

GOETE

Governance of
Educational Trajectories
in Europe



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GOETE Newsletter

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Contents

GOETE Project News

- Recent activities in the GOETE Project
- The GOETE Consortium Meeting in Warsaw, Poland, October 2012
- Life Course Trajectories of Students across the EU
Joanne McDowell
- Youth Research in Europe:
Interview with Andreas Walther

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Editorial

Dear readers,

We are glad to present you the fifth newsletter of the GOETE research project. GOETE aims at analysing how educational trajectories of young people are regulated as a result of complex interactions in different European education systems. The study “Governance of educational trajectories in Europe” (GOETE) investigates how access of children and young people to different stages of education is enabled or restricted, how coping with educational demands is being facilitated through formal and informal support and how it is being negotiated between different actors what kind of education actually is relevant for society at large as well as subjectively for the learners.

This GOETE newsletter brings an update on the progress in our research. In the first contribution, we present some first findings from the individual survey with 15- and 16-year-olds with a particular focus on their life course trajectories. Also, an interview with Andreas Walther discusses youth research in Europe.

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With best regards from the GOETE coordination team

GOETE Project News – Recent Activities

All participating countries in GOETE have been busy during the past months with activities aiming at the dissemination of the project findings both into the scientific community and to policy and practice concerned with children's and young people's educational trajectories inside and outside school, on the local, regional, national and European level.

Through a variety of forms, tools and channels chosen in order to secure widest possible representation, GOETE partners *first* organised meetings and round tables on educational topics starting from the local case studies conducted and whenever possible drawing on existing working groups or committees within the local context as well as involving all actors concerned with education.

In this way, contextualised findings and recommendations emerging from the comparative analysis were fed into the local process. In the current *second* phase of the work, partners are documenting the activating research and feeding it back into the analysis process (in the thematic reports being currently produced). Particularly interesting is the editing of a video film with contributions from all countries involved (see also: www.goete.eu and the [GOETE channel on YOUTUBE](#)) and an edited book including students' essays, art collage, etc. as well as statements from all different categories of actors.

One further important activity of the GOETE Consortium was a general meeting held in Warsaw, Poland, from October 04th to 06th 2012. Prof. Dr. Piotr Bledowski and his team at the Warsaw School of Economics warmly welcomed representatives from all partner teams who attended the meeting to discuss research related issues such as thematic and comparative analysis as well as dissemination strategies and activities of the GOETE project.

One important issue discussed during the meeting revolved around the preparation of a European Policy Seminar to be held in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. The international conference titled '*Youth and Educational Disadvantage: Governance of Access, Coping, and Relevance of Education in Europe*' and will take place on March 21st, 2013. During the conference research results of the GOETE project will be presented and discussed. At the centre of attention will be a dialogue between research, practice and policy on the topic. For more information please send an email to: coordination@goete.eu



Warsaw Royal Castle

GOETE First Findings: Life course trajectories of students across the EU

Joanne McDowell, Queens University Belfast

One main part of the GOETE project aims to provide a comparative assessment of individual educational trajectories and educational practice from the perspective of students and parents through standardised questionnaires. Two questionnaires were developed and used to survey students and their parents. The *student survey* aimed to assess young people's subjective accounts and experiences regarding progression through their educational trajectories to date as well as attitudes, expectations and aspirations towards continued participation in education. The *parental survey* was used to assess parents' views in relation to school choice, progression, problems and support experienced in their child's schooling as well as their expectations for their child's future educational and employment career.

The research was conducted with young people aged approximately 15/16¹ years who were in their last year of compulsory education in 3 cities per country. *Lower secondary schools* were selected at random from a sampling frame in each city. The sample was stratified according to school context and/or the level of (socio-economic) disadvantage within the school and its catchment area. Here three categories of stratification of school contexts were used: *disadvantaged*, *average* and *affluent* defined according to each national context.

