro-forma* enrolments may be a useful strategy among upper-class students who did for some reason not directly enter into their aspired degree course. However, *pro-forma* students may

affect the social integration and academic performance of other students negatively, as these are forced to produce group works with *pro-forma* students, apart from representing an important additional cost for the state and decreasing efficiency indicators by worsening dropout rates. Pro-forma enrolments may be read as another example of the Catalan extension of the youth phase (Serracant, 2012), as these students do not seem to mind to spend another year in university without actually studying.

Considering the high HE participation rates in Spain, a low signalling function of HE titles is expectable (Jacob et al., 2015). Though further manifestations of cultural capital - e.g. international experiences, language skills, work experiences etc. - could overtake this signalling function and several of the upper-class participants showed a strategic CV construction in this line, many participants displayed a belief in connections - social capital - as a crucial mediator smoothing labour market entrance. Several participants directly criticised the importance of connections even in the search for a student job and most of the participants who achieved work in the course of the follow-up, mentioned to have been recommended by a personal contact or to have known someone (see *Connections*). The importance of social capital in the University transition did, furthermore, already appear in the focus groups, as the participants favoured personal information sources, so the more their social capital knew about University, the more they knew themselves, not only in the sense of 'hot knowledge' (Davey, 2009), but regarding any HE-related knowledge in general (see *Information preferences and silence*). Further research might find out if social capital is of a more crucial importance in the Catalan or Spanish context than in other regions of Europe. If this was the case, an adaptation of Bourdieu's approach to situate people in the social field may be necessary (see *Capitals, field and habitus*), as social capital might then determine the position, rather than being a side-effect of high economic and cultural capital. If this was the case, it may also indicate that social reproduction happens in Spain less concealedly, as meritocratic justifications are less employed to justify positions and a consciousness of the importance of social capital was rather high, at least among the participants. Interestingly, the participants who did not refer to social capital, where those who did not have many connections (see Andrés in *Becoming a professional*). Though in Andrés' case his meritocratic discourse may have been a sign of his adaptation to his work environment in a hotel chain, it is also possible that young people gain awareness of the importance of social capital when this did favour them in a certain way and as they are then little likely to protest, this may explain the lack of mobilisation against this hardly concealed social reproduction. In this sense, it is possible that connections are actually of similar importance in other geographic contexts, but that they act more in the background and are less visible in observations and narratives.

8. Conclusions

"Per un vers atrapo les paraules a ple vol, aturo el batec de tots els tràfecs, enlairo les cabòries com estels, em banyo en aigües guaridores d'algues tendres, desgrano la magrana del desig.

Per un sol vers capgiro el curs calat de l'aigua en ploure..."

Mireia Lleó i Bertran (Barcelona 1960)

Roda Mots 27.11.2017

"Cada matí la gasela es desperta sabent que, si no corre més que el lleó, la mataran. Cada matí el lleó es desperta sabent que, si no corre més que la gasela, es morirà de gana. Tant se val si ets un lleó o una gasela: quan el sol despunta, el millor que pots fer és començar a córrer."

Proverbi africà

Roda Mots 01.02.2018

This PhD thesis asked how social inequality is reproduced in the university transition (Q1), understood as the transition from school to university, the time in university and the transition from university to the labour market. HE is an ideal field to study the reproduction of social inequality from one generation to the next, as certain social groups continue highly underrepresented in Spanish HE (Rahona Lopez, 2009), while social positionings are now increasingly reproduced on the labour market, so 'educational climbers' are less able to translate their credentials into corresponding positions (see *The Reproduction of Social Inequality in the University Transition*). This inclusion of access to HE and labour market outcomes, as well as the procedural character of reproduction mechanisms under transformation, made a longitudinal approach necessary, enabling the construction of a very rich data set, unique in the Catalan context.

Through the gained insights the thesis meant, furthermore, to identify Qa) aspects that influence in the higher risks of non-traditional students to abandon their degrees or to complete them with worse results; and Qb) successful coping strategies; in order to assess Qc) how the identified aspects and coping strategies influence the students' chances on the graduate labour market.

The empirical basis consisted of a longitudinal project with students who were, after a first data construction in High Schools employing focus groups, accompanied from their first-year in University onwards over five years through annual semi-structured interviews (2011-2016). In total, 17 participants were considered in the longitudinal analyses and diverse methodological reflections led to additional insights regarding the employed methods, the longitudinal character of the project and the success in terms of low dropout (see *Ethics*). The theoretic background of this work consists of research on youth transitions, Bourdieusian perspectives on social inequality combined with intersectional approaches and Higher Education theories.

As the findings of this thesis indicate, reproduction mechanisms in HE are multifaceted and begin to intervene already in school, when the foundations for educational decisions are laid, while their effects overarch the whole life course. Three aspects appeared as crucial in the reproduction of social inequality: 1) entitlement, 2) discouragement and 3) misinformation. In concrete, tendencies to discourage young people to undertake and continue University studies were identified on the structural level and regarding social representations. While increasing costs and scholarship allocation make it difficult for young people who actually depend on

financial aids to enter HE, an expectation of a very high level of difficulty discourages the decision for HE or, at least, for degree courses that are perceived as demanding. The pressure to take an 'informed' study choice, may furthermore provoke important distress, especially as it is impossible to comply, and may lead young people to cope by limiting their choices to options they perceive as adequate for someone from their social milieu, their sex etc., favouring like this the reproduction of social inequality. Though all young people are similarly exposed to discouragement, traditional students are more likely to show resilience, as they have developed a sense of entitlement for HE that allows them to continue in this line, even in the face of difficulties. Though non-traditional students may develop such a sense of entitlement in the retrospective, as their success confirms that they were in the right place, this comes too late to facilitate their coping and does not expand to their labour-market entrance either, as they continue to lack a prospective sense of entitlement.

This may explain why none of the first-in-family participants in this study experienced severe academic or social difficulties in University, as such difficulties may be avoided by not entering HE or by choosing especially achievable degree courses (Torrents, 2017). Though misinformation, misconceptions and a general lack of information literacy seemed to be common among the participants, once again its effects are worse for first-in-family students, as their misconceptions about scholarships, for instance, may actually prevent them from applying and achieving the financial aid that would allow them to enrol in HE or to participate in an exchange programme, while their similarly badly informed peers do not actually need any financial aid to do so. Coping may then consist in reducing the HE experience to a minimum and to concentrate on passing the assignments rather than to seek further activities, though these would look good on the CV. Moreover, non-traditional students showed a tendency to individualise their problems, searching for instance explanations for their anxieties or their reserved relation to lecturers in their personalities, rather than blaming the University or their lecturers for causing them health issues and not approaching them in a more welcoming way. Coping with difficulties was, therefore, marked by the sense of entitlement or the lack of it: the sense of entitlement seemed to increase in the course of the follow-up among the traditional students, allowing them to ascribe any difficulty, in the end, to a shortage of their University or degree course, rather than questioning their own abilities. Non-traditional students, on the other hand, began their studies with a much lower sense of entitlement and did not achieve the same levels in it as their peers even though they did also gain security in the University surrounding in the course of the follow-up. These students coped with their difficulties by withdrawing even further from HE, concentrating on their families or partnerships instead and seeking disconnection from HE, as a synonym to relaxation, in their free time. Apart from leading to less attractive CVs, the lack of entitlement may furthermore explain the observed difference in the exigencies for the labour market entrance after graduation, as the non-traditional students seemed to be grateful for any job, while their peers were more selective in their job search, achieving a 'better' first employment. However, as only few participants had achieved this point in the course of the follow-up, especially this tendency has to be seen as a hypothesis for future research.

In the section on *The Transition from School to University*, main topics were developed from within the participants' narratives. Here it appeared that all participants, independently of their backgrounds, had expected University entrance to be a much bigger change than they

experienced in the end. The anticipation of such a big change may contribute to the discouragement of certain social groups to access HE and may explain why especially non-traditional students, in particular women and students from lower social *milieus*, tend to choose rather 'achievable' degrees (Torrents, 2017), as they might expect even these to be highly difficult. This is in line with the psychological distress Sara and Piruleta, the two female participants from the lowest social class in this project, developed in spite of their rather good academic performance (see *Health*).

As a possible peculiarity of the Catalan case appeared *pro-forma* enrolments, in the sense of an enrolment in a degree course, in spite of already planning to change for another degree after a year (see *Gap years and Pro-forma Enrolments*). This upper-class strategy enables a smoother transition to University and explains a part of the rather high dropout rates in the Spanish HE system.

The intersectional analyses of the participants' narratives and the interactions observed in the focus groups allowed, furthermore, for the observation of rather clear intersections of gender and social class in the transition from school to university (see *Intersections of social class and gender*): While the male participants either displayed a certain superiority or passivity in the focus groups and constructed their study choices as straightforward, the female participants were much more likely to express worries and insecurities and doubted their capacity to choose a degree programme that would determine their future career path. Especially the participants from lower social classes adopted a defensive attitude in the focus groups and hardly intervened, displaying in their few comments important knowledge gaps regarding the access to university. In the first-year interviews, the male participants were much more likely to admit doubts and insecurities they had faced in their study choice. This may indicate that all young people suffered from similar worries, but the male participants were less able to verbalise these difficulties in the focus groups - possibly because of the presence of their peers or because it is easier for them to comment on difficulties from a retrospective. Both explanations hint to a male difficulty to seek support, especially in the intersection with lower social class, and may form part of the explanation why women have come to outrun men in HE participation in the wake of the broadened access to HE.

Difficulties to estimate the workload and to reconcile the academic work with a social hyperactivity (see *Social success* and *Fellow students*) may explain, in part, the rather high incidence of at least one suspended subject in the first year among the participants (see *Academic success*). The participants' narratives confirmed, furthermore, the importance of the social division 'locality' in the transition from school to university, though this dimension lost importance in the course of the follow-up. Regarding the lecturers, all participants seemed to start from a very distanced relationship, they had already anticipated in the focus groups. However, some participants had already in the first-year interview established personal conversations with some of their lecturers and several came to develop a closer relationship to at least some of their lecturers in the course of the follow-up, e.g. asking their advice regarding postgraduate studies or the acquisition of equipment or even considering them friends. However, while all participants who established such a personal contact belonged to social class D, the students from the lowest social class, A, continued to experience a rather distanced and sporadic contact to their lecturers, limiting themselves to answering their questions and did not

mention to seek their support or advise, indicating that they had not turned their lecturers into social capital they were able to mobilise (Bathmaker et al., 2013). This is in line with a general tendency not to accumulate additional merits for the CV that are nowadays considered important indicators of 'employability' (see *Massification, Neoliberalisation and Internationalisation*), in contrast to a strategic CV construction displayed by some of the upper-class participants (see *Strategic preparation*).

In the section *Study-Choice Narratives under Construction*, the high variation in the participants' study-choice narratives has been broached. Their reflexivity about their study choices may indicate a new development task for young people, who face more difficulties to integrate their choices into a coherent life story. That especially the participants from social class A tended to construct their study choices more similarly over the years, may indicate that they either already realised such reflexivity before taking their decision (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2015), that they felt a stronger need to construct their choices coherently over the years or that they had established certain patterns in the 'defence' of their choices as these were more contested in their families (see *Family affairs*).

Especially the often surprising and contradictory ideas the participants expressed regarding job opportunities and professional profiles made it obvious that an informed study choice is in the end impossible (see *Professional profiles and the labour market*). This has important implications for school support, as schools should not attempt to inform young people about the current labour market situation, as it is susceptible to change, but rather show young people why they should not trust indicators of labour market trends and how different indicators can lead to opposed evaluations. Trends or recommendations to consider the current labour market in the career orientation in schools (Archer et al., 2014; Santana Vega, Feliciano García, et al., 2010) have to be seen critical, as they may lead non-traditional students to reorient their study choices in line with what they are told in school about the labour market demands, provoking difficulties when the chosen degrees turn out to be not to the students' liking or when the labour market chances prove to be lower than expected. As traditional students are much less likely to be influenced in their study choice by school, considering their family experiences and support in the transition to University (Archer et al., 2014), social inequality is then additionally reproduced.

