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From Cases to Stories to Lessons: Exploring Landscapes of Lifelong Learning across Europe

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This chapter offers some concluding thoughts on the case studies by bringing together insights generated throughout the chapters in Part II of this volume. It does so by revisiting the themes dealt with in each chapter and relating them to the conceptual frameworks adopted to illuminate their overall contribution. Here, questions regarding the meaning and

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S. Benasso et al. (eds.), *Landscapes of Lifelong Learning Policies across Europe*,
Palgrave Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-96454-2_10

relevance of the discussions for life course research and opportunity structures of young people are dealt with. This chapter also includes an overview table highlighting the contribution of each of the cases to a better understanding of the landscapes of Lifelong Learning across Europe.

The first section situates the explorations undertaken in the previous chapters in terms of places, spaces, and cases, thus highlighting their relevance to researching landscapes of LLL policies. The second section is organised along the themes of the chapters, and also along the conceptual perspectives adopted—Life Course Research, Cultural Political Economy and Governance—and draws from the discussions and conclusions in the chapters in Part II of the book.

10.1 Exploring Landscapes of Lifelong Learning: Places, Spaces, Cases

Exploring landscapes of LLL in the previous chapters entailed giving careful attention to the different places and spaces inhabited by young people across Europe, in which they encounter LLL policies. Observing LLL policies through the lenses of discursive, institutional and relational opportunity structures yielded interesting insights not only into the widely differing realities across the European landscape, but also into the diverging ways young people deal—react or conform to, adapt or reject—with the perceptions of problems and solutions offered in LLL policies. Not least, it uncovered different ways young people relate to professionals in the field and the varying “styles” of their participation.

Focusing on cases helped us to do justice to the uniqueness of the various social formations to which LLL policies belong. In particular, the methodological choices made aimed at accounting for their multi-layered nature and at clarifying the interactive and relational dimension among actors and levels. Instead of taking cases for granted—as if they existed

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out there waiting to be examined—the chapters represented an exercise in case construction; indeed, an exercise in “casing”. They were viewed as complex systems made up of countless relationships between the parts and the whole, which pointed to different configurations and constellations of complex and contingent phenomena at various levels. As such, each case can be regarded as a lesson; it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that a lesson stands in its own right in the first place. That is, we learn something specific to the phenomenon/situation at hand, something that shows the dynamics and interconnections that are contingent and unique. Yet, each case can also assist us in understanding each LLL policy “as a deeply political process of cultural production” (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 1), to which young people also contribute substantially.

In addition, examining the issues dealt with from the conceptual perspectives adopted throughout the volume—Life Course Research, Cultural Political Economy, and Governance—has also contributed to direct attention to the various dimensions of the phenomena examined. Life Course Research offers us a conceptual lens to focus on the individual/biographical dimension of the themes analysed and enabled us to assess how LLL policies are effective/ineffective in accounting for young adults’ needs in constructing a meaningful life course. Governance research sharpened our attention to the coordination of different actions and agents partaking in these LLL policies—most likely influencing young adults in their decision-making processes. In its turn, Cultural Political Economy has been extremely useful in describing and making sense of the different objectives of LLL policies and, in particular, of the intended impact of LLL policies at national, regional and local levels.

The following section aims at highlighting the main insights yielded from the case studies.

10.2 Cases and Stories

This section draws on the discussions and conclusions in the chapters in Part II of the book. It is organised along the themes of the chapters, but also along the conceptual perspectives adopted—Life Course Research,

Cultural Political Economy and Governance research. The section includes a table with an overview of the insights gained in each chapter.

Linking to the metaphor that opens this book, that of the LLL pathways as three-dimensional spaces, and applying the narrative approach to the case analysis introduced in the third chapter of this volume, a “travelogue” of the exploration of the cases and stories presented in Part II is provided in the following. Indeed, although the three main theoretical perspectives come into play in each chapter, in the accounts developed by the authors we find different weighing of their relevance, different rationales for case construction and narrative entry points. From each chapter we gain the opportunity to observe the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of the processes of LLL policies delivering, and we do this through different points of view, levels, and temporal horizons.

