

Title: Being and becoming : youth poverty and labour market transitions in Europe

Author: Sánchez, Alba Lanau

Awarded: 2015

Abstract:

The socio-economic transformations that accompanied the development of post-industrial societies in the West have generated debates regarding the impact of social change on the nature and patterning of youth disadvantage (e .g. Giddens, 1991; Paugam, 2007; Woodman, 2012). Individualisation theory argues a loosening of the influence of structural factors on young people's transitions (Leisering and Leibfried, 1999). In contrast, social disqualification theory suggests that the experiences of young Europeans are becoming increasingly polarized (Paugam, 2007). Finally, supporters of structural theory highlight that biographies remain strongly shaped by the traditional stratification markers and that the impact of socio-economic transformations on youth transitions has been overstated (Furlong, 2009). To date empirical evidence is scarce (Vandecasteele, 2011). Drawing on two longitudinal European comparative surveys, this thesis examines change and continuity in youth disadvantage during the 1990s and early 2000s. The project assesses changes in the extent to which gender, class and migrant background shape young people's exposure to poverty, as well as the influence of disadvantage on young people's labour market transitions. Results for a range of economic and institutional contexts are contrasted by comparing six European countries: Denmark, Belgium, France, the UK, Italy and Spain. The study finds no sign of an individualisation of youth transitions. During the period of examination, the association between individual background, poverty and transitional pathways is remarkably robust. There is no indication of a process of polarisation either. There are however significant cross-national differences indicating that national structures filter the impact of social change in the nature and patterning of youth disadvantage. Changes in the patterning of disadvantage also vary across predictors, suggesting the need for theories of social change to consider factors such as gender, migrant background and their interaction with class in order to build a more nuanced understanding of social inequality.