Danish Country Report

Learning for career and labour market transitions

Pia Cort
Rie Thomsen
Ida Juul

April 2013

Research Programme
Lifelong Learning
Contents

INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................. 4

METHOD .................................................................................................................................................... 6

SAMPLING .................................................................................................................................................. 6
INTERVIEW SITUATION ........................................................................................................................... 8
ANALYSIS ................................................................................................................................................ 9
STRUCTURE OF REPORT .......................................................................................................................... 10

THE LABOUR MARKET CONTEXT ........................................................................................................... 11

FLEXICURITY AND THE DANISH MODEL .............................................................................................. 11
THE DANISH AGREEMENT MODEL .......................................................................................................... 13
FLEXICURITY ........................................................................................................................................... 11
THE FLEXICURITY MODEL AND THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS .......................................................... 13
ADULT AND FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING ............................................................................. 15
COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT FUNDS .................................................................................................... 15
THE ADULT AND FURTHER EDUCATION SYSTEM ................................................................................. 17

SUPPORT STRUCTURES – OPPORTUNITY OR BARRIER FOR LEARNING? .................................................. 22

NEGOTIATING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES WITH LEADERS AND MANAGEMENT ................................... 22
POTENTIALS OF PES AND CAREER GUIDANCE FROM A PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVE – IN SEARCH FOR CAREER COUNSELING... 26
POTENTIALS OF PES AND CAREER GUIDANCE FROM A PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVE – MANAGING ON MY OWN ... 34
SUMMARY ................................................................................................................................................ 39

LEARNING FOR AND FROM RADICAL CHANGES IN THE LABOUR MARKET ........................................... 41

STRESS AS A TRIGGER FOR CHANGE .................................................................................................... 41
ILLNESS AS A TRIGGER FOR CHANGE .................................................................................................... 45
SUMMARY ................................................................................................................................................ 53

LEARNING FROM LABOUR MARKET TRANSITIONS ................................................................................ 55

FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO GREEN KEEPER .................................................................................. 55
FINDING WORK-LIFE BALANCE ................................................................................................................. 60
CONTINUATION OF CAREER AND YET! .................................................................................................... 63
SUMMARY ................................................................................................................................................ 68

CAREER DECISION-MAKING STYLES ..................................................................................................... 71

TRANSVERSAL THEMES .......................................................................................................................... 74

FLEXICURITY – FLEXIBILITY BUT LESS SECURITY ................................................................................ 74
THE GLOBAL CRISIS – UNEMPLOYMENT AS AN INDIVIDUAL PROBLEM ................................................... 75
STRESS AS AN INDIVIDUAL PROBLEM .................................................................................................... 75
FURTHER AND CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING .................................................................... 76
TRANSITION AS A PRODUCTIVE PAUSE .................................................................................................... 77

REFERENCES .............................................................................................................................................. 78
**Introduction**

In Denmark we pride ourselves of our flexicurity model which makes it easy for the enterprises to dispose of their employees and easy for the employees to move between jobs. The model is based on securing employees in transitions between jobs through an unemployment system which steps in the moment that the transitions between jobs are difficult. This is the grand narrative of flexicurity which has been promoted all over the world as a case of good practice. The individual narratives in this project shed another light on this model. It is true that transitions between jobs are not perceived as problematic by the interview persons. When it comes to transitions within the same sector or trade, transitions are to some extent not even regarded as a transition. However, transitions between trades and sectors are regarded as more problematic as the system itself becomes a barrier for change. As to the security part of the model, this seems to some extent to have evaporated. The interview persons do anything to avoid contact to the Public Employment Services (PES) and if in contact this is described as a system based on distrust, control and bureaucracy.

In Denmark, we also pride ourselves of our LLL system. The continuous and further education and training system is highly developed and publicly provided – although the past 10 years of government has introduced fees for both individual participants and enterprises. There exists an extensive system of competence funds which should ensure that all employees have the right and possibility of continuous and further education. This is the grand narrative. However, when we look at the individual narratives, there are many barriers for continuous and further training and especially for changing career pathway altogether. The system is based on the logics of the trade unions and continuous career pathways are constructed as linear within the same line of trade or sector. Changing career in midlife is something which requires will power, resilience and determination, not to mention capital in all its forms.

In Denmark, we also pride ourselves of being a highly equal society in which there is equal access to education and training – although statistics from Eurostat show that in the past ten years Denmark has moved from first to tenth place in terms of equality (AE, 2012). However, in the individual narratives the social inequality in times of transitions is marked. Social, cultural and economic capital play a decisive role in expanding the individual space of opportunity. Today, the market for coaching and guidance services is expanding and to an increasing degree people buy these services in times of transitions and in times of career change. There is no such equivalent in the public system for
those who cannot afford these services. They are left with the control of the PES and the activation courses which in the individual narratives are represented as “a waste of time” (Mette, Anna, Mike).

The narratives presented in this report bring forth many paradoxes in the Danish model and education and training system. There seems to be a long way to a genuine LLL system which provides access to education and training to all from cradle to grave.
Method

Sampling

Within the overall criteria defined for the project, we decided to define specific criteria for the sample selected in Denmark. There were two overall criteria which should be met:

- recent experience with guidance or support in its various forms;
- recent experience with career transition.

On this basis, we contacted respectively E-vejledning (E-Guidance) which is a public guidance portal available for anybody in need of guidance concerning education and/or career and AS 3 which is an outplacement company which provides support for people who have been laid off. The company pays for the outplacement package which has varied length but which is based on a concept developed by AS 3.

A third string of our sampling strategy was to recruit randomly through Facebook and our social network. Randomly, in the sense, that the interview persons should meet the criteria concerning age, education, dispersion between city and rural areas, and professional background.

We ended up with a sample consisting of 21 interview persons in the age from 34 to 49 with general upper secondary education as the lowest level of education and a Master in Languages as the highest. See the tables below.

5 interview persons were recruited randomly through Facebook. Both authors posted the following on Facebook:

We are looking for participants to a European mapping of working life narratives. Do you have a story to tell? We are interested in all kinds of working life narratives. To take part you do have to meet the following criteria: you are between 35 and 45, employed or newly unemployed, have a vocational background or a short or medium-term higher education, you should not be in a managing position.

2 interview persons were recruited through E-guidance in order to have interview persons who had experience with public support structures and who had actively sought
support. Contact was established to E-guidance who posted our call for interview persons on their website and who recruited through the contacts they made via the portal.

6 interview persons were recruited through AS 3 with who we established contact. The recruitment went through the coordinator of outplacements in AS 3. She sent a general call to the coaches responsible for the outplacement and after a slow start the number of persons volunteering for an interview went beyond our needs. In order to ensure correspondence with the selection criteria in the project, the interview persons were asked to fill in a form describing their educational and professional background. Some of the interview persons had higher education and were consequently not included into the sample. However, a number of the interview persons had worked at management level but were still included due to the fact that they had a vocational background. The interview persons from AS 3 came to represent the consequences of the crisis as many of them were dismissed due to the general 10% cut in the public sector or to the consequences of the crisis in the private sector.

8 interview persons were recruited locally (i.e. through Rie Thomsen’s local network in Slagelse) in order to ensure the balance between rural areas and city or through our networks in general. All interview persons live on Zealand either in one of the provincial towns or in the Copenhagen area.
The first interviews took place in May – June 2012.

The second round of interviews took place in February – March 2013. The transcriptions were sent to all interview persons with an invitation to mail back about reflections on the interview and changes since 2012. On the basis of the themes we have chosen to work with, a number of interview persons were contacted and a second round of narrative interviews was carried out. For the theme on “Learning from labour market transitions”, three of the interview persons contacted through AS 3 were reinterviewed with a view to make them narrate what they learnt from being in transition.

**Interview situation**

The interviews took place in different locations: at the university, in the interview persons’ homes, in our own homes, at cafés, at AS 3, in an office in Slagelse and at the work places of the interview persons. We let the interview person decide on the setting.

Compared to structured and semi-structured interviews, we experienced that narrative interviews do something else. The narrative approach establishes a situation where the interview becomes more of a dialogue (in Danish: samtale) and in some cases the interview had a therapeutic character. Many of the interview persons expressed that the interview had been beneficial to them and had helped them reflect on their situation.

The fact that the narrative interview worked at the border of “guidance” and “interview” made us reflect on the ethics of narrative approaches. I (Pia) experienced two
interviews where the persons interviewed told me stories in which they showed me a vulnerable side of themselves. Afterwards, we discussed two issues: 1) how to deal with this vulnerability in a respectful way in the analysis and 2) the ethics of handing over these interviews to Cedefop without knowing how they might be used. The first issue we have hopefully managed to overcome through anonymity and keeping a narrative structure in the presentation of the interviews. The second issue we dealt with by making “directors’ cuts” in the interviews, leaving out sections that were too sensitive.

In all the interviews we started out by asking the interview persons: Please tell me your working life story. Many responded by asking where should I start? To which we replied wherever you feel. All interview persons told their working life story chronologically starting either with the leaving school or graduation. Some of the interview persons included the odd jobs that they had had as teenagers.

**Analysis**

All interviews were transcribed and on the basis of the transcriptions we drew up the short summaries. All quotes in the summaries were translated from Danish into English by the authors.

In the summaries we worked with the themes defined within the project:

- Transitions
- Learning
- Work-life balance
- Support

Furthermore, we defined a number of other themes which were recurrent in the interviews such as communities/colleagues, management, stress, identity etc. The summaries also included a categorization of the decision-making style of the interview person (cf. Bimrose), telling examples and a contextualization of the narrative.

In the summaries, we already started analyzing the interviews and provide input to the project understanding of transitions, learning and support structures. In the country report, we go deeper into these themes looking into

- Support structures;
- Radical career changes;
- Learning from transitions.

In this analysis, we have under each theme chosen to work from three narratives identified as “iconic” i.e. exemplary of the themes under discussion. These cases are contextualized and we trail their narrative into the wider social and political context, hereby exploring the dialectics between structure and agency.

Structure of report

The report is organized in six sections:
- The labour market context;
- Three thematic sections on
  - Support structures;
  - Radical career changes;
  - Learning from transitions;
- Career decision-making styles;
- Transversal themes.

In the thematic sections, the two sections on support structures and radical career changes are based on the full narrative and highlight the aspects related to support and career change whereas in the section on learning from transitions, we have chosen to work on the basis of the follow-up interview and give a short introduction to each of the interview persons in the beginning. The analysis is from the critical common-sense perspective (Kvale, 1994, p. 210).

In the last section, we contextualize the cases and draw up the transversal themes which came out of this first common-sense analysis. We propose the theoretical takes that we see feasible in the further analysis of the project.
The labour market context

Flexicurity and the Danish model

A country’s industrial relations or labour market system can be characterized by how regulation is distributed between market mechanisms, collective bargaining and legislation. In Denmark, we talk about the Danish model (Knudsen & Lind 2012, 9). In Denmark, the term refers in part to a labour market model primarily regulated via the system of collective agreements (Due et al 1993, 14), in part to a combination of welfare and employment policy, as well as collective agreements, which is labelled ‘flexicurity’.

The Danish agreement model

The Danish agreement model is based on characteristics which can be traced back as far as the 1890s. The model includes the following features:

- The parties themselves define the ground rules for the collective negotiations which play a central role in the regulation of wage and employment conditions. While the minimum wage and employment security are regulated through legislation in many countries, in Denmark these conditions are regulated through collective agreements;
- There has traditionally existed a consensus between the trade unions, employer associations and political parties to minimize the role of Government;
- The strong stakeholder regulation is supported by relatively high levels of unionization among both employees and employers. Approximately two thirds of employees belong to a trade union\(^1\). Organisations are mainly unified (i.e., without religious or political divisions);
- The agreement model comprises rules governing the interaction between shop stewards and management. The principal idea is that cooperation should benefit both parties\(^2\); and
- The right to strike is regulated in such a way as to support the agreement system (the no-strike commitment) (Knudsen & Lind 2012, 13).

Flexicurity

According to Bredgaard et al. (2007, 10), the special balance between flexibility and security was first thematised explicitly in a 1999 publication from the Ministry of La-

\(^1\)The Danish unemployment insurance funds are administered by the trade unions – the so-called Ghent system.

\(^2\)Knudsen & Lind (2012) note that it seems paradoxical in this regard that, in its statutes, the Danish Employers’ Confederation has included the support of member organisations in their work towards greater deregulation as an objective.
bour. Here, the so-called ‘golden triangle’, comprising a flexible labour market, a generous unemployment insurance scheme and an active labour market policy, is outlined; however, the term flexicurity was not used. Indeed, it did not come into widespread use as a collective designation for the Danish labour market model until several years later where it became an important part of the Danish vocabulary of labour market policy in 2004 and quickly developed into a term with positive connotations. In other words, flexicurity became a seal of quality for the Danish labour market model in much the same way as the Lur mark once was for Danish butter (Andersen et al 2007, 5).

The flexicurity model (the agreement model and a number of additional features) has the following characteristics:

- A high level of numerical flexibility as the collective agreements make it easy to lay off personnel (periods of notice are short and there are no compensation requirements for those made redundant); flexible working hours which can be agreed locally; and functional flexibility because trade unions, by and large, take a positive view in terms of breaking down narrow job demarcations;

- The joint venture agreement between the Danish Employers’ Confederation and the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions promotes the development and streamlining of enterprises as a shared interest, and the involvement of as many employees as possible in the planning of day-to-day operations;

- The Government contributes to flexibility through education and employment policy, among other things. The active labour market policy has the upskilling and reskilling of the labour force, both unemployed and employed, as its objective, thus improving employment opportunities for the unemployed and reducing the risk of redundancy for those already in work;

- The welfare state compensates for the problems which the agreement model either creates or is not equipped to solve. The lack of protection against redundancy is partially compensated for legislatively in the form of unemployment benefits (which are relatively high and lengthy in comparison with other countries, but which are currently being substantially eroded, see below);
The welfare state supports a high rate of employment (70% of all aged 15-65) via maternity and parental leave as well as public childcare (Knudsen & Lind 2012, 16-17).

Due to the “flexicurity” model, the Danish labour market is characterized by a high level of mobility compared to other countries. Around 700,000 workers change their job every year. “Danish wage earners have on average had more jobs in the course of their working lives than their counterparts in every other EU country.” (Voss, E., Wild, A., Pulignano, V., Kwiatkiewicz, A., & Farvaque, N. (2009 p. 13).

