

RYOT Network

Research on Youth's Opportunities and Transitions

working paper



INCREASINGLY DEMANDING, RISKY, AND DE-STANDARDISED – YOUNG PEOPLE IN WESTERN COUNTRIES COPING WITH LIFE COURSE TRANSITIONS IN THE MIDST OF SOCIETAL CHANGES

After a short introduction of the goals and objectives of this working paper, we discuss some definitions of the concept of life course and the main tenets of life course research. The working paper examines also topics such as life course institutionalisation and de-standardisation, understandings and experiences of time in life course, and constructing life courses in today's late modern societies. A particular emphasis is placed on youth as a life phase as well as to the life course transition from youth to adulthood.

September 2022

**Jenni Tikkanen, Domingo Barroso-Hurtado & Laura Guerrero-Puerta
Structure, Agency, and the Life Course Working group**

INTRODUCTION

We are using this working paper¹ to share ideas and sharpen our understanding on the configurations and developments of the life course and youth transitions as well as to pinpoint some of the questions that are of interest to the RYOT network more broadly. We aim to improve our understanding of the life course both as theoretical approach and as a social institution by paying attention to its heuristic principles (e.g. Elder 1998; 2007) and to the different trends in its evolution, such as the de-standardisation hypothesis (see e.g. Brückner & Mayer, 2005; Levy & Bühlmann, 2016; Mills, 2007). We place a particular focus on the transition from youth to adulthood and seek to contribute to current debates on individualisation and reflexivity, time and temporality, as well as risks and social reproduction. In our research, we are also concerned with examining the interrelations of young people's life courses and their surrounding institutional, discursive, and relational opportunity structures (see Dale & Parreira do Amaral, 2015).

¹ This working paper draws upon the doctoral thesis of the first author (Tikkanen, 2019).

The RYOT working group *Structure, Agency, and the Life Course* is interested in exploring, for example, the following research questions and their derivatives: How are the current macro-social changes influencing young people's transitions to adulthood? Is the life course being further de-standardised or is there a new and different re-standardisation of young people's life courses? In times of increased individuality, what are the different mechanisms through which social inequalities are reproduced? How do youth and young adults cope with their transitions in different societal and regional contexts and in times of increased uncertainty and intensified demands on individuals?

THE LIFE COURSE APPROACH

The concept of life course has been defined in many ways, such as 'people's movements through social space' (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016, 31), 'the sequence of activities or states and events in various life domains spanning from birth to death' (Mayer, 2004, 163), and 'a temporal pattern of age-graded events and roles that chart the social contours of biography, providing a proximal content for the dynamics of human development from conception and birth to death' (Elder, Shanahan, & Jennings, 2015, 6). An individual's life course is multidimensional as it develops in different mutually related and influencing life domains (Mayer, 2004), that correspond to functionally differentiated spheres of modern societies (Heinz, 2010; Heinz, Huinink, Swader & Weyman, 2009). Further, it is characterised by trajectories, which are sequences and combinations of transitions between positions and stages, such as leaving childhood home, entering education, finding employment, and becoming a parent. In their lives, people tend to follow normative patterns of age-proper behaviour and proper sequence of transitions, such as entering the labour market after finishing education. These normative pathways are shaped by ethical prescriptions and cultural preferences, but they have also been institutionalised through the regulation of the welfare state and its institutions (Kok, 2007, 204). In Europe, the life course as a social institution that influence and guides individuals movements across life has also been conceptualised in the form of life course regimes (Kholi, 2007; Walther 2017) and transition regimes (Walther, 2006), which vary across different countries.

As life course research has no explicit and encompassing theory, life course researchers refer often to the life course paradigm or life course approach (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016), which is generally identified with five heuristic principles of life course presented by Elder (1998; 2007; Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). The principles are 1) life-span development, 2) historical time and space, 3) timing of life events, 4) linked lives, and 5) human agency (Elder et al., 2015, 28–32). Because these principles are 'oecumenical' in the sense that they do not exclude more strict theoretical approaches, they are identified as a paradigm rather than a theory. This does, however, limit the analytical grasp of the life course principles as they do not offer any explicit conceptual framework (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016, 30).