The aim was to involve around 12 schools in each country. With an estimated average achieved sample in each class of 25 students and 2 classes per school it was expected to achieve a sample of 600 in each national context providing a total European sample of 4,800. Questionnaires were distributed to

students through in-class surveys, and parent questionnaires were distributed at the same time for parental completion at home and return. The datasets of all 8 participating countries were merged to create an EU sample (UK, Italy, Slovenia, France, Germany, Poland, and the Netherlands). In total, the final samples resulted in 6390 student participants and 3290 parent participants across the EU countries involved in the GOETE project. Most countries were broadly balanced in terms of school type, but some were under-represented either in terms of disadvantaged schools, which in many cases proved hard to access, or affluent schools. Design weights were applied to balance the sample by country, and each of the school contexts. Despite these shortcomings the achieved sample represents a very large European sample of young people in their final post-compulsory year of education across 8 countries and statistical designs weights can help adjust for any observed imbalances in the national samples. In order to make best use of this unique dataset the focus of the analysis was at the European level and in particular the ways in which education systems are organised to strengthen the reliability and validity of the findings.

The GOETE themes

The GOETE project is interested in five overarching and interrelated themes in relation to European education systems: Life course, Governance of education, Access to education, Coping and support in education, and the Relevance of education. This research was concerned with understanding how education systems deal with the changing relation between education and social integration in the knowledge society. Applying a *life course perspective* it asks how young people's *access* to

¹ Due to the nature of the education system in Italy the Italian sample is slightly younger most aged 13/14.

different stages of education is regulated, how *coping* with forms and demands of education and lifelong learning is facilitated, and if and how education is perceived as *relevant* for the future lives of young people. Examples of some of the key findings that address the *life course*

Life course

Applying a *life course perspective* means it is important to assess how young people view education and its relevance and place in their lives, both present and future. To investigate educational aspirations, students' attitudes to their future plans and what they expected to do at the end of compulsory education were examined, as well as their occupational aspirations for the future. Figure 1 shows that a clear majority of young people wish to remain at school, with just over seven out of ten young

theme at the EU level are presented in this newsletter to highlight some of the main issues that young people growing up in today's economic climate encounter, and how this may affect their future trajectories.

people in the sample saying that they intend to stay on in some form of full-time education (71%). Full-time employment was the most popular response among those who wanted to leave school at the minimum age, with one in ten young people wanting to get a full-time job and 7 per cent a work placement or an apprenticeship. Only around 2 per cent thought they would be looking after the home or family or were hoping to become a full-time parent (included in 'other').

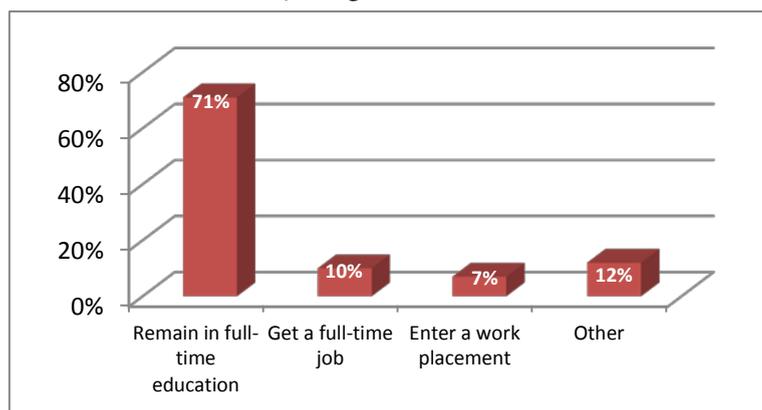


Figure 1: Question as to what students think they will be doing after compulsory education

Differences were apparent across socio-economic status of schools; where perhaps not surprisingly a lower number of students from disadvantaged schools wished to carry on with education than among the average and affluent groups. Furthermore students in disadvantaged schools were much less likely to aspire to a place on a university course. Nearly two-thirds of students from disadvantaged schools did not want to go to university (63%) compared to less than half of those from affluent schools (39%), with the average schools falling somewhere in-between (53%). Those from disadvantaged schools were also more likely to want to leave school at an early stage or enter employment

than those attending average or affluent schools. This is reflected in their occupational aspirations whereby those from disadvantaged schools were more likely to be aspiring to jobs that did not always need further education. Students from the disadvantaged schools tended to opt for more vocational, skilled manual occupations than any other group. Affluent students tended to choose more prestigious jobs that would require higher education.