Chapter 4 and 5 devote particular attention to the LCR perspective. In accordance with that, the exploration of the LLL landscapes is run in “first person”, as the biographical interviews with young adults are their main source of information. The topics of individuals’ aspirations, plans, and projections for the future, and how the participation in LLL policies impacts them are at the core of both chapters, which enable a reflection on the kind of subjective agency allowed (or hindered) by the formal aspects regulating LLL pathways.

The entry points for the exploration of the LLL landscapes in Chap. 4 are the biographies of three young adults who have accessed LLL policies. By following their trajectories, we can observe different combinations of subjective aspirations and policy aims. The negotiations that occur between these two dimensions result from the interplay of relational elements, “institutional” and subjective meaning-making, within the borders set by policy regulation, and tell us about the hardly standardisable nature of the processes of policy delivering.

Throughout the chapter we moved bottom-up from the singularity of the life stories to the upper levels of the structural and cultural features of their local, and then national, contexts. The biographies unfold in Germany, Italy and Bulgaria, and tell the stories of how their protagonists, in their search for fulfilling employment, access LLL policies to overcome structural and cultural problems affecting their movement towards the labour market: the rigidity of the German employment

system, the static nature of the local labour market in Italy, the scarce opportunities and the ethnic segregation of the labour market in Bulgaria. In all three cases, the overall aim of the LLL policies is smoothening the access to the labour market by traineeships and guidance, yet they lead to variable outcomes in that respect. The policy at the core of the German case provides individual, tailor-made support (e.g., guidance to everyday life management, competence training) to young people dependant on social benefits to prevent their definitive withdrawal from seeking a job or a VET place. Both measures assessed in the Italian and Bulgarian stories are integrated within the European scheme of Youth Guarantee and can be interpreted as attempts to compensate the “stagnation” of the local labour markets by keeping the youths “on the move” with experiences such as traineeships. The hegemonic discourse on activation seems to resonate in all these stories, where youths are responsible for finding their way through structural problems, notwithstanding the fact that they are related to scarce employment chances or the rigidity of the dual system. However, the most significant feature of the lessons is to be seen at the micro level of relations, as the three youths are able to widen the range of attainable opportunities by actively constructing positive relations with street level professionals and/or employers met within the LLL landscapes. Thus, the relational opportunity structure comes into play in these stories, introducing changes in the range of “visible” opportunities shaped by the discursive and institutional opportunity structures. Considering the LCR perspective, this is relevant as it also prompts changes in the subjective dimension of the aspirations for the future, which in the observed stories were limited by negative relationships with the education system and/or the labour market, experienced before the participation in LLL policies. It is again at the micro level that the protagonists of the three stories find a possibility to emancipate from dominant cultural assumptions concerning the supposed passive attitude of young people (in Italy), the inadequacy of workers belonging to ethnic minorities (in Bulgaria), the reluctance to take on the opportunities provided by institutions (in Germany). The building up of trust with professionals and the active commitment to the duties encountered during the participation in LLL policies have thus allowed to overcome stereotypical representations which, to some extent, inform the institutional vision of

the youths' attitudes and needs embodied in the processes of LLL policy-making, namely with regard to target construction.

In terms of governance, the policies accessed by the protagonists of the three stories present different aspects. In Germany, we observe elements of rigidity due to the relevance of formal qualification, which produce a formal "resistance" to the customisation of the LLL pathway and imply the need for an active individual solution devised by the protagonist to be by-passed. In Italy and Bulgaria, the networks built around the policies are limited by the distance between employers and education/VET systems in their local contexts.

In turn, Chap. 5 draws mainly from qualitative interviews with policy experts and young policy participants to build its cases. It devotes attention simultaneously to the "twin-tracks" of subjective agency and structure, questioning how their interplay shapes the biographical trajectories of the LLL policies' users. The amount of explored LLL landscapes in this chapter is higher than in the previous (six cases equally distributed in Finland, Scotland and Spain), and the reconstruction of different expressions of agency works here as the pivotal dimension of the cross-case analysis. By relating it to the processes of individual meaning-making of the aims of the accessed LLL policies, the authors identify different "participation styles" that result from different combinations of individual aims and policy objectives, and can prove useful for further analytical applications.