The Transition from University to the Labour Market was characterised, apart from the already mentioned differences regarding the strategic preparation of 'employability', by an important change in the perception of labour market opportunities in the course of the follow-up and a significant decrease in social activity and satisfaction among the few participants who had already achieved a first full-time work before the end of the follow-up. While the changing perceptions may have been influenced by the general public discourse on the economic crisis that showed a similar tendency in the same period (see *Labour-market perceptions*), the decreased satisfaction was often related to new time constraints and a reduction of the social network, leaving them less free time and fewer contacts to pursue leisure activities. However, the few participants who had already achieved this point in their trajectories, tended to ascribe their dissatisfaction to concrete aspects of their current work - e.g. the mentality of the colleagues, the locality or the lack of professional preparation for the concrete tasks, leading to high pressure and long hours. In this, they came to embrace the temporal character of their

contracts as something positive, allowing them to hope for a rather soon improvement in their situation. This is in line with Chisholm's (2006) observation that young people come to want the changing conditions they are confronted with in their transitions.

In this section, it was furthermore interesting to see how quickly the participants adapted to their new working surroundings, changing for example their ways to express themselves or introducing a different terminology (see *Becoming a professional*). Noteworthy are as well the observed tendencies to ennoble the own itinerary, by highlighting the overcome difficulties and the value of the achieved educational credential, and to discourage the access to the degree, by highlighting either its difficulty or the importance of a strong vocation in this field (see *Ennobling the own itinerary and closing doors*). Apart from some exceptions, the participants supported such a closure of their field and Sara and Piruleta even requested more selectivity in their degree, though they had suffered severe anxieties to pass at the beginning of the degree. This may be read as an example of how students and graduates come to contribute to social reproduction, even if their own itineraries are that of social climbers. In doing so, the participants often showed less criticism regarding their degrees after graduation than they had shown throughout the degree, reproducing the tendency observed regarding their High Schools that were also much more criticised before the end of school and appeared in much more positive terms in the first-year interviews (see *High School*). Such observations may be useful when choosing the moments for data construction in research and for evaluations.

The longitudinal analyses of the interviews enabled the development of eight *Faces of longitudinal analysis*, which summarise all insights gained in the course of these analyses and were used to complete the last step of the suggested analyses: type constructions (see *Analyses*). In *Degree of completion of development tasks*, we have observed that especially participants from the lower social classes were more likely to show a stronger advancement in the completion of the development tasks described by Hurrelmann (2007) (see *The invention of youth and development tasks*). An important gender difference appeared in the tendency to be in a relationship, whereat the girls were more likely to be in relationships, but also to construct their independence within their relationships, even when a strong orientation towards their partners became visible in their decisions. Especially parenthood was a topic for the female participants, who were, on the one hand, rather exigent with parents, considering that adults unable to be caring parents should not have children at all, while, on the other hand, considering fathers as rather dispensable for sexual reproduction. The combination of the two ideas indicates a continuity in the high exigencies towards mothers, reproducing and even strengthening traditional role models as women are considered to have the choice between either meeting the ideal to be a good mother or not to become a mother at all. Such a tendency to invisibilise social inequality through an individualisation of differences and the highlighting of the moment of choice (Kelan, 2014) appeared repeatedly in the participants' narratives and may explain the lack of social mobilisation in spite of an increasingly obvious social reproduction, especially in the Spanish context (see *Discussion*).

In *Interview characteristics* appeared diverse differences in how the participants from different social classes 'sold' themselves and 'managed' the interviews. Though all participants gained eloquence in the course of the follow-up - possibly due to a training effect of the annual

interviews - especially the participants from social class A had difficulties to express themselves and to ideally 'sell' their plans, decisions and ideas at the beginning of the follow-up and continued to show a more passive attitude towards the interviews at its end. Some of the participants from the upper social *milieus*, on the other hand, took successively control of the interviews, appearing with a prepared monologue of events they wanted to share with me or directly criticising interview questions they considered difficult to answer. Though all participants seemed to accept that the interviews were about them, several came to ask me questions back and showed an interest in my person before or after the interview or in reaction to contact messages, leading me to reflect upon my approach towards reciprocity, considering myself an element of their social capital and adopting an attitude similar to an older sibling (see *Comparability & Reciprocity* and *Insider / Outsider Status & Unconditional Love*).

Regarding the axes *Academic success* and *Social success*, very different constellations were observable in the course of the follow-up. While a certain academic failure appeared to be rather acceptable for the participants and was normalised by many of them, difficulties with their social integration seemed to surprise them and provoked crises, as some of the participants who did not manage to befriend fellow students felt 'excluded' from what they perceived as a student's 'normal' social life. Certain difficulties in this field appeared, however, to be rather common among the participants and the importance of social success decreased in the course of the follow-up, as the initial levels of social hyperactivity were substituted by a stronger balance between academic and social commitments. Interestingly, the participants from social class A did neither display severe academic nor social problems, while several of the participants from social class C and D did. This may be interpreted as a sign of the sense of entitlement among the higher class participants that led them to join a project on University students and to not withdraw neither from their degree nor from the project when faced with difficulties. Students from lower social classes and women are moreover likely to choose degrees that are rather achievable for them considering their previous academic performance (Torrents, 2017), so being among the high achievers should be especially easy for them.

An afresh change in the participants' social life appeared around graduation, as several participants commented on how the more sporadic contact to their fellow students influenced the maintenance of the developed friendships negatively. This may indicate that many students may be unable to maintain the social capital achieved in the course of their studies (Bathmaker et al., 2013), so the social capital the family of origin has at its disposal is again more important and may explain, especially in the Spanish context where social capital appeared as particularly crucial (see *Beyond Catalonia*), the reproduction of social inequality.

Future ideals and fears confirmed the increased future insecurity young people are confronting (see *Youth Research and Transitions*), but also displayed the importance the 'normal biography' continues to have in the future plans and imaginaries of many participants. Only few participants constructed alternative future models and many of these moderated their ideas in the course of the follow-up. It almost seemed that the more the participants feared to be excluded from the 'normal biography', the more they aspired to achieve it. In this sense, the economic crisis may have contributed to turning what had achieved a character of a 'natural advance' into an important success and accomplishment.

Happiness appeared as an important axis of analysis, characterised by a difference between the impression the participants left with their accounts and their self-perception as being happy or not. Especially the participants from the lower social classes tended to consider themselves happy, though their narratives were full of worries and negative ideas. Most participants appeared to be, in every case, convinced that a lack of current happiness was only temporal and that they would be happy as soon as they had achieved the next objective on their list. Only few participants articulated a fear not to achieve happiness, assuming that their own choices and personality could impede the achievement of their dreams. Another interesting aspect regarding happiness, was that it gained importance in the course of the follow-up, as several participants revisited their priorities and came to consider happiness and well-being more important than, for instance, academic excellence. Happiness appeared here almost as a coping strategy for the less successful in other spheres, allowing them to still feel privileged, by considering happiness the most important aim. This may also be the explanation why mothers whose children faced academic difficulties tended to consider their children's happiness their priority, while those who could still expect their children to be among the academic high achievers, concentrated on pushing them to such outcomes (Reay, 2000). Non-traditional students may then enter into a vicious circle as their well-being is more likely to be compromised in HE (see *An ethical dilemma or another reproduction mechanism?*), while they are less likely to be among the academically high achievers, so if they start to furthermore consider happiness the most important priority, they may withdraw further from academic life and strategic CV construction, reducing their chances on the labour market and, hence, reproducing social inequality (see *Discussion*).

Mobility appeared among the most important axes of analysis as almost all participants displayed important ideas and plans regarding mobility. Though some participants planned to live abroad, especially temporal experiences abroad seemed to attract all participants, even those who knew for sure that they wanted to live their lives in the localities where they had been born. Though only few participants came to take part in student mobility programmes in the course of the follow-up, these appeared as highly attractive for students, as only the participants from social class A did not mention the possibility to become an Erasmus student. However, diverse institutional practices (see *Discussion*) together with a polemic announcement of changes to the financial aids for Erasmus students (see *Sudden changes of the rules: The Erasmus aid*) discouraged many participants to pursue this plan. Many believed, moreover, to be able to go abroad after graduation or later in their life course, postponing the desired international experience, though, as Piruleta realised in her last interview, the chances to go abroad for longer periods of time decrease over the years, so she accepted the idea that if she did not leave soon, she would probably not come to leave at all. Just as the other participants from social class A, Piruleta considered to work abroad rather than a stay as a student. This may indicate that students do not differentiate between international experiences, considering that working abroad would be just as enriching as studying abroad, but as the latter requires the investment of money, while the first includes the option to earn and save it, especially students with fewer economic resources may favour the second option. However, as Peter's friends found out in London and previous research indicates (Rubio & Strecker, 2016; Wiers-Jensen, 2011), achieving work on a foreign labour market may be very difficult and high

labour precariousness may limit young people severely, so that an international experience working abroad is likely to be qualitatively different from a student experience abroad. Student mobility programmes are, furthermore, another example of strategic CV construction and though many students did not participate in any in the end, the direct exclusion of the possibility among the participants from social class A hints again at reproduction mechanisms at work.

The last axis of longitudinal analysis, *Change and Continuity*, offered insights regarding the participants' own perceptions to have changed in the follow-up in comparison to the changes that appeared in the analyses of their narratives over the years. As was expectable, most participants combined change and continuity in their narratives, so narratives highlighting a big change can be understood as discursive strategies to justify or idealise certain decisions. Interestingly, though many participants had argued that they had expected a bigger change on entering HE than they actually experienced, several came to mention the same changes they had described in their first-year interviews once again in their last year, when evaluating how university changed them. This may indicate that University entails a significant change, but this is achieved through the successful adaptation to slightly changed living conditions over several years, rather than a dramatic life-changing experience.

Apart from the University experience itself, especially work experiences -in some cases internships, in others first employment in the field of studies after graduation - seemed to change the participants, affecting their ways to talk and to express themselves (see *Becoming a professional*). Several participants stated, furthermore, negative life events like separations, the prolonged illness and death of one or several grandparents or the death of friends as influential, indicating that the University transition is for many accompanied by first close experiences of loss, in the sense of losing significant others, though some of the participants had made such experiences before. These experiences contributed in the opinion of several participants to their maturing and may be understood as an additional development task that is now predominantly faced in youth: the development of an ability to mourn and to manage grief, without jeopardising the daily functioning completely. The current system favours that students who disengage temporarily, end up abandoning their degree completely, as they lose the contact to their group. More freedom in the study organisation, e.g. allowing the students to mix with fellows from different years in elective subjects, could help to attenuate such effects.

It is, in conclusion, important to not only focus on academic success when supporting the University transition, but to show a more holistic approach to the realities and complexities of university students' lives. This may, in the long run, improve the quality of degrees and graduates' competences, as it favours their engagement and resilience, rather than practices to just comply with the minimum necessary to pass in order to achieve graduation.

In the last finding section, *Criticism & Ideas for Improvement*, I have granted visibility to the participants' own ideas of how things should be improved in University, analysing their ideas in the light of the previous findings in order to discover further facets of reproduction mechanisms. The section is completed with a *List of Recommendations* in which I included several of my own ideas regarding the improvement of social equality developed in other parts of the

thesis. This list could be considered as an applied conclusion - especially for public education policies - of this PhD research.