Overall young people's educational aspirations are very high with around half saying they wish to study in Higher Education (49%). These high educational aspirations are also reflected in the student's occupational aspirations with the

majority of young people aspiring towards managerial, professional or higher technical occupations (Table 1).

Table 1: Student Occupational Aspirations (ISCO 2008)

	%
Military	2
Managers, senior officials, legislators	5
Professionals	53
Technicians	18
Clerks	2
Service and Sales	13
Skilled Agriculture	1
Craft and Related	6
Plant and Machine Ops	1
Elementary	*
<i>Total</i>	<i>(5387)</i>

* Less than 0.5%

In many respects young people across Europe have appeared to have embraced the concept of the knowledge economy, and aspire for both higher levels education and the sorts of graduate jobs that they expect in return. However, it is somewhat unclear in the context of the global economic crisis the extent to which these aspirations will be fulfilled. While in some GOETE contexts the economic downturn has had a minimal impact on young people in other contexts rising youth unemployment has particularly hit young entrants to the labour market. And this is no longer restricted to the less qualified but also well qualified graduates as well. This risks undermining social bargain they have been led to believe is the result of educational success: ‘work hard at school and you will be rewarded with a good job’. While it is too early to tell the scarring effects of the current economic crises on this current generation of young people, although some are already labelling them as the ‘lost generation’, it is likely they will experience further levels of qualification inflation and under-employment.

While much has been done at the EU and national levels to promote the concept of gender equality, we can still see evidence among this generation of boys and girls adhering to fairly gender specific occupational roles. Males and

females in the GOETE survey both typically chose stereotypically gender specific jobs, with men choosing the male dominated areas of military, managers/senior officials; technicians; plant and machine ops; and craft and related occupations. Women however were drawn toward occupations in the stereotypical female employment sectors as professionals, and service and sales positions, although more than one in ten had aspirations towards technical related occupations. Perhaps at the risk of alienation or marginalisation both sexes wished to remain within occupational areas deemed suitable for their gender (Lupton, 2000, Williams 1995). This may be the result of traditional stereotyped gender roles that are currently still solidified by the traditional beliefs and practices of schooling, study and job occupations (Holmes 2006, Eccles 1987). This may be a result of school/parental influences that still channel or encourage boys and girls into certain gender specific job roles, and may even be part of a hidden curriculum in school reflected in stereotypical teaching contents, teaching methods and the general climate in the classrooms. The international PISA study (2006) has highlighted that girls only represent a small proportion of the population who complete education in the fields of mathematics, science and computer science. Across the EU

there are only 12 per cent of girls who study for a university degree in the areas of science and mathematics. Furthermore, their confidence in succeeding in such areas may be lower than among the males (Eccles: 1987). Differences in the confidence of females and males in their potential achievement in mathematics, a traditionally male area of study especially at tertiary levels (Eurostat 2008), was illustrated in the GOETE survey. At the EU level, the student survey found a significant difference between boys' and girls' confidence in how well they will do in maths. Over half of males felt they will do well or very well in maths (52%), compared to just over two-fifths of females (44%). Females were also found on average to have a lower sense of their subjective health or well-being, lower self-efficacy, and were less confident in their abilities in achieving in school than males. Despite this, females were still more likely to want to attend university, with 51 per cent of women wishing to achieve an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in comparison to only 46 per cent of men. This desire to achieve a high level of education indicates that females may see tertiary schooling as a means for upward social mobility in terms of gaining a good job and therefore independence.

