



Call for Submissions

Thematic Issue of the journal *Sociologie du travail*

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Lifelong Learning: Individual Commitment or Collective Duty?

*Proposals for an article should take the form of an anonymous text comprising between 8000 and 10,000 characters. They may foster diverse disciplinary perspectives and adopt qualitative as well as quantitative methodologies. Proposals relating to countries other than France or of a comparative nature are welcome. These proposals should be submitted in electronic form to the review's editorial department **no later than 15 December 2019**.*

In 1995 the review *Sociologie du travail* published a special issue coordinated by Odile Benoit-Guilbot and entitled “Contre le chômage la formation? Variations européennes” (“Combating Unemployment through Education? European Variations on the Theme”). Since that date, “lifelong learning” has established itself both within the European Union and its member states as an inescapable reference point of public policy with respect to employment as well as professional and social integration. However, like “permanent education” before it, it gives rise to societal translations which differ through historically contrasting institutional configurations, through the manner in which the debates take place in each country, through the way that reforms are crafted and that systems and their appropriation get shaped.

Not limiting ourselves to the French case, the objective of this issue is to subject the inherent tensions involved in lifelong education – related to its regulation, contours and usages – to an empirical investigation in different sectors, professions, territories and societies. Going beyond the study of practices, the concern is also with examining the category of lifelong learning itself. How does the European category relate to nationally instituted categories (Jorbe et al., 1995) such as *formation professionnelle continue* in France or *berufliche Weiterbildung* in Germany? What kind of practices do these categories include and exclude? What about on-the-job learning for instance? Or where are the boundaries between training and information? What are the roles played by coaching and personalized accompaniment? How are these latter thematized and adapted in connection with lifelong learning? Can a distinct line of demarcation be drawn between professional and personal education, whether of a certifying

character or not? What exactly is behind each of these subcategories, how are they translated into theory and practice? Who are their users and to what purpose? Finally, in each of the countries under examination, what are the main debates and conspicuous displacements in the recent history of lifelong learning?

In France, since the year 2000, continuing education has been the object of several reforms which have redeployed its scope, particularly at instigation of the European Commission, which promotes the broader category of lifelong learning. The reforms came into being on the basis of starkly contrasting assessments of the existing system, these sometimes bordering on the paradoxical. On the one hand the ineffectiveness of training and the opaqueness of the use of funds devoted to it are the object of recurrent denunciations intermingling diverse arguments such as rent appropriation, misappropriation of pooled funds and the ultimate futility of training (see especially Cahuc and Zylberberg, 2006); on the other hand, the necessity of lifelong learning enjoys an overwhelming consensus in dealing with major issues such as the struggle against unemployment, the safeguarding of career paths and the competitiveness of companies.¹ Continuing education is therefore called upon to simultaneously participate in the development of individuals – in terms of both the personal and professional side of things – and in the success of collective projects conducted at various scales, from the company to society as a whole, through sectors of activity and local territories. In connection with these issues there are two requirements which have never ceased to be promoted in France, often conjoined and sometimes contradictorily, the one being equal access and the other being the cost-effectiveness of training (Dubar, 2015). Added to the discussion more recently has been the question regarding the latitude of individual choice. The recent French reform synthesizes the ambiguity of these discrepant requirements under the evocative heading: “Law for the Freedom to Choose One’s Professional Future.”²

This special issue calls for an analysis of the challenges raised by the French equation aiming to combine equality of access, cost-efficiency, individuals’ freedom to choose and self-realization. It also aims to bring together contribution devoted to those specific terms of the equation of lifelong learning which prevail in other countries as well as to those issues which ensue from it, and if possible why not in comparison (as an introduction see Milana et al., 2017). So as to better enter into the factory of these national equations and to ensure a dialogue among the contributions, we suggest three main angles of attack.

1. Responsibilities: New arrangements?

A first series of questions deals with the distribution of competence among states, regions and social partners (Culpepper, 2003), further between specific persons and the collectivity. Thus in France the last law of September 2018 calls into question co-determination in the regulation of continuing education so as to make for an increased role of the national political bodies. This kind of development would not seem to be particular to France (Gräbener, 2017) but to what extent? Addressing this question requires to identify how the regulation of

¹ On this simultaneously consensual and catchall character, see Merle (2006).

² Law no. 2018-771 of 5 September 2018.

continuing education is carried out, who are its protagonists, what are their respective roles, what are the orientations and tensions which ensue (on these subjects see Brucy et al., 2007). The agenda here is to map the institutions and mechanisms of lifelong learning as well as the resources which they make available and the challenges they raise.

Another set of questions deals with the responsibilities of companies and individuals in terms of, among other things, the time and money invested in training. With the founding legislation of 1971, France chose to give primacy to “the company offering training” while subsequently also encouraging measures of “co-investment” in financial and temporal resources as required by the process of lifelong education (Mériaux, 1999). Yet compared to other countries such as Germany, in France the “co-investment” among companies, persons and public authorities is still taking its first faltering steps. In Germany, individual responsibility in lifelong learning devoted to professional or personal development has long been an established fact. This has now resulted in calls for greater commitment on the part of companies and public authorities (Zimmermann, 2018) at a time when in France the reforms aim at the reverse in strengthening individuals’ responsibility as to their employability and in terms of securing their career.

On the model of these two contrasting cases, we welcome articles devoted to specific national configurations, their historicity and rationales. Encouraged is the study of those conditions appertaining to the sharing of responsibilities and the consequences which ensue for individuals in their relationship to education, for professionals in the training sector as well as for employers and human resource managers as to their respective practices.

