

# **All precarious? Institutional change and turning points in labour market trajectories in Spain: Insights from narrative biographies.**

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## **Introduction**

This article analyses the impact of changes to employment regulations made during ‘austerity’ on the trajectories of Spanish workers. Taking its cue from Anxo et al (2009), this article considers that life courses are shaped by the labour market, the family and the state, in interaction with individuals as agents. Trends in labour market patterns and changes in employment regulation can, therefore, modify the way life courses are institutionalised. The so-called standard employment relationship developed in many countries after the Second World War has provided the conditions and securities in which individuals develop their careers. Life courses have been institutionalised and have become part of the social structure of society (Barteleheimer et al, 2009) through the regulation of employment. Inequalities and boundaries of exclusion have been set up (from social rights, employment protection, etc.) for those with intermittent participation in paid work, traditionally women. But, around this regulatory architecture a stable and socially protected relation has been defined in which elements such as working time, pay, social transfers, etc. are regulated by collective agreements or by labour and social security laws (Bosch, 2004), while job security regulations decrease the capacity of employers to hire and fire at will (Emmenegger, 2014). The introduction of certain rules has reinforced workers’ securities by constraining corporate-decision making. As Bosch states (2004), these elements have permitted employees to plan for the long term, both in terms of planning for everyday life and in relation to investment in their own capacity for work. Therefore, they have provided the support that allow for the capacity of individuals to plan and develop life courses –in opposition to day to day living- by making it possible for non capital-owners to be not completely dependent on others (Castel, 2003). Hence, this article aims to analyse these elements in the context of a deep change of employment relations in Spain and during the so-called austerity turn that has jeopardised employment protection.

The 2007 recession caused a deep and prolonged effect in the Spanish labour market. Between 2007 and 2014 more than 3 million jobs were lost and the unemployment rate reached a peak of 26.2% in 2014, in comparison with 8.3% in 2007. In this context, the narrative about the lack of flexibility of the Spanish labour market (Fernández Rodríguez and Martínez Lucio, 2014) gained momentum as an explanation for these patterns. In many countries, especially in Southern Europe, the austerity narrative and practices imposed at EU level allowed governments to carry out drastic reforms that the balance of power at the national level would not have permitted (Meardi, 2012). In the case of Spain, public sector budgets suffered deep cutbacks, and severe changes in employment regulations, that enhanced employers’ capacity to dismiss and to modify working conditions, were implemented from 2010 by Socialist and Conservative governments. These reforms de-stabilised previous existing norms, practices and trends and the institutionalised paths in which individuals develop their trajectories. The emerging patterns that these changes provoked are illustrated thorough data from narrative biographies of workers affected by a job loss or a downgrading of working conditions. The workers of the sample had relatively stable positions and careers and were affected by changes that substantially modified their paths. The interviews provide information about the effect of the ‘event’ in the trajectory, how individuals reacted to the change, and the trajectories developed after the change.

The article is organised as follows. In the first section we briefly describe the general trend towards weaker employment protection and explore the effects of institutional changes and ‘unexpected events’ in working lives. Second, the main changes during ‘austerity’ in

employment regulation in Spain are described and the emerging dynamics are briefly illustrated using statistical data. The following section presents the methods used. The adequacy of the narrative biographical method to analyse the effect of specific event in individual lives is discussed, and the characteristics of the sample described. The fourth section is focused on the results and deals with the dynamics of the change as an unexpected event that has spread insecurities and capacities to react and plan after the change. Finally, the last section discusses the main results.

### **The increase of insecurities in work and employment and its effect in working lives**

The demise of the regulations associated with the standard employment relation have been discussed by several authors via the expansion of neoliberalism, directly linked to the aim of capital to restore profitability since the 1980s (Harvey, 2007), and with the reconfiguration of social relations around a restoration of class power and finance-led accumulation (Koch, 2013). In this regard, a trend towards the marketisation of employment has been identified, defined by the decline of internal labour markets and long-term careers and the expansion of atypical employment. Specifically, and as Thompson (2013) argues in the ‘disconnected capitalism thesis’, there has been a trend towards systematic rationalisation and perpetual restructuring, tightening cost pressures, undermining job security and introducing different pay structures and rates. The key element here is that employer capacities regarding the use and deployment of work have been reinforced by enhancing their ability to reduce or increase employment or wage levels with ease, to increase mobility, to make more elastic use of skills, and to introduce non-conventional work arrangements (Baccaro and Hawell, 2011; Arnold and Bongiovi, 2013). Therefore, the milestone is that certain securities associated with the employment relation, such as a certain degree of security in job and working conditions are being jeopardised. These changes should be understood more as a process rather than an institutional convergence towards, namely, neoliberal regimes. This is acknowledged by MaCartney (2011) who uses the concept of ‘variegated neoliberalism’ to illustrate how neoliberal trends are embedded in existing institutional structures and conditioned by path dependencies of existing institutional arrangements and different balances of power in societies.