The two selected policies in Scotland aim to support the school-to-work transition by valuing vocational training as a suitable alternative to higher education, thus providing guidance and information about the opportunities in this field. The policies intervene at the conclusion of lower-secondary school and focus mostly on the development of the skills acquired so far by the youths. The policies in Spain base on guidance and training, mainly targeting 16–24 youths with NEET status. They provide support for attaining a lower-secondary qualification. The policies analysed in Finland are based on the understanding of youth unemployment as both cause and effect of social exclusion. Against the background of a general (mildly normative) aim of integration in the employment or education systems, both policies provide a tailored approach to the needs of their users. As a significant part of these young people deal with different

vulnerabilities, the very construction of their life plans often needs to be supported by the policies' professionals. Using a holistic approach, they work on increasing the youths' self-confidence and self-awareness before focusing on more employability-related issues.

Being able to "bend" the official policy aims to their own purposes is the most considered strategy of the youths' agency in these chapters. To be successful, this customisation demands a variety of individual resources, from material to immaterial (with particular regard for the cultural and social capital). Otherwise, and some of the participation styles belong to this condition, the risk for the insufficiently equipped LLL users is to be overwhelmed by the standardisation produced by the fitting of preferred solutions to culturally framed problems in LLL policy design. Here, "side effects" of further exclusion may result from participation in the policy, especially for those who have struggled to fit the preliminary requirements for accessing the policies. In other words, a potentially fruitful attempt to widen the range of reachable opportunities through LLL participation can actually turn into their increased narrowness due to rigid features fostered by the discursive and institutional opportunity structures that shapes the policy design and implementation. From the analysis of the case studies, the informal leeway for the adaptation of policy aims to the personal needs and aspiration, which sometimes paves the way for unexpected positive outcomes, seems to be as crucial as it is dependent on unpredictable contextual factors, such as coming across street level professionals willing to support the young adults beyond their formal duties. With the only exception of the Finnish case studies, where the LLL policies embodied flexibility from their original design, the cases have confirmed the difficulty to acknowledge (and put into practice) it for most of the LLL policies. On the one side, this suggests the need for further studies focused on the capacity of governance patterns to introduce elements of flexibility in the processes of policy delivering. On the other side, pointing it out as a central aspect may help in promoting a new consciousness about the role of relational opportunity structures in the knowledge produced by research as a support for policymaking.

The CPE perspective is the main "guide" for the exploration of the cases in Chaps. 6 and 7. As readers we gain information not only about the ways in which national institutions and socioeconomic contexts

contribute to shape the goals of LLL policies, but also about the governing, through discourse and power technologies, of the individuals accessing them. Here the topic of individual agency moves to the background, and the focus is on the impact of cultural and ideological assumptions on policy design and implementation.

In the analysis of the cases constructed for Chap. 6, we find a significant example of the multilevel exploration of LLL landscapes, which mainly stems from the integration of CPE and GOV perspectives. It makes visible how different dominant understandings of the meaning of LLL policies trickle down from the national to the regional contexts, producing different impacts according to the governance patterns arranged at local level. The six cases are located in Austria, Finland, and Scotland and are built around policies sharing the aim of smoothening the school-to-work transitions. Specifically, one Austrian policy targets young adults aged 22 or above who have professional experience though no formal qualification, and it tackles this lack by short work-based learning aimed at final certification. The second policy in Austria provides transitional work activation to unemployed youths aged between 18 and 24. In Finland, the first policy targets students who are undertaking on-the-job training, giving priority to those with special needs such as mental health problems. It pairs them to a work life coach who works on their needs through a holistic approach. The other Finnish policy targets unemployed young adults struggling with labour market integration. It seeks to enhance young adults' employability through work-based learning courses that certify their skills, in addition to actions oriented to improving their self-confidence and job-searching skills. In Scotland, the two policies belong the national policy "Developing the Young Workforce". They are run through a national-regional-local governance approach that seeks to meet local demands and needs by adapting the general framework of the national policy. It aims to prepare youths aged between 16 and 24 for the labour market by providing career guidance and facilitating access to apprenticeships in local businesses.