Although students have high educational and occupation aspirations, albeit framed by gender specific considerations, they also demonstrated a degree of awareness or realism that having a 'good' education will not necessarily lead to secure and attractive careers. Over 30 per cent of the young people in our sample were not confident they would ever achieve their ideal job. Parents also reported high educational aspirations for their children with over half the sample (61%) hoping their child would achieve a university degree or higher, but 35 per cent had concerns about their children actually achieving their educational goals, feeling that something would stand in their way of fulfilling their educational ambitions. Parents were mainly worried about their children not

doing well enough in school to gain access to university (24%), while 18 per cent felt they would not be able to afford university financially. Sixteen per cent of parents had concerns about the availability of university places with increasing competition to secure a place. Therefore, students across the EU may have their life course trajectories altered by broader processes than their immediate school context or education system. The labour market demands higher and higher qualifications from their future employees which can push students to aim higher and continue their education pathways after compulsory schooling. However, due to the uncertainties generated by the current economic climate, jobs are harder to secure, unemployment is rising, competition for university places is tough, and fees in some contexts are rising perhaps putting university beyond the reach of some students altogether despite their aspirations. With hindered access to education, confidence may be lowered, leading to adjustment and "cooling out" processes resulting in lowered hopes and goals for the future, i.e. to decreased possibilities to plan the future *life course*. These processes are not innocent as they allow the reproduction of both educational and broader socio-economic inequalities.

Analysis of the parental reasons behind their educational aspirations for their children showed that in general, subjective reasons such as feelings of personal accomplishment or doing a job of personal interest were more important to parents than external reasons such as good pay or secure employment. However, these reasons varied according to socio-economic status; the more affluent the parent (the more socio-economic-cultural capital they have) the more they can afford to plan or think about their child's future in line with their children's interests, desires and abilities. Parents in lower socio-economic positions on the other hand, were more likely to feel their wishes, plans and aspirations would be

subjected to the external fluctuations of capital, demands in the labour market and current socio-economic prospects in society. This suggests that all these factors combine and reinforce both the subjective and objective

difficulties that students and their families from more disadvantaged backgrounds have to overcome and thus have considerable and long-term influence over the life course trajectories of these students.

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Youth Research in Europe: Interview with Andreas Walther

When young people in European cities start burning cars, occupying the faculties, and throwing well measured granite cubes into the Parliamentary windows, youth issue becomes an important political theme. Youth protests are frightening for adults, since they are touching their deepest parental fears and remind them that the society is less friendly than they see it themselves – it is unpredictable, uncertain, with no real prospects and no hope that someday it will be better – which is first felt precisely by young people.

How to make boring European projects interesting

Therefore, youth protests do not only trigger the usual mixture of indignation, compassion and moral panic, but also stir up the field of youth policy. Politicians, state secretaries and European officials start looking for the causes of the riots, reviewing statistics on youth unemployment, start counting school drop outs and calculating how much damage will the unemployed and unmotivated youth make to the national economy in the coming decades. Then they start to order research, which would tell them, why young are prolonging their studies, live with their parents, why they are not interested in politics, and, in addition, the research should suggest fast and practical measures to address the “youth problem”. Such approaches are usually ineffective because youth is treated as a problem or – more recently – as an unexploited human resource. However, policy makers forget that young people are not some kind of a uniform statistical category, but a very diverse group of individuals who are trying to get by in society as best as they can and are able, as youth researcher Andreas Walther of the University of Frankfurt points out. Survival strategies, motives and life decisions of young people are highly dependent on the environment in which they live, therefore no, even the most extensive pan-European survey of youth, cannot give a universal prescription on how to design a successful youth policy. It can at best remind us of how complex societal problem we are trying to understand and how deceptive it is to judge the young according to our own image, Walther added.

Over the recent years you have been involved in most major European research projects in the field of youth. Can you, on the basis of these projects, assess how European institutions, which are financing these projects, understand youth policy?²

This can already be seen from the calls for applications, which are prepared by national and European institutions. Young people are mostly seen as a part of the labour market – sometimes as a problem, other times as an opportunity, depending on the current political rhetoric. Some years ago we have primarily dealt with reducing the economic damage and costs, which is caused by youth unemployment, while today we are thinking about how to motivate, how to change educational system, and how to better manage human resources and use human capital, which is hidden in young people in order to accelerate (*smile*) economic growth. All these projects are very instrumental. Their main purpose is to provide information, which would enable politicians and European officials to justify their economic, social and educational policy.

