

## **What quantitative life-course research can tell us about the puzzle of flexibilization: the case of working lives in (West) Germany**

*Keynote by Prof. em. Karl Ulrich Mayer*

*“That lives have become less predictable, less collectively determined, less stable, less orderly, more flexible, and more individualized has become one of the most commonly accepted perceptions of advanced societies”* (Brückner and Mayer 2005: 28). This core tenet of the self-understanding of contemporary societies applies especially to the sphere of work and here to the degree of continuity and discontinuity of the trajectories of working lives. There is a multitude of good reasons to assume massive changes: de-industrialization and the rise of the service-economy, globalization, the decline of trade-union membership and power, the increasing share of the female labour force, automation and occupational restructuring, but also value changes in the direction of post-materialism and self-realization.

While the general idea of major changes in working lives has been readily accepted, it is much less clear whether these changes are merely strong beliefs or actual facts. It also has been often less transparent which specific changes are being postulated, e.g. the increase of inter- or intra-firm job shifts, of occupational mismatches and occupational changes, recurrent moves in and out of employment, or the increase of downward career mobility. Not least there is considerable confusion as to in which specific historical periods such changes occurred and what the shape of historical change is assumed to look like (e.g. continuous trends vs. period shocks).

The empirical evidence is scattered and non-conclusive. Many studies are cross-sectional or cover only short and diverse periods of time. Historians often rely more on actual discourses or selections of biographical material rather than on representative quantitative data. And data on the composition of the labour force is being used rather than longitudinal observations on working lives. Controversies about the stability and orderliness of working lives can only be resolved if we are focussing on longer observations both across life time and history, and if we carefully distinguish between specific aspects of work trajectories.

Our paper aims – after a rehearsal of the debate and some conceptual clarification – to review recently available empirical evidence on long-term changes in working lives in (West) Germany. It is based on various longitudinal sources for the life courses of women and men born between the 1920s and the 1980s, whose working lives we can observe for the time period from roughly 1940 to 2015. Our conclusion is that – at least for (West-) Germany - we do not find much support for the alleged trends. We finally reflect why we do not observe what seems so plausible.

## **Analyzing Micro-Level Processes and Macro-Level Structures That Shape Educational Trajectories**

*Keynote by Prof. Dr. Kaspar Burger*

In life-course scholarship, there are long-standing debates: on how individual trajectories evolve over time; on how personal characteristics, life events, and social institutions shape such trajectories; and on the relative importance of these factors. TREE offers the opportunity to examine questions relating to these debates from multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives. I analyze some of those questions with regard to educational trajectories, using a theoretical framework that considers different analytic levels ranging from micro to macro. In the talk, I address three main topics.

First, I examine how institutional structure and human agency influence educational trajectories. The education system partially channels educational trajectories along distinct educational tracks, leading otherwise similar students to quite different educational destinations. However, the boundaries between educational tracks are partly porous and, hence, the system allows for some mobility between tracks, providing a structure of opportunity for individuals to exert agency. With this in mind, I study the extent to which individuals can exert agency and beat their own paths within the institutional structure.

Second, I analyze the role of expectations about the future in educational trajectories. Expectations about the future are powerful inner resources that steer individuals' trajectories and ultimately influence what they can attain in life. At the same time, socioeconomic origins shape educational trajectories. I assess the relative predictive power of socioeconomic origins and subjective future expectations. I also take into account students' sense of belonging in school. Accumulating evidence indicates that it has a substantial positive effect on educational attainment. However, as life course theories suggest, this effect could be weakened by the channelling effects of education systems that sort students into different educational tracks. Against this background, I examine the extent to which sense of school belonging influences educational trajectories when considering the channelling effects of the system.

Third, extending discussions on ‘trajectories of failure’, I present a study that examines school dropout. This study considers longer-term vulnerabilities alongside temporary risk and protective factors for school dropout. It investigates to what extent dropout intentions and dropout can be predicted by negative life events, general self-efficacy, and perceived social support. The study distinguishes between time-averaged levels of self-efficacy and social support, and within-person change in self-efficacy and social support over time. This allows us to determine whether dropout intentions and dropout are sensitive to fluctuations in perceived self-efficacy and social support over time when controlling for person-specific levels of these psychosocial resources. The study underlines the need to further investigate person-specific and situational psychosocial drivers of school dropout in combination.

In sum, this talk will give insights into studies that adopt a life-course perspective on educational trajectories, illustrating micro-level processes and macro-level structures underlying these trajectories. It seeks to exemplify some of the manifold ways in which TREE data can be used to address questions pertaining to ongoing debates in life-course research.

## **Two decades of longitudinal research with TREE: Lessons (yet to be) learnt**

*Keynote by Prof. Dr. Irene Kriesi and Dr. Thomas Meyer*

TREE is Switzerland's first (and so far only) nationally representative panel survey on how students leaving compulsory school fare on their pathways through post-compulsory education, into employment and young to middle adulthood. TREE's 20th anniversary offers the opportunity to assess, on the one hand, the relevance and adequacy of its scope and design in view of a research context which has changed dramatically over the past two decades. On the other hand, we aim at exploring the impact research based on TREE data has developed on both domestic and international research discourses.

Taking a life-course perspective, we will attempt to provide an overview of important insights regarding young people's educational trajectories, early careers, family formation histories and life satisfaction. We will discuss the relevance of young people's socio-economic and national background at different life stages and look at the development of gender inequalities between the end of compulsory school and early adulthood. We will summarize insights regarding the role of individual competencies and support structures in explaining young people's development. Furthermore, we will put a special focus on research findings discussing the relationship between the structure of the educational system and individual attainment in education and the labour market.

The keynote also aims at identifying open questions and research gaps that should be addressed in the near future. Last but not least, we will conclude with an outlook on the future of longitudinal youth research based on survey methodology, which is increasingly hampered by deteriorating response rates and challenged by the changing modes of communication.