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ESREA – European Society for Research on the Education of Adults, in Copenhagen

‘Discourses we live by’

(How) Do they benefit the world we live in?

(in other words, how we make sense of the world we live in and is this useful to society)

This paper explores how lifelong learning (LLL) policies and implicitly discourses as part of policies influence the individual life projects of young adults at risk or ‘vulnerable’ as for instance, young people from migration background, early school leavers, young adults not in school nor in training, single parents etc.. Since the economic crises in 2007/2008 the life of young adults has deteriorated across Europe, especially the transition from school to working life proves to be difficult, complex and sometime uncertain. A significant number of young adults leave formal education without proper qualifications and skills much praised when entering into the labour market. Less educated and less skilled young adults are increasingly forced to reshape their life course in order to decrease their disadvantage on the labour market by investing in new skills and qualifications. Due to the scarcity and precarity of the jobs young adults at risk are more willing to standardize their life courses according to the needs and demands of the labour markets. The economic, educational and societal challenges young adults at risk are currently facing are addressed at European level by LLL polices. The discourse of the LLL moves around on how to create economic growth and ensure social inclusion. Not too many time these type of discourse hide a Job message on being conform to the economic demand/growth at the costs of heterogeneous individual life projects. My paper will focus on how LLL policies reflect and impact on the life courses of young adults at risk at a German regional/local level and on how/if LLL polices are creating new life course normality expectations. The central question of my research will be:

* How do/does LLL policies/discourse in Germany define and construct young adults at risk and what are their supposed (intended or unintended) effects?
* How do LLL policies promote and/or allow for conciliation between young adults’ different life spheres (work, leisure, family, community)?
* How do different LLL policies promote or allow for young adults’ freedom and autonomy in their biographical decisions?
* Are LLL policies tailored to address and reduce life course uncertainty and insecurity within young adults?

Key words: LLL policies/discourse, life projects, young adults at risk, labour market