And create an impression, that these are not political decisions but expert decisions?

² The interview was conducted by Lenart J. Kučić on July 10, 2010, foto: Uroš Hočevar. See also: <http://www.lenartkucic.net/2010/07/10/andreas-walther-raziskovalec-mladine/>

If policy is supposedly based on scientific facts, its political status is hidden and with it also the need for social consensus. Let's take a concrete example. In Germany a few years ago a lot of agitation was caused by the news that our students are ranked very low on a comparative scale of PISA, by which the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identifies their "readiness to face the future challenges". German policy was not only agitated by low classification - and the slap to the German education system - but also the OECD's warning that extra twenty points in PISA in the next twenty years means also a \$ 200 billion more revenue in the German economy and the creation tens of thousands of new jobs. I am telling these numbers by heart, but anyway, such was the main argument, which led Germany to subordinate its educational reforms almost entirely to a single goal: to improve the ranking of German students in PISA.

And although educational systems thus became only a means to achieve the best possible results on some comparative scale?

Or to meet educational standards prescribed by this scale, although there was almost no general debate of what these standards really are and what educational goals they are trying to reach. I am certainly not saying that young people should be learning the same contents by the same methods as 20 years ago, but it is still a telling fact that the German society did not consider necessary to discuss what are the objectives of educational process and what should the new role of teachers and students be, but simply slackened to the pressure of alleged economic arguments.

Alleged?

Alleged because the writers of these reforms are not critical enough in their choices of economic arguments. These documents are in a way created like this: a younger national or European official, who must quickly prepare a certain strategy, asks institutes and other research institutions, whether they are familiar with "any research", which is analysing economic consequences of unfinished education – of young people, who from these or other reasons do not finish school or are excluded from the education system. Researchers think a little and they – for information only – send a link to a certain American study, which has calculated that every young person, who does not complete his/her education, will potentially burden the country for more than half a million dollars – because it is more likely that s/he will become a criminal, which will require more police on the streets, increasing costs of imprisonment and rehabilitation... Already in the next step it may happen that this study becomes an official part of the German or even European educational strategy, although it may be completely useless for our environment. Moreover, it is not clear what the results of such studies actually tell us. Will we try to keep the children in schools at any costs, so that we will not have to pay this half a million dollars one day? I am caricaturing a bit, but a lot of strategies and policies are actually created in this way.

Why did the numbers become so important even in the areas, which once were not so obviously exposed to economic calculations – education, culture, health...?

Because it is necessary somehow to convince the financial ministers to spend more budget money on these areas (*smile*). However, such a strategy is two-fold. Education, for example, may indeed receive greater financial resources, but this will also strengthen the weight of questionable economic arguments.

Is it not that also researchers have adapted to this two-fold strategy? In one of Europe's largest youth research projects GOETE, where you are involved, you will try to figure out how can the European educational systems contribute to the building of a "knowledge society" - which is a

typical economic-political cliché.

We (the researchers) are in a quite ungrateful position. We have to all the time look for ways for getting the money, which would allow us to explore-research at all, and at the same time we try to retain some research criticism within these narrow frameworks; we try to develop our projects in such a way that they will not come down only to acquiring information which our financiers would use to scientifically justify their economic, educational and social policies. Once you know the rules of the game, you realize that these opportunities are fortunately not so rare. Therefore, with some skills it is possible to include qualitative methods in majority of the projects; these methods try to figure out how young people really live, how they are coping with the challenges and what do they actually think. Especially so in pan-European projects.

Although European projects are usually considered as extremely bureaucratic?

European projects offer significantly more research opportunities, as it may seem when reading their complex tender documentations. In Germany, I can usually apply only those projects where I know already in advance what the results should be, because only in this way my assessors know how to determine whether the project was “successful”. At the same time I always have a feeling that German research projects are intended primarily for the reproduction of the German scientific community, which decides, what the real science is and who will share national research projects. At the EU level such control is much harder to implement, since the bureaucracy in euro-authorities is not as homogenous as those in the national states. Euro-crats are namely a very curious mixture of extreme neoliberalism, sincere social-democratic mentality and the desire to rescue the world (*smile*).