The Danish flexicurity model created quite a stir in the international arena as a case of “good practice” until the dawn of the global financial crisis in 2008, since when the term flexicurity has begun to slip into obscurity. The backdrop for the international attention centred on the Danish model was that Denmark, at the time, had the highest employment rates in the EU, the lowest levels of unemployment (2.6% in June 2008 compared to an EU average of 6.8%), and a robust economy which made Denmark appear a role model for the rest of Europe. Another thing which drew international attention was that Denmark had apparently succeeded in combining traits of the Nordic welfare models with traits typical of liberal welfare models such as the Anglo-American (Madsen 2011).

The flexicurity model and the global financial crisis

The global financial crisis which began in 2008 put the Danish flexicurity model under strain. By May 2011, Denmark had already fallen to ninth place among the EU’s 27 member states in terms of unemployment rates. The sharp increase in unemployment reflects an equally drastic fall in employment rates and in domestic product (Madsen 2011).

In 2012, notice was given of a total of 13,443 redundancies, representing an increase in comparison with 2011 levels of 11,406 redundancies. The most recent unemployment figures from December 2011 do, however, show a slight fall with, when converted to full-time unemployed equivalency, 6.2% of the labour force affected. Within the public sector, 639 redundancy notices were issued in 2012 compared to 2,848 in 2011 and 3,337 in 2010: a significant fall.

Frederik I. Pedersen, senior analyst for the Economic Council of the Labour Movement, points out that Danish employment is primarily dependent on domestic demand with only 25% dependent on export. He underlines that this does not mean that export has
no significance for growth and employment, but that the domestic market, i.e., domestic consumption levels, drives the labour market in the short term.

Since summer 2012, the number of enterprises making redundancies has shown a downward trend. With the crisis at its peak, approximately 60 enterprises per month gave notice of redundancies, while this figure in January 2013 was less than 20 (http://ae.dk/analyse/arbejdslosshedstal).

Madsen (2011) concludes that the reaction of the Danish labour market to the crisis was relatively strong compared to the majority of the old 15 EU countries (Madsen 2011, 7-11). It could be said that the Danish labour market demonstrated its flexibility in the form of mass redundancies within the private sector and increased outsourcing of jobs to countries with low labour costs. But, one might ask, what about the other part of the flexicurity model – the social safety net?

The active labour market policy which constitutes a vital component of the flexicurity model has come under increasing pressure in the wake of the global financial crisis and has been accused of being both too expensive and too inefficient, while the unemployment insurance scheme has been criticized as too generous (Bredgaard et al. 2011, 44). At the same time, comparatively speaking, Denmark has some of the strictest regulations regarding availability (Bredgaard et al. 2011, 56). The unemployment insurance scheme is a voluntary insurance system which members of unemployment insurance funds pay into and which is administered by the unemployment insurance funds which are placed under the trade unions. The social benefits system, meanwhile, is a Government system of income support for people who have not paid into an unemployment insurance fund or who have dropped out of the unemployment insurance system. Today, there are approximately 2 million people with unemployment insurance; a figure equivalent to roughly two thirds of all salaried workers (Bredgaard et al. 2011, 58).

Further to the structural reform of 2007, the state and municipal components of the job centres were merged as of 1 August 2009 with local authorities assuming full responsibility for job activation. The change was rolled out under the headings ‘a unified system’ and ‘increased employment levels’. The objective was to provide incentives for the activation of the unemployed; however, in summer 2010, the media ran stories suggesting that the unemployed were being sent on meaningless courses with the sole purpose of securing the individual municipalities the maximum share of the available
government reimbursement. As a result, funding schemes were altered in order to increase the stimulus for job-oriented activation and for helping the unemployed into mainstream education and training. At the same time, fees for job retraining programmes were increased. The most drastic change in labour market policy, meanwhile, was the shortening of the maximum period of eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits from four years to two (Madsen 2011, 14-15) while at the same time strengthening the conditions for re-earning the right to unemployment insurance benefit from 26 weeks to 52 weeks of eligible activity. This change in legislation is currently (February 2013) showing its teeth with 5,000 unemployed falling outside of the unemployment insurance system during January alone. The Ministry of Employment estimates that within the first half year of 2013 between 17,000 to 23,000 long-term unemployed will lose the right to unemployment benefit (Berlingske Tidende, 6 March 2013).

The Danish trade union movement has protested, taking the view that these changes constitute an attack on the flexicurity model, but these protests have not led to any relaxation of the new regulations. The government has, however, offered to provide the unemployed who ‘drop out of the system’ so-called ‘akutjobs’ (emergency jobs). The plan is to establish 12,500 akutjobs before July 2013. By January 2013, 3,000 jobs had been created, but this has not prevented 5,000 people losing their rights to unemployment insurance benefits in the first month of 2013 alone, as already mentioned.

*The Danish model – is there still such a thing?*

Knudsen & Lind respond to this question that, in terms of an agreement model, the answer is yes. In terms of flexicurity, however, there is increasing regimentation of the labour force, due, in part, to the growing unemployment levels and the reduced levels of compensation. In this light, Knudsen & Lind question whether one can apply the term flexicurity when the security which was originally at the core of the model has seemingly been eroded.

**Adult and further education and training**

Another element in the Danish model concerns public involvement in adult and further education and training. Public funded further and continuing education and training programmes are targeted at both the unemployed, in need of reskilling or maintenance of existing competences, and people in work who can likewise need to refine or update their competences.
As mentioned, the use of education and training as a means of activation has been on the receiving end of criticism. The Chairmanship of the Economic Council, for example, emphasizes:

Educational activation should be the subject of further targeting and streamlining efforts as the current configuration is expensive, and, historically speaking, it has neither increased employment levels nor income for those being activated. If improvements are not possible then there should be a significant reduction in scope (The Economic Council (Det Økonomiske Råd), spring 2007, 294. Cited in Bredgaard et al. 2011, 114).

Instead, they suggest focusing on private job training. Meanwhile, the lion’s share of educational activation does not come under the umbrella of what is generally understood by education and training. Data from the Labour Market Commission indicates that almost 60% of the educational and training programmes undertaken in 2007 were of less than seven weeks duration and only around 14% lasted more than six months (The Labour Market Commission (Arbejdsmarkedskommissionen) 2008, cited in Bredgaard et al. 2011, 114).

**Competence development funds**

The competence development funds – in daily speak the competence funds were established as a result of a collective agreement among the social partners in industry. The aim of the competence funds is to support workers participation in competence development and education free of their choice. Employees and businesses can apply for grants for courses, training and education in the competence funds. The aim of the funds is to provide the opportunity to apply for grants to self-directed and self-selected competence development and create motivation to increase education and training activities. Each employee can spend up to two weeks a year on courses, education and training free of choice. Most of the funds are administrated by kompetencefond.dk. At the website kompetencefonde.dk, employees and businesses can see which courses, training and education the competence fund subsidizes. It is first and foremost AMU courses, business degree courses and courses that strengthen employees’ literacy and numeracy. The courses must be relevant to employees’ work and continued competence development. The employee can apply for subsidies related to participation fees, materials to be used in the course, subsidy pay and transport.
The annual contribution to the competence funds per employee varies in the collective agreements from 400 Dkk per full-time employees up to 820 DKK in 2013. Employers pay for all full-time and part-time employees with more than 9 months seniority who are members of the unions and therefore covered the collective agreements.

**The adult and further education system**

Denmark has a longstanding tradition for publicly provided further and continuing education and training. Education and training programmes can be divided into three categories:

- Programmes offering formal qualifications
- Programmes not offering formal qualifications
- Private courses

The adult and further education and training programmes offering formal qualifications (VEU) can be split into general and vocational programmes. In the following, we will take a closer look at the latter, comprising:

- Adult vocational training programmes (AMU) which include approximately 3,000 different programmes and selected single subject courses from upper secondary level vocational education and training programmes (EUD/IVET). The programmes offer self-contained qualifications and are targeted at both skilled and unskilled workers and at both the unemployed and those in work;
- Adult upper secondary vocational education and training programmes (VEUD) which are special adult-oriented courses within mainstream IVET;
- Basic adult education (GVU) which is an individually tailored college-based course supplementing previous education and training as well as relevant vocational experience with components from IVET and AMU to offer a full upper secondary vocational education and training qualification;
- The adult higher education system (VFV) which includes further adult education programmes (VVU) as well as programmes at the diploma and master levels, offering qualifications corresponding with bachelor’s and master’s degrees within mainstream education and training;
Open education has the aim of promoting a broad array of vocationally-oriented education and training to the adult population and includes, among other things, part time programmes, single subject courses and specialized courses;

- Programmes not offering formal qualifications; and courses at evening schools, folk high schools and day high schools are among the programmes not offering formal qualifications (Danish Ministry of Children and Education: adult education and training in brief (kort om uddannelser til voksne)).

It is possible for the unemployed to participate in courses while continuing to receive unemployment insurance benefits. For example, a higher preparatory single subject course at an adult education and training centre (VUC), as long as there is less than 20 hours teaching per week. When courses involve 20 hours or more of teaching, this has to be agreed with the unemployment insurance fund.

Figures from Statistics Denmark (2010) show that almost 70% of the employed population participates in some form of further education or training during the course of a year. Among the unemployed this figure is 58%, while the figure for those classified as outside the labour force is 24% (3f.dk/article/20120627/NYHEDER/120629905). In general, highly educated people have better access to continuous and further education and training. Especially employees in the financial sector and people at management level have a higher participation rate than the rest of the workforce.

**Adult vocational training (AMU)**

AMU programmes comprise by far the largest component of adult and further education and training. The social partners have a considerable say in the content of the programmes via the 11 trade-specific adult education and continuing training committees which are appointed by the social partners. Together, these 11 committees, e.g., for industry, social and healthcare, transport, or construction, cover all the adult vocational training programmes. The committees are tasked with developing programmes which fulfil the labour market’s needs for vocationally-oriented adult education and further training for skilled and unskilled workers. Programmes are developed on the basis of analysis of skill needs. In addition, the adult education and continuing training committees are responsible for the development of teaching materials and for the trade-specific professional development of teachers. The Ministry for Children and Education has responsibility for: accreditation of programmes, accreditation of public and private institutions as providers, quality inspection, allocation of funds, and estab-
lishing the framework conditions for the programmes. The Ministry additionally administers the financial support available to participants as long as they fulfil the stipulated requirements (State grant system for adult training – for further details, see below). The National Council for Adult Education and Continuing Training (VEU-rådet) is appointed by the social partners and has an advisory role to the Minister for Children and Education.

Programmes may be offered at adult vocational training centres, at vocational colleges, or within an enterprise. There are participation fees, generally DKK 120 or 180 per training day for each participant, depending on the course. Exemption from fees is not uncommon; however, participants with a degree-level qualification are charged a higher fee. The unemployed are entitled to a six week adult vocational training course free of charge. Enterprises whose employees participate in an AMU programme while continuing to receive their salaries are eligible for compensation in the form of wage reimbursement corresponding to the highest rate of unemployment benefit. Unsalaried participants can likewise apply for a state grant for adult training corresponding to the highest rate of unemployment benefit. The target group for the programmes is the over-20s, and generally those with a qualification not exceeding upper secondary level vocational training.

The regulations for planning, fees and access in relation to AMU programmes have undergone a number of changes, brought about by both cutbacks and more stringent accountability requirements.

With regard to access regulations, the previous government, supported by the Danish People’s party, introduced a price ceiling for payment of state subsidies for AMU courses – a ceiling which has since been removed by the current government, effective from 1 April 2012, which means the unemployed once again can choose freely among all AMU courses, regardless of cost (http://www.fagbladet3f.dk/nyheder/fagligt/c1685d0fe6d84093aa61ae00b2f5e4e8-20120222-forhadt-loft-over-amu-kurser-vaek).

On the other hand, new regulations, effective from 1 August 2012, mean that wage earners have to be employed for 14 days before becoming eligible for a state grant for adult training. This rule does not apply for certification courses.
The regulations for the outsourcing of AMU courses to private providers without previous AMU accreditation have been tightened as a result of widespread fraud whereby the government has paid out millions to companies for example sending Eastern European workers on month-long AMU courses. Upon completion of these courses, the pledge of a job within the cleaning industry for the participants has proven to be false. In order to close this loophole, external providers are no longer allowed the responsibility of marketing their own courses. At the same time, the outsourced course cannot be conducted in other locations than the provider’s address. The contract for outsourcing has been tightened up (3.f.dk/article/20120903/NYHEDER/120839986).

Furthermore, the regulations for individuals with qualifications exceeding the skilled worker level have also been tightened such that these employees, regardless of whether they use their existing qualifications in their work, must pay a higher participation fee than the core target group of skilled and unskilled workers.

The AMU system is funded via the so-called labour market contribution: a tax paid by all wage earners despite AMU not being targeted at the entire labour force, only those with the lowest qualification levels.

In terms of AMU participation rates, there has been growth since 2004 (21% for the period 2004-2011) with a minor decline in 2010 and a more drastic decline in 2011 where participation levels fell 31% in comparison with 2010 (from 1,042,180 participants to 715,992). The chairman of the association of AMU heads, Lars Bo Breddam, places the blame on the crisis and cutbacks. In addition to cutbacks within the AMU sector, he points to companies’ focus on maximizing productivity with as few employees as possible rather than on education and training. Senior consultant for Danish Industry, Inge Steen Mikkelsen, acknowledges that there has been a steep decline, but considers participation levels in 2010 extremely high and expects figures for 2013 to be normalized (3f.dk/article/20120402/NYHEDER/1204993/).

Finally, on 5 November 2009, the then government (Venstre and the Conservative People’s Party), the Social Democrats, the Danish People’s Party and the Danish Social Liberal Party reached an agreement on the utilization of the reserve allocated to improve adult education and continuing training for the period 2010-12. This agreement refers to an earlier agreement, as part of the Welfare Agreement (2 November 2006), to improve the vocationally-oriented adult education and continuing training system with the allocation of DKK 1 billion in funding. The initiatives were implemented from
2007. The agreement also included an increase in fees for vocational adult education and continuing training. This was implemented in conjunction with ‘The follow-up agreement to the globalization agreement of 1 March 2008’. As a result, the sector went from making a loss to turning a profit. Combined with growing demand, this has led to greater activity in the vocationally-oriented sector.