In essence, the life course paradigm is a heuristic device for studying the way in which individual lives and social change interact (Kok, 2007, 204; Mills, 2007, 62). For Elder (Elder et al., 2003, 10), the life course paradigm and its principles provide 'a framework for studying phenomena at the nexus of social pathways, developmental trajectories, and social change'. Life course studies typically focus on examining the ways in which individual life courses are affected by macro-level societal changes and how different institutions have a filtering role in the way these changes impact individual opportunities, constraints, and decision-making (Mills, 2007, 63). Following Marshal & Mueller's (2003, 17–18) synthesis about Walther Heinz's efforts to delineate life course research, these studies could be developed from different approaches. The cohort approaches focus on social change and transitions along and between generations and cohorts (e.g. timing, sequencing); the constructionist approach to agency focuses on the notion of biography and personal narratives; and, finally, the institutional approach pays attention to the interaction of individuals and policies regarding transitions (e.g. sequencing, timing).

According to the heuristic principle of life-span development, developmental and aging processes are most fully understood from a life-long perspective (Elder et al., 2015, 28). As individuals act based on their prior experiences and resources at their disposal, life course is a self-referential process. Hence, some life course outcomes are shaped, in addition to situational, personal, and contextual conditions, by experiences and resources acquired at earlier life course stages (Mayer, 2004, 164). As life course is a cumulative process, advantages and disadvantages do not occur randomly during a lifetime, but according to a logic of path dependence that usually starts with early advantages or disadvantages brought about by people's social origins (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016, 36), what has been related to the so-called Matthews' effect.

Linked to the notion of temporalised social inequality, long-term consequences of transitions and periods of dis/advantage can also derive in wider intra-cohort differences in the quality of life of their members. Due to such cumulative processes, those differences would be broader at the end of their lives rather than at their beginning (Marshall & Mueller, 2003). While a similar idea of accumulation is at the basis of Bourdieu's concept of capital, accumulation in life course concerns also more psychological resources like cognitive complexity and flexibility as well as the resulting self-directedness and beliefs of personal control and self-efficacy (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016, 36). Transitions are critically important events in an individual's life course and some of them can even become turning points, which could imply diversification points in his/her life (Heinz et al., 2009). Succeeding in transitions requires agentic capacities and is decisive for further performance and development, which, in turn, open up new opportunities for further agentic growth. Coping with transitions during youth is highly consequential for respective development and, hence, for adult life course formation (Buchmann & Steinhoff, 2017).

The principle of historical time and space underlines how individuals' life courses are embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime (Elder, 1998). Hence, life courses are a part and a product of societal and historical multilevel processes, but they also reproduce and change social structures through the manner in which people live and construct their own individual lives (Mayer, 2004, 166). Institutional configurations reflect their temporal and spatial surroundings, and Levy and Bühlmann (2016) highlight that life course analysis is directly related to the institutional, meso-social setup that structures the social space of a societal unit. They distinguish five types of institutions that are relevant for life course construction: 1) phasing institutions, such as education, paid work, and retirement, are those which people have to pass more or less compulsorily; 2) relating institutions, most importantly family, link lives together; 3) supporting institutions, such as public child care, which assist individuals to solve biographical problems that result from their participation in more than one socially demanding field; 4) normalising or repairing institutions, such as systems of health care, enter into action when some kind of life course turbulence occurs and work on individuals' needs, identities, and motivations in addition to their social relations and individual capabilities and resources; and 5) background institutions, including public and private services and infrastructures, which are not geared to influence people's life choices, but may still have indirect and mostly unintended effects on life course as they operate on the basis of implicit assumptions of normality (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016, 35). More generally, the so-called welfare mix (the relative importance and manner of interconnectedness of economic markets, family, and the state) is one of the major determinants of life course patterns (Mayer, 2004, 167).

The third principle, life course timing states that developmental impacts of a succession of life course transitions and events depend on when they occur in a person's life (Elder, 1998). In other words, the developmental antecedents and consequences of life course transitions, events, and behavioural patterns vary according to their timing in a person's life (Elder et al., 2003). The relationship of life course and timing schedules is, to a large extent, socially constructed, and institutions play an important role in this regard (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016, 38). According to Mayer (2004, 165), it is not single individuals but populations that are allocated to and streamlined through the institutional fabric of society. For instance, the size of one's cohort as well as the sizes of preceding and succeeding cohorts influence individuals' opportunities beyond individual or situational conditions. In this regard, Heinz (2010) points at potential interest of exploring the simultaneous aging process of a wide cohort

of individuals, such as the one that was born during the baby boom, and its potential effects over their life course.