Special attention has to be paid to the role of academics and institutions in the reproduction of social inequality, as they may easily turn into accomplices rather than promoters of change and equality. Examples in this line are lecturers and other staff who directly discourage students through their practices and attitudes, apart from contributing to a discourse of the 'decreasing quality' of HE or directly recommending interventions in schools or universities that would, in the end, contribute to the reproduction of social inequality (see *Discussion*). In concrete, the offer of more information about vocational trainings and the situation of the current labour market in schools, requiring higher enrolment fees for HE or identifying students at risk of attrition through socio-economic variables, potentially before even admitting them, may contribute to the reproduction of social inequality.

If HE institutions treated their students differently, offering them more encouragement and support and considering their diversity as an asset, this could furthermore improve the students' impression to be in the right place and their sense of entitlement. Especially the latter proved to be crucial for the HE experience and the posterior labour market positioning, as students from underrepresented groups often suffered more and in silence, but also limited their own chances by not daring to aim for high targets, e.g. mobility programmes or a direct full-time employment in their field of studies after graduation, or by showing insecurity (see *Discussion*).

Though efficiency indicators like dropout rates were not the focus of this thesis, the findings indicate that improving social equality could improve student retention, as fewer students would be diverted into subjects that are not completely to their liking or discouraged. Direct encouragement and support, e.g. through transversal subjects introducing the students to questions like time management or academic writing, could decrease their experiences of academic failure. Moreover, *pro-forma* enrolments could be avoided by fostering gap years or offering possibilities to only take preparatory or transversal courses to first obtain an idea of the aspired degree course and to prepare for it.

Methodologically, the developed combination of the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2010) and the intersectional approach (Winker & Degele, 2009) displayed several advantages and enabled interesting insights, for example regarding the influences of social representations, structures and identity constructions in reproduction mechanisms. Regarding the study choice, it appeared for example important with which degree and which profession the participants felt able to identify, based on their self-efficacy beliefs and their - often limited or even false - preconceptions of degrees, related professions and job opportunities. Preparatory courses, e.g. offered in some engineering degrees, were considered a sign of high difficulty and as most participants suffered from a certain lack of self-efficacy in the wake of the PAU and had not studied at least one of the subjects of the degree's study plan in High school, many decided against engineering degrees. This may partly explain why the female participation in engineering degrees and architecture is still significantly below the male participation, while women have come to outrun men in all other study branches (see *Demographics and University participation*).

As often in research, the answering of the research questions in this thesis, leads to a list of many more questions for further research. In concrete, future research should shed light on questions like: How do the described mechanisms of reproduction work in private universities? How do students adapt their narratives to different situations, especially job interviews or conversations with lecturers? How common are difficulties with social integration among university students? What causes them and what are their consequences? Are young people more exigent with parents than adults? Why is the phenomenon of the gendered study choice in Spain reduced to the engineering branch, is this also going to be female dominated soon and how might other regions 'learn' from Spain in order to achieve more gender equality in study choices? Are men from subordinated groups diverted from entering HE, while women are diverted into lower positions on the labour market? And if so, is this related to gender images of women being less 'dangerous' and more 'controllable'? What differences exist to other geographic contexts and how could social equality be improved by 'learning' from other contexts? How does the current generation of HE students translate their credentials into labour market positions and reconcile family and work?

Considering the uniqueness of this data set, it would be especially interesting to conduct a last follow-up, several years after graduation, in order to ascertain if and how the participants translated their HE credentials into labour market positions and how their narratives regarding their life course and their University transition changed. In the meantime, I would like to dedicate myself to the deepening of my research in Australia and Argentina, in order to compare the findings regarding the reproduction of social inequality presented in this thesis with other geographic contexts. Moreover, increased attention to youth cultural aspects within the University transition and how these relate to the reproduction of social inequality promise to offer further insights. Considering that several participants expressed ideas regarding how their participation in the project helped them to think about their lives and decisions and that I also observed a certain training effect of the repeated interviews in the sense that the interviewees gained confidence and eloquence over the years, further longitudinal research or even a universal inclusion of such interviews within the Universities' mentoring programmes could not only lead to further insights, but also serve as an intervention, improving the University transition for all students.

To close the circle - and this thesis - I would like to return once again to the participant 0 of this work, my own case, and reflect on my own future in University. Though I have not spoken to several of my participants recently, I know that some achieved a rather stable labour situation that allowed them economic autonomy and future planning. As my current work contracts are all bound to end within the next months and do furthermore depend on each other (a contract as an associate lecturer requires a further contract in another field) I may be, by now, the less advanced participant in this sense. Rather than understanding my precariousness as a fountain of youth, in the sense of a prolonged transition to adulthood (see *The invention of youth and development tasks*), I see my own case as a sign that in some sectors, like HE, transitions are by now completed in adulthood - if they are completed at all. Future research on my case may show how gender, social class and migration histories intersect in the academic transition, understood as the transition from a PhD dissertation to a tenure-track employment as a researcher. Hopefully, it will be yet another study of a successful case.

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Annex

1. *Presentation Letter used to contact High Schools in 2011*

Tanja Strecker


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Asunto: Investigación sobre la juventud estudiantil de Lleida orientada al proyecto de tesis doctoral de la UdL

Estimado Señor, estimada señora:

Me llamo Tanja Strecker y me dirigo a usted con la petición de poder realizar una parte del proyecto de investigación de mi tesis doctoral en su escuela, bajo la dirección del Dr. Carles Feixa, profesor de la UdL, que avala el proyecto.

La tesis doctoral trata sobre la juventud estudiantil de Lleida y quiero desarrollar un seguimiento de estudiantes de la UdL desde el momento que toman una decisión sobre sus estudios superiores al finalizar el instituto, hasta la finalización de sus estudios universitarios. Para la primer parte del proyecto, organizo grupos de discusión en diferentes institutos de Lleida con la participación de estudiantes del segundo de bachillerato. Cada grupo de discusión constará entre 5 y 10 estudiantes que podrán discutir aproximadamente durante una hora sobre sus planes y su percepción de la universidad de Lleida, sus expectativas, sus miedos, las formas de tomar decisiones, etc. Esta información se tratará de forma confidencial, respetando el anonimato de los participantes. La época en que quiero realizar los grupos de discusión va desde principios de 2011 hasta final del presente curso (junio de 2011).

Le agradecería mucho si me diera la autorización para llevar a cabo un grupo de discusión en su escuela. Esto no afectara al normal seguimiento del curso. Para establecer una fecha para realizar el grupo de discusión en su escuela o para pedir más información sobre el proyecto doctoral diríjase a:

Tanja Strecker

tanja.strecker@gmx.de







Le saluda cordialmente

vist-i-plau del director de la tesi

(Tanja Strecker)

(Carles Feixa)

²⁹⁶ The lines were my personal contact data appeared were blackened.

2. *Information for participants and socio-economic questionnaire used in the Focus Groups (2011)*

Información para participantes

Por favor, arranque esta página y quédela para poderte poner en contacto conmigo.

Me llamo Tanja Strecker y en primer lugar te tengo que agradecer mucho que hayas participado en este grupo de discusión! ¡¡¡Muchísimas gracias!!!

Como ya sabes el grupo de discusión es un parte de mi proyecto de tesis doctoral. Durante los 3 o 4 años que vienen, quiero investigar sobre la juventud estudiantil universitaria de Lleida. Hoy has discutido con tus compañeros sobre vuestras decisiones de ir a la universidad o no y como elegir la carrera. En unos meses – cuando ya habrá empezado la universidad – me gustaría volver a hablar contigo, entonces en una entrevista personal, para saber como te ha ido este inicio. Seguramente será una etapa emocionante de tu vida, verás muchas cosas nuevas y tendrás muchos pensamientos, percepciones e incluso miedos cuales me gustaría escuchar y grabar. Después el seguimiento será menos frecuente. Habrá aproximadamente una entrevista personal cada año de tus estudios, así que en total participarás en **3 entrevistas**.

También puedes participar si te decides a tomar un año de descanso antes de empezar de estudiar, si te vas a estudiar a otro sitio, si cambias la universidad o la carrera durante el seguimiento del proyecto, si te vas de Erasmus o si dejas de estudiar. Especialmente estos tiempos emocionantes serán otra vez interesantes para mí, así que te lo agradecería mucho si me dijeras algo fuera del “normal” seguimiento de tu caso para hacer una entrevista con antelación o adicional y poder capturar estos momentos especiales. Así podría hacer una comparación entre los momentos especiales y emocionantes de la vida estudiantil universitaria, y los más cotidianas y corrientes, que también son importantes – incluso igual más importantes que las excepciones.

De momento no te tienes que comprometer a nada. Pero si estás interesado en intentar seguir con el proyecto, llena por favor el papel siguiente con tus datos de contacto, para que te pueda llamar en unos meses para preguntarte si sigues interesado y listo para la primera entrevista.

Aquí encontrarás mis datos de contacto, así te podrás poner en contacto conmigo siempre cuando tengas alguna duda sobre el proyecto, cuando pienses que estaría bien hacer una entrevista extraordinaria, cuando cambie algo de tus datos de contacto, etc.

Tanja Strecker

[Redacted contact information]

[Redacted contact information]

¡Saludos y hasta pronto!

Datos de contacto

Estos datos sólo sirven para poder mantener el contacto contigo. No serán publicados en ningún sitio y también todos los datos extraídos de tus entrevistas será anonimizado. Más abajo podrás elegir un seudónimo/alias para tu anonimación.

Si no estás interesado en seguir en el proyecto, deja este parte en blanco pero llena la tabla “datos sociales” por favor.

Nombre y apellidos	
Correo electrónico	
Teléfono móvil y/o fijo	
Dirección postal (también puedes dar la de tus padres)	

Datos sociales

Los datos siguientes serán usados para el análisis de tus entrevistas y para tu anonimación.

Seudónimo / alias (¡NO tu nombre!)	
Fecha de nacimiento	
Sexo	
Lugares dónde has pasado tu vida	
Educación escolar (cambios de escuelas, rama de bachillerato...)	
Después del bachillerato quiero...	
Hermanos (sexo, edad y trabajo actual)	
Padres edad estado civil formación trabajo actual	
Personas que conviven en tu casa	

3. Information for participants and socio-economic questionnaire used in the socio-economic survey to expand the sample in 2012

Información para participantes

Primero quiero agradecerte que hayas rellenado este cuestionario. ¡¡¡**Muchísimas gracias!!!**

El cuestionario es un parte de mi proyecto de **tesis doctoral**. Durante los 3 o 4 años que vienen, investigaré la juventud universitaria de Lleida. Hoy me has dado tus datos para un primer análisis cuantitativo. Algunos de los participantes serán seleccionados para un seguimiento cualitativo y los volveré a contactar para realizar una entrevista personal, de carácter voluntario. Después habrá aproximadamente una entrevista personal al año, así que en total **3 entrevistas**.

¿**Has sido seleccionado**? Puedes participar también si cambias la universidad o la carrera durante el seguimiento, si te vas de Erasmus o si dejas de estudiar. Especialmente estos tiempos emocionantes son interesantes para mí, así que te agradecería mucho si me avisaras de todo aquello fuera de lo “normal” para hacer una entrevista con antelación o adicional.

Aquí encontrarás mis datos de contacto, así te podrás poner en contacto conmigo siempre que tengas alguna duda sobre el proyecto, cuando pienses que estaría bien hacer una entrevista extraordinaria, cuando cambie algo de tus datos de contacto, etc.

Tanja Strecker

Lo ideal sería poder ofrecerte una recompensa para tu participación. Intento conseguirlo de una forma u otra, aunque será más que nada simbólica.

¡Saludos y hasta pronto!