The agreement to allocate an extra DKK 1 billion to vocationally-oriented adult education and continuing training of early school leavers took place against the backdrop of collective bargaining agreements in the private sector in spring 2007 which contained agreements on competence development. ‘With the extra billion and the significant funds which the social partners agreed to set aside for the area of adult education and continuing training during the collective bargaining negotiations in the spring, there is talk of a massive cash injection’ stated Bertel Haarder, then Minister of Education in a press release (12.10.2007, translated from the original Danish) with the headline: ‘Significant strengthening of adult education and continuing training’.
Support structures – opportunity or barrier for learning?

This theme relates to the theme ‘Negotiating careers within different opportunity structures’ presented in the inception report 2012 which was based on Brown et al. (2010) study of changing patterns of work-related learning and career development in Europe.

From the interview material we have selected three iconic cases. In each case the informants tell about wishes to engage in learning activities in order to make transitions on the labour market. We have analysed how support structures and learning possibilities interact and how the dialectics of agency and structure, (dynamic interplay between agency and structure) as dialectic of opportunities for learning and a wish for future labour market transitions unfolds in the narrative. We quote from the interviews.

The three cases were chosen to illustrate “management” as an important support structure in relation to opportunities for learning (Mads). The cases of Mette and Anna illustrate Public Employment Service (PES) as an (un)support(ive) structure. Mette and Anna are chosen as contrasting cases as they illustrate different attitudes and approaches to career change. Whereas Mette actively seeks to find meaning in her working life, Anna’s need for security is a barrier for making a change. In all three cases we will discuss opportunity and barriers for learning.

Negotiating learning opportunities with leaders and management

Mads is 37 years old. He lives in a farm house in a village in Western Zealand. Mads is married and has two children age 9 and 5. His educational background is as an industrial electrician and he has worked as such since 1997 when he completed his training. Mads has worked at different workplaces - from small enterprises to large factories. For the last seven years Mads has worked as an electrician at a navy base nearby.
Categorising learning opportunities from a participant perspective

In his interview Mads talks about different kinds of learning opportunities in his current work as an electrician at the navy base. He mentions the following three kinds:

1. Learning opportunities that are available to him because they provide him with competences needed for the job (soldering, sonar etc.)
2. Learning opportunities that are available because they are potentially needed in the job (rescuing from heights, setting up alarm systems)
3. Learning opportunities that are unavailable because his leader does not think that the navy would benefit from providing Mads with the opportunity to gain these competences (management courses, leadership training)

Whether a learning opportunity is available through work, according to Mads, comes down to his boss perception of whether the navy would benefit from the competences acquired at the course in question or not.

Mads is frustrated with this and in his first interview he talks about the annual MUS-interview (MUS Employee Development Dialogues) he has with his manager. Mads has for several years stated his wishes for leadership training, but the manager will not allow him the opportunity he repeatedly replies with different explanations such as lack of time, lack of resources/finances. This does not mean he does not get to attend courses at all. Every year he gets the chance at pursuing other learning opportunities within category one and two and Mads grasp those opportunities, but it comes down to whether his manager finds that the course would provide Mads with competences needed for the job he is holding at the navy base now. Moreover Mads finds that the decisions about his participation in learning do not follow a long term plan, decisions are taken on day to day basis, Mads explains.

This reflects that Mads has wishes for career development which are different from what his manager finds that the workplace needs. Career development in this workplace seems to not follow a long term plan for finding relevant learning opportunities – rather learning opportunities seems to be happening from one day to another and not specifically related to the wishes of the learner. Mads experience getting learning opportunities just not the ones he wishes for (leadership training).

You can’t really say that the wish of the employee is considered. It is more like the boss sits there and he decides what the company needs and
that is what you get. You can say that you are tied to the job because you can never move on. (Mads)

Mads talks about that previously there was an agreement with the union that workers were entitled to two weeks training courses per year. One week the company decides and the other week the employee can decide for himself. Mads does not know when this agreement ended. It was gone over night probably during negotiations. On the other hand Mads tries to understand that a company might not be willing to provide learning opportunities that will lead to an employee leaving the company. But he says:

It will just lead to negative employees if you don’t develop them. But that is a consideration the company must do for themselves and decide what to do.

The potential negative employees that Mads is referring to are not far from what he is experiencing himself. The below quote is to illustrate Mads mind-set around the importance of him gaining support in relation to his wish to attend a leadership course that will support his future labour market change.

I find it boring to be an electrician actually. It is not exiting anymore. Ok I can turn the light on and get other things to function, but it doesn’t speak to me anymore. I would rather do something where I can talk to people or be outside. I think it has become boring but I have also been doing this since 94, 20 years. I am getting bored. I will probably stay a few more years though...I regret that I haven’t started on a leadership course. Ok I haven’t had much time. But I do regret it. I think that I am wasting my time at the navy base. It doesn’t get me out of the hole. It doesn’t move me onwards. I do think that I waste my time, both my time and the company’s. I want to move on and try something different.

Like Erik and Katrine who will be presented in the section on Learning from Labour Market Transitions, Mads would like to make a mid-life career change, but whereas Erik and Katrine make the change, Mads perceives the barriers as insurmountable.

Leaders and management as gatekeepers
Mads narrative illustrates how management and leadership level at workplaces has sufficient impact on motivation for learning and on creating support structures and opportunities for learning.
Mads, off course, could have signed up for a leadership training course used his ‘own time’ and paid for this by himself. That action is not easy as Mads explains – off course he might be able to save up the money but them there is the time. If he can’t get off from work to attend the course it should be after hours, during weekends and holidays. Since his wife is currently following a course related to her work it would be quite a challenge so pay for this with, house, cars and two kids. A common solution in Denmark on this is that the employers pay the course fee and the employees invest their own time when attending the course.

Tax level in Denmark includes taxes called Arbejdsmarkedsbidrag (AM) which is used to pay for the AMU and the tripartite negotiations has each year set aside funding for competence development. This funding is administrated through the competence funds. The competences funds are to be used for competence development through participation in different learning activities. The funds can be used to pay for the activity, to pay for temps replacing the worker who is taking part in competence development. The establishment of the competence funds is meant to support employees to invest their own time in learning opportunities. The collective agreements from different branches establish the right which vary slightly from union agreement to union agreement. For instance the Office and logistic agreement say that from January 2009 the employee has the right to 10 days education free of choice every year and 10 days ‘normal’ continuous or further education every year. As of January 2013 the employees are also given the right to save their days for education free of choice for three years so that unspent days can be spend the following years. When it comes to Mads agreement there is a slight difference according to the free choice of education. The collective agreement with the electrician trade union states that employees are entitled to 10 days free choice of education but with the addition that this should be relevant to the trade/sector in a wide sense. Many of the other agreements do not have this addition.

Follow up
Since the first interview nothing has happened regarding Mads wish to attend a leadership course (merkonom). His manager had given reasons relating to money, time

---

4 http://ipaper.ipapercms.dk/TEKNIQ/Overenskomster/Elektrikeroverenskomst20122014/
and resources but now the manager says that he is willing to pay if Mads will complete the education in his own time. The interviewer asks about the collective agreements and Mads explains that it will not be possible for him to attend the course on the circumstances that are possible. He says he will slowly die in the job and it is increasingly more difficult to get a new job without competence development courses. “We are highly specialized and that might decrease our possibilities for getting a new job.” Mads finds that the system should benefit the interests of the employees more. Employees should have more influence on their job and on their possibilities for further learning. Much of what Mads does is manual labor. It doesn’t challenge him and he finds that seldom gets to use the knowledge and skills he acquires at the learning activities he does get to attend. Mads boss says at the annual interviews that he will take his wishes into consideration and discuss it with his boss. However, it is not Mads’ impression that he does so as he has never returned to Mads with an answer. He has also talked with the shop steward who says that the boss is just following the collective agreement.

It is Mads impression that his workplace does very little to support the competence development of the employees and they have been told that a reduction of staff is coming up. “This will be a huge task for the Job Centre to up skill those employees.” Mads reports that he will start looking for another job. He is disappointed as he thought that the possibilities for learning would be better at the navy base, a state financed workplace, and it was not. Mads talks about the possibility to save days for education from one year to another and thereby making it possible to use more days in one year than in another. This is actually a part of Mads collective agreement, but the employer still has the last say in which kind of education it can be used for.

Metaphors:
Dying in the job. Growing on to the job (grow fast). Being stuck in a hole

Potentials of PES and career guidance from a participant perspective – in search for career counselling

Iconic Case Mette
Mette is 41 years old. She lives in Copenhagen. Mette is single and has no kids. She talks a bit about her sister and explains that she has moved twice to be closer to her family but she also says that family has not been very significant to her. At the time of the interview Mette was doing an internship at an acupuncture clinic and trying to set
up her own business as massage therapist. For this iconic case we have chosen to present a chronological narrative very close to the way Mette presented it to the interviewer, the reason for doing so is that the narrative provides us with the opportunity to analyse points of contact (potential career guidance points) where Mette has been or could have benefitted from career guidance in relation to exploring learning opportunities. In this respect we talk both about the potentials of career guidance, as we can point to and we extract the potential that Mette identifies when talking through her learning-, and work-life history.

Mette herself talks about seeking support for instance at PES but feeling that her wishes are not met. This is different from the Iconic case Anna (below) who does not talk about seeking support.

**Chronology**

Mette left school after basic VET (EFG kontor og Handel basis). She began her working life as an office girl in a large travel agency. After that she worked shortly as ‘hatter’ for a month. Then she worked for three years in a big warehouse. During the time in the warehouse she considered an apprenticeship as decorator. She saved money for going to guide school, when the exam at guide school came, Mette fell ill and the company would not allow her to do a reexamination. She was redundant for one month. Then she got a job at a hospital kitchen which she liked very much. During her employment at the hospital she got a work-related injury and the hospital wouldn’t recognize this. Mette went to work the day after the injury what weakened her case. The case made it difficult to work in the hospital kitchen and she decided to resign. Mette was then redundant for a short while. Next job was in an amusement park near Copenhagen, she was selling sweets. Her employer was very tempered and yelled at her; she stood up to him and got fired. She was redundant but received support from the union and did voluntary work at first aid in the amusement park. She kept doing that for many years during summer periods. At age 22 Mette decided to do upper secondary exams (HF)

I knew I wanted some kind of education I was 22 by that time...it was about time. I thought I had to find something steadier instead for doing all different kind of things...I didn’t know what I wanted to do.

Alongside upper secondary Mette worked at a toy shop. The education went well for a long time – but Mette lived with a man who himself and the rest of his family were deeply alcoholic. Mette was the only one providing for them. It came to the point where she couldn’t keep up with her studies because of the chaos at home. When she
decided to stop studying she talked to a counselor at the school. They talked about having a break and then coming back. Mette got very good grades. She never came back to the studies. Then followed some years of seasonal work. During the summer at the amusement park as a toilet cleaner and in winter Mette cannot recall what she was doing. She then found work in a restaurant in the amusement park. The couple who owned the restaurant helped Mette to leave her alcoholic boyfriend. To get away from the amusement park Mette takes up her first education (Basic VET) and starts looking for office trainee positions. She gets a trainee position in a law firm as a secretary. Mette is now 25. She had a good boss at the law firm and the only reason why she left this firm was because of her conviction that she could never move away from the role of ‘the trainee’ if she stayed in the same company in which she was trained. The firm helped her find a position and recommended her for it. (She kept her job at the amusement park during summer periods). Mette did not keep her job at the next law firm for long. Shortly after she started she fell ill. She stayed a lot with her sister during that period. Her sister lived at a farm in another part of the country. Mette liked living at the countryside and applied for a job nearby. She got a job in the administration in a phone company through a temp agency. Her next transition was to a large law firm in a nearby city, but she found the work impersonal and boring. She kept the position but also found a job for the weekends at the check in counter at the local airport. Mette states in the interview:

I like having more than one job.

Mette then got a full time position at the airport security and completed an internal course on airport security at Copenhagen Airport (statens lufthavnsvæsen). She became shop steward and started teaching airport security check to new colleagues. The job at the airport started to get boring. Through the airport she got a job in HR in a production company as timekeeping assistant. She cared about the workers and tried to help them if she saw that they had problems for instance related to alcohol. Mette liked the job but then got an opportunity to work in Greenland at an airbase. At first she said no, but immediately as she had said it, she felt deep down inside, that it was the wrong decision. When she called back the day after and the position was taken. She then called the head office every Friday until a position was open.

It almost became an obsession because I felt I made the wrong decision when I was offered the job at first.
Mette gets the job at an airbase in Greenland- She works with cargo. Mette’s supervisor left for another job and offered Mette the position as supervisor. Mette found that there were no one else to do the job, applied and got the job. She worked as a supervisor for a year and found the work interesting but didn’t see herself as a leader she enjoyed doing the work. Mette then got a manger who she describes as a psychopath. She takes a leave but returns when the manager is fired and works at the airbase for a couple of years again. When Mette decides to return to Denmark she finds work as legal secretary again – but soon gets bored with it and she decides to move back to Zealand. Mette soon finds a job as a legal secretary at a law firm. Alongside working as a legal secretary she attends courses in life and business coaching, nutrition and fitness. Mette meets a coach that tells her to listen to her heart she decides to quit her job as a legal secretary and set up her own coaching business. Before she gets to do so she is contacted by a law firm in Greenland that offers her a job as a legal secretary, which she accepts because it gives her the opportunity to go back to Greenland. Mette explains that she meets a totally different working culture and she soon decides to return to Denmark. The day after she returns she starts an education as massage therapist because she wants to work with people and make a difference, she says. At the time of the interview Mette is redundant but doing an internship at an acupuncture clinic in Copenhagen and following different courses within massage therapy and acupuncture.

**Learning and transitions**

Mette talks about her basic education as (kontorelev) ‘now I had this, so I have to use it’ during her trainee position she completes an education at the business school as legal secretary. Mette relates her learning to having the opportunity to do things. During her many different jobs Mette continues to educate herself in different directions as life- and business coach, in nutrition, as a fitness instructor and attend an Anthony Robbins coaching course in Rome. She pays for most of this herself.

Mette has had a lot of different jobs and for very different reasons. One of the reasons Mette explains was that she was on a mission to find out what kind of work she really liked.

I wanted to find out what I liked. It has always been ... it’s been a search for what I wanted to do. There’s no doubt about that. And I have been very conscious of that.
Potential career guidance points

Mette’s narrative reflects a constant desire to try out new occupational opportunities; she seems to constantly seek to put herself in new situations and to learn about herself and what kind of work she enjoys through work. A question is whether Mette could have benefited from career guidance? She explains that she attended coaching, and this made her able to follow her heart. At the follow up interview Mette is in the middle of a radical change in her working life. She has set up her own business as a massage therapist.