According to the principle of linked lives, human lives are lived interdependently, and socio-historical influences are expressed through a network of shared relationships. Individuals are often affected by large social changes through the impacts that these kinds of changes have on interpersonal contexts (Elder et al., 2003). Historical events and individual experiences are connected through family and the 'linked' fates of its members (Elder, 1998). Indeed, a major instance of the life-linking institutions is family, but its strength in constituting binding inter-biographical links can change depending on the availability of welfare state institutions establishing (or demolishing) reliable forms of solidarity outside of kinship or communitarian networks of exchange (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016, 40). In the context of 'institutional' life courses, transitions or status passages highlight the significance of social stratification. Family's social position is related to differences in the support it can provide for coping with life course transitions as well as to young people's agentic capacities regarding expectations, aspirations, and goal setting. Furthermore, those young people with more advantaged family backgrounds are often in a relatively good position even when they do not succeed in coping with a life course transitions as they are more likely to avoid the subsequent risk of unfavourable path dependency and cumulative disadvantage. This is because of the compensatory advantage of higher social class background associated with higher levels of different capitals (Bernardi, 2014; Buchmann & Steinhoff, 2017). For instance, Bukodi (2017) explored the relation of intergenerational class mobility and life-long learning (LLL) participation in a British cohort that was born in 1970. She pointed at cumulative inequalities based on individual's social origins, as far as those who came from the managerial and professional ones seemed to benefit more from obtaining further (formal) education credentials than those who had working-class background. Those who came from more advantage origins showed higher chances to experience upward mobility than those from the less advantaged ones, especially when the former had started their careers in lower level class positions, thus contributing to their counter-mobility and to maintaining rather than narrowing social inequalities.

Lastly, the principle of human agency emphasises that people make choices and compromises based on the alternatives that they perceive before them and are not, hence, passively acted upon by social influence and structural constraints. The planning and choice-making of individuals can have important consequences for their future life course trajectories, but this planfulness and its behavioural expression depend on context and its constraints (Elder et al., 2003) as well as the different forms of resources individuals have at their disposal. In this regard, Levy and Bühlmann (2016) argue that, when it comes to the actual behaviour of individuals, it is necessary to distinguish between wilful, agentic influence on one's own life course and the life course being shaped by field-related and institutional influences. Different attempts have been made to better understand human agency by paying attention especially to both time (past, present, future) and social contexts (e.g. Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Evans, 2007; Evans & Biasin, 2017).

LIFE COURSE INSTITUTIONALISATION AND DE-STANDARDISATION

According to Brückner and Mayer (2005, 32), life course standardisation refers to 'processes by which specific states or events and the sequence in which they occur become more universal for given populations or that their timing becomes more uniform'. Kohli (1985, cited in Levy & Bühlmann, 2016) recognises three dimensions in these developments: chronologisation (crucial transitions are increasingly tied to individual age), sequentialisation (biographical phases are increasingly ordered sequentially), and biographisation (a strongly agentic vision of biographical achievement becomes more important; every individual is increasingly considered personally responsible of their successes and failures).

Whereas standardised life course trajectories are produced by social construction and structural forms of institutionalisation (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016, 34), institutionalisation of life course takes place through processes by which normative, legal, and organisational rules define the social and temporal organisation of individual lives (Brückner & Mayer, 2005, 32; Kholi, 2007). Many different developments have been associated with more standardised and institutionalised life courses, such as the expansion of secondary and tertiary education and training, larger work organisations together with strong trade unions and an increased prevalence of white-collar jobs, the provisions of the welfare state, and the relative security of income and employment (Brückner & Mayer, 2005; Stauber & Ule, 2015). However, the development of increasing life course standardisation has been argued to have reached its peak and given way to inverse processes of de-standardisation (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016), which relates to the process of individualisation. The view that life courses have become less predictable, stable, and collectively determined and, hence, increasingly flexible and individualised has become a widely accepted perception (Brückner & Mayer, 2005) the general assumption being that increased choice and autonomy result in manifold life course choices and, therefore, pluralisation and de-structuration of life courses (Mills, 2007, 67). However, in the frame of these individualisation and de-standardisation trends, the perception of wider choices and options available for individuals could camouflage the ways in which social inequalities are reproduced (e.g. Furlong, 2009; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Following Roberts' (2009) metaphor about the outcomes of personal choices, people from different social backgrounds would not be allocated in railways that would bring them together to specific destinations anymore, but they would be allocated in their own automobiles that have different features and would still be influential in the outcomes of their choices.