Via a CPE perspective, we can assess how, given the common orientation of the six policies, the analytical focus on the skills formation regimes (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2012) that shape institutional action in supporting and regulating those transitions enables highlighting

cross-national variations. Indeed, as according to this perspective Austria belongs to the collective regime (social partners collaboration), Finland to the statist model (state-led) and Scotland to the liberal regime (market-led), the cross-national comparison shows different ways of addressing both the users' and the market's needs with different logics of prioritisation, on the basis of varying understandings of the role of LLL policies within the skills formation regimes. Specifically, in Austria, the analysed policies work mainly on certification and apprenticeships to adapt their users' profiles to the opportunities available in the local VET systems; the Finnish policies, steered by the state, promote a more holistic approach to the youths' needs, with less emphasis on the immediate requests of the labour demand; in Scotland, the overarching goal of compensating for problems in the synchronisation between educational and employment systems leads to focus mostly on the coordination between private and public actors in the VET domain, in accordance with the ideological orientation of a liberal, market-centred approach. From another analytical standpoint, this chapter provides insights about the mutable synergies between discursive and institutional opportunity structures at national level, and sheds light on how they result from historical processes involving cultural, social, and political assumptions that intervene in the processes of LLL policymaking and delivering, affecting the overall orientation and objectives of the policies.

Furthermore, as each country's cases belong to different regional contexts, the analysis provided in this chapter shows the bearing of contextual features, here framed as economic-material opportunity structures, on the patterns of policy implementation; indeed, these are impacted by the characteristics of structures such as the labour market and the skill regulation systems at the local level, as well as by the predominant economic sector in the area. The focus is on the interplay between material contextual elements and governance patterns in different regions, and the exploration of the cases pointed out their different impacts on the effectiveness of the policies. This is due to their varying success in matching the local economic-material conditions and the patterns of coordination among the actors involved in LLL policy delivering. This latter strand of analysis constitutes an element of innovation when compared to the

more traditional approaches to discursive and institutional opportunity structures, which are usually carried out by referring to the national level.

Through its use of the LCR approach, Chap. 6 provides food for thought about how young adult's trajectories are influenced by the specificity of the LLL policy they meet, as well as by the more general interaction with different opportunity structures. We gain insights about this impact by drawing from the opinions of the interviewed experts, who have stressed how improving individual employability in contexts where the labour market is able to integrate fresh workforce might also produce positive effects in terms of self-esteem. On the contrary, in regions where the labour market is more static, participation in LLL policies has been framed by the experts as a strategic tool for engaging youths who are at risk of exclusion from the education and employment systems.

From Chap. 7 we learn a lesson about the realms of power crossing the LLL landscapes, bringing to light that such landscapes are not ideologically neutral spaces. Drawing from Foucault's work on the processes of subjectivation as a discursive product and power technologies, this chapter addresses the role of LLL policies in articulating dominant cultural understandings of problems and related solutions in the education and employment systems, consequently fostering the forms of subjectivities which better fit these landscapes. Since the analyses carried out are context-sensitive, such processes are also put into relation with the economic conditions of different regions, their particular labour market situation, and the prevailing socio-cultural habits and norms. In this way, the varying ability of an LLL policy to succeed and to be institutionalised is assessed.

The LLL policies at the core of the three analysed case studies focus on the connection between education and labour market, although dealing with different structural contexts. The policy in Portugal is an educational measure aimed at preventing early school dropout and youth unemployment. It focuses on the adjustment of the training offer according to the local market demand. In Germany, the case is built around a policy which pursues the preparation of disadvantaged youths for entering the skilled craft sector within the VET system by extending their training one year beyond the regular duration of secondary schools. The analysed policy in Croatia tackles the problems in the systems of skills

demand and supply by providing guidance services throughout individual careers.