The analyses of Mette’s narrative allow us to identify the following potential career guidance points:

- Mette enters and complete office training
- Mette gets a work-related injury
- Mette drops out of upper secondary education
- She gets a trainee position in a law firm.
- Mette falls ill
- Short period of redundancy
- Start education as massage therapist
- Start her own business

It is important to notice that this is not Mette’s CV because Mette has almost her entire life held a job and often more than one, the list comprises potential career guidance points as we can identify them from Mette’s narrative and in relation to our knowledge about the Danish guidance system.

Educational guidance

Mette herself talks about different types of support and different times in her life. Mette finds the support from the counselor at upper secondary (HF) helpful. Her life was chaotic by then and she had to quit, she was glad to be presented with the opportunity to come back the year after a couple of years and felt that the school believed in her being able to complete her studies. But the school (and the counselor) never made contact again, neither did Mette. If they had Mette would maybe have considered completing her studies, she explains.

E-guidance

Mette contacted e-guidance while she was in Greenland she wanted to know more about education programmes within physiotherapy and nutrition. She explains that she was ready to live from study allowances. Mette got in contact with e-guidance when she was looking for information about education at the internet. She sends an
email in which she asks for information about the possibilities and gets an answer. She find it encouraging that this works and the counselor writes that she is more than welcome to contact her again when she is back in Denmark.

The role of PES in labour market transitions

When Mette starts her education as massage therapist, which she pays for herself she does so while receiving unemployment benefits from her union, this is against the rules but Mette explains that she doesn’t feel bad about it. I am applying for jobs but there is no job to get, she says. Mette is reluctant to talk about this:

They (PES and the unemployment fund) don’t do anything to help me get a job... It’s a hopeless system. If they find a job for me they make themselves redundant.

Mette has experienced that the PES does very little to help her find a job. When she returned from Greenland she was contacted by the PES – she explains her situation, that is that she has just returned from a job in Greenland, she then hears nothing from the PES and she doesn’t get any money. She then contacts the PES and an employee tells her that they will contact her for a first meeting. Mette says that it’s a waste of time she has participated in the same meeting (with the same agenda and information just one the year before. Mette talks about the meaningless activities at the PES as a kind of ‘job’. You get your benefits, you spend two hours applying for jobs, and you spend two hours at a meeting. 6 hours that leaves you with a fine hourly pay.

I don’t need to understand the system I just need to follow it.

She uses phrases as: ‘you have to show up’ – ‘Then they will leave you at peace’. ‘If you do something yourself you are in the fast lane, they can’t follow you.’

The PES then transfers Mette to a private employment service provider, which should help her find an internship, by that time Mette has found an internship herself and it seems to Mette that the private provider does not know what to do with her.

During her contact with the PES Mette has never experienced that someone asked her: What do you like to do? What are your interests? Mette assumes that she isn’t the only adult in search for a fulfilling work and wishing for a transition on the labour market. Mette says:
'I think that 40% of the people who are in the same situation as I they are there because they want a change of work. They don’t want to work in an office… they (PES) are so eager to get us back into the offices instead of asking. Could we reeducate you to do something different?’

Mette has tried to say to the employment officers she has been in contact with: ‘I want to work with something else, can you please help me’. She was told that she can apply for ordinary education and for study allowance ‘as young people do.’ Mette was disappointed with the answer, she thinks there are all kinds of learning possibilities and expect for the people working in PES to know about them and be able to guide her to relevant learning opportunities that can support her labour market transitions.

They are so busy trying to fit us back into the same job that we are trying to escape.

Mette thinks that it is not acceptable to PES and to her Union that she wants to change her line of business.

The union doesn’t want this because the effect would be that you left the union too.

The PES should be neutral in terms of supporting peoples learning activities, according to Mette. Mette has also tried to get other courses for instance cleaning, hygiene. She ended up paying for this herself at AMU. She was entitled to 6 weeks course, but she was not entitled to the kind she wanted.

Follow up
Since the first interview Mette has started her own business. She has done so because the activities in the Job Centre were aimed at getting Mette to take a wage subsidy job. Mette found is strange, as it seemed like the Job Centre had a hard time helping her find an ordinary job. At the time of the first interview Mette started an internship at an acupuncture Clinic. The reason Mette was allowed to do this internship was because she was supposed to be assisting in the reception and with bookkeeping as that was what the Job Centre regarded. Mette arranged the internship around doing actual acupuncture in the clinic while she was also studying this in the evening. They have a lot
of contacts. Mette finds that there is certain negativity about wage subsidy jobs and some employers exploit the system. One lawyer, for instance, had no other employees. Mette attended meetings at the Job Centre and had the impression that it was one size (internships and wage subsidy jobs) fits all. She overheard people suggesting alternative routes to the job market but was met with resistance from the Job Centre. Mette then decided to start her own business as a massage therapist. She has extended knowledge on how to gain the competences needed to get authorization and she took part in different learning activities to gain and improve these skills. She is very focused at attracting customers to her business. Mette thinks that she will never go back to being a legal secretary. The big difference is that she is now out of the office she has chosen not to do her bookkeeping herself. The learning that has supported her in the transition is what she did at her courses in sports therapy, coaching and acupuncture.

**Talking about unemployed and access to adult education**

Mette finds that it is tough, economically, for adults to enter the education system on the same terms as young people. She also finds it difficult to gain access to the educational system but at the same time it necessary and crucial for her to persevere, as she needed the further knowledge and skills to radically change her working life.

It is Mette’s experience that the system for tackling unemployment in Denmark is directed at the wrong people. Instead of focusing on helping those that are motivated, they target those that are unwilling to find work with various control and monitoring systems. They forget to help those that are willing and when they do get to them, they fail to help them in the right way. They say: you are in this line of business; you stay in this line of business. Mette finds that the unions contribute to this because they would lose members if people changed their occupations. This is therefore a weakness in the system. Mette feels that kind of logic this is not sustainable in the long run. Through her learning activities Mette has met other people who have paid for their education themselves. *This doesn’t create equal opportunities AND makes it hard to succeed because they have to earn money while attending learning activities.*

Whilst Mette is able to pursue further education, Mads is reluctant as he has more risks and family obligations. This in turn leaves him with different and fewer possibilities for changing his line of work.
Potentials of PES and career guidance from a participant perspective – managing on my own

Iconic Case Anna

In this case we will also analyse potential points of contact. One significant difference between the two cases is that where Mette is seeking support within the support structures available to her PES, her union and e-guidance and she is disappointed when her needs are not met, Anna is not expressing a search for support. This will be discussed in the discussion rounding the three cases presented under the theme support structures.

Anna is 46 years old. She has been divorced since 15 years and lives alone. She has two children above 18. She lives outside the Copenhagen area in a 4 room flat. Her educational background is general upper secondary education (Gymnasium). She has later acquired a vocational qualification as a clerk through recognition of prior learning and an 18 week VET course at a commercial college. She has had a working life characterised by many shifts and primarily in low skilled functions (receptionist, punch operator, sale). She is currently unemployed (since 9 months) and is connected to the Job Centre and will have to be activated within the next couple of months.

During the interview, she reflects on the fact that she took the general education route (Gymnasium) after basic schooling and that this, when she talks about her choice retrospectively, was the wrong route for her.
Learning for Career and Labour Market Transitions – the case of Denmark

Similar to Mette, Anna has tried out many different jobs in her life (see above) and she describes how it was possible “back then” to come from the street and be employed without any certificates or references. She does not think this to be the case today: the labour market focuses more on formal qualifications. One of her explanations for this is the high unemployment rate which makes it easier for companies to “pick and choose”.

When Anna was asked about the many jobs she has had after working in the Y bank she constructed her shifts as a deliberate choice she made. She wanted to try out something new. The changes between jobs are not narrated as being problematic or challenging. But despite this seemingly appetite to try out new things, security is a key word for Anna’s working life. She has never dared to move beyond the positions at the

Anna’s CV

- Temporary work in an office after Gymnasium
- Temporary work in a stock room
- Steady employment in Y bank (14 years)
- Temporary employment as a Temp:
  - Receptionist
  - Office work
  - Warehouse operative (few weeks)
  - Mobile telephone company (few weeks)
- HGS (VET in order to become a medical secretary)
- Unemployed (4 year)
  - Activation in a company in Copenhagen
  - Temp in a kindergarten (8 weeks - activation)
- Stress
- Benefit claimant for a short period
- Employed in X bank (5 years)
- Stress
- Unemployed
  - Course in accounting at a commercial college
  - Job and assessment of competence
- Future prospects: clerk with customer contact – all round office work

Labour market changes and personal transitions

Labour market changes and personal transitions
lower echelons of an organization. She was asked in bank Y if she wanted to become a leader, but she turned it down with this reason. “I prefer to blend in.”

**Learning opportunities**

Anna started in an unskilled job where she worked packaging invoices and moved into a job in a stock room which was physically hard. She was then employed as a punch operator in a bank where she was on piecework. This job opened for new job opportunities where she learned administrative tasks through on-the-job learning:

> I was in customer service, I wrote letters, all kind of tasks. And everything was learning-by-doing. Well of course, I had somebody who taught me but ... back then you could come in straight from the street and find employment. The only requirement for my employment was a math test. And this I remember clearly [Anna laughs]

This is characteristic of her entire working life. She has learned on the job and through peer instruction.

As to formal learning, she has taken some courses at vocational colleges especially during her unemployment periods but she does not narrate these to have been put to use in her working life. E.g. Anna signs up for a course at a commercial college in order to qualify to become a medical secretary. She takes classes in Latin in Copenhagen. Most of the participants wanted to become medical secretaries but

> As our applications for positions as medical secretary apprentices were unfruitful, people dropped out of the course. […]

Anna did not complete the course as she did not get an apprenticeship position. The courses that she has taken have not promoted her chances in the labour market in this sense and she does not see any connection between course participation and the jobs she has had. It is her work experience that has helped her to get a qualification as a clerk.

Anna’s narrative illustrates in various ways that she constantly return to the importance of feeling secure in her job and that she is less likely to take chances. Here career guidance could help her see and feel that security while she is in transition and that might in turn release a learning potential because she can relax about the security and truly pursue what she is doing. This could count for her attempt to educate herself as a medical secretary which she quit because she could not find an apprenticeship.
**Points of potential career guidance points**

In terms of her many transitions Anna has never looked for support beyond her friends and her feelings. “I discuss it with myself, I think: what do I want? What is my gut feeling? Is this what I want?” From an outside perspective, there seems to be at least three transitions in Anna’s life where career guidance might have been helpful:

1. The transition from basic schooling to Gymnasium. Retrospectively, Anna finds that she chose the wrong route. The question is whether she could have benefitted from being guided into a VET programme as the Gymnasium qualifies for further and higher education, not for entry into the labour market.

2. Anna’s return to the education system where she wanted to become a medical secretary. This seems to be a critical turning point where guidance might have helped her to finalise the programme instead of dropping out. Especially a kind of advocative guidance which actively served the interests of the adult students and took an active part in marketing the more mature students to help them secure the apprenticeship that is necessary in order to complete their education.

3. Her current situation as unemployed where she runs the risk of falling out of the unemployment benefit system within six months. Despite two activation courses, Anna does not report on an interview which was helpful in allowing her to realize her own barriers for learning, her own potentials and her space of possibility in order to make a career change.

We go more into point three below.

**The role of PES from a citizen perspective**

During Anna’s long-term unemployment she was connected to the regional labour market centre (PES). She felt that the un-employed people were treated in a condescending and humiliating manner. She tells how people who had been in the labour market for 40 years were treated badly. This experience made her think
“This, I cannot accept. And then I meet an old colleague from the bank by accident and she says, I work in X bank. And then I sent an uninvited job application to the bank.”

She still feels that being unemployed is humiliating and that the treatment by the Job Centre (PES) is condescending. She thinks that her Unemployment Fund is better at supervising unemployed people. At the job centre individual job interviews are often mass meetings where the individual client has to draw a number in order to get access to individual support.

At the time for the first interview Anna is unemployed again and is soon to be activated according to the Law on early activation. She starts in May and the activation ends in June. Her activation activity will be a course that focuses on writing a CV and job application. She has been through similar courses five times and Anna is very critical. She thinks it is a waste of time. It would be more meaningful if she could have a wage subsidy job. Anna is not alone with her criticism of the Danish activation system at the moment the system is heavily criticized from different perspectives (see e.g. the ironic description from the perspective of an unemployed: Aaen, 2012) including the Minister of Employment (Ministry of Employment website: http://bm.dk/da/Aktuelt/Pressemeldelser/Arkiv/2013/02/Ny%20beskaeftigelsespoliti k%20skal%20sikre%20ledige%20en%20bedre%20indsats.aspx).

Anna was interviewed again in March 2013. She told about her job situation which was unchanged i.e. still unemployed. She had been through two activation courses, one in May 2012 and one in January 2013. The activation courses lasted four weeks and took place on weekdays from 8.30 to 14.30. The activation courses took place same place and had similar content.

The activation courses were run as part self-study, part exercises and part interviews. Anna compared the two courses and said that this time it had been more structured and included more exercises, however it was still primarily based on self-study i.e. the participants applying for jobs during the course and the teachers helping them with writing the application and teaching them to answer a telephone. The participants included receivers of unemployment benefits, social security and those eligible for help because they had fallen outside the unemployment system (recent legislation has reduced the period from four to two years).
Anna said that many of the participants were not motivated and spent most of the day playing cards. It was up to the individual participant to make use of the offer and ask for interviews with the teachers. The teachers put their network to the disposal of the participants; however for most of the participants the course did not lead to employment. However, Anna thinks that the course was helpful in the sense that she had something meaningful to take part in and she enjoyed being part of the group. She found the conversations with the other participants very helpful. But otherwise, the course was focusing narrowly on writing cvs and on job interviews.

Returning to the first interview and her dream of becoming a medical secretary, Anna narrates the main barrier as one of the companies being reluctant to take in adult apprentices. She still perceives this as a main barrier and says that today the only way to achieve this dream is to receive student grants and this is an economic barrier. She says: “It is damn difficult to start studying when you have settled down. If you had a load full of money, you could do it”. Anna sees the limitations and not the possibilities. Another major barrier in Anna’s narrative is that of transportation. It is something which she mentions several times: that she does not want to work too far from home. She simply cannot overcome working too far from home. She talks about being afraid of taking public transportation and relates it to her experience with stress. Although, she has been to a psychologist and says she has learnt a number of ways of dealing with stress, she is still easily brought into a condition of feeling stressed. This was something which she discussed with the participants in the activation course, many of whom had gone down with stress or depression.