Widmer and Ritschard (2009) have reviewed various empirical studies examining the hypothesis that de-standardisation of life courses has increased and led to more complex life courses in late modern societies. They argue that the trend towards pluralisation of life courses has been less pervasive than widely assumed, and that empirical evidence suggests that de-standardisation is not a general development concerning all individuals and all life domains in the same way. For example, there are significant national differences in the levels of de-standardisation, which varies also according to life domains with family trajectories showing clear signs of de-standardisation while the evidence for occupational trajectories is much more ambiguous.

TRANSITION FROM YOUTH TO ADULTHOOD

In Europe, as elsewhere in the Western world, societies have undergone significant structural, cultural, and economic changes in the last decades, and young people who are in the middle of constructing their identities and lives are the ones most affected by the shifting societal surroundings. While youth and young adulthood are periods of several life course events and transitions to new roles and positions involving, therefore, inherently some level of uncertainty and risk, the challenges the contemporary youth face in their transitions to adulthood are unprecedentedly demanding as they have to navigate in an increasingly complex, insecure, and globalised world (Aapola-Kari & Wrede-Jäntti, 2017; Hamilton, Antonucci, & Roberts, 2014; Ilmakunnas, 2019).

These societal transformations are reflected, for instance, on labour markets and education, and intertwined with shifts and developments in global economics. It is often argued that transitioning from youth to adulthood has become more difficult, prolonged, non-linear, and individually varied especially in terms of achieving self-actualisation in professional career and, consequently, a stable financial situation (e.g. Hamilton et al., 2014; Sironi, 2018). Furthermore, youth transitions have also become 'reversible' or 'yo-yoised' (e.g. European Group for Integrated Social Research [EGRIS], 2001). One central reason for their increased complexity is that the entrance criteria for the labour market have become more demanding than ever before due to altering occupational structures, increasing skills requirements, rising expectations for higher and more formal education, and collapsing demand for unskilled manual workers. Moreover, flexible employment practices, such as

temporary and part-time work, are typical forms of (under)employment for young people, which increases their precarity further (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011; Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; Harkko, 2018). The opportunity structures in which young people are demanded to decide and make choices have changed (Roberts, 2009).

There is a strong emphasis on individuals' own responsibility in managing labour market risks by becoming 'active', 'flexible', and 'employable' through improving and consolidating their skills and knowledge (Antonucci & Hamilton, 2014, 259). Critical perspectives on life-long learning point at how LLL contributes to individuals' self-responsibility in providing solutions to the crisis of the European social model (Nóvoa, 2010) and relates to individuals' achievement of full citizenship in a time when formal education alone does not guarantee it anymore (Walther & Stauber, 2006). The youth are expected to take charge of their own future and individualise their lives by constructing educational and occupational trajectories based on their personal preferences and choices (Aapola-Kari & Wrede-Jääntti, 2017). They are constantly urged to choose, even though the consequences of the choices are often unpredictable (Hoikkala & Paju, 2016), and the choices are not always even real in the sense that there might not actually be meaningful options available. Nevertheless, young people are still expected to act and accept the situation as if they truly had the possibility to choose from a variety of suitable options (Aapola-Kari & Wrede-Jääntti, 2017). This could derive in the articulation of misleading trajectories (e.g., Walther et al., 2002), in which systemic (e.g., higher chances of exclusion and unemployment) and subjective (e.g. young adults considering that those trajectories do not lead to their social integration) risks turns relevant (Biggart et al., 2002). Moreover, while the demands placed on young people are getting more intense, they are increasingly left to their own resources to cope with the consequent pressures as the withdrawing welfare state and declining community-oriented policies lead to more tenuous institutional support for life course transitions and, hence, to more destabilised and less predictable life course trajectories (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007).

While many of the risks experienced by young people result from large-scale, long-term societal and political developments, their effects have been significantly exacerbated by the financial crisis in 2008 and the ensuing economic recession (Aassve, Cottini, & Vitali, 2013; Antonucci & Hamilton, 2014). Research has repeatedly shown that young people have been the ones most affected by the recession in comparison to older age groups (e.g. Dietrich, 2013; Fondeville & Ward, 2014). Their economic conditions have deteriorated more, and they experience more financial difficulties and a higher risk of poverty. Across Europe, especially youth unemployment rates and the share of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) have risen and persisted long after the initial crisis (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2018; O'Higgins, 2015; Sironi, 2018). Hence, the financial crisis and its repercussions have intensified the risks and uncertainties experienced by young people and created new forms of insecurity and exclusion to which different austerity measures, such as labour market reforms and cuts in state-granted social security, have also contributed (Antonucci & Hamilton, 2014; Fondeville & Ward, 2014; Hamilton et al., 2014) affecting young people's lives and future prospects in many ways.