The chapter enables deepening the relationship between the CPE and LCR perspectives. From the standpoint of the first, the cases show how the very targeting of youth in different conditions of vulnerability (from NEET and school drop-outs to individuals with learning disadvantages) embodies and reproduces an understanding of the users as subjects who should be prone to be assisted and “fixed” to regain the “right” direction lost somewhere along their allegedly “deviant” biographies. Here, the resonance of hegemonic normative assumptions about how individual life courses should unfold becomes clear as it intertwines with the neoliberal push towards self-entrepreneurship, and its consequences are often emphasised by the reactions of the policies’ addressees. Through the LCR perspective, this chapter illuminates how participation in the analysed policies can impact the self-perception of the youths. Especially for those who have experienced difficult and/or interrupted relationships with the education systems, participation tends to take on the sense of a “last chance”, even a kind of “redemption” to emancipate from previous mistakes and personal deficits and return to the “right track”. A normative action towards (at least attempted) life course (re)standardisation is thus highlighted by the authors as a potential (side) effect of the policy participation.

The main element of governance in the analysis of Chap. 7 focuses on different models of cooperation between the education and employment sectors. When this coordination fails, the distance between market needs and the supply of VET actions increases. The authors point out how that this can further affect the youths’ life course management, as it decreases the possibility to find a chance to pursue their desires in LLL participation given the haphazardness of the educational and labour market offers, which might lead them to select among the available options, seeking the most suitable to their current situation.

With Chaps. 8 and 9, we gain insights into the “material” dimension of the LLL pathways, as they mostly provide a governance analysis which metaphorically helps in tracing their “roadmap”. The governance patterns applied in policy implementation shape the architecture of those

pathways, and the variable networks of actors supporting the policy delivering affect the structuration of the routes towards different opportunities.

In Chap. 8, the cases are constructed around three LLL policies in Croatia, Portugal, and Spain. They share a common orientation towards employability, and they are explored by giving particular attention to elements such as the systems of regulation of the match between skills demand and supply, and the interactions within the constellations of actors involved in the processes of policy contextualisation at a local level. In Spain, we find a policy targeted at unemployed young adults who have dropped out of or had to leave school early. It aims to increase their skills and labour experience through training and apprenticeship periods. The policy in Croatia is a local institution which operates outside the formal education systems and it offers professional training or re-training and supports the acquisition of vocational qualification. The Portuguese policy targets youths over 15 years of age who have completed the ninth grade and consists of high-school level courses that allow students to have access to higher education. In addition, as the three policies have been working for more than 20 years, the evolution of their governance patterns is taken into consideration in the exploration of the cases, highlighting the contrast between the cases in Spain and Portugal, where a process of decentralisation has characterised the VET national system, increasing the relevance of regional authorities, and Croatia, where the core regulation has remained at a national level. In a multilevel governance perspective, the overall aim of matching the educational system's responsiveness according to the variability of the local labour market's needs can be pursued by managing vertical coordination. It involves different policymaking levels, and horizontal coordination between different policy areas and coordination between stakeholders from public, private, and nongovernmental sectors. The analysed cases have shown different results in this sense, with the Croatian policy's implementation being affected by problems of lack of coordination, and that of Portugal being more effective, as it benefits from the synergy of the actors and institutions involved in the measure.

Adopting a CPE perspective, the authors shed light on the effects of the resonance of employability in the cases analysed. In addition to a

general imbalance derived from the policies' aims being more focused on the needs of the market, at the potential detriment of the users' aims, the "dominance" of the goal of increasing employability also intervenes on the processes of decentralisation, as it affects the collaboration, participation, and trust between the actors on different scales and spheres (public/private). For instance, in Spain, the focus on employability has narrowed the impacts of the policy on supply-side factors, while in Croatia it has contributed to increase the competition among the local actors providing employability-oriented measures.

Furthermore, from a LCR point of view, we can consider how such a strong focus on employability risks to produce a dominance of extrinsic motivations at the potential detriment of the intrinsic motivations of the young people participating in the policies, reducing the leeway for their subjective policy meaning making, and shrinking the fit between participation and their own life projects.

The analysis of Chap. 9 mostly focuses on the organisation of the addressed LLL landscapes, namely the governance patterns that have been implemented to provide three diverse policies aimed at easing the transitions between training and work in local contexts of Austria, Spain, and Portugal. The policy in Austria aims at recognising and improving qualifications for people that have not completed apprenticeship training. The policy in Spain mostly targets youths in NEET condition seeking to improve their qualifications. The policy in Portugal provides professional courses to underqualified young adults, leading them to compulsory education and/or professional certification.