When asked about the future, Anna says that she might have to take a job in a local supermarket. She perceives this is as the only solution. Her daughter works there and she might be able to get employment and accept the low pay. She talks about crowding-out in the labour market i.e. people with higher qualifications taking low-qualified jobs. When asked about her “dream job”, Anna says that she would like to work for a humanitarian organisation in a job half-clerical, half-social work. However, this is also narrated as problematic: you have to start working as voluntary help and you cannot be sure to be employed afterwards. Her reason for dreaming about this kind of job is that she would like “to work with people”.

**Summary**

From Mads’ narrative we categorised three kind of learning opportunities based on Mads interpretation of the type of competence development they would each provide.
Learning for Career and Labour Market Transitions – the case of Denmark

1) providing competences for the job;
2) providing competences potentially relevant for the job;
3) providing competences wished for by the individual learner.

This categorisation actualises the collective agreements as well as the managers as gatekeepers for employers to gain access to learning. The case suggests that there are unequal opportunities for funding possibilities within the structures such as the unions’ collective agreements and the competence funds. None of the participants in the interviews mention the competence funds. It could be interesting to analyse Mads case in the light of the flexicurity model where the logic of Mads employer according to Mads seems to be that withholding learning opportunities can serve as means to sustain employees in their current positions which is quite the opposite of the values and ideas the flexicurity model was based on. Mads point to a wish for greater individual disposal of the learning opportunities.

Career guidance as a support structure and as support potential

Mette exposes a strong and complex wish for the possibility to make stable but radical changes in her working life. Mette thinks she has had a need for career guidance. She wanted to change her line of work and was met by practitioners who wanted to keep her in the same line of business.

Whereas Mette’s case illustrates a search for counseling which can help her explore possibilities, Anna is in no search for exploring her possibilities. This does not imply that there is less potential concerning Anna’s participation in career guidance activities. The two narrative interviews point to a number of personal barriers for learning which Anna could be made to reflect upon in cooperation with a counselor. Counseling activities in career guidance cannot provide more apprenticeships, but the guidance practitioner could take on the responsibility of marketing students for apprenticeships. Such support structures are identified by the NICE-network as a function of career guidance and counseling under the headline Social Systems Intervener and developer and described as one of five core competences as social systems intervention and development.

The narratives reveal several points in the lives of the interviewees where they could have taken advantage of career guidance. These shifts are related to shifts and transitions and could be provided by guidance and counselling centres independent of the Job Centres as these seem to have too much of a double role to provide this service.
Learning for and from radical changes in the labour market

In our analyses of the narrative interviews we discovered that quite a few people have experienced what we call radical changes in their working life. We define radical changes as a change in job which is a shift from one profession to another. In the theme of support structures one iconic case was Mette who wished for and was actively pursuing a (radical) change in her work life through participation in different learning activities. From the interview material we have selected two iconic cases. In each case the informants tell about radical changes and the difficulties they have experienced. The cases exemplify radical change triggered by stress respectively severe illness. In cases, meaningfulness and the wish to make a difference has given rise to a new and different perspective on career and mobility in the labour market. For Hans and Tom pursuing ‘meaningfulness’ is now given a higher priority than before when prestige, high wages and upwards mobility were their criteria for success.

Stress as a trigger for change

Hans is 45 years old. He is married and he is living with his wife and two children. He lives and works in in a big city just outside the Copenhagen. Hans tells his working life story chronologically, starting with the fact that he worked as a salesman for 8 years for 3 different companies. He has been working since he was 10 years old.
Trigger for change

Hans is made redundant from his job as a salesman in 2008 due to the general recession in Denmark. During Hans’ period of unemployment which lasts for six months, Hans’ daughter says something to him which causes Hans to consider the possibility for making a radical change to his work life.

When I stopped as a salesman my daughter said: I’ve got a new father now, totally different from what I have ever had.

Hans’s daughter meant that in a positive way and that made Hans think about what kind of father he had been for the last 8 years. He then sat down and thought about what to do and which way to go from there and decided that he would like a serious change of job. After talking to his wife Hans decided that he would like to work with children. Hans and his wife have a son, who is autistic, and he felt that he could use these experiences in future jobs.

Hans showed up to a meeting at the union, where he was to answer what he would like to work with in the future. He replied that he wanted to work with children. He experienced a very positive feedback and afterwards he found out that out of twelve

---

Hans’ CV

- Trained in retail
- Works for a while in a warehouse
- Works in customer service
- Drives as a salesman for 4 ½ year
- Works a short time, 1 ½ month with two Swedes.
- Working in an office supply store, where he is Key Account Manager
- Starts working in a company situated in Jutland
- He works in the company for 1 ½ year in spite of nonexistent sale
- Unemployed for 6 month.
- Starts to look for other kinds of jobs – educational/pedagogical.
- Got an interview in Copenhagen in a kindergarten.
- Got a new interview at a school He got the call already in the car on his way home and he got the job.
unemployed salesmen in the room that day only two of them would take a key account manager job again. Similar to Mette, Hans experienced that there were many people who would like to change try a new line of business. In the first interview Hans explains that he applied for around 100-200 jobs, it was uphill, but he also got a positive response in between. Hans finally landed a job in an afterschool care at a primary school.

In Hans’ case the meeting at the union played a positive role and supporting him in his efforts to change his work. This is opposite to the experience Mette had with her union where she experienced that they didn’t support her efforts. We do not know whether this was due to lack of capability or unwillingness to help the union members change their line of business. Mette suggest that the latter plays a role when members are seeking career guidance and support to change from one profession to another. During the last 10 years unions in Denmark has given higher priority to career guidance. Several unions are marketing the availability of career guidance as one of the advantages of being in a union. For many years unions in Denmark have played a pivotal role in relation to supporting their members in pursuing (lifelong) learning opportunities. The unions administer the so called Competence Funds which is aim is to support further education and to broaden the members professional skills. The funds can be used for a broad range of activities that are specified in the collective agreements. Access to learning has always been high up on the negotiation agenda.

**Learning**

About this change in his working life Hans says:

I have changed my work dramatically. From wearing suits, be clean and freshly shaven. To go with jeans, be dirty and unshaven. Ha ha ha

It's a whole new world. Before, everything was square and orderly and now you have a lot of freedom. Before the responsibility was counted in dollars and what matters now is children who need help to move on.

I've had to learn continuously for one and a half years. I started out in a second grade class with a very experienced teacher. I had a hard time finding my role.

Hans explained about learning in the new job as an assistant to the school pedagogue:
They have set a VERY good pedagogue by my side. And in the beginning I walked around like an apprentice and one sees how things work. What has been most difficult is what lies behind. "How is a child doing? good or bad or?" I’m getting better, but yet not good enough.

Hans also participated in some courses through his work at the school, but mostly courses in what is called the LP model, an educational analytic model on which all staff at the school are expected to base their work.

Hans tells about an activity at his new job that he found especially challenging because it was very different from how he was expected to conduct himself in his previous job in retail. The activity was called pedagogical day and all the staff are gathered to learn from each other

I was a great challenge for me, because we had to interview other people and ask for other people’s views and opinions and wasn’t allowed to comment ourselves. Previously I was in control of the agenda which was all about selling stuff, now what matters is to ask the right explorative questions to get other people to open up.

Hans would like to become a social worker. He considers starting with the assistant education which he can do as distance learning. He would like to complete the entire education, but considers this would be economically impossible, because the family cannot afford him being on study allowance.

**Stress**

Stress also plays a part in Hans work life history. After working as an assistant to the school pedagogue for a while Hans has a break down. From his narrative we can see that the shift from trade to pedagogical work is a major shift. For instance Hans was used to work on his own. He would often be alone driving from customer to customer. During his different employments as a salesman there hasn’t been much communication between him and his colleagues. In his new job Hans is working with an autistic boy, he explains that he has difficulties handling the shift between being at work or being at home, he thinks a lot about the children at work while he is at home. He tells that he starts to keep to himself while being at home and he also has difficulties to concentrate. Both Hans's colleagues and his wife notice this and urge him to see the doc-
tor. The Doctor had to check if it was stress or depression, but it was definitely stress related. Hans starts seeing a psychologist.

Discussion: Can stress be related to learning or to the lack of (learning) coping strategies that are needed for certain types of jobs and certainly for working as a pedagogical assistant with boys in need of special care, attention and teaching. The underlying assumption is that learning plays a significant role in relation to stress.

**Follow-up**

Hans was interviewed in January 2013. He was still employed as an educator assistant in a SFO in primary school. However, he had been through a merger between two SFOs and this had been very demanding and had challenged him mentally. He experienced mood swings both at work and at home. He explained his reaction as one against working in an organisation that was too big and too impersonal. There was no longer time for reflection or time for working with an individual child or group of children. He labels it “pure child care”. At home, his son has started at a continuation school. The son enjoys being away from home, but Hans misses him and has problems handling the fact that his son is growing older. Hans is looking for a new job within special education. This is his pathway, he says.

**Illness as a trigger for change**

Tom lives in a mid-sized town and has worked in various parts of Denmark, but primarily in Greater Copenhagen. He is currently unemployed. He talks about his wife, Hannah, and his autistic daughter. Regarding his working life, Tom states:

> I haven’t had a plan of, what do you want to be? And I haven’t... I haven’t really had a goal in terms of career. Even though it’s actually happened for me and I ended up as a project manager and IT manager along the way and what have you.

Tom was recruited through local network. He was interviewed at the chartered surveyors’ office in Slagelse. Tom was very open about his situation and his thoughts about his working life. He also seemed to be looking for meaning and advice and came on as open minded and searching.
There have been a variety of reasons behind the transitions during Tom’s working life. In his first job, he decided to move on after becoming tired of the job, always being rushed off his feet and the long hours. Once he discovered that not all supermarket executives had the same expectations regarding employee work rates, he began to look for positions elsewhere. Regarding his next position, Tom tells that he was supposed to have been a travelling Space Management consultant, but it turned out to be a very quiet year with little activity after his boss suffered a coronary thrombosis and subsequently ‘used his resources elsewhere’. As a result, Tom received new assignments which did not suit him and he began looking for a new job. In his next position, Tom worked as a travelling Space Management consultant covering a large district. Consequently, he was away from home a lot.

Talking about his years in retail, Tom states:

I’ve been quite fortunate with that kind of thing, with getting involved with the kind of stuff where it’s been pioneer work.

I think that’s what has pushed me on each time. I guess I’ve actually been pretty good at finding those things which uh, that’s something I want to get involved in. Shake things up.
He also says that, while it may appear as though he has had a lot of transitions, all the chains are related:

> It was part of the family. Whether you worked one place or the other, it was more or less the same thing.

Tom does not find transitions within the same line of business as problematic. He explains that he has been able to gradually move on and upwards all the time by switching between the different chains which he sees as part of the same family. The more difficult transition began when he fell ill and started to pursue other kinds of work. As the below quotes illustrates it was not very difficult to find a job but new insecurities set in. Insecurities which were related to Tom’s illness and to the fact that he wasn’t formally qualified to the new job.

**Trigger for change**

During his working life, Tom has suffered two cancers. He does not tell much about the first instance; just that it went well and did not hit him too hard. The second bout was in 2008 and he tells that it did not go too well because they were extremely busy at work and because he:

> Had a boss who was incredibly bad at dealing with it.

Tom was able to return to work for a period where he to start with worked two days and took three days off. Subsequently, they wanted to see whether he could work half-time, but Tom says about this:

> It was kind of all or nothing for me, so that didn’t work.

Tom therefore handed in his notice, but they agreed on a severance package whereby he remained in the company’s employment for four months but did not actually work.

Tom indicates that the illness has had great significance in relation to his future working life. He refers to the cancer as a wake-up call: “Hey! What the hell is it actually that is important in life?”, and as a result he now has other priorities in terms of work and of what he wants to do in the future.

Following his resignation and period of illness, Tom found work with a local firewood supplier where he spent seven months. Among other things, he operated a machine for
cutting up the wood. Tom describes this job as somewhat transitional and he therefore looks to move on:

And when I could, like, feel that now I had more or less got my head sorted out and was back on top of things, someone came, along purely by chance, and said that they’d heard that they were looking for a caretaker and a youth care assistant, half caretaker half youth care assistant, somewhere or other.

Tom got the job and, six months later, dropped the caretaker role and functioned entirely as a youth care assistant. He worked there for two years, until February 2012 when the place went bankrupt. Tom is currently mainly applying for positions which involve working with young people because, as he puts it:

It’s been fantastic for me. I mean, the whole thing of working with young people who’ve had a few problems and who you can help. It’s the best job I’ve had. That’s for sure.

At the time of the first interview, Tom finds himself in a transitional period where he is unemployed but still receiving a salary due to a bankruptcy at the youth institution where he was employed. Tom wants a job which he finds meaningful, where he can make a difference, and he gets that from working with young people. Tom finds it difficult to be unemployed:

Well, actually the hardest thing about being unemployed is that you don’t... it may well be I’m getting paid and all that kind of stuff, but the moment I start receiving unemployment benefit, there will be a psychological shift; I’ll feel like, ok, now being unemployed is a whole different kettle of fish. But it’s more the thing of there not being any time frame.

The lack of a time frame is something that Tom finds difficult in this transition: not knowing when you’re going back to work and thereby not knowing how long this transitional phase will last. This feeling of uncertainty and problems with dealing with the “unknown” future runs across the sample. In the next section on learning from labour market transitions, all three interview persons talk about the difficulties handling not knowing when they will find a new job.
Gaining foothold in the new trade/profession

Tom describes the change of profession/sector as a strange readjustment process. Despite a 50 per cent salary reduction and waving goodbye to the company car and company phone, Tom still considers it the best decision he’s ever made.

At the time of the first interview Tom is looking for work as a youth care assistant but finds it difficult because he has no qualifications in this field and only two years of experience. Nevertheless, he expects to find something sooner or later.

On the current job market:

The problem is that there aren’t a lot of jobs around at the moment, not in this field. And the people applying, even though it’s youth care assistant positions, they’re getting applications from qualified youth educators. And that’s somewhat of a challenge.