Although the transition from youth to adulthood has become more individualised and de-standardised, there is a widely shared (albeit not entirely uncontested) understanding that individuals' abilities and opportunities to avoid or deal with the increased risks and uncertainties are affected by their position in social structures (e.g. Dawson, 2012; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007), which continues also to influence their educational and employment careers (Harkko, 2018). In this vein, risk and choice biographies have been characterised as marked by different levels of intentionality in the changes experienced by people and in their outcomes. Risk biographies are usually related to less advantage positions (e.g., Furlong, Cartmel & Biggart, 2006; Walther, Stauber & Pohl, 2005). In this sense, lower socio-economic and immigrant backgrounds and a low education level are particularly strong risk factors among young people. For example, youth unemployment tends to be concentrated among the less educated, and low education level is also an important predictor of future dependence on social assistance (Ilmakunnas, 2019, 4; O'Higgins, 2015). Successful youth transitions do not, of course, involve only progressing through education and finding paid work, but also factors such as social connectedness and a sense of purpose and belonging (Pao, 2017).

Nevertheless, low level of education and unemployment are associated with effects beyond financial conditions, such as reduced physical and mental wellbeing. Being unemployed in youth or young adulthood, especially when it is long term, has particularly adverse impacts (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; O'Higgins, 2015).

However, it is not only those young people in the most disadvantaged and vulnerable social positions who are affected by the societal changes and current educational and labour market conditions. Also those who are in more advantaged positions with no particular vulnerabilities are exposed to risks and precarious conditions (Furlong, Woodman, & Wyn, 2011; MacDonald, 2011), and not even highly skilled and educated young people are sheltered from the societal uncertainties and experiences of labour market precarity (Antonucci & Hamilton, 2014, 257; Murgia & Poggio, 2014). Furthermore, also those who are employed are affected by times of high job insecurity due to increased fears of becoming unemployed (O'Higgins, 2015). More generally, complex and unpredictable outcomes of life course choices and individual responsibility for managing various risks are sources of stress and vulnerability for young people because they intensify feelings of insecurity and perceptions that one can never be sure if personal decisions will be the right ones and have the desired consequences (Côté, 2005; Lindfors, Solantaus, & Rimpelä, 2012; Lundahl, Arreman, Holm, & Lundström, 2013). While young people are often flexible, resourceful, and persistent in managing different risks they encounter, the current societal context forces them to focus on the present and makes it difficult for them to plan for the future (Antonucci & Hamilton, 2014, 263). Despite the increased risks and various uncertainties associated with contemporary societies, it needs to be emphasised that most young people are doing well in life, make different life course transitions at least fairly smoothly (see Aassve et al., 2013; Jørgensen, Järvinen, & Lundahl, 2019; Lorentzen, Bäckman, Ilmakunnas, & Kauppinen, 2018), and are, hence, able to overcome the challenges they face. Moreover, in addition to many young people being able to manage regardless of the increasingly challenging societal contexts, there are undoubtedly also those for whom individualisation provides more opportunities for emancipation and social mobility and who, thus, benefit from the related changes (c.f. Howard, 2007, 20; Mills, 2007).

TIME, YOUTH, AND LIFE COURSE

Youth as a category has been constructed as a transition between childhood and adulthood (Martín-Criado, 1998) following certain specific temporal traits of modern societies (Souto, 2007). In this way, due to the transitional nature of youth, young people are forced to negotiate their present position in relation to the future in a much more accentuated way than people in other vital life stages (Frederiksen & Dalsgård, 2014). Taking into account the significant changes that have occurred in late modernity (some of which have been discussed above), considering the question of time and temporality in youth studies offers a lens for observing how the changes in the temporal structure of today's societies affect agency and individuality (Carmo, Cantante, & Almeida, 2014) and how this condition affects the transition from youth to adulthood (Leccardi, 2014).

In recent decades, time has been defined in literature by pointing out its double existence (Luhman, 1982; Giddens, 1991; Frederiksen & Dalsgård, 2014). On the one hand, time has a chronological and objective existence, but, on the other, it also operates as a subjective category, which is socially constructed as well as reflexively appropriated and understood by individuals (Carmo, Cantante, & Almeida, 2014). In this construction, which, according to Mead (1932), settles in the distinction between different dimensions of time (present, past, and future), the key factors to understand the temporary relations are social interpretation and individual reflexivity (Luhman, 1982; Giddens, 1991). This is the case particularly in late modernity, which is characterised by its changing, accelerated, and open character (Leccardi, 2010; Carmo, Cantante & Almeida, 2014) and by its over-focus on the future (Bauman, 2001).