Here, the core of the case study analysis is constituted by the mechanisms of interaction and coordination between the public and private actors that cooperate on policy delivery. It is undertaken by a multilevel governance approach, which devotes attention to the dimension of scale and the interdependence between governments of different territorial level. The cases are built around three policies which combine preventive and activation strategies targeted at vulnerable groups, such as under skilled and unqualified youth, and give relevance to qualifications in accessing the labour market. Furthermore, the comparative analysis takes into consideration the different transition and skills formation regimes of the national contexts where the policies unfold. The Austrian context is

quite prolific in terms of opportunities for youth employment and invests especially on LLL policies linking education and the labour market, like the vocational training through dual apprenticeships. The Spanish and Portuguese contexts face instead high rates of youth unemployment, and deal with the fragmentation of vocational training due to its weak links with the labour market.

The main lesson to be drawn here refers to governance issues. The three analysed policies are designed following a top-down scheme which gives pivotal role to (respectively) EU, national and regional governments in setting their aims, targets, general patterns of implementation and expected outcomes. Yet, to be able to adapt to the local structures, the policies need to introduce flexibility in terms of decentralisation. To different degrees, this is pursued in the examined cases mostly by relying on networks of local actors cooperating on the implementation of the policy, generally under the coordination of a national or local public entity. This point has proven crucial in terms of the actual adaptability of the policies. In the Austrian case, the well-established routines of cooperation between social partners have produced qualifications fitting the market's and the youths' needs. In the Portuguese one, the actions to improve coordination were also part of a successful mode of governance, helping to overcome the formal system's rigidity. The case in Spain, on the contrary, has shown how the lack of coordination among local actors has reduced the impact and the scope of action of the policy.

As seen through the CPE lenses, a common trait among the cases was the framing of professional qualifications as a crucial area of intervention to improve youths' employment. The underlying idea is that an effective synchronisation between education and employment can be pursued by institutionalising alternative pathways towards qualification, in parallel to the more traditional offers of the education system. Here, a challenge for future LLL policymaking is identified by the authors, who find in this solution a way to introduce greater dynamism in the skills supply to fit the variability of the labour market demand.

In terms of LCR, as stressed by the authors, it is important to consider that, given the preventive and activation strategies applied by the analysed policies in targeting youths in vulnerable conditions, a too narrow orientation towards employment outcomes might be reductive, or even

generate exclusion, as these youths are usually also in need for new learning possibilities, to gain improvements in knowledge, learning capacities and self-esteem.

In order to provide an overview of the exploration of the LLL landscapes provided in each chapter, Table 10.1 below is organised to recap the criteria for case selection in each chapter, the main lesson learned, and the most relevant findings resulting from the perspectives of LCR, CPE and GOV.

10.3 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have returned to the cases analysed in Part II of this book to enlighten how the stories deriving from their exploration were narrated, and distil the main lessons learned from them. The approach adopted by the authors has shown that there are different ways to weigh the interplay between the LCR, CPE, and GOV perspectives. Throughout the empirical section of the volume, we have thus gained a multidimensional reading of the case studies, which helps us to better immerse in the LLL landscapes, gain awareness of their material and immaterial features, and assess the relational dynamics which unfold in their respective contexts.

As the discussions in this volume showed, the life course in general and the educational trajectories of young people in particular comprise a high degree of complexity, as they take place in iterative, recursive and interactive negotiation processes in which numerous actors, institutions and discourses are involved. The chapters in this volume focused and compared different landscapes of lifelong learning in order to capture some of this complexity and they offered interesting insights by discussing the highly heterogeneous cases. In this volume, the complex relations among governance, discourses and structures of opportunity that impact the governing of the life course in general and educational trajectories in particular were discussed in order to show a nuanced picture of what it means for young people to pursue their life projects across Europe.