Learning

Tom talks a lot about his path into the retail industry and what he terms Space Management. He quickly received in-company training within Space Management, which he describes as very much a buzzword at that point in time. This training made it easy for him to find other positions.

While employed in the retail industry, Tom took a number of courses, including project management training and courses in presentation techniques. He has also spent time making presentations and teaching trainees and retail personnel. Tom has also completed several courses in IT. Looking at the way in which Tom has been able to move onwards and upwards it look as it has been possible because he has constantly been a first mover, seeking new challenges and being the first to learn new areas.

In his spare time, Tom has both coached a youth football team and been a scout leader for a group of mentally handicapped children and these are among the competences he is actively using in his job search and which he emphasises in his CV. In relation to him functioning as a football coach Tom has completed several football coaching courses which he has left off his CV (he discover this during the interview). The interviewer asks what you learn on such courses and it becomes clear to Tom that it’s not just technical knowledge about playing football, but also how to motivate 9-12 year old children, for instance.
In Tom’s case it seems relevant to point to the potentials of career guidance that could help Tom explore his prior learning experiences and link them to competences asked for in the new line of jobs he is pursuing and even to introduce accreditation of prior learning as a possibility.

Tom would like to study again, some form of pedagogical course, but he considers the financial side of studying while having a family untenable. This Tom has in common with Hans who also points to the financial side of studying as a barrier. Denmark has set up a formal system for accreditation of prior learning which would be relevant to consider both in the case of Tom and Hans.

Work – Life balance
Tom does not say much about his home life. We learn that he met his wife back when he first started at A, and later on he also talks about his daughter, who is autistic. He also makes active use of his daughter’s autism in his job applications where he highlights the experience and knowledge it has given him.

Tom tells that it was extremely difficult to keep his working and private lives separate while working in retail. He was online around the clock, could be called in at any time, and he says himself that he prioritised work above his home life and that his working life infiltrated his home life. He is pleased that the two are now properly separated:

You’re more like a person who participates in both contexts, but in completely different ways. When you’re at work then you’re at work; when you’re at home then you’re at home. That’s something I completely failed to grasp (laughs).

Support
For the time being, Tom continues to receive his salary following his redundancy and he is therefore not yet a part of the system. He mentions the possibility of receiving support via the job centre in the future, but he is none too enthusiastic:

But I’m not too keen on having to go through the job centre and all that, and having to go all the way out there.

Still on the theme of the job centre, Tom says that ‘then they come along with all their tests and all kinds of irrelevant stuff’. As such, he wants to avoid the job centre and
find something himself. Tom talks about why he approaches the job centre with dread and trepidation. His aversion stems from his period of illness with cancer where he was attached to the job centre and had an unfortunate experience at a large group meeting on sickness benefits:

Then there’s a PowerPoint presentation where they explain about being on sickness benefits, which I don’t really understand that I am because I receive a full salary, but yeah, my company gets that refunded, but I had to sit there anyway. And then that PowerPoint finishes up with that, by the way, if you didn’t feel unwell, and this is really what it said, then you could go out to the counter and you could tell them you’re well again and be registered as unemployed. And then I just sat there and thought: “You’re just taking the piss. Now I’ve sat and listened to this for twenty minutes, and you finish up with a slide where you actually question whether I’m sick, if that’s why I’m out here.”

Tom adds that, as a result, he is a little perturbed.

Towards the end, the interview takes the form of guidance with the interviewer asking about and making suggestions regarding opportunities for further education and training etc. Afterwards, Tom indicates that the interview has opened his eyes to new opportunities regarding both education and jobs.

**Follow up**

Tom has held three jobs since the first interview. One of the jobs was a permanent position but he quit (again) due to poor working conditions. After that he found another temporary job working with criminal youth, and then the business went bankrupt. He then found work in a boarding school in a temporary position – but fell ill with cancer. Tom is currently on sick leave with cancer and has been for the last 1½ months. Being sick has been difficult for him and has made it even more difficult to start looking for a job. He doesn’t know when and for how long he will be able to work. The job center has let him be for the moment but he expects them to contact him soon. Tom refers to the meeting at the Job Centre that ended with a slide where the Job Centre encouraged people to report that they are not sick anymore. That meeting has set traces. It has been a turbulent time since the first interviews. Tom has been able to find jobs that he has been happy with but the illness means that he has not been able to gain a foothold within his new line of business. When Tom is asked what kind of support he could
need he says: ‘I have been talking to a social case worker at the hospital. It was the hospital’s suggestion. Then you can talk to someone who has no interests and no moneybox. It is really difficult to be in this situation.’ The medicine he takes has side effects and he is not able to hold a fulltime job. The job he had required long working hours (often in the evening) so it was difficult for him to get time with his family whose support Tom needed whilst fighting the cancer. He talked to the social worker about finding part time work. Tom told the social worker that he would really like to work but that he cannot endure too long hours right now. But no workplace says: ‘just come 5 hours a day and do what you can.’ Tom talks about the possibility of getting a flex-job. To be considered for such a job he would need to be declared 50% invalid, which means taking part in a trial period work assessment to test manageable work levels (arbejdsprøvning). If he has to go through that he will do it. Up until now he has not been able to work, but work means a lot to Tom. He says he should have changed his line of business many years ago. He hasn’t talked to the social worker about taking an education. Economically it has been hard since the first interview- another bankrupt workplace, different jobs and so on. Tom talks about a psychological shift and uncertainty in relation to these changes.

It is important for Tom to take good care of himself. He can’t bare thinking that this would be his last work. He needs contact with other people and to get away from home. He would take any job that could help him be in contact with other people and get away from home- delivering mail for instance.

But right now, the most important thing is peace and quiet for Tom. Later he will get an answer as to how his cancer is responding to treatment. He feels that his life is on standby. The waiting time is tedious and hard. If he gets positive feedback he will start thinking about work again. He hates the vacuum. He wants to stay active and it helps to do so. He still coaches football and will continue to do so. He thinks it will help him to work but he is not able to.

To gain a foothold in his new line of business Tom needs to think about how to tell a future employer about his situation. His employer would have to accept that he needs to go to the hospital for regular check-ups.
Summary
To sum up on the theme Learning for and from radical changes in the labour market and the presentation of two iconic cases, Hans and Tom made transitions from one line of business in respectively sale and retail to working with children and youth as assistant pedagogue and youth care assistant we will highlight the following bullet points for discussion.

It is more a question of learning from the transitions than it is a question of learning for the transition. In these cases there has been little planning of the transitions they have been spurred by life events. Therefore learning has been a matter of learning on and from the (new) job. Not a matter of learning to qualify for the job.

There has been very little – next to none – career guidance or advice made available to Hans and Tom. In the first theme about support structures we used the term potential points of contact. We see similar potential points of contact for career guidance in these iconic cases.

Downwards mobility (we need to problematize this term)
Central to the cases of Hans and Tom, is that they experience radical changes in their careers which means lower salary. They change from skilled to unskilled jobs. As pointed out in the introduction to the Danish study the education benefits a directed towards the unskilled – this means that Hans and Tom would both have difficulties getting a share of the education benefits. The Danish Government passed a law on accreditation of prior learning stating the everybody are entitled to have their prior learning, non-formal, informal and formal assessed and accredited.

People such as Tom or Hans are trapped in the system, they want to pursue a radical change in their work, but they are not the target group for adult guidance, they are not the target group for accreditation of prior learning, they are often not entitled to receive study benefits because they are not in a permanent position, they want to change profession and cannot access education and training through their unions and they are considered to be skilled already. Therefore they end up doing un-skilled work, having difficulties gaining foothold, being the first one to be made redundant in times of crises and having poor access to formal learning activities. Another possibility for obtaining funding for education as an adult is revalidation which is used very differently across the municipalities. You are entitled to revalidation if you, due to illness are unlikely to
be able to perform the job you were educated for. However, in both cases their working life histories point to numerous skills gained through non-formal and informal learning, which could be recognised and put to use elsewhere.

In the next section, we have another example of radical change and of downwards mobility and its implications for the individual and the social community of which he is part. However, compared to Hans and Tom, Erik is strategically going for the change having used his gardening leave as a period for reflection and personal development.
Learning from labour market transitions

In this section, we will look into how labour market transitions spark off a learning process. Through three iconic cases, focus is on how our interview persons have experienced being dismissed and put on gardening leave and how they narrate the transition as a learning process. The interview persons have all in common that they received full salary during six months and hereby had the opportunity to reflect on their careers and how they would like to see them develop. The three cases chosen represent:

1) The radical career change (see also the previous section);
2) The change in work-life balance;
3) The continuation of career.

The section is based on the follow-up interviews where the interview persons were asked to describe their experiences during the gardening leave and reflect on what they learnt during this period. The cases touch upon the same two themes as the previous sections i.e. support structures and change, but add to this the theme of learning and the learning processes made possible during a transition. This section points to the learning potential of transitions in contrast to the political idea of transitions as something to be controlled and minimised.

From executive director to green keeper

When I first meet Erik, he is in the middle of a crisis where he is uncertain as to the direction that his working-life should take. He has a background where he has worked his way from shipping trainee to executive manager in an international company with strong traditions and identity. He has suffered from severe stress as a consequence of a major merger between two companies and is at the time of interview still highly affected by this stress situation. He is fired due to re-organisations and is challenged in all aspects of his life at the time of the first interview:

Economically, he has to reconsider the economy of the family. They live in one of the most affluent and expensive areas in Copenhagen:
One of the hardest things, that’s the economical, the money that’s missing. I haven’t been hit hard, as I have a wife who earns, she also works for the Company, and earns a lot. So we’re ok, although I earn nothing compared to previously. Together we’re ok. But we cannot afford the big expensive things any more.

Socially, it is a kind of “dérout” as there’s a lot of prestige connected to being an executive manager and working for this specific company.

Existentially, Erik has to confront himself and his values and reflect on who he is and what he wants to be. During the interview, he talks about becoming a green keeper but has serious doubts:

Is it because I think it would be awesome to be a green keeper? Or is it because I hereby avoid some of the things that I fear by working in an office and being a leader or all the tasks connected to this, because I’m ... I don’t know.

When I met Erik seven months later, he had taken a decision which is radical in terms of his working-life: he had started in the vocational programme for green keepers and had also managed to find an apprenticeship through his extensive network. The interview evolved around his decision and what it had taken him to go from uncertainty to a radical change of his career.

The role of support structures in transitions
The support of others had a catalytic effect in the case of Erik. Especially the conversations with a close friend were narrated as having helped Erik to reach a decision. When analysing Erik’s narrative on the support that he drew on during his transition, it can (tentatively) be categorised as civil society, market and state.

Civil society
The radical change that Erik has made has been with the support of a good friend. Erik describes how he has discussed his situation with this friend and that he has been able to give him the feedback necessary for Erik to reflect on his situation and have new perspectives to work from:

I have a really really good friend. He’s also the one who has provided me with the contacts [to the golf clubs]. He is the most fantastic person to sit down with
and have a conversation, so that you find clarity about your situation and what you think. He gives you a friendly kick, so you turn things around.

Like Mette, Erik emphasised that dialogue is one of the most important factors in taking a radical decision and he continued:

If you don’t have such a friend, then buy a session with a coach, who is good at it.

This is also something which runs across the sample: the open dialogue in which somebody listens actively and takes on the role as a critical friend.

Market
As part of his gardening leave, Erik’s previous employer bought an outsourcing package at AS 3 where he had the right to six sessions. When Erik was interviewed the first time, he did not have the mental resources to use the support provided by AS 3:

I was offered an AS 3 scheme with placement and outplacement service and I started, but I couldn’t really go on with it. I didn’t really know what to do and couldn’t find out what I wanted to do and so on. Basically, I had a good time being at home, but the insecurity about what the hell should happen to me afterward, weighed heavily so ... I couldn’t really enjoy it as I liked, like you enjoy a holiday for a month knowing that you have something to return to.

I got a briefcase where I had to write what my mission and life goals were, and I had to get back to work again, great, that was awesome. I sat at home, I sat in the living room and looked at the papers, and suddenly I started crying. I just sat there and my eyes filled with tears. My wife sat in the sofa and asked, “What’s wrong?” “I don’t know. I simply cannot contain it. If I start containing it, I start crying”. I couldn’t.

Erik’s narrative points to the fact that counselling/coaching cannot be standardised and delivered as a ‘bulk’ commodity. It has to be adapted to the individual client and take his/her life situation into account. In Erik’s case, the coaching sessions were put on standby for a period until Erik was emotionally ready to start working on his career plans. In the second interview the AS 3 support was narrated as central to his decision-making:
I worked with AS 3 about this [decision]. To get the greater perspective: what do you wanna do with your working-life? I tried to make a journey: I stand before the day of retirement and look back upon the past 20 years, which are those that I have to define. When you see those years, what do you see? What has been fantastic? Why have you been happy for those 20 years? What have you done where you thought, wauw, this is just fun and great?

In this exercise, the aim is to identify Erik’s values and make him gain a sense of his ‘intrinsic’ motivation. The exercise led to a list of 28 points in which Erik defined a “good” working-life. The list included items such as good management, good colleagues, motivation, work-life balance and specific items such as working outdoors, having a well-defined working day. In the exercise, Erik reflected on his experiences from his former job and how he had been available 24/7 and decide that he wanted another balance in his life.

During the interview, I asked Erik to reflect on his decision-making process and he said that he had not been ready to go into this process at the beginning, but as he got better, he had the energy to start working with the coach and go into a more strategic rational coaching process [important point]. AS 3 also adapted the coaching to his needs and supported him in the process towards making this radical change happen.

State
Finally, Erik talks about his encounter with semi-public support at his union (semi-public as the union is under the legislation on unemployment and has to inform their members of the rules). This reflection was brought around by a question concerning the role of dialogue and the need for symmetry between the participants in the dialogue. About the interview (in Danish: samtale which has different connotations than interview. To “samtale” means to talk together) at the union, Erik says:

When I was fired and applied for unemployment benefit, I needed to go to an interview. At first I thought, “great”. As an introduction, a two hour presentation was held about practical stuff and legislation. It was ok. And then we had this interview and I thought, that’s great, I look forward to it. I’m going to have a good dialogue with this guy about the future. How I see it and my possibilities. And then I came up to a young guy, who definitely didn’t have any management or personal experience. He was standing at a counter. “You have to apply for this and this many jobs!” Well, listen, I’m looking into the possibility
of becoming a green keeper and of course it’s difficult […] “That’s not enough. You have to apply for other jobs”. Well, fine, but my goal is to become a green keeper. “But the rules are like this: you have to apply for at least four jobs and then you have to apply for something else”. Ok, see you.