Datos de contacto

Nombres y Apellidos	
Correo electrónico	
Teléfono móvil y/o fijo	
Dirección postal (también puedes dar la de tus padres)	C/

Es voluntario participar en el seguimiento. Pero te lo agradecería muchísimo. 😊

Cuestionario

Sexo	<input type="checkbox"/> Masculino <input type="checkbox"/> Femenino	
Fecha y lugar de nacimiento	Nací el ___/___/_____ (dd/mm/aaaa) en _____	
Edad al llegar a España (Nacidos fuera de España)		
Edad al llegar a Cataluña (Nacidos fuera de Cataluña)		
Rama de bachillerato	<input type="checkbox"/> Artes <input type="checkbox"/> Ciencias y Tecnología	<input type="checkbox"/> Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales
Estudios actuales		
Tipo de convivencia (durante el curso académico)	<input type="checkbox"/> Con padres <input type="checkbox"/> Con otros parientes <input type="checkbox"/> Vivo a solas <input type="checkbox"/> En pareja	<input type="checkbox"/> Piso compartido <input type="checkbox"/> Residencia de estudiantes <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:
Trabajo	<input type="checkbox"/> Ninguno <input type="checkbox"/> Fines de semana <input type="checkbox"/> Vacaciones <input type="checkbox"/> 10 horas o menos semanales	<input type="checkbox"/> Media jornada <input type="checkbox"/> Jornada completa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:
Financiación estudios (se pueden marcar varios)	<input type="checkbox"/> Padres <input type="checkbox"/> Otros familiares <input type="checkbox"/> Trabajo	<input type="checkbox"/> Beca(s) (resueltas) <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:
¿Qué aspectos han influido tu decisión de estudiar en Lleida? (se pueden marcar varios)	<input type="checkbox"/> Carrera escogida <input type="checkbox"/> Fama de la universidad <input type="checkbox"/> Coste Económico <input type="checkbox"/> Proximidad a vivienda familiar	<input type="checkbox"/> Decisiones de amigos <input type="checkbox"/> Consejos <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:
Hermanos	<input type="checkbox"/> Masculino <input type="checkbox"/> Femenino Año de nacimiento:	<input type="checkbox"/> Masculino <input type="checkbox"/> Femenino Año de nacimiento:

<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> estudia <input type="checkbox"/> trabaja <input type="checkbox"/> otro:	<input type="checkbox"/> estudia <input type="checkbox"/> trabaja <input type="checkbox"/> otro:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Masculino <input type="checkbox"/> Femenino Año de nacimiento: <input type="checkbox"/> estudia <input type="checkbox"/> trabaja <input type="checkbox"/> otro:	<input type="checkbox"/> Masculino <input type="checkbox"/> Femenino Año de nacimiento: <input type="checkbox"/> estudia <input type="checkbox"/> trabaja <input type="checkbox"/> otro:

	(1) Padre <input type="checkbox"/> difunto	(2) Madre <input type="checkbox"/> difunta																
Fecha y lugar de nacimiento	___/___/____ (dd/mm/aaaa) En:	___/___/____ (dd/mm/aaaa) En:																
Estudios finalizados	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> ninguno <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de ...	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> ninguno <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de...																
Trabajo actual	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Sí (Marcar último trabajo) <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none; vertical-align: top;"> <input type="checkbox"/> En paro → <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilado <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> decisión propia <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: </td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none; vertical-align: top;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empresario <input type="checkbox"/> Autónomo <input type="checkbox"/> Empleado <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: </td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> En paro → <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilado <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> decisión propia <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empresario <input type="checkbox"/> Autónomo <input type="checkbox"/> Empleado <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Sí (Marcar último trabajo) <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none; vertical-align: top;"> <input type="checkbox"/> En paro → <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilada <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> decisión propia <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: </td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none; vertical-align: top;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empresaria <input type="checkbox"/> Autónoma <input type="checkbox"/> Empleada <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: </td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> En paro → <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilada <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> decisión propia <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empresaria <input type="checkbox"/> Autónoma <input type="checkbox"/> Empleada <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:												
<input type="checkbox"/> En paro → <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilado <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> decisión propia <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empresario <input type="checkbox"/> Autónomo <input type="checkbox"/> Empleado <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:																	
<input type="checkbox"/> En paro → <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilada <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> decisión propia <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empresaria <input type="checkbox"/> Autónoma <input type="checkbox"/> Empleada <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:																	
Estado civil	<input type="checkbox"/> Casado/Juntado <input type="checkbox"/> Soltero <input type="checkbox"/> Divorciado/Separado <input type="checkbox"/> Viudo	<input type="checkbox"/> Casada/Juntada <input type="checkbox"/> Soltera <input type="checkbox"/> Divorciada/Separada <input type="checkbox"/> Viuda																
Convivencia con participante	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center; padding: 5px;"> Marcar con X o indicar los años. </td> <td style="width: 30%;"></td> <td style="width: 20%; text-align: center;">Padre</td> <td style="width: 20%; text-align: center;">Madre</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Siempre</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Nunca</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Desde (año) – hasta (año)</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Marcar con X o indicar los años.		Padre	Madre	Siempre				Nunca				Desde (año) – hasta (año)				
Marcar con X o indicar los años.		Padre	Madre															
Siempre																		
Nunca																		
Desde (año) – hasta (año)																		

¿Cuál es, aproximadamente, tu nivel de gastos MENSUALES?

<input type="checkbox"/> Menos que 200€	<input type="checkbox"/> 301-400 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 501-600 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 701-800 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 901-1.000 €
<input type="checkbox"/> 201-300 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 401-500 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 601-700 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 801-900 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 1.001-1.200 €
				<input type="checkbox"/> Más de 1.200 €

¿Cuál es aproximadamente tu gasto mensual en los siguientes conceptos?

Alquiler	€	Ropa y calzado	€	Ocio	€
Residencia	€	Transporte	€	Restaurantes	€
Alimentación	€	Clases complementarias	€	Otros (especificar):	€
Material (libros, papel, copias, etc.) e informática para los estudios					€

¿Cuál es el nivel familiar de ingresos MENSUALES?(aproximadamente)

<input type="checkbox"/> Menos que 1.000 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 2.001-3.000 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 4.001-5.000 €
<input type="checkbox"/> 1.001-2.000 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 3.001-4.000 €	<input type="checkbox"/> Más de 5.000 €

Tengo en cuenta los ingresos de mis padres: sí, ambos sólo madre sólo padre no

iiiiMuchas gracias por tu participación!!!!

4. Long socio-economic questionnaire used to accompany the first-year interviews (2011-2012)

Participante²⁹⁷ Nombre: _____ Alias: _____

Correo electrónico	
Teléfono móvil y/o fijo	
Dirección postal (también puedes dar la de tus padres)	C/

Fecha y lugar de nacimiento	Nací el ___/___/____ (dd/mm/aaaa) en _____
Lugares dónde has pasado tu vida	_____ (de 0 - ___ años) _____ (de ___ - ___ años) _____ (de ___ - ___ años) _____ (de ___ - ___ años)

Si fuera necesario, sigue en otra página.

²⁹⁷ In the original version of this questionnaire, this line was included as a page heading and appeared on all 8 pages of the questionnaire.

Educación escolar (cambios de escuelas, rama de bachillerato...)	Primaria: _____ Secundaria: _____ Rama de bachillerato: _____ Cursos que repetí _____ Cambios adicionales de escuelas: _____	
Estudios actuales		
Universidad	En:	
Tipo de convivencia	<input type="checkbox"/> Con padres <input type="checkbox"/> Con otros parientes <input type="checkbox"/> Vivo a solas	<input type="checkbox"/> Piso compartido <input type="checkbox"/> Residencia de estudiantes <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:
Trabajo	<input type="checkbox"/> Ninguno <input type="checkbox"/> Fines de semana <input type="checkbox"/> 10 horas o menos semanales	<input type="checkbox"/> Media jornada <input type="checkbox"/> Vacaciones <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:

Si fuera necesario, sigue en otra página.

Hermanos	Herman@ 1	Herman@ 2	Herman@ 3
	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 padres en común <input type="checkbox"/> 1 padre común <input type="checkbox"/> diferentes padres	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 padres en común <input type="checkbox"/> 1 padre común <input type="checkbox"/> diferentes padres	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 padres en común <input type="checkbox"/> 1 padre común <input type="checkbox"/> diferentes padres
Sexo	<input type="checkbox"/> masculino <input type="checkbox"/> femenino	<input type="checkbox"/> masculino <input type="checkbox"/> femenino	<input type="checkbox"/> masculino <input type="checkbox"/> femenino
Fecha y lugar de nacimiento	En:	En:	En:

Estudios finalizados	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... <hr/>	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... <hr/>	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... <hr/>
Trabajo actual	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Emplead@ <input type="checkbox"/> Empresari@ <input type="checkbox"/> Autónom@ <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Am@ de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Emplead@ <input type="checkbox"/> Empresari@ <input type="checkbox"/> Autónom@ <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Am@ de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Emplead@ <input type="checkbox"/> Empresari@ <input type="checkbox"/> Autónom@ <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Am@ de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:
Convivencia (con participante)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No

¿Cómo te has informado sobre la Universidad antes de empezar tus estudios? (puedes marcar más de 1)

<input type="checkbox"/> Familiares <input type="checkbox"/> Amigos (universitarios) <input type="checkbox"/> Otros amigos <input type="checkbox"/> Conocidos	<input type="checkbox"/> Profesores (instituto) <input type="checkbox"/> Profesores (universidad) <input type="checkbox"/> Otro personal de la Universidad	<input type="checkbox"/> Internet <input type="checkbox"/> Día de puertas abiertas <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:
--	--	---

¿Has elegido tu carrera basado en está información?

- Sí, sobre todo en la de _____
- No, me he informado después de decidirme
- No, dependia de otros factores
 - ubicación de la universidad
 - resultado de selectividad
 - Otro:

Padres biológicos	(1) Padre		(2) Madre	
Fecha y lugar de nacimiento	En:		En:	
Estudios finalizado	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... <hr/>		Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... <hr/>	
Trabajo actual	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empleado <input type="checkbox"/> Empresario <input type="checkbox"/> Autónomo <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilado <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Amo de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:		<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empleada <input type="checkbox"/> Empresaria <input type="checkbox"/> Autónoma <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilada <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Estudiante <input type="checkbox"/> Ama de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro:	
Estado civil	<input type="checkbox"/> Soltero <input type="checkbox"/> Divorciado/Separado <input type="checkbox"/> Viudo <input type="checkbox"/> Casado con... (marcar con X) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@: <input type="checkbox"/> Juntado con ... (marcar con X) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@:		<input type="checkbox"/> Soltera <input type="checkbox"/> Divorciada/Separada <input type="checkbox"/> Viuda <input type="checkbox"/> Casada con... (marcar con X) (1) (3) (4) (5) (6) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@: <input type="checkbox"/> Juntada con ... (marcar con X) (1) (3) (4) (5) (6) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@:	
Convivencia (con participante)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No		<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No	
otros padres (adoptivos, parejas de padres, etc.)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	<input type="checkbox"/> masculino <input type="checkbox"/> femenino	<input type="checkbox"/> masculino <input type="checkbox"/> femenino	<input type="checkbox"/> masculino <input type="checkbox"/> femenino	<input type="checkbox"/> masculino <input type="checkbox"/> femenino
Relación	<input type="checkbox"/> Juntad@	<input type="checkbox"/> Juntad@	<input type="checkbox"/> Juntad@	<input type="checkbox"/> Juntad@

Si fuera necesario, sigue en otra página.