Also, as the chapters in this book made clear that LLL policymaking is extremely context specific. In that respect, more accurate insights depend on context-sensitive analytical categories, such as attempted throughout

Table 10.1 Cases, stories and lessons from Part II chapters

Chapter	Justification for the selection of the case studies	Main lesson from the case study analysis	Insights by the perspective of		
			LCR	CPE	GOV
4	Different match between individual life aspirations and LLL policies in contrasting contexts in terms of structural and cultural arrangements	A greater steering capacity on individuals' educational and professional trajectories can be "crafted" at the micro relational level, notwithstanding the predominance of the institutionalised paths towards the market	The construction of individual's aspirations is highly context specific: the local opportunity structures orient life plans towards the solutions devised by institutions; alternative solutions need to be actively "discovered" and negotiated through relations	The hegemonic representations about youths' attitudes in different cultural contexts (e.g., not being active/keen enough; not being suitable for labour market for ethnic reasons) often affect the LLL policies paths, shaping the range and the quality of the reachable opportunities	LLL paths designed by similar governance patterns produces different impacts on the users' biographies in relation to different local structures of opportunity

5	Contrasting LLL policy landscapes in terms of policy goals, salient practices, and degrees of rigidity/flexibility in policy design	Different "participation styles" to LLL policies result from the interplay of individual agentic and social resources, and the local features of opportunity structures. Successfully accessing and manoeuvring in LLL policies requires varying degrees of autonomy, and the structures afford formal and informal leeway to young adults' agency	The stronger and more consistent the individuals' life plans are, the better the match between policy and subjective aims works. Consequently, actions aimed at providing holistic approach to the users' empowerment, instead of interventions on their deficits, can prove an effective long-term "investment" for the LLL systems	The different dominant understandings of how LLL policies can contribute to compensate structural disadvantages shape their design, affecting the leeway for customisation according to the users' needs	Institutionalising the possibility to customise the participation in LLL policies requires a flexible though established coordination among a great variety of local policy actors
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Table 10.1 (continued)

Chapter	Justification for the selection of the case studies	Main lesson from the case study analysis	Insights by the perspective of			
			LCR	CPE	GOV	
6	LLL policies aimed at smoothening the school-to-work transition although contextualised in contrasting countries in terms of skill formation regimes, and in contrasting regions in terms of economic-material opportunities	The discursive and institutional opportunity structures influence the objectives and orientations of LLL policies, and their subsequent configuration at the regional level can be better understood by integration of the economic-material opportunities	Different skills formation regimes contribute to prioritise the LLL policies' aims from the skill demand side from the users' needs	Different skills formation regimes differently influence policy objectives at the regional level.	Allowing for regional flexibility to adapt LLL policies' priorities improves the fit to the regional economic-material conditions of the policy objectives	
7	LLL policies operating in different landscapes with the common aim of improving the synchronisation between education and employment	LLL policies targeted to youths framed as in vulnerable conditions might trigger subjectivation processes oriented to the production of dependent and "needy" youths	The participation in LLL policies targeted to youths in vulnerable conditions could contribute to interiorise social stigma and legitimise institutional actions of life course (re) standardisation	The discursive processes in LLL policymaking tend to produce subjects that are able to learn, or are meant to be "fixed" to adequate their profiles	Mismatches in the coordination among the main actors of the LLL landscapes might entail a further reduction of the adaptability of the policy aims to the users' ones	

8	Employability-oriented LLL policies which have faced different processes of decentralisation during their vicennial story	According to different governance patterns, the processes of decentralisation produce variable effects on the integration of the policies in their local contexts	A strong focus on employability (extrinsic motivation) restricts possibility of young people to derive own meaning (intrinsic motivation) and design strategies consistent with own life projects	The focus on employability might produce side effects on the networks of actors involved in the VET systems (e.g., increased competition)	Coordination and cooperation among public and private local actors can improve the effectiveness of the LLL policies
9	LLL policies implemented in different transitions and skill formation regimes at national level, and combining preventive and activation strategies targeted at vulnerable groups, giving particular relevance to the qualification in accessing the labour market	To be able to fit the features of the local contexts, top-down designed LLL policies needs to introduce elements of flexibility by means of horizontal coordination among local actors involved in their provision	To intervene on the employability of youths in vulnerable conditions, measures able to provide a holistic approach to the users' needs can be more effective	The relevance of formal qualification and the different pathways for obtaining it is a crucial aspect for the synchronisation of education and employment systems	The actual contextualisation of the LLL policies can be better pursued by integrating top-down regulation with the support of local horizontal networks of stakeholders