The impression that Erik is left with is that the interview was solely about control and had nothing to do with guiding him in his efforts to change career. The experiences with the unemployment system are in most of the narratives quite negative (see Hans, Mette and Anna). Erik feels that the message conveyed is that it is close to impossible to make such a radical change as he is about to do.

It should be noted that in Denmark unemployed people have to meet a number of requirements in order to receive unemployment benefit:

1) They have to register that they are available in the labour market once a week. If they forget, the unemployment benefit will be suspended/confiscated.
2) They have to apply for four jobs every week and depending on the union the applications have to be uploaded or a list of applications has to be filled in. The number of applications was lowered in 2012 due to criticism from both employers and unemployed people (see section xx).
3) They have to attend a number of meetings at the jobcentre or in the case of people with an academic background in an external provider of employment services. As with the registration, absence without legal grounds will lead to the suspension of unemployment benefits.

In the narratives, the role of the PES seems to be concentrated around making people abide by these rules and less on supporting the unemployed.

Learning from transition
Erik pointed to three factors in terms of a successful transition: time, money and network. Making a radical decision such as he has done takes time. Erik had six months of full salary and a wife in a high salaried position, and he was therefore not under immediate pressure in order to push the decision. Finally, Erik’s personal network was important. He pointed to his close friends and to his wife as important people who have supported him in the decision-making. The metaphor that Erik is using during the interview is the metaphor of travelling: a personal journey.
Reflections on change

When Erik reflected on change and the barriers for taking a radical decision in terms of his working-life, he talked about the reactions from the surroundings. Basically, he described two types of reactions, the supportive and the non-supportive.

As to the non-supportive, there seems to be a certain level of conservatism among people. Expectations are that Erik either should stick to what he has been doing in order not to waste “his potential” or that he will not be able to fit into a job at a lower level of the echelon.

When Erik applied for an apprenticeship he met different attitudes among the golf clubs that he contacted:

Some said directly that I was too old. Others thought, that here’s somebody who has quit his job. A big boss in XX company. He has been a leader of many people. He will not fit in. It won’t last. Or he will take over my job. “I’m green keeper now and he’ll push me out”. Others said, “that’s great! Fantastic that you have managed to do this. I did it myself many years ago when I […]

As to the supportive, Erik seemed to spark off reflections in other people where they started reflecting on their careers and what they “really” want to do. There seems to be a general feeling of “being caught up” in a career. This may reflect the fact that many of the interview persons are in their mid-lives.

Erik’s narrative about the labour market was one about a certain level of rigidity. Downwards vertical mobility is not easy and a major shift in mid-age is likewise perceived as problematic, also by Erik himself. He talks about social segregation: that he does not have any friends who have a vocational background and that he feels that the attitude towards him has changed since he made the shift from top management to green keeper. He is aware that this is an attitude that he has himself. A radical career change affects not only the person himself, but his role in his social network and the relations within the social network.

Finding work-life balance

Katrine was in a similar position to Erik’s, but her way of handling it was different. She seemed to be more clarified about her situation and what kind of changes she wanted to see in her working-life. Her background was to some extent also similar to Erik’s.
She had climbed the hierarchical ladder from IT assistant to Head of the IT administration in a ministry. She was made redundant as part of a general 10% downsizing of the public sector. However, whereas Erik made a radical change in his working-life, Katrine focused on work-life balance and on how to promote specific values in her life:

That’s something else that this reflection has given me – that I don’t want to go back to that. I want a balanced life, and of course I want to work, I enjoy working, but it’s not going to take all my time. So there’s also that balance. That I want to make an effort, I want to leave my mark like I’ve said the whole time, but I also want to leave my mark in other areas. Whilst previously, perhaps even last year, if we use that as the turning point, I would have said I’m going to leave my mark on the job, you know? So that’s also the major difference since this redundancy.

In the second interview, Katrine continued this narrative and narrated her decision to go for a job as middle manager as an informed choice. She had reduced her weekly working hours from 60 to 40 and made space for travelling. She described her decision as a compromise between her need for security, which she finds in her competences within IT, and the need for making a difference, which she pursues through humanitarian work.

The role of support structures in transitions
Katrine had a wide range of opportunities for support during her gardening leave, in fact almost “too many” she concluded. Whereas Erik considered the support he received from his friend as the most important, Katrine did not mention anything about support from family or friends. Instead, the offers provided by the market in the form of coaching and mindfulness are central to her transition.

Market
Katrine received support from AS 3 and two personal coaches, one (Cecilie) of which she had met on a mindfulness course and the other (Anne) as a management coach during her employment in the ministry. When comparing the offers, the coaching sessions with Anne were the most helpful. Katrine had three sessions with Anne who helped her to become more aware of her wants and her needs. Anne encouraged Anne to see her gardening leave as an opportunity, regardless of how traumatic Katrine perceived being dismissed after 19 years in the labour market. Anne made Katrine reflect on her needs and objectives. An exercise which is central in Katrine’s decision-making is the same as described by Erik:
What kind of life narrative would I like to look back on the day I die? What would I like to have experienced? I worked with these more philosophical questions during my gardening leave. What I learnt was that my work should not be so dominating. I wanted something else into my life that could trigger me.

Katrine’s case shows the usability of narrative approaches in guidance.

The support provided by AS 3 was more focused on writing CVs and cultivating her social network and Katrine thinks that she was quite capable of this without any help. However, AS 3 proved helpful in the sense that the AS 3 coach also worked in a project for ethnic youth and was able to support Katrine in her efforts to do humanitarian work. She established the contact between Katrine and a mentee. In this sense, the coach brought meaningfulness into the AS 3 course but as a side-effect.

Finally, Katrine had contact with the leader of the mindfulness course who had become an acquaintance (“in-between the sphere of my professional and private life”). Cecilie helped her through conversations where she reminded Katrine about being mindful in the transition and create an awareness of herself and her needs.

**Learning from transition**

To Katrine, the gardening leave provided her with the possibility to evaluate her working-life and “do some soul-searching”. She was able to assess her values and realised that some of them were no longer so important for her: prestige, influence/power, position (see also the section on radical change). She made a decision to change her working life – in a less radical way than Erik – but still to work for a better work-life balance although it meant that she had to go down the hierarchical ladder to middle management.

Katrine had also become more aware of her professional network and to nurture this network. As she says, “You never know when such a transition period might come back”. Linked-In is mentioned as an important way to keep your network updated. Katrine uses the metaphor of “comfort zone” to explain the changes that have taken place during her transition. She has been forced to step out of her comfort zone and test her values and competences.

**Reflections on change**

The reactions from her surroundings have been quite positive:
People have been positive, professionally and personally. The reactions are often related to the personal level, where people say, “great that you had the courage to do this!” The fact that I have stepped out of a career, out of a stressful life. [...] 

Like Erik’s narrative, there seems to be a general longing among people for changing their life into another direction.

Katrine narrates the gardening leave as a “unique opportunity” and points to the fact that she had the financial room to turn the transition into something positive:

Had I had three months of termination of my contract and had two children, husband and a house, which I couldn’t pay if I didn’t get a job within three months, then I think my focus had been completely different. Then it is a question of your monthly pay check. But [coaching] as a supplement could work in order to turn the situation into something positive: you have a chance not to go by routine but to have a sense of your gut feeling. I definitely think that coaching could be a good offer [to unemployed people].

If we compare the support structures that Katrine has drawn on, there are markedly different from the support structures described by Anna who has been activated by the job centre. To turn focus from the writing of CVs and to the intrinsic motivation of the unemployed proves to be valuable.

**Continuation of career and yet!**

In the first interview, Bente is trying to come to grips with her situation. She has been employed in the same company for 25 years and has never been unemployed. She finds the situation troublesome and is focused on finding a new job as quickly as possible. Compared to Erik and Katrine, Bente does not reflect about making a radical change in her career pathway. Her dream job is one similar to the one she has had for 25 years. She has a strong identity as a translator but still she is ready to take whatever job that she is offered and describes in the first interview her strategies for finding a job before her gardening leave ends:

- Applying for jobs below her qualification level. She describes this strategy as problematic as she is competing with many applicants and may be considered over qualified by the employers. She says
You cannot use a standard application, and I know, but I can feel that in terms of some of the jobs I’m applying for, I am, sorry for using this expression, applying downwards, because there are no translator jobs – you know, people with knowledge of communication and languages are being dismissed when there’s a crisis, right, and I can do many administrative things, office work and the like, so it is quite natural for me to apply for a job as secretary, and then I experience that we are many applicants. A position I applied for had 900 applicants, right [...];

- Applying for jobs at her qualification level. This is difficult as many translator jobs are being outsourced by companies.
- Being self-employed/freelancer in translation but she is not whole-heartedly following this strategy as being part of a collegial group is important for her:

  My mother-in-law says, “well, if you have to sit at home, you might as well sit and translate”. But I have found out that I want to have colleagues. I want to have sparring partners and I also think that by sitting at home, I have found out that [Freelancing] is not me.

- Applying for jobs in teaching where she can draw on her qualifications, but where she does not have the teaching qualification. She says

  I wrote to AOF and HOF [liberal education organisations] [...]. I called and then I asked – teaching, right. And if I had some ideas [...] And then I wrote that I would like to become a teacher and they probably already knew what they needed, but if they needed one, I would be ready, and I had some ideas – now I’m a fan of Jane Austen and I could plan a course in this, no problem, or in commercial writing.

In the second interview, Bente has been employed as a translator in a lawyer firm and on my invitation she reflects on her transition period.

The role of support structures
Similar to Erik and Katrine, Bente was offered an outplacement package at AS 3. However central to her narrative is the close dialogue that she has with her husband during the transition.
Civil society
In both interviews, Bente’s husband has a central role as sparring partner on her applications and CV. He is as concerned as she is with her situation as it is not solely her problem but a problem for both of them:

[…] He was just as concerned as I was. One thing is that you for many years talk about the risk of one of us being unemployed and that we could handle this. It is this insecurity that you feel. So he was strongly affected by the fact that his wife was unemployed. He thought, “now I have to hold on to my job”. We are both addicted to feeling secure. He is employed in the public sector and can lose his job if a restructuring takes place. So he is vulnerable too.

The unemployment situation reaches into the life situation of the family and Bente and her husband work together in order for Bente to find a job. Her husband comments on her applications and coaches her:

I started out making a CV with the aid of the outplacement. Brief and concise and no longer than three pages. And my husband said, “but you also know this and this. Nobody will understand what competences you have. What about all the other stuff you’ve done”. And he has coached me. You need to have somebody to talk to. We [sic!] went from a chronological CV to a thematic CV.

The dialogue with her husband is narrated as central in her efforts to find a job.

Market
Bente is offered an outplacement package by her previous firm and she has six coaching sessions of a duration of 1 ½ hour. During the coaching sessions, the coach focuses on helping Bente with mapping her competences in order for Bente to create a CV which encompasses her competences. Bente also says that the coach helps Bente to boast her self-confidence:

Of course this coach in AS 3 she sits there and says, “well, what can you do? And then, fantastic you’re also able to do this”. It’s probably a psychological thing that they have to do in order to make you feel good.

Bente is also coached on how to present herself at a job interview:
Next time I had to prepare a presentation of myself. And then I said something which was too colourful. “You have to say, I, I, I”. That was one of the things that I learnt. To focus on myself. Not say we, say “I” [interestingly Bente still uses the neutral “man” or the plural “vi” during the interview].

Compared to Erik and Katrine, the AS 3 sessions have in Bente’s case been addressing the practical aspects of her job search. She does not talk about more existential reflections on her situation or coaching related to possible career changes.

**State**

Officially, Bente is only unemployed for a month. It was a situation that she dreaded in the first interview. I ask her in the second interview if her expectations were met:

> I had hoped that I would get a job before. You have to … it’s full-time employment to be unemployed. You have to register and write and follow-up. Fill in and not fill in and remember a lot of deadlines. Well, it’s oh… I’m not good at it. That you … that somebody has to decide over you in this way.

In Denmark, a public debate has been if unemployed people take advantage of the Danish social security system. In this debate, one case was used to illustrate how unemployed persons are basically not interested in taking available jobs. This person, Robert, has become an iconic case and referred to as “Lazy Robert”. I ask Bente about her opinion of Robert:

> I was only unemployed for one month. But in my own eyes I was unemployed [for the whole period of gardening leave]. And you wouldn’t wanna be compared to him. It was so annoying. Somehow it becomes personal what goes on in the media and it is not constructive in any way.

Later when talking about the bureaucratic measures set up for unemployed people, she says

> Somehow you understand it. We don’t want any Lazy Roberts. But there are so many of us [unemployed]. And nobody reaches out for us. You are just a number in the line.

Bente narrates the system as bureaucratic and with a strong focus on controlling the unemployed in order to avoid free riders in the system. She is not offered any support as unemployed person as she says
Maybe I got registered as somebody who could manage on my own.

**Learning from transition**

Bente perceives her gardening leave as a period where she has learnt about herself. The transition is narrated as a rupture and a transformative learning experience. She says:

> Now I’m in a job and I can sit and think, “well, it was a good and educating period”. But that’s only because I’m in a job. If I hadn’t had a job, I would have pulled my hair out and been totally frustrated.

In terms of her search strategies, Bente evaluates these in terms of learning:

- Applying for jobs below her qualification level proved to be difficult. The fact that she had an academic degree was by some employers perceived as a disadvantage:

  I applied for clerical jobs and called. Generally, I called for information on most jobs before I applied for them in order to learn about the job and to introduce myself. Often I was told that I should apply as I had an interesting profile, but I also had other reactions during the conversation, “But you have an academic background. Then we don’t want to employ you cause you don’t wanna be here. And then I thought, “well, if I want to change to something entirely different, then I won’t have a chance. So sometimes I didn’t send my application as I knew that it wouldn’t be selected due to the fact I have an academic background.

- Applying for jobs at her qualification level. In the first interview, Bente said that jobs as translator is generally difficult to find. However, in terms of the job that she found she says:

  I had the right profile for this job. It is difficult to change. Now I got this and this is great. But it has been frustrating to experience that you cannot change and do something else.