	<input type="checkbox"/> Casad@ Con...(marcar con X) (1) (2) (4) (5) (6) Desde _____ Hasta _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Casad@ Con...(marcar con X) (1) (2) (3) (5) (6) Desde _____ Hasta _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Casad@ Con...(marcar con X) (1) (2) (3) (4) (6) Desde _____ Hasta _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Casad@ Con...(marcar con X) (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) Desde _____ Hasta _____
Fecha y lugar de nacimiento	En: _____	En: _____	En: _____	En: _____
Estudios finalizados	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... _____ <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... _____	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... _____ <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... _____	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... _____ <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... _____	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... _____ <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... _____
Trabajo(s) durante la relación	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Emplead@ <input type="checkbox"/> Empresari@ <input type="checkbox"/> Autónom@ <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Am@ de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Emplead@ <input type="checkbox"/> Empresari@ <input type="checkbox"/> Autónom@ <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Am@ de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Emplead@ <input type="checkbox"/> Empresari@ <input type="checkbox"/> Autónom@ <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Am@ de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionari@ C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Emplead@ <input type="checkbox"/> Empresari@ <input type="checkbox"/> Autónom@ <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Am@ de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: _____
Convivencia (con participante)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No

Abuelos paternos	Padres de (1) (si te refieres a los padres de otro padre, indica su número de la pág. 4)	
	(A) Abuelo <input type="checkbox"/> Biológico <input type="checkbox"/> Otro	(B) Abuela <input type="checkbox"/> Biológica <input type="checkbox"/> Otra
Fecha y lugar de nacimiento	En:	En:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Vivo <input type="checkbox"/> Muerto, desde: <input type="checkbox"/> Moría antes de mi nacimiento	<input type="checkbox"/> Viva <input type="checkbox"/> Muerta, desde: <input type="checkbox"/> Moría antes de mi nacimiento
Estudios finalizados	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... <hr/>	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... <hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... <hr/>
Trabajo actual	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario A,B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empleado <input type="checkbox"/> Empresario <input type="checkbox"/> Autónomo <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilado <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Amo de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: En caso de jubilados/invalidez Trabajo anterior:	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empleada <input type="checkbox"/> Empresaria <input type="checkbox"/> Autónoma <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilada <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Ama de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: En caso de jubilados/invalidez Trabajo anterior:
Estado civil	<input type="checkbox"/> Soltero <input type="checkbox"/> Divorciado/Separado <input type="checkbox"/> Viudo <input type="checkbox"/> Casado con... (marcar con X) (B) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@: <input type="checkbox"/> Juntado con ... (marcar con X) (B) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@:	<input type="checkbox"/> Soltera <input type="checkbox"/> Divorciada/Separada <input type="checkbox"/> Viuda <input type="checkbox"/> Casada con... (marcar con X) (A) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@: <input type="checkbox"/> Juntada con ... (marcar con X) (A) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@:

Convivencia (con participante)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No
Abuelos maternos	Padres de (2) (si te refieres a los padres de otro madre, indica su número de la pág. 4)	
	(C) Abuelo <input type="checkbox"/> Biológico <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Otro	(D) Abuela <input type="checkbox"/> Biológica <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Otra
Fecha y lugar de nacimiento	En:	En:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Vivo <input type="checkbox"/> Muerto, desde: <input type="checkbox"/> Moría antes de mi nacimiento	<input type="checkbox"/> Viva <input type="checkbox"/> Muerta, desde: <input type="checkbox"/> Moría antes de mi nacimiento
Estudios finalizados	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... _____ <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... _____	Estudios... <input type="checkbox"/> elementales (14 años) <input type="checkbox"/> superiores/medios <input type="checkbox"/> universitarios de ... _____ <input type="checkbox"/> 1r ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 2n ciclo <input type="checkbox"/> 3r ciclo (doctorado) <input type="checkbox"/> FP de... _____
Trabajo actual	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionario C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empresario <input type="checkbox"/> Empleado <input type="checkbox"/> Autónomo <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilado <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Amo de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: En caso de jubilados/invalidez Trabajo anterior:	<input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria A, B <input type="checkbox"/> Funcionaria C, D, E <input type="checkbox"/> Empresaria <input type="checkbox"/> Empleada <input type="checkbox"/> Autónoma <input type="checkbox"/> En paro <input type="checkbox"/> Jubilada <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidez <input type="checkbox"/> Ama de casa <input type="checkbox"/> Otro: En caso de jubilados/invalidez Trabajo anterior:
Estado civil	<input type="checkbox"/> Soltero <input type="checkbox"/> Divorciado/Separado <input type="checkbox"/> Viudo <input type="checkbox"/> Casado con... (marcar con X) (D) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@:	<input type="checkbox"/> Soltera <input type="checkbox"/> Divorciada/Separada <input type="checkbox"/> Viuda <input type="checkbox"/> Casada con... (marcar con X) (C) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@:

	<input type="checkbox"/> Juntado con ... (marcar con X) (D) <input type="checkbox"/> otro@:	<input type="checkbox"/> Juntada con ... (marcar con X) (C) <input type="checkbox"/> otr@:
Convivencia (con participante)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Sí, desde _____ hasta _____ <input type="checkbox"/> No

Personas que también han estudiado o estudian en la Universidad: (marcar todos)

Parientes	Han estudiado	Estudian	Parientes	Han estudiado	Estudian	Otras personas:	Han estudiado	Estudian
Padres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	cuñad@s	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	novi@s o	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hermanos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	ti@s	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	amigos cercanos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Abuelos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	sobrin@s	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Primos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	parientes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____		
hermanos			más lejanos					

Parientes que poseen títulos universitarios: (incluido los anteriores)

<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> ≈ 10	<input type="checkbox"/> Ninguno
<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> ≈ 20	De ≈ _____ familiares.
<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> Más de 20	
<input type="checkbox"/> ≈ 5	<input type="checkbox"/> Todos	

¿Qué aspectos han influido tu decisión a estudiar en Lleida?
(puedes marcar más que 1)

<input type="checkbox"/> Carrera escogida	<input type="checkbox"/> Decisiones de amigos	<input type="checkbox"/> Otro:
<input type="checkbox"/> Fama de la universidad	<input type="checkbox"/> Consejos	
<input type="checkbox"/> Coste económico	<input type="checkbox"/> Proximidad a vivienda familia	

¿Cómo financias tus estudios? (puedes marcar más que 1)

<input type="checkbox"/> Padres	<input type="checkbox"/> Trabajo	<input type="checkbox"/> Otro:
<input type="checkbox"/> Otros familiares	<input type="checkbox"/> Beca(s)	

¿Cuál es, aproximadamente, tu nivel de gastos MENSUALES?

<input type="checkbox"/> Menos que 200€	<input type="checkbox"/> 501-600 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 901-1.000 €
<input type="checkbox"/> 201-300 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 601-700 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 1.001-1.200 €
<input type="checkbox"/> 301-400 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 701-800 €	<input type="checkbox"/> Más de 1.200 €
<input type="checkbox"/> 401-500 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 801-900 €	

¿Cuál es aproximadamente tu gasto mensual en los siguientes conceptos?

Alquiler	€
Residencia	€
Alimentación	€

Ropa y calzado	€
Transporte	€
Material (libros, papel, copias, etc.) e informática para los estudios	€
Ocio	€
Restaurantes	€
Clases complementarias	€
Otros (especificar):	€

¿Cuál es el nivel familiar de ingresos MENSUALES?(aproximadamente)

<input type="checkbox"/> Menos que 1.000 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 2.001-3.000 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 4.001-5.000 €
<input type="checkbox"/> 1.001-2.000 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 3.001-4.000 €	<input type="checkbox"/> Más de 5.000 €

**¿Cuáles dirías que son los dos puntos fuertes de tu Universidad?
Quiere decir, qué dirías que es lo mejor de esta universidad?**

¿Y cuáles son los dos puntos débiles?

Si pudieses llevar un máximo de 3 personas a una isla desierta, a quién te llevarías? (Tienen que ser personas que realmente conozcas o que has conocido, pueden estar muerta)

Quién son esta gente?

Comentarios:

iiiiMuchas gracias por tu participación!!!!

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5. Schema of interviews and duration

N°	Participant	Int1	Minutes	Int2	Minutes	Int3	Minutes	Int4_1	Minutes	Int4_2		Minutes	Int 5	Minutes
1	Mabe	00:31:31-6	32	01:07:22-5	68									
2	Cristóbal	00:35:37-7	36											
3	Estanteria	00:34:39-2	35	00:26:02-7	26	1:08:52	69							
4	Nic	00:50:48-5	51	01:05:52-8	66	2:14:55	135	1:03:43	64	1:52:47		112	1:34:40	94*
5	Nadia	00:38:56-1	39	00:29:24-5	30	1:28:36	89			1:00:08		60	0:54:23	54
6	Libro	00:23:12-1	24	1:39:08	100									
7	Maduixa*	00:21:12-9	22	00:34:44-5	35	1:11:03	71			1:25:21		85	1:51:02	111
7	Maduixa*	-		00:34:24-9	35									
8	Skone	00:57:18-0	58	00:53:36-8	54	1:38:29	99			0:57:28	0:35:14	93	1:47:00	107
9	N.	01:06:28-5	67	01:07:40-0	68	2:15:54	136	1:26:00	86				2:49:51	170
10	Koala	00:51:27-1	52	1:20:42	81	1:48:51	109			1:55:48	0:00:53	116	1:40:43	100
11	Floreta	00:41:12-8	42	0:38:20	39	1:40:26	101			1:21:58		82	2:03:06	123
12	Willy	00:21:04-1	22	0:45:57	46	1:06:02	66			0:38:00		38	0:21:37	77
	Willy	-											0:55:19	
13	Cara	00:31:58-5	32	00:30:27-8	31	1:00:29	61			0:40:09		40	0:45:59	45
14	Jab	00:33:42-2	34											
15	Sara	00:17:56-9	18	1:04:07	65	1:11:15	72			0:42:53		43	1:03:02	63
16	Ariel	00:27:04-5	28	0:47:56	48	1:36:56	97			0:59:26		60		
17	Piruleta	00:24:48-9	25	1:13:57	74	1:22:42	83						1:11:18	71
18	Irina	00:27:32-6	28	00:43:35-3	44	1:39:42	100	1:07:21	68	0:53:45		53	1:19:54	80
19	Xenia	00:47:51-5	48	1:02:14	63	1:06:36	67			0:52:14		52	0:58:17	58
20	Peter	00:25:59-2	26	1:03:11	64	1:21:46	82			0:59:09		59	0:58:00	58
21	Andrés	00:20:17-2	21	00:35:20-0	36	1:24:42	85			1:37:05		97	0:43:33	43
21	Andrés	00:05:22-1	6											
22	Dylan					2:38:44	159			1:21:08		81	0:43:59	
22	Dylan					0:56:50	57						0:49:48	94
23	Margarita					1:04:03	64			1:06:32		67	1:28:13	88
	Total Min		746		1073		1802		350			1138		1436

*Comment: The audio is longer, but certain interruptions are not considered necessary for the transcription.

6. Interview Guidelines²⁹⁸

6.1. Interview 1

- 1) Puedes contar que ha pasado en tu vida desde nuestro grupo de discusión?
 - a. Qué estás estudiando?
 - b. Cómo has llegado a estudiar eso? (selectividad, lugar, decision...)
 - c. Dónde vives?
- 2) Qué ha pasado durante las primeras semanas en la universidad? (novatadas, ...)
- 3) Cómo pasas el día desde la mañana hasta la noche?
 - a. Durante la semana?
 - b. Y el fin de semana?
- 4) Es cómo te lo habías imaginado?
- 5) Qué diferencias ves en comparación con el instituto?
- 6) Cómo te ves a tu mismo? (maduro?)
- 7) Crees que has cambiado al empezar estudios universitarios?
- 8) Qué relación tienes con tus compañeros de estudios?
 - a. Qué hacéis juntos?
 - b. De qué habláis?
 - c. Cuenta de uno de vuestros encuentros.
- 9) Qué relación tienes con los profesores?
- 10) Tienes amigos fuera de la universidad?
 - a. Qué hacéis juntos?
 - b. De qué habláis?
 - c. Cuenta de uno de vuestros encuentros.
- 11) Con quién hablas de tus problemas?
- 12) Has tenido algún problema relacionado con la universidad?
 - a. Hay algo que se podría mejorar? Qué y cómo?
 - b. Te has sentido insegur@ alguna vez? Describe la situación.
- 13) Mirando hacia delante: Qué pasará durante los próximos años?
 - a. Qué planes tienes?
 - b. Cómo ves tu carrera?
- 14) Cómo te sientes cuándo piensas en el futuro?
- 15) Qué más te gustaría comentar?
 - a. Qué te preocupa? Qué te pasa por la cabeza?