2. Training and individual pathways

In France, the individualization of continuing education is associated with a personalization and subjectification of rights (Luttringer, 2018) in connection with the problem of securing individual pathways. If subjective training rights are defined as attached to a person her entire life and independent of his status, the question arises as to their effectiveness and their final aim. Who makes use of them and with a view to what type of training? If the association between individualization, securing individual pathways and freedom of choice is one of the hallmark of the current French debate, then how does lifelong learning in other countries relate to the construction of individual pathways, as well as professional and social mobility? What are the associated practices and issues at debate? For instance can the accreditation of work experience, which may count toward a qualification, constitute an alternative and/or relevant addition to entering a training program? Beyond the study of the objective conditions pertaining to the access to training, the achievements which ensue in terms of professional and personal development, and the impact on individuals’ pathways, the question also arises as to the individual appropriation of training and the provisions which support it. This question covers not only that of non-recourse to rights (Warin, 2016) but the subjective relationship to training. Another equally interesting facet of the issue is the development of lifelong-learning practices at the initiative of individuals, outside the box of corporate policies and public-policy measures, whether in terms of retraining courses, professional or personal development. In France these practices can be observed particularly in those alternative sectors such as for instance eco-construction and naturopathy, but they seem to be more widespread in other countries.

Personal accompaniment established in France as a flagship mechanism of the 2018 reform, together with the reinforcement of personal advising on professional development, is yet another way of addressing this double facet, objective and subjective, of the individual relationship to training. Beyond the French case, what does it mean to support a person in terms of choosing and gaining access to training?³ What are the concrete modalities of this support, who are the actors, the providers? In the United Kingdom, for instance, attention is focused on the quality and quantity of information available to individuals for the purpose of guidance rather than support, which suggests a certain conception of individual pathways and how to influence them. Furthermore, are the beneficiaries all equal in terms of personal support, even when it is intended to be free as in the French case? Does an individualization of rights expose persons, particularly those less endowed with educational and social capital, to an increased risk of isolation and withdrawal despite the existence of a right to personal support? Does it engender new forms of non-recourse?

In order to answer these questions, one needs to undertake a detailed examination of the uses of training rights and arrangements, not only by individuals but with respect to the practices of employers, professional organizations, providers of training, as well as local and regional authorities.

3. Training and organizations: companies' practices, industrial regulations and training agencies

The aim of this special issue is to also accommodate articles which closely examine company training policies. How are these policies conceived, defined and debated? What are the uses to which those devices developed by companies are put? In what way are these in compliance with law and collective agreements? How is the legislative and contractual framework – at both the sectoral and interprofessional level – perceived, interpreted and mobilized? Are the companies themselves producers of norms in the field? Are their policies the object of an evaluation or at least a balance sheet? And according to what criteria – cost, effectiveness, struggle against inequalities and discrimination, professional development, etc.? And with what indicators for what debates, in what quarters? For instance, in order to assess training effectiveness one needs first to agree on what effectiveness means, on what the relevant criteria would be. These questions are more broadly an invitation to examine the plurality of aims involved in company training policies.

They further invite authors to take into account the sectoral, territorial, organizational, technological and institutional specificities pertaining to company practices (Vero and Sigot, 2017), when studying the types of mobilized training (specific, certified, on-the-job, etc.), the intended objectives and the actual outcomes. Under what conditions is for instance training articulated in loyalty practices and the promotion of all or part of the workforce? Is access to training resources made the object of claims, conflicts, formal and informal negotiations? On another front, can one speak of “learning” or “capability-enhancing” organizations (Vero, Zimmermann, 2018) likely to promote – according to diverse rationales, which would require

³ For a legal perspective see Maggi-Germain (2018).

documentation – development of not only the employees' skills but their professional autonomy? What are the conditions for such organizational configurations to emerge? To what extent are they able to combat those longstanding structural inequalities which characterize access to continuous education in terms of qualifications, gender, age, company size, etc. (Baudelot et Estabiet, 1982)?

A last important point is that training is inseparable from the bodies and professionals which provide it (Lescure et Frégné, 2010). Are their practices primarily market offerings and/or professional regulated so as to define standards of quality in programming, validation, certification and evaluation? In other words is training produced by market oriented firms organized in a tertiary sector and/or by collective organizations of trainers in a position to affirm specific professional identities and legitimacies towards training consumers, individuals and companies as well?

The articles should examine, supported by empirical inquiry, one or several of the above questions. They will pay particular attention to tensions, ambiguities and contradictions which influence lifelong learning, torn between its establishment as a fundamental social right and its treatment as a suppletive resource of employment policies in the same way as other instruments. Especially welcome are researches which compare or confront different training mechanisms, arrangements, usages, in different sectors and/or countries. Interdisciplinary researches associating co-authors from different disciplines are much appreciated too.

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The procedure is divided into three steps:

1. The proposals for an article should take the form of an anonymous text comprising between 8000 and 10,000 characters. It can be written in either French or English. It should be sent in an electronic format to the review's editorial department ([socio.dutravail\[at\]sciencespo.fr](mailto:socio.dutravail@sciencespo.fr)) **no later than 15 December 2019**.
2. The coordinators and editorial board will inform authors of the pre-selection results by mid-February 2020.
3. The authors of the pre-selected proposals should send their articles (75,000 characters maximum) to the review's editorial department **no later than 1 September 2020**. The anonymous articles should be submitted in French or English and will be published in the language in which they have been submitted. They will be evaluated by the editorial board in line with its usual standards.

See the editorial guidelines and submission instructions on
<http://www.sociologiedutravail.org/spip.php?article4>

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