Source: Author's own

this volume, which allow for a better understanding of the varying embeddedness of LLL policies in regional landscapes. Examining these contextual specificities more closely also revealed the interdependencies between the implementation of lifelong learning policies and the sedimented economic and socio-cultural arrangements, such as a focus on a single industry or long-term structural unemployment.

Moreover, the use of a narrative approach to policy analysis aimed to overcome a rather common constraint in the extant literature. Indeed, in this field there is a quite widespread use of narratives focused on the policy problem, which tend to reproduce the perspectives and conceptual frames of policymakers, or, more generally, of the people who design or implement policies, leaving little or no room for addressees' viewpoints (see Polletta et al. 2011). This tendency particularly emerges in situations in which different kinds of narratives are produced by different actors in a potentially conflicting scenario with different interest groups (e.g., McBeth et al. 2005), and it is quite usual in conditions of unbalanced power between countries (Roe 1994), or between addressees and implementers.

In trying to establish "relations between sets of relationships", the narrative approach allowed us to find meaningful sets of relations without a dramatic simplification of the reality, a price often paid by comparativists when making comparisons between overly abstract versions of reality. In other words, a serious limit to comparison is the strong simplification of cases needed to allow comparison itself, because generalisation is permitted only at such a high level of abstraction as to render the generalisation useless. On the contrary, by highlighting relations between sets of relationships, the storytelling approach shows, particularly along the biographical entry point, that the relationships between the designers', implementers' and addressees' points of view are sometimes divergent, especially when the activation paradigm seems to promote the so-called Matthew effect (Merton 1968), according to which only the less disadvantaged part of a target group can be supported. The approach also shows how sometimes the "right" choice is made by the addressees for the "wrong" reason, obtaining the intended results according to a divergent mechanism. This happens because young adults react in diverse ways to policies, internalising social expectations such as success and material wealth, yet the absence of equal opportunities to achieve those goals

generate a strain between the socially encouraged goals of society and the socially acceptable means to achieve them (cf. Palumbo et al. 2020).

The following sections close the chapter and point to some possibilities for future research which, based on our data and analyses, invite articulation with other theoretical domains.

One major analytical issue to emerge from the data generated by our multilevel, multi-method approach has already been hinted in Chap. 1, although it was firstly introduced as a metaphor. The imaginary of LLL policies as landscapes has enabled to focus on the unequal distribution of power and resources among the actors interacting in those “spaces”, but it looks worth considering even in its literal meaning. Indeed, the materialisation of social (in)justice in the spatial organisation of the city—or, more broadly, the territory—as inequalities are reproduced and sometimes reinforced through spatial segregation, unequal distribution of resources, and geographically uneven systems of opportunities. Thus, a door is open for the development of research on lifelong learning policies through a critical geography approach which considers, but is not limited to, the Learning Cities movement (Facer and Buchczyk 2019).

A second paramount dimension brought to light in this volume is that of the need to overcome the standard monolithic representation of the youth recipients of LLL policies as mostly passive subjects. Indeed, not only “youth” is not a homogenous group, but its processes of re-subjectivation, personal empowerment, and political (in a broad sense) interpretations of their context are actually vastly diverse. This means that the topic of “participation styles”, already put forward in this volume, can likely be expanded to encompass the ways in which youth civic and political participation articulates with LLL policies, namely with regard to their implementation (Biesta 2011; Malafaia et al. 2018).

Third, research on the important processes of youth rapport building with LLL professionals, highlighted at several moments throughout this book, would benefit from a micro, possibly ethnographic, approach to uncover the details of how such rapport is established. This might unfold in different directions, from the less common ethnomethodological and conversation analysis driven approach suggested, for example, by Drew and Heritage (1992) to the more standard viewpoint of network approaches (Grothe-Hammer and Kohl 2020).

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