6.2.1. Interview 2 (second-year students)

1. Que ha passat després de la nostra entrevista el curs passat?
2. Com veus el primer any a la universitat?
 - a. Ha sigut com t'ho imaginaves?
 - b. Hi ha una cosa que faries diferent si podries tornar darrere?
 - c. T'has trobat algun problema?
 - d. Que es podria millorar?
 - e. Que ha sigut bé, que ha sigut mal?
3. Que has fet durant l'estiu?
4. Com ha anat el inici del segon any?
 - a. És diferent al primer?
 - b. Et sentis diferent?
 - c. Penses que has canviat?

²⁹⁸ All interview guidelines were printed in a format aimed at easy reading throughout the interview (big letters etc.). In order to not prolong this annex unnecessarily, I changed the format and omitted free spaces between lines and pages.

- d. Com va amb els companys d'estudis?
- e. Com amb els amics de casa?
- f. Com es la relació amb els professors?
- 5. Que fas ara des d'el matí fins a la nit?
 - a. I el cap de setmana?
 - b. Participes en alguna organització per a estudiants?
 - c. Treballes?
- 6. Penses que existeix un estil de vida universitari? Com és?
- 7. Que plans tens per aquest curs?
- 8. Que plans tens pel futur en general?
- 9. Que et preocupa?
 - a. La crisi econòmica?

6.2.2. Interview 2 (degree course change)

- 1. On estudies ara i que? Quan vas canviar?
- 2. Que ha passat després de la nostra primera entrevista fins ara?
 - a. Que ha sigut bé, que ha sigut mal?
 - b. Has tingut algun problema o alguna dificultat mentre el curs?
 - c. Faries alguna cosa diferent si podries tornar darrere?
 - d. Quan vas prendre la decisió de fer el canvi?
 - e. Com et vas decidir?
- 3. Que havies d'organitzar? Explica-ho.
- 4. Com ha anat el inici a la nova universitat/carrera? Pots contar una mica que vas fer els primers dies etc.
 - a. Va ser com t'ho havies imaginat?
 - b. Et sentis diferent?
 - c. Penses que has canviat?
 - d. Com va amb els companys d'estudis?
 - e. Com amb els amics de casa?
 - f. Com es la relació amb els professors?
- 5. Com et passis ara el dia des d'el matí fins a la nit? (cap de setmana?) (on vius?)
- 6. Que t'esperes del futur en aquesta nova carrera/universitat? Que penses serà igual, que serà diferent?
- 7. Com et veus al futur?
- 8. Que et preocupa?
 - a. La crisi econòmica?

6.3.1. Interview 3 (Spanish)

- 1. ¿Qué ha pasado desde nuestra última entrevista? ¿Hay algo que te gustaría comentar especialmente?
 - a. ¿Sigues con la misma carrera? ¿Cómo la ves?
 - b. ¿Cómo pasas un día entre semana, desde la mañana hasta la noche?
 - c. ¿Y el fin de semana?
 - d. ¿Trabajas? ¿Participas en asociaciones o tomas cursos de algo aparte de tu carrera? ¿Has hecho prácticas profesionales?
 - e. ¿Recibes una beca?
- 2. Esta vez me gustaría hablar más del tiempo libre. ¿Qué haces en tu tiempo libre?
 - a. ¿Ha cambiado desde que empezaste la universidad?

- b. ¿Qué harías si tuvieras más tiempo libre?
- c. ¿Tienes alguna afición creativa? (música, arte, diseño...)
- d. ¿Qué papel juega el ordenador/internet en tu tiempo libre?
 - i. ¿Para qué lo usas?
 - ii. ¿Formas parte de alguna red social? ¿De cuál?
 - iii. ¿Whats app etc.?
- 3. Otro tema de actualidad: Europa y el mundo
 - a. ¿Qué es para ti Europa? ¿Qué importancia tiene en tu vida?
 - b. ¿Qué diferencia Europa del resto del mundo? ¿O es igual?
 - c. ¿Si pudieses vivir en cualquier lugar del mundo, dónde estarías? ¿Qué harías?
 - d. Muchos participantes mencionan pensar en emigrar a otro país. ¿También te gustaría a ti? ¿Es un sueño o una necesidad?
- 4. En las últimas entrevistas hablamos a veces de amistades. Ahora mismo, ¿quién son tus amigos más importantes?
 - a. ¿Qué les diferencia de los conocidos? ¿Cuáles son las características de un amigo?
 - b. ¿Cómo los has conocido?
 - c. ¿Tienes una mejor amiga/un mejor amigo?
 - d. ¿Cómo se ha desarrollado vuestra amistad?
 - e. ¿Qué pasó con tus amigos del instituto/del pueblo/del país de origen?
 - f. ¿Cómo crees que puede evolucionar vuestra amistad en el futuro?
 - g. ¿Tienes pareja? Cuando y cómo la conociste?
- 5. Hablando del presente:
 - a. ¿Cómo ves la actual situación de crisis económica?
 - b. ¿Cómo te ha afectado personalmente o a tu entorno familiar o de amistades?
 - c. ¿Crees que puede afectar a tu acceso al mundo del trabajo?
 - d. ¿Has participado o participas en algún tipo de movimiento social?
- 6. Hablando del futuro:
 - a. ¿Qué crees que puede pasar en los próximos años?
 - i. ¿Dónde te ves dentro de 5 años? ¿Y dentro de 10? (Planes vs. sueños)
 - b. ¿Piensas mucho en el futuro o no tanto? ¿Qué es mucho/poco?
 - c. ¿Cómo te sientes cuando piensas en el futuro?
- 7. Carrera actual.
 - a. ¿Ahora que ya llevas un tiempo haciendo tu carrera, cómo la ves?
 - b. ¿Qué se podría mejorar?
 - c. ¿Si pudieses volver atrás, harías algo diferente?
 - d. ¿Has pensado en algún momento en cambiarte de carrera o dejar la universidad completamente?
 - i. ¿Qué había pasado?
 - ii. ¿Qué te hizo decidir quedarte?
 - e. ¿Conoces a compañeros que dejaron sus estudios? Sabes que les pasó?
 - f. Si un amigo te comentara no saber si seguir con sus estudios o no. ¿Qué le aconsejarías?
- 8. ¿Qué otros temas te gustaría comentar?

6.3.2. Interview 3 (Catalan)

- 1. Què ha passat des de nostra última entrevista? Hi ha alguna cosa que t'agradaria comentar expressament?
 - a. Segueixes amb la mateixa carrera? Com la veus?
 - b. Com et passes un dia de la setmana, des del matí fins a la nit?
 - c. I el cap de setmana?

- d. Treballes? Participes en associacions o prens cursos de alguna cosa apart de la teva carrera?
Has fet uns pràctiques professionals?
- e. Reps una beca?
2. Aquesta vegada m'agradaria parlar més del temps lliure. Què fas en el teu temps lliure?
 - a. Ha canviat des que vas començar la universitat?
 - b. Què faries si tinguessis més temps lliure?
 - c. Tens alguna afició creativa? (música, art, disseny...)
 - d. Quin paper juga l'ordinador/Internet al teu temps lliure?
 - i. Per a què l'utilitzes?
 - ii. Participes a alguna xarxa social? Quina?
 - iii. Whats app etc.?
3. Un altre tema d'actualitat: Europa i el món
 - a. Què és per a tu Europa? Quina importància te a la teva vida?
 - b. Què diferencia Europa de la resta del món? O és igual?
 - c. Si poguessis viure a qualsevol lloc del món, on estaries? Què faries?
 - d. Molts participants mencionen pensar en emigrar a un altre país. També t'agradaria? És un somni o una necessitat?
4. En les últimes entrevistes vam parlar a vegades d'amistats. Ara mateix, quins són els teus amics més importants?
 - a. Què els diferencia dels coneguts? Quines són les característiques d'un amic?
 - b. Com els vas conèixer?
 - c. Tens un millor amic/una millor amiga?
 - d. Com s'ha desenvolupat la vostra amistat?
 - e. Què va passar amb els teus amics del institut/del poble/ del país d'origen?
 - f. Com creus que pot evolucionar vostra amistat al futur?
 - g. Tens parella? Quan i com la vas conèixer?
5. Parlant del present:
 - a. Com veus la situació actual de la crisi econòmica?
 - b. Com t'ha afectat personalment o al teu entorn familiar o d'amistats?
 - c. Creus que pot afectar al teu accés al món laboral?
 - d. Has participat o participes en algun tipus de moviment social?
6. Parlant del futur:
 - a. Què creus que pot passar als pròxims anys?
 - i. On et veus dins de 5 anys? I dins de 10? (plans vs. somnis)
 - b. Penses molt en el futur o no tant? Que és molt/poc?
 - c. Com et sents quan penses en el futur?
7. Carrera actual.
 - a. Ara que ja portes un temps fent la teva carrera, com la veus?
 - b. Què es podria millorar?
 - c. Si poguessis tornar enrere, faries alguna cosa diferent?
 - d. Has pensat en algun moment en canviar-te de carrera o deixar la universitat completament?
 - i. Què havia passat?
 - ii. Què et va fer decidir quedar-te?
 - e. Coneixes a companys que van deixar els seus estudis? Saps que els va passar?
 - f. Si un amic et comentés no saber si seguir amb els estudis o no. Què li aconsellaries?
8. Quins altres temes t'agradaria comentar?

6.3.3. Interview 3 (First interview Margarita)

- 1) Dónde vives? Dónde vivias en los últimos años?

- 2) Cómo has llegado a querer estudiar INEFC? (selectividad, lugar, decision...)
 - a. Es cómo te lo habías imaginado?
 - b. Qué relación tienes con los profesores?
- 3) Cómo pasas el día desde la mañana hasta la noche?
 - a. Durante la semana?
 - b. Y el fin de semana?
 - c. Durante el verano?
 - d. Trabajas? Participas en asociaciones o tomas cursos de algo aparte de tu carrera? Has hecho unas prácticas profesionales?
 - e. Recibes una beca?
- 4) Qué relación tienes con tus compañeros de estudios?
 - a. Qué hacéis juntos?
 - b. De qué habláis?
 - c. Cuenta de uno de vuestros encuentros.
- 5) Tienes amigos fuera de la universidad?
 - a. Qué hacéis juntos?
 - b. De qué habláis?
 - c. Cuenta de uno de vuestros encuentros.
- 6) Con quién hablas de tus problemas?
- 7) Ahora mismo, quién son tus amigos más importantes?
 - a. Qué les diferencia de los conocidos? Cuáles son las características de un amigo?
 - b. Tienes una mejor amiga/un mejor amigo?
 - c. Cómo se ha desarrollado vuestra amistad?
 - d. Qué pasó con tus amigos del instituto/del pueblo?
 - e. Cómo crees que puede evolucionar vuestra amistad en el futuro?
 - f. Tienes pareja? Cuándo y cómo la conociste?
- 8) Hablando del presente:
 - a. Cómo ves la situación actual de crisis económica?
 - b. Cómo te ha afectado personalmente o a tu entorno familiar o de amistades?
 - c. Crees que puede afectar a tu acceso al mundo del trabajo?
 - d. Has participado o participas en algún tipo de movimiento social?
- 9) Hablando del futuro:
 - a. Qué planes tienes para este curso? Para el futuro en general?
 - b. Dónde te ves dentro de 5 años? Y dentro de 10?
 - c. Piensas mucho en el futuro o no tanto? Qué es mucho/poco?
 - d. Cómo te sientes cuando piensas en el futuro?
- 10) Carrera actual.
 - a. Ahora que ya llevas un tiempo haciendo tu carrera, cómo la ves?
 - b. Qué se podría mejorar?
 - c. Has tenido algún problema relacionado con la universidad?
 - a. Te has sentido insegur@ alguna vez? Describe la situación.
 - b. Si podrías volver atrás, harías algo diferente?
 - c. Has pensado en algún momento en cambiarte de carrera o dejar la universidad completamente?
 - i. Qué había pasado?
 - ii. Qué te hizo decidir quedarte?
 - d. Conoces a compañeros que dejaron sus estudios? Sabes que les pasó?
 - e. Si un amigo te comentara no saber si seguir con sus estudios o no. Qué le aconsejarías?
 - f. Piensas que existe un estilo de vida universitario? Cómo es?
- 11) Qué más te gustaría comentar?