How do you avoid cynicism in this system as you describe it?

Indeed, there are many reasons for cynicism. Thinking about how projects have to be designed in order to obtain money for research, taking into consideration who will evaluate them, what will their real effects be, it is difficult to avoid the cynical reflections about our work. Our possibilities as researchers to influence the youth policy are extremely limited. In practice we can be already satisfied if our findings are present in some strategic document – albeit in the wrong context and without real possibilities that anyone would consider them. However, I already successfully resist cynicism, because I get many small victories in my work. Maybe it sounds unusual, but for me it is a great pleasure when I think about how to transform these boring euro-projects into something interesting despite all the constraints. This might help attract ambitious researchers across Europe, maybe help some young researcher to assert her/himself and I am also learning something new about the life of the European youth. Although I am very critical of the motives and ways in which politics finances and uses youth research, I still believe that without these researches it is impossible to design a successful youth policy.

What is successful youth policy to you?

My personal definition is very simple: policy, which helps young people to be able to decide for themselves about their lives. This means many things: access to education, possibilities of becoming independent from their parents, working in chosen occupation, freely expressing personal views, real possibility to influence the politics and society,...

Is any European country close to this ideal?

When our institute IRIS was comparing youth social policies across EU countries, we have not found such a perfect ideal, but we did find out that some countries are much closer to it than

others. We were interested, how EU members take care about social security of young people, how they promote their education and employment, what are their measures in solving young people's social problems, what is the role of families and the like. In general, countries can be divided into 5 groups. First is the Scandinavian group, the second consists of UK and Ireland, third of continental countries, fourth of Mediterranean countries, fifth of post-socialist countries. In the last group we have also placed Slovenia. If I considerably simplify, at the end we could clearly see that youth, social and educational policies differ especially by the attitude of countries and their institutions towards an individual.

Individual as a citizen?

Yes, precisely citizenship is a category in which majority of differences occur. In the Scandinavian societies individual does not serve to his/her country, but the country is a community of all individuals – citizens. Country is therefore not distinct from the citizen and is not superior to him/her, but has to enable him/her the active citizenship, which means a possibility of choice and means, with which s/he will realize those choices. And since also their institutions are derived from the individual, they are ready to respond to his/her changed needs and thus also to the changes in education, labour market and elsewhere.

This is quite the opposite in the continent – an individual is considered as a sort of subject of the country.

Germany is known for its paternalistic approach to citizens. Bismarck's legacy from the 19th century is still present in the whole system and so is the question of how to organize the society together with the help of the country and its institutions. Therefore, rather passive role is expected from the citizen – fulfilling their duties, but not the co-creation of society. Attitude of country towards an individual of course also influences the attitude of an individual towards the country; in Germany people expect that the country will govern things for them – look for their employments or provide the lacking knowledge – while in Scandinavian countries individuals are convinced that the country has to mainly offer the opportunities so that they can do this by themselves.

Similar as in the UK?

In the UK and in Ireland they also argue for an autonomous individual, however, this is no longer a citizen in a Scandinavian sense, but an entrepreneur, who works in an open market. Therefore, the country has much less responsibility towards them than in Scandinavian countries and offers practically no incentives or help to the individual. Also, youth is considered only as a temporary phase, which has to end as quickly as possible with gaining economic independence; therefore, UK and Ireland promote early recruitment to the labour market and deliberately limit social support and other measures, which allegedly postpone employment. On the other hand, youth policy in other two groups of countries is very well summed up in the statement of young Italian woman, who said that young people feel alone. If you have family and friends, you manage somehow. If not, you are left alone and you cannot count on anybody, least of all on the country...

Researchers of youth in the post-socialist countries have often pointed out that their countries have, due to the lack of money and political will, long abandoned concrete youth policy, and limited themselves to improving statistical indicators. Higher education is among the victims of such an approach, since countries are non-critically establishing universities and increasing enrolment and thus postponing the problem of youth unemployment and at the same time

raising formal level of education, with which they are even bragging.