- Being self-employed/freelancer in translation was also an option which presented itself to Bente. She had a former colleague who called her to ask her to do some freelance work for him. But during the transition Bente realized that she was not interested in working from home and having no close colleagues:
I also learnt that I shouldn’t have my own small company at home. I wanted to go out and have some colleagues.

- Applying for jobs in teaching was a strategy that Bente pursued and was actually successful in doing. She made a proposal for a course in written English for a liberal education association. However, there were not enough participants. She also applied for a job as English teacher at a commercial college so she did contemplate making a career change during her transition:

  It’s not because I didn’t apply. But again there were many others who applied and who had the right background. I didn’t have a teacher qualification. I called on a job in Hillerød and had it been I would have been qualified on a continuous basis. But there were 200 applications, so they didn’t consider my application.

In terms of her strategy to find a new job, Bente applied for jobs within, below and outside of her profession. She found that it was difficult to change career pathway. This may reflect the fact that in times of crisis, the labour market is “buyers’ market” and the employers can pick among many applications. In the case of Erik, he used his network to find an apprenticeship.

**Reflections on change**

Bente does not change her career pathway during her gardening leave but still she goes through a process of personal development where she has to discover what her skills are and what she can offer in a labour market where jobs are scarce. She discovers – among other things – that she is resilient and has a capacity to learn new things quickly.

She narrates the transition as a process of personal development where she has had to “re-invent herself” and learn “how to sell yourself”. She does not use a specific metaphor to describe the transition but draws on the languages of self-development and marketisation.

**Summary**

In all three cases, unemployment is a trigger for a process of development and change. The situation that the interview persons involuntarily are placed in gives rise to reflection and action. In terms of learning, the interview persons are emotionally strongly affected by the situation and have to learn how to cope with a new life situation.
In terms of support, an external provider of outplacement service, AS 3, has been providing coaching. The experiences with AS 3 vary across the cases. Erik experienced a coach who adapted the service to his specific needs. Katrine had a coach who could help her with her ideas of doing humanitarian work, while Bente received practical advice on applications, CV and job interviews. The coaches employed by AS 3 are employed on a freelance basis and matched with the clients on the basis of the clients’ background and sectorial experience. So although, AS 3 has a common approach to the outplacement dealing with the various phases that a dismissed person goes through, in practice the coaching is adapted to the individual client (from clarification to active job search). The support provided by AS 3 is perceived as helpful due to the adaptation to the individual needs.

In the iconic cases of Erik and Bente, the support from family and friends makes the major difference. Erik is supported by a friend who asks him the relevant and critical questions during long walks, while Bente’s husband helps her in her search for a new job. They both emphasise the importance of dialogue and the role of somebody who listens. This is also the case of Katrine, although she has made use of professional coaching through a coaching firm. Katrine recommends coaching as part of the support of unemployed people.

As to the public/semi-public system, none of the interview persons has any experiences with offers that supported them during their transition. In the case of Erik, he narrates one incident where what he thought was to be a dialogue was in fact an information meeting telling Erik about his obligations as unemployed. Bente’s overall narrative is characterised by ambiguity. She understands that the system has to control that there are no free riders, but she also feels that the system is overly bureaucratic and controlling. The unemployment system has been heavily criticised due to a number of rigid requirements which the unemployment fund had to control.

The transition is in the case of Erik and Katrine used as an opportunity to reflect on their careers so far and how they would like their careers to develop in the last 20 years in the labour market. Both use a method of retrospection i.e. looking back on their working life on the day they retire/die. This method makes it clear to Erik that something radical has to change in his working life (it should be noted that another trigger is the fact that his son is involved in a serious car accident). To Katrine it is a matter of work-life balance.
A theme which cuts across all three cases is the difficulty of career change. They describe various barriers: personal, social and structural. At a personal level career change challenges the identity and requires will power (?), resilience and capital (social and economic). Socially, a career change also challenges the surroundings. In the case of Erik, his radical career change also changes his place in the social community. Work identity is strong in the Danish context and the move from executive director to green keeper gives rise to different attitudes and reactions. Bente’s situation is also a situation which affects her family and creates a feeling of insecurity. Structurally, the cases of Erik and Bente show that both the labour market and the unemployment system have difficulties handling career changes. It is difficult to leave a trajectory once established. It demands a high level of determination in the person making the shift, along with support from the family and nearest friends.

Transitions as opportunities for change: transitions provide an opportunity for change. During transitions the interview persons have the possibility of change and for learning. The transition is a rupture with previous career. Support structures have to support learning in terms of the cognitive, the emotional/affective and the social.
Career decision-making styles

In the summaries drawn up on the basis of the narrative interviews, we attempted to categorise the interview persons’ career decision-making style. This categorisation was tentative but still adds to a picture of career decision-making which is overwhelmingly opportunistic. If we see the four styles from a temporal aspect, the majority of the interview persons relate to the present and the opportunities at hand.

If we look into the narratives of those who are in a transition between jobs it is striking how they in this process with the help of others (professional coaches and family) draw on other career decision-making styles. Erik is an iconic example as he goes through the stages of non-coping through the evaluative (what has working life been so far) to the aspirational (and what would I like it to be according to my aspirations), to the stra-
tegic (how can I get there) to the opportunistic (what are then the possibilities in my network and in the education system to make it real). In this sense, this is not only decision-making typologies but career guidance methodologies that can support a transition. The stages described here correspond to the prescribed stages in career guidance in many theories (e.g. Peavy, 1997).

Comparing Erik’s narrative to that of Anna, she also stands out as an iconic case. Anna is in another situation in terms of social network and financial situation. The activation schemes offered by the Job Centre focus narrowly on practical aspects of writing a CV and performing at a job interview. There is no focus on Anna’s competences, her “needs and wants” (as Katrine puts it when talking about coaching) nor on any strategies for moving Anna from unemployment to employment. On the basis of the narrative interview, Anna does seem to have resources for a career change however she is focusing narrowly on barriers and have no idea of her actual space of possibilities. The schemes offered by the Job Centre are not supporting Anna in making her transition a transition, but seem to leave her in a defensive position where a job in a supermarket is perceived as the last resort. Anna’s narrative is not the only one pointing in this direction; Mike and Mette have the same view on the Job Centres and their activation schemes. Mette says in the interview about the Job Centres:

Yes, but I just think that they (PES) are not even taking the time to sit down and really listen to people. And it has lacked every time I’ve been there. They are more focused on getting people quickly through the system. Out of their office, yes; not out of unemployment, as such, of course. Somehow I can understand them, because the more people they get back to work, the less they get to do. That is, if they have less work to do, so they will also be fewer. They would close themselves down. So I understand, but it’s just not good practice. I think it’s a shame there are so many good resources in people we need to listen to what they want. And many of them, they are geared to do something different than what they’re doing. Through an interview you could find out. You don’t get anything from answering questions on a piece of paper, because the only thing you have to answer is what computer programs you know and for how many years have you been doing Excel. It gets you no wiser people. I didn’t know what I wanted to do…I could not put a title on…So I think the people who sit on the other side of the table should be professional enough to come up with ideas on what it could be. Just like my expectations to the
career counselors in the schools. They should be able to come up with good ideas, well, what do you want to be when you grow up? (Laughs)…And I think it is a real shame because I really think that they (PES) miss being able to get people out in some amazing jobs that they would love wildly.

Mette points to the need for career counselors opening up the space of possibility of the individual and helping her through the stages of finding out “what you can do”, “what you want to do”, “how you can do this” and “what are the possibilities”. She points to the professionalization of the career counselors in the Job Centres and from the narratives, we would point to the need to separate career counseling and the control functions laid down in the legislation on unemployment benefits. The fusion of the two leads to a double role of the career counselor and adds ambivalence to the relationship between counselor and counseled.
Transversal themes

The data material in this project is rich and provides basis for many perspectives on career and labour market transitions. In this report, we have chosen to go into three themes which are central to the project. In this section, we will trail the narratives into the wider societal contexts and see how they are linked with policies and institutional settings in the Danish context. Furthermore, we will outline a number of key issues which we would suggest to be further explored theoretically and empirically.

Flexicurity – flexibility but less security

The flexicurity system is in many ways represented in the narratives of the interview persons. Transitions are perceived as part of a working life and are not problematized in terms of changing from one company to another. To the interview persons it is “natural” to change jobs and be mobile which is also reflected in the fact that around 700,000 employees, approx. 1/3 of the labour force, are mobile every year. Consequently self-decided transition from one job to another is not problematized, especially not if it is within the same sector. Sectorial or trade shifts are problematized by the interview persons. There seems to be many factors that reinforce a linear career pathway: societal values, social structures and national policies. It seems from the narratives to be easy to move within the same sectors and trades/professions that one is already qualified for and difficult to acquire new competences and move across sectors and trades. In this sense, there seems to be a certain degree of conservatism in the flexicurity system, some collective agreements and the PES which makes it difficult to change career pathway.

As to the security component of the flexicurity model, this is currently being eroded. Recent legislation has as described in the section on the labour market context reduced the maximum period of eligibility for unemployment benefits and strengthening the conditions for re-earning the rights. These changes are reflected in the narratives where there is a strong concern about ensuring one’s foothold in the labour market. The PES is described in highly negative terms and there is no sense of being “secured” during unemployment rather a sense of being controlled and treated in a condescending manner reflecting an overall discourse on unemployment and unemployed people as free riders and a burden to tax payers. In the current political debate, the discussion centres around the role of education and training in employment policies. The present gov-
Government proposes to move emphasis from activation to education in the employment policy. This is a return to the policies of the end 1980s where education and training played a central role in activation measures.

**The global crisis – unemployment as an individual problem**

The global crisis is pervading many of the interviews. Almost all of the interview persons recruited through AS 3 have become unemployed as a consequence of the global crisis. The crisis appears in many of the interviews as an explanatory factor for the interview persons’ current situation. However, despite the crisis as a kind of backdrop there is also a strong tendency in the narratives to individualise the problems. The interview persons narrate unemployment as an individual problem, not as a collective problem which should be solved through political interventions. The public (neoliberal) discourse in which unemployment is a problem of mismatch between skills and labour market demand is something the interview persons take upon themselves. In short, there is a tendency to the interview persons taking the responsibility for situations outside their control e.g. unemployment and stress (see below). Hereby the whole responsibility for re-skilling comes to rest on the individual.

**Social downside of unemployment**

What is striking from the cases is the social downside of unemployment. Two cases illustrate people who are in higher positions and have higher level degree have better opportunities to make changes in their career. They have the financial space to take time out and reflect on their career. They can buy professional help such as coaches. They have the resources to react to the controlling forms of “counselling” at the job centres. Furthermore, they have been given six months of gardening leave i.e. full salary in the transition period which provides a sense of security in this period – although it does not prevent a sense of urgency and stress.

**Stress as an individual problem**

Stress is an undercurrent in most of the interviews. Despite the fact that this was not a theme pursued and not even taking into consideration in the sampling, 11 out of 21 had suffered from stress in various degrees. As with unemployment, stress was narrated as an individual problem to which there had to be found individual solutions, like ensuring a better work-life balance, going through psycho-therapy, learning how to be mindful and present, etc. Stress can be identified as a potential contact point with support structures.
This search for “mindfulness” and “meaningfulness” also runs through the sample. The persons who chose to make a radical career change did so out of consideration for making their lives more meaningful and being able to make a difference to other people. Their choice seemed to spread in ever-widening circles causing other people to reflect on their working life and what they would like to achieve in life. This may have something to do with the age of the interview persons being in their mid-life.

Further and continuing education and training

In the narratives, learning-on-the-job is narrated as the most important mode of learning. Learning-on-the-job is often seconded by courses closely related to the work and the company. In the case of Erik, who worked in an international company, a predestined career pathway was made possible through international and external courses. From the sample it also stands out that the higher position the more likelihood that the person will take part in further and continuing education and training. This picture fits into statistics drawn up by the Economic Council of the Labour Movement (Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd) from 2012. They showed that unskilled workers participate less in adult and further education than the rest of the labour force. The figures showed that those with a formal short-term higher education had a participation rate of 90% which was the highest in the labour market. Furthermore, that non-formal education such as learning-by-nelly, internal seminars and courses are most widespread (AE, July 2012).

When it comes to participation in formal education and training there are a number of barriers. The case of Mads shows how leader and managers are gatekeepers to training. The case of Mette shows how the unions can be gatekeepers and the case of Anna shows how the labour market (lack of apprenticeships) may turn out to be a gatekeeper. In all three cases, it is also evident that their own mindset may prove a barrier along with social and economic capital. The case of Erik shows how the change of career in mid-life requires will power, resilience and determination, not to mention capital in all its forms. It raises a central question in this era of LLL: how can midlife career change be handled – politically, socially and individually? The competence funds described in the section on the labour market context can be seen as such an answer. It draws on the idea of “vouchers” and provides the individual with the right to continuous and fur-
ther education and training. However, as they are managed by the unions and the requirements are laid down in the collective agreement, they may prove a barrier to career change as in the case of Mads. This is something which could be further explored.

**Transition as a productive pause**

Transitions are in education, guidance and employment policies perceived as something to be smoothed out and reduced to a minimum. The idea of lean, cutting away the superfluous is dominant due to strained public budgets. However, the narratives open up for another perspective on transitions: as a time for reflection where ideas mature and where learning can be transformative and lead to radical career changes. In the transitions, the interview persons point to the dialogue (in Danish: samtale – talking together) as an important support. The dialogue is based on a symmetrical relationship and a significant other willing to listen. It can be family and friends, but also a private coach. In terms of the Danish guidance system, this points to the need for an impartial and independent guidance – a task which PES seemingly has problems handling within a controlling policy framework.
References


Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd: Ufaglærte får mindre efteruddannelse end højtuddannede, juli 2012.

Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd: Gennem 00’erne har Danmark haft Vesteuropas største stigning i ulighed, august 2012.

Aftale mellem regeringen (Venstre og Konservative), Socialdemokraterne, Dansk Folkeparti og Radikale Venstre om udmøntning af den afsatte reserve til styrket voksen- og efteruddannelse i perioden 2010-2012 og VEU-puljen (5. november 2009)

Andersen, P.T., Bredgaard T, Juul, I og Larsen, T (2007). Indledning, i Tidsskrift for Arbejdsliv, vol 9, 4,(5-7)


Eriksen, A.H. (2012) Over 300.000 færre på AMU-kursus (3f.dk/article/20120402/NYHEDER/1204993/).


Petersen, L. (2012). Ledige får mindre uddannelse end folk i arbejde 3f.dk/article/20120627/NYHEDER/120629905