- a. Qué te preocupa? Qué te pasa por la cabeza?

6.4. Interview 4

- 1) Qué ha pasado desde nuestra última entrevista? Hay algo que te gustaría comentar especialmente?
 - a. Sigues con la misma carrera? Tienes algun trabajo aparte?
 - b. Cómo te pasas el día desde la mañana hasta la noche? (y el fin de semana?)
- 2) Cómo ves tus estudiós ahora, que no falta tanto para acabar-los?
 - a. Qué estaba bien? Qué estaba mal?
 - b. Cómo se podría mejorar? Te has encontrado con algun problema en algun momento?
 - c. Cómo es la relación con los profesores? Cómo es con los otros estudiantes?
 - d. Sabiendo lo que sabes ahora, harías alguna cosa diferente si pudieses volver atrás?
 - e. Qué recomendaciones darías a los estudiantes que estan pensando en escoger tu carrera?
- 3) Quienes son las persones más importantes para tí en tu red social?
 - a. Gente de la Universidad?
 - b. Gente de la escuela?
 - c. Ha cambiado vuestra relación en los últimos años?
 - d. Cómo se irá desarrollando en los próximos años?
- 4) Cómo te ves a tí mism@? (madur@?)
 - a. Piensas que has cambiado durante estos años en la universidad?
- 5) Que pasará durante los próximos años?
 - a. Qué harás después de la carrera?
 - b. Donde te ves dentro de 10 años? Qué estarás haciendo? Dónde estarás viviendo?
 - c. Cómo ves las posibilidades de conseguir este sueño? Tienes un Plan B?
- 6) Qué otras cosas quisieras comentar? Qué preguntarías tu si harías esta entrevista?

- 1) Qué ha pasado desde nuestra última entrevista? Hay algo que te gustaría comentar especialmente?
- 2) Cómo te pasas el día desde la mañana hasta la noche? (y el fin de semana?)
- 3) Quienes son las persones más importantes para tí en tu red social?
 - a. Gente de la Universidad?
 - b. Gente de la escuela?
 - c. Ha cambiado vuestra relación en los últimos años?
 - d. Cómo se irá desarrollando en los próximos años?
- 4) Cómo te ves a tí mism@? (madur@?)
- 5) Cómo piensas ahora sobre tu tiempo en la universidad?
 - a. Quisieras volver a estudiar ahí?
- 6) Que pasará durante los próximos años?
 - a. Donde te ves dentro de 10 años? Qué estarás haciendo? Dónde estarás viviendo?
 - b. Cómo ves las posibilidades de conseguir este sueño? Tienes un Plan B?
- 7) Qué otras cosas quisieras comentar? Qué preguntarías tu si harías esta entrevista?

- 1) Què ha passat des de la nostra última entrevista? Hi ha quelcom que t'agradaria comentar especialment?
 - a. Segueixes fent la mateixa carrera? Tens alguna feina apart?
 - b. Com et passes el dia des del matí fins a la nit? (i el cap de setmana?)
- 2) Com veus els teus estudis ara, que ja no falta tant per acabar-los?
 - a. Què estava bé, què estava malament?

- b. Què es podria millorar? T'has trobat algun problema en algun moment?
 - c. Com és la relació amb els professors, com amb els altres estudiants?
 - d. Sabent el que saps ara, faries alguna cosa diferent si podries tornar enrere?
 - e. Què recomanacions donaries a estudiants que estan pensant en triar la teva carrera?
- 3) Qui són ara per tu les persones més importants a la teva xarxa social?
- f. Gent de la universitat?
 - g. Gent de l'escola?
 - h. Ha canviat la vostra relació als últims anys?
 - i. Com s'anirà desenvolupament als pròxims anys?
- 4) Com et veus a tu mateixa? (madura?)
- j. Penses que has canviat durant aquests anys a la universitat?
- 5) Què passarà durant els pròxims anys?
- k. Què faràs després de la carrera?
 - l. On et veus dins de 10 anys? Què estaràs fent? On estaràs vivint?
 - m. Com veus les possibilitats d'aconseguir aquest somni? Tens un pla B?
- 6) Quines altres coses voldries comentar? Què preguntaries tu si faries aquesta entrevista?

6.5. Interview 4_1 (N., No and Inna before their respective stays abroad)

Pots explicar una mica on t'aniràs, per quants mesos etc.?

- Aniràs sols o hi haurà gent que ja coneixes? (Qui...?)

Que faràs allí?

- estudiar, treballar, cursos d'idiomes, viatjar...?
- què faràs els primers dies després d'arribar?
- Què faràs des del matí fins a la nit? I els caps de setmana?

Quines expectatives tens per la teva estada?

- aprendre, veure, viure,... CV
- Com és la vida d'Erasmus? La viuràs?

Com t'imagines la vida a?

- Com t'imagines la gent?
- Què tens ganes de fer/veure expressament?
- Haurà coses que trobaràs a faltar d'aquí? Quines?
- Tens alguna preocupació? Què no t'agradaria que et passés?

Com t'has organitzat l'estada?

- Demanar beques, buscar informació ...
- Quan has començat a plantejar-te aquesta estada?
- Et recordes com et va sorgir la idea?
- Com vas triar el país/el lloc?
- Estàs realitzant la teva idea inicial o han canviat alguns aspectes? (país, duració...)
- Quan has començat a fer els tràmits administratius?
- Havia algú que t'ha ajudat expressament a preparar l'estada? Què t'ha fet?

Què et falta per organitzar? Com ho faràs?

Et prepares d'alguna forma per l'estada?

- idiomes, informar-te, contactar gent d'allí o gent que ja hi ha estat...

T'has trobat amb algun problema a l'hora d'organitzar aquesta estada?

- Quins problemes?
- Com els has solucionat?
- Hi ha aspectes que es podrien millorar?
- Sabent el que saps ara, faries alguna cosa diferent?

Quina recomanació donaries a altres estudiants que també volen marxar-se?

Com creus que tornaràs després de l'estada?

- Creus que hauràs canviat?

Tens alguna cosa més que t'agradaria comentar respecte a l'estada o als teus estudis en general?

6.6. Interview 4_2 (Fina²⁹⁹ after her stay abroad)

(1) Cómo ha ido tu estancia en ...?

- Ha sido cómo te lo habías imaginado?
- Has podido hacer todo lo que te habías planteado?
- Cómo te has pasado ahí el día desde la mañana hasta la noche? (fin de semana?)
- Qué ha sido bueno? Qué ha sido malo?
- Trabajo? Gente?
- Crees que has cambiado durante la estancia?

(2) Te has encontrado algún problema relacionado con tu estancia?

- Antes de ir, mientras la estancia y/o después de volver?

(3) Harías algo diferente si podrías volver atrás?

(4) Qué recomendarías a otro estudiante que está pensando en irse allá?

(5) Qué pasará ahora, después de tu vuelta?

- Ya tienes planes concretos para el verano/el curso que viene? Cuáles son?
- Qué desearías hacer a partir de ahora?
- Dónde te ves en un año? Dónde en 5? Dónde en 10? (dónde estarás viviendo? Qué estarás haciendo?)

(6) Ya tienes acabado el grado o te falta hacer algo más?

- Cómo te lo harás?
- Cómo ves a tu grado, ahora en la retrospectiva?
- Qué ha estado bien? Qué ha estado mal?
- Recuerdas un momento (o varios) concretos que fue muy bueno/malo?
- Qué se podría mejorar?
- Cómo es ahora tu relación con tus compañeros?
- Y cómo es ahora tu relación con tus profesores?
- Sabiendo lo que sabes ahora, harías algo diferente si pudieses volver atrás?
- Qué recomendaciones darías a estudiantes que están pensando en escoger tu carrera?
- Conoces a estudiantes de cursos inferiores de tu grado? Cómo los ves?

(7) Quiénes son las personas más importantes para ti en tu red social? (Familia, amigos de la escuela/uni...)

- Ha cambiado vuestra relación en los últimos años?
- Cómo se irá desarrollando en los próximos años?

(8) Cómo te ves a tu misma?

²⁹⁹ Nic returned so early from his stay in Japan that he participated in the fourth interview wave the participants who had not stayed abroad took part in. N. returned so late from her year in Germany that we could not meet before my maternity leave, so her reflections on her stay were included into Interview 5.

- a. Crees que has cambiado en estos años en la universidad?
- (9) Qué otras cosas quisieras comentar? Qué preguntarías tu si hicieras esta entrevista?

6.7. Interview 5

Grado acabado

- 1) Qué ha pasado desde nuestra última entrevista? Hay algo que te gustaría comentar especialmente?
 - a. Qué estás haciendo en la actualidad? (máster, trabajo, ...)
 - b. Cómo te pasas el día desde la mañana hasta la noche? (y el fin de semana?)
- 2) Cómo ves tu grado, ahora en la retrospectiva?
 - a. Qué ha estado bien? Qué ha estado mal?
 - b. Recuerdas un momento (o varios) concretos que fue muy bueno/malo?
 - c. Qué se podría mejorar?
 - d. Cómo es ahora tu relación con tus compañeros?
 - e. Y cómo es ahora tu relación con tus profesores?
 - f. Sabiendo lo que sabes ahora, harías algo diferente si pudieses volver atrás?
 - g. Qué recomendaciones darías a estudiantes que están pensando en escoger tu carrera?
 - h. Conoces a estudiantes de cursos inferiores de tu grado? Cómo los ves?
- 3) Dónde te ves en un año? Dónde en 5? Dónde en 10? (dónde estarás viviendo? Qué estarás haciendo?)
- 4) Quiénes son las personas más importantes para ti en tu red social? (Familia, amigos de la escuela/universidad...)
 - a. Ha cambiado vuestra relación en los últimos años?
 - b. Cómo se irá desarrollando en los próximos años?
- 5) Cómo te ves a tu mism@?
 - a. Crees que has cambiado en estos años en la universidad?
- 6) Qué otras cosas querrías comentar? Qué preguntarías tu si hicieras esta entrevista?

Grau acabat

- 1) Què ha passat des de la nostra última entrevista? Hi ha quelcom que t'agradaria comentar expressament?
 - a. Què estàs fent en l'actualitat? (màster, feina, ...)
 - b. Com et passes el dia des del matí fins a la nit? (i el cap de setmana?)
- 2) Com veus el teu grau, ara en la retrospectiva?
 - a. Què ha estat bé? Què ha estat malament?
 - b. Recordes un moment (o diversos) concret que va ser molt bo/dolent?
 - c. Què es podria millorar?
 - d. Com és ara la teva relació amb els companys?
 - e. I com és ara la teva relació amb els teus professors?
 - f. Sabent el que saps ara, faries alguna cosa diferent si poguessis tornar enrere?
 - g. Quines recomanacions donaries a estudiants que estan pensant a escollir el teu grau?
 - h. Coneixes a estudiants de cursos inferiors del teu grau? Com els veus?
- 3) On et veus en un any? On en 5? On en 10? (on estaràs vivint? Què estaràs fent?)