The way time is experienced has changed significantly (Carmo, Cantante, & Almeida, 2014). Early modernity was characterised by stable and lasting structures that acted as a foundation and allowed individuals to build a serene image of the future in which the present acted as the pivot towards the construction of certain goals. In the late modernity, these structures have lost their prominence and with these losses, as some authors argue, also part of the sense of historical continuity has been lost (Bauman, 2000; 2006; 2010; Wilk, 2009). The literature indicates that, in the last decades, the predominant temporal dimension has been the future. Future gives meaning to individual biographies and marks the way. In this sense, the value of the present is purely instrumental, its strength and meaning depend on the potential it has to build and shape the future (Leccardi, 1999; Han, 2017). Nowadays, the way in which the future is constructed is related to uncertainty and change making it difficult for individuals to create stable expectations (Cook, 2015). This uncertain future that is constantly 'in movement' has led to a reconfiguration of the relationships between work and training, and individuals have to be constantly redesigning themselves and renewing their skills as they face the doubtful reality (Bauman, 2000; 2006; 2010). Multiple studies highlight that, together with the changing work/training relations, a dislocation of responsibilities has taken place and in the prevailing societal discourses, such as those of the knowledge society and lifelong learning, great emphasis has been placed on individual responsibility (Novoa, 2013; Han, 2017). In this way individuals, especially youngsters, seem to feel responsible for their own success or failure (Martuccelli, 2001; Valiente, Capsada-Munsech, & de Otero, 2020). Simultaneously they often forget that success and failure are not natural categories as they depend on wider social factors, and that age specific norms about youth have been built on an ideal model based on the timing and lifestyle of the middle classes that have marked certain transitions as improper and at risk. (Carmo, Cantante, & Almeida, 2014; Frederiksen & Dalsgård, 2014; Vogt, 2018). Moreover, Leccardi (1999; 2005; 2014) adds that this individualisation in the face of external difficulties, together with an internalisation of uncertainty, has had a significant impact on the definition of young people's identity and life plans as they have to mediate between social and individual time in the process of transitioning from youth to adulthood.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we have discussed in this working paper, young people's life courses and life course transitions have, in many respects, become increasingly individualised and flexible as well as less predictable and stable. Furthermore, young people are expected to take on responsibility for solving society's structural problems, make the 'right' life course decisions without any certainty about the consequences of the different choices, and manage risks of the volatile labour market by acquiring skills and traits that make them 'employable'.

This increasing difficulty of making choices and constructing one's life course together with the declining institutional support for life course transitions available for young people underscores the importance of conducting solid, up-to-date research on the topic of young people's life courses. Thus, the RYOT network strives to examine and understand issues such as how social inequalities are (re)produced in individualised societies, who are the ones benefitting from the drastic societal changes and who are the ones bearing the brunt, how can young people's coping with the increasing demands be supported in an effective and meaningful way, and how the concept of social-relational opportunity structures, which focuses on the effects of the intersection between individual lives and institutions, can contribute our understanding of the structure-agency relationship often claimed to be in flux in late modernity.

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RYOT NETWORK

The RYOT network aims to encourage and enable collaboration between young European researchers and to strengthen their professional connections, going beyond their local and national contexts. The network facilitates discussion and the sharing of ideas, questions, and concerns among early career researchers. RYOT network also aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of young Europeans' life course opportunities and transitions, which encompasses a range of highly important social justice and equality issues.

CONTACT

Jenni Tikkanen, University of Turku (jenni.tikkanen@utu.fi); Domingo Barroso-Hurtado, University of Granada (dobarroso@ugr.es); Laura Guerrero-Puerta, University Pablo Olavide and University of Granada (laura.guerrero.puerta@gmail.com)

WEBSITE

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HOW TO CITE

Tikkanen, Jenni, Barroso-Hurtado, Domingo, & Guerrero-Puerta, Laura. (2022). Increasingly Demanding, Risky, and De-Standardised – Young People in Western Countries Coping with Life Course Transitions in The Midst of Societal Changes. RYOT Working paper on the Life Course. Zenodo. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4719820>