I am familiar with such warnings; however, I am somewhat reluctant to them. Namely, there are many much worse environments for young people in this world than faculties; in addition, student status is socially acceptable, positive and influences well on the self-esteem. What is better to tell your friends? That you are studying or that you are doing third category jobs because you have no other choice? These are not irrelevant questions, although they cannot be captured by economic analyses or eliminated by frequent reproach that young people today are simply unmotivated. That they are not motivated to accept every job that appears at the labour market – no matter what they were studying or what they are interested in? That they are not motivated when they send hundreds of applications for work and working practice, but do not even get a response? We are often forgetting that all our decisions need to have a meaningful place in our personal biographies. If we decide to study the language because we wish to become a high school teacher, we cannot be excited about low paid translations of some user manuals. If we anyway accept this kind of work, we will probably want to believe that it is only temporary – a detour on our way or a way how to earn money for our rent.

What happens when young people figure out that this kind of jobs are not only temporary, and that they simply will not get better opportunities with their education?

In the debates about young people I repeatedly encounter two deeply rooted views. According to the first, unlucky young people are always passive victims of harsh social changes, while according to the second, young people are opportunists, which choose the most comfortable options – prolonging the studies, receiving unemployment benefits or living with their parents. The first view is patronizing and underestimating, the second is moralistic. What does it mean that young people prefer to study than working 3rd category jobs? That they prefer studying instead of working? That they are opting for comfort? That education is a value to them? Let's try to get into their skin. On the one hand they know that education is still important for their future and career success, on the other, experience show them that education does not ensure jobs or social status. This means that they will probably deal with education in an opportunistic way: they will try to graduate as fast and as easy as possible and at the same time constantly look for other opportunities.

Why do we so resent this opportunism of youth, if it is perhaps only a rational response to the circumstances in which they have found themselves?

This resentment is deeply rooted, since it is derived from the belief that precisely young people are the agents of positive societal changes – which is a legacy of revolutionary 60s of previous century. However, any resentment is very unfair, because it was precisely young people who felt first that the values of these revolutionary years – education, social activism and responsibility – will not bring them any security. Therefore, they have started to live above all in the present, and hedonism has become their dominant life philosophy. This certainly does not mean that young can no longer imagine a better world. They just no longer have a grand plan: what should be done to change something that we could all live better. Today almost no one believes in such a plan, therefore all political protests have to be first of all entertaining, open, without rules or belonging, since already tomorrow a new agenda, new entertainment, new opportunity for socializing can emerge.

Which is true not only in politics or searching for employment, but also in their private lives

Of course! If the future is uncertain, it is not wise to attach too much to one person, one job or

one ideal. What if already tomorrow I get a better opportunity or if I find out that there are also more important things in life than global warming? Adults and traditional institutions understand such thinking as unreliability, lack of commitment, lack of seriousness or as egoism. I believe that this is almost the only possible rational behaviour for young people today – if we are able to understand that young people see the world in a considerable different way than us. This does not mean that I approve of their philosophy; it just means that I cannot judge it that easily.

Institutions would probably wish the future would be more predictable and young people more diligent. But – is it not precisely this hedonistic, unattached and infinitely flexible individual an ideal worker of post-industrial capitalism, the kind that today's advocates of economic growth and knowledge society only wish for?

This doubt is probably reasonable (*smile*). In the last decade countries are reducing the importance of their institutions, because they are shifting increasingly more responsibilities to their citizens. In doing so, the juvenile “hedonistic” way of life in the present can become an unexpected ally. From conversations with young people we can see that today they often pose a very reasonable question: why would I even grow up if this is boring? Is it not much more interesting to stay unattached, flexible and always doing something new? Like this uncertainty gets a much kinder face. A human resource, which offers him/herself on the labour market, invests in additional training and is ready to incessantly compete for work, is an ideal labour force for today's employers. Those, who internalize this world view, no longer consider her/himself as a victim of political and economic system. And thus also a desire to protest or change the society disappears.

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