- 4) Quines són les persones més importants per a tu a la teva xarxa social? (Família, amics de l'escola/uni...)
 - a. Ha canviat la vostra relació en els últims anys?
 - b. Com s'anirà desenvolupant en els pròxims anys?
- 5) Com et veus a tu mateix/a?
 - a. Creus que has canviat en aquests anys a la universitat?
- 6) Quines altres coses voldries comentar? Què preguntaries tu si fessis aquesta entrevista?

Último año de grado

- 1) Qué ha pasado desde nuestra última entrevista? Hay algo que te gustaría comentar especialmente?
 - a. Sigues con la misma carrera? Tienes algún trabajo aparte?
 - b. Cómo te pasas el día desde la mañana hasta la noche? (y el fin de semana?)
- 2) Cómo ves tus estudios ahora, que no falta tanto para acabar-los?
 - a. Qué estaba bien? Qué estaba mal?
 - b. Cómo se podría mejorar? Te has encontrado con algún problema en algún momento?
 - c. Cómo es la relación con los profesores? Cómo es con los otros estudiantes?
 - d. Sabiendo lo que sabes ahora, harías algo diferente si pudieses volver atrás?
 - e. Qué recomendaciones darías a los estudiantes que están pensando en escoger tu carrera?
- 3) Quiénes son las personas más importantes para ti en tu red social? (Familia, amigos de la escuela/uni...)
 - a. Ha cambiado vuestra relación en los últimos años?
 - b. Cómo se irá desarrollando en los próximos años?
- 4) Cómo te ves a ti mism@?
 - a. Piensas que has cambiado durante estos años en la universidad?
- 5) Que pasará durante los próximos años?
 - a. Qué harás después de la carrera?
 - b. Donde te ves dentro de 10 años? Qué estarás haciendo? Dónde estarás viviendo?
 - c. Cómo ves las posibilidades de conseguir este sueño? Tienes un Plan B?
- 6) Qué otras cosas quisieras comentar? Qué preguntarías si hicieras esta entrevista?

Últim any de grau

- 1) Què ha passat des de la nostra última entrevista? Hi ha quelcom que t'agradaria comentar especialment?
 - a. Segueixes fent la mateixa carrera? Tens alguna feina apart?
 - b. Com et passes el dia des del matí fins a la nit? (i el cap de setmana?)
- 2) Com veus els teus estudis ara, que ja no falta tant per acabar-los?
 - a. Què estava bé, què estava malament?
 - b. Què es podria millorar? T'has trobat algun problema en algun moment?
 - c. Com és la relació amb els professors, i amb els estudiants?
 - d. Sabent el que saps ara, faries alguna cosa diferent si poguessis tornar enrere?
 - e. Quines recomanacions donaries a estudiants que estan pensant en triar la teva carrera?
- 3) Quines són les persones més importants per a tu a la teva xarxa social? (Família, amics de l'escola/uni...)
 - a. Ha canviat la vostra relació en els últims anys?
 - b. Com s'anirà desenvolupant en els pròxims anys?
- 4) Com et veus a tu mateix/a?

- a. Penses que has canviat durant aquests anys a la universitat?
- 5) Què passarà durant els pròxims anys?
 - a. Què faràs després de la carrera?
 - b. On et veus dins de 10 anys? Què estaràs fent? On estaràs vivint?
 - c. Com veus les possibilitats d'aconseguir aquest somni? Tens un pla B?
- 6) Quines altres coses voldries comentar? Què preguntaries tu si fessis aquesta entrevista?

Grado abandonado

- 1) Qué ha pasado desde nuestra última entrevista? Hay algo que te gustaría comentar especialmente?
- 2) Cómo te pasas el día desde la mañana hasta la noche? (y el fin de semana?)
- 3) Quienes son las personas más importantes para ti en tu red social?
 - a. Gente de la Universidad?
 - b. Gente de la escuela?
 - c. Ha cambiado vuestra relación en los últimos años?
 - d. Cómo se irá desarrollando en los próximos años?
- 4) Cómo te ves a tí mism@?
- 5) Cómo piensas ahora sobre tu tiempo en la universidad?
 - e. Querrías volver a estudiar ahí?
- 6) Que pasará durante los próximos años?
 - f. Donde te ves dentro de 10 años? Qué estarás haciendo? Dónde estarás viviendo?
 - g. Cómo ves las posibilidades de conseguir este sueño? Tienes un Plan B?
- 7) Qué otras cosas querrías comentar? Qué preguntaría tu si hicieras esta entrevista?

7. *Activity Diary*

DIARI D'ACTIVITATS

Nom (pseudònim)	<input type="text"/>
Edat	<input type="text"/>
Activitat	Estudia <input type="checkbox"/> Treballa <input type="checkbox"/> Estudia i treballa <input type="checkbox"/> Treballa i estudia <input type="checkbox"/> Busca treball <input type="checkbox"/> Altres <input type="checkbox"/>
Estudis que realitza	<input type="text"/>
Estat civil	Solter <input type="checkbox"/> Casat <input type="checkbox"/> Separat/Divorciat <input type="checkbox"/> Amb fills <input type="checkbox"/>
Lloc de naixement	<input type="text"/>
Lloc de residència	Leida <input type="checkbox"/> Barcelona <input type="checkbox"/> Sabadell <input type="checkbox"/> Cerdanyola <input type="checkbox"/> Altres: _____ <input type="checkbox"/>
Forma de residència	Amb els pares <input type="checkbox"/> Amb altres adults <input type="checkbox"/> Pis d'estudiants <input type="checkbox"/> Pis propi <input type="checkbox"/> Residència/ Alberg <input type="checkbox"/> Altres <input type="checkbox"/>
Classe social subjectiva	Baixa <input type="checkbox"/> Mitja-Baixa <input type="checkbox"/> Mitja <input type="checkbox"/> Mitja-Alta <input type="checkbox"/> Alta <input type="checkbox"/>

INSTRUCCIONS

- L'objectiu d'aquest treball és analitzar la distribució del temps quotidià per part dels joves universitaris. El resultat són completament anònims.
- Cal omplir les caselles cada 15 minuts. En cas que sigui impossible fer-ho, cal fer-ho el més aviat possible. Aquesta tasca que a priori pot semblar bastant feixuga, per l'experiència de gent que ha omplert els quaderns es torna molt fàcil i força interessant per a qui ho fa, perquè després li ajuda a interpretar el que fa amb el seu temps. A més no sempre cal fer-ho cada 15 minuts, per exemple si al matí s'està 4 hores a classe amb les diferents interrupcions per anar a fer un cafè o el que sigui, es pot omplir perfectament al migdia. I si a la nit un està al bar de copes, no cal que porti el quadern a sobre, després a l'arribar a casa pot omplir-ho, però anotant-ho tot.
- Cal apuntar totes aquelles activitats per petites que siguin: menjar un "bocata", descansar, no fer res, etc. Descriure l'activitat (¿Què feia?) de manera resumida: estudiar, llegir, sortir de copes, desplaçar-me al centre de treball, etc., això permetrà després sumar les activitats coincidents. Descriure amb qui s'està fent l'activitat: pares, amics, veïns, companys de classe, desconeguts en un bar, etc. Explicar el tipus de lloc on s'està: bar, carrer, pis d'estudiants, pis propi, etc.
- Les paraules claus cal inventar-les un mateix, tenen que expressar en pocs termes: sentiments, estat d'ànim, sugerències de la situació, opinions, que subjectivament comporten l'activitat que es fa i la situació. Ajuden a descriure de manera immediata l'activitat i el seu impacte o resultat.
- Al final de la setmana es pot fer un comentari personal sobre com ha anat l'experiència i quina valoració es fa de la distribució del temps que en surt.
- Un cop realitzat el Diari es donarà una Taula amb un seguit de codis per tal que es pugui quantificar la distribució diària de les activitats (omplint la taula de codis).

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DIA SETMANA:

DATA:

300

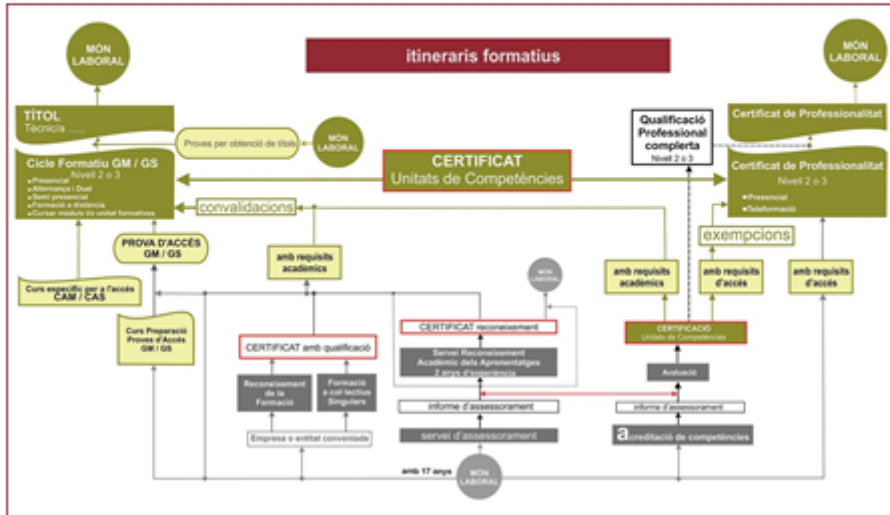
HORA	¿QUÈ FEIA?	¿AMB QUI?	¿ON?	PARAULA CLAU	CODI		
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³⁰⁰ In order to not unnecessarily add pages to this Annex, I only add a few lines of the chart the participants had to fill in throughout the whole week.

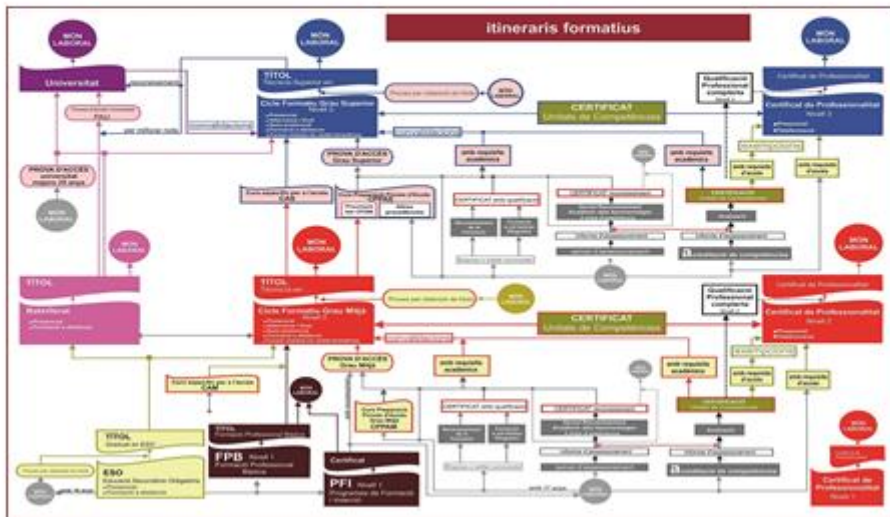
8. *Additional Information*

8.1. *Itineraris formatius 1 and 2*

Itineraris formatius 1:



Itineraris formatius 2:



These slides appeared in a power point presentation given by representatives of “Noves Oportunitats”, an initiative to offer formation to young people without a secondary education title formation courses that are eligible to receive subventions in the framework by the EU Youth Guarantee, in a meeting about the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Lleida on the 16th of June 2016 in Lleida. Rather than offering insights into these itineraries, the aim of this annex is to transmit the labyrinth of alternatives that make it difficult to assess parent educational levels in a questionnaire.