These patterns are far from being a general trend (Nico and Caetano, 2015). Moreover, they have been reported as more common among those with a lower capacity to resist employer changes, i.e. the least advantaged (Fenton and Dermott, 2007). In this regard, our interest lies in how individuals react to ‘unexpected events’ provoked by a changing institutional context. As argued by Potter (2015), significant working transitions destabilise lives and challenge identities and established assumptions. The effect of unexpected events in biographies can lead to what Denzin (1989) calls ‘epiphanies’, where interactions and experiences modify the fundamental meanings and structures of individuals lives. Concepts of interest here, such as ‘critical moments’ (Thompson et al, 2002) and ‘biographical ruptures’ (Lahire, 2003), permit us to identify the intersection between the subject and the institutional level in changing life course dynamics.

The literature on how individuals and households react to changes such as redundancies has highlighted two main types of responses, ones characterised by the lack of planning and capacity to react and, others, characterised by productive planning and negotiation. This is the case of the so called ‘fatalistic’ and ‘fateful’ responses reported by Thompson et al. (2002) and the ‘survivalists’ and ‘strategic’ individuals identified by Parry (2003). The key element here is that the capacity to plan is underpinned by factors such as financial security, educational level, socio-economic background, and gender differences. In their study of worker redundancy, Gardiner et al (2009) remark that what they call ‘active career planners’ base their capacities on structural factors (such as high incomes, education and training opportunities, and material and care resources) and in cultural contexts related to family, community network and trade union

membership (MacKenzie et al, 2006). In this regard, it has been argued that the spread of changes and related uncertainties has led to the re-emergence of class inequalities in the more common transitions (Atkinson, 2010), as most of the factors related to the capacity to plan are related to the existence of personal or family-related capital.

The changes in the settings of working conditions and job security are a source of ‘events’ not foreseen by the individual, which can include redundancies, retraining and career shifts. The aftermath of the 2007 recession has been a reinforcement of the neoliberal trends mentioned above. While the first phase of the crisis was characterised by fiscal stimuli and/or increased government spending, the shift towards fiscal austerity and the re-framing of the causes of the crisis as a product of State intervention and regulation led to a new phase. Several reforms of employment rights were developed in different countries weakening employment protection and eroding working conditions in the public and private sector (Heyes et al, 2014; Hermann, 2014). Therefore, how the changes in the institutional context during austerity have led to greater insecurities in working lives is a relevant object of study.

### **Institutional change during austerity: deepening neo-liberalism in Spain**

The Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) literature has situated Spain in the so-called Southern European model. It is characterised by high employment protection, which is made possible by a relatively low-level of product-market competition and the absence of short-term profit constraints (Amable, 2003). However, we consider that Spain does not fit well (or completely) with this characterisation. Following Koch (2006) we better characterise it as an “extensive labour path” model characterised by strong wage inequalities and low salaries. This highlights the importance of sectors –such as construction and tourism- characterised by an extensive use of labour force and shows that financial institutions have been deeply implicated in short-term profit strategies (López and Rodríguez, 2011). Moreover, since the 1980s, a stock of about 30% of the workforce has been in temporary contracts and employment protection for open ended contracts have decreased in practice through subsidies, deductions and lower dismissal costs for certain groups since the 1990s (author). These elements have not always been considered by comparative studies on labour market protection, which tend to consider the formal dismissal cost established in law, but not the implementation and application of these laws in real labour markets (Sola et al., 2013:78). Therefore, it is better to characterise the Spanish model before the recession as a move towards ‘Mediterranean neoliberalism’ (Banyuls et al, 2009).

The economic recession of 2007 began a period characterised by structural reforms in Spain. In the first phase of the crisis, the Socialist party in power passed measures to deal with what it considered a temporary downturn. After this period, the government performed a strategic U-turn in May 2010 accepting a programme of budget adjustment and structural reforms commanded by the EU and with a neoliberal bent (Banyuls and Recio, 2014) aimed at reforming the labour market and collective bargaining and at reducing public sector budgets. These patterns were deepened by the conservative People’s Party in 2012. These measures were imposed unilaterally by different governments, after failed negotiations with social actors (2010 and 2011) and without consultation (2012).

The main target of reforms has been job security, the setting of working conditions and public sector reform. In relation to job security, the causes for objective dismissal, with a redundancy payment of 20 days for every year worked, were broadened by including current or foreseeable losses. The reforms also reduced dismissal costs for compensation in the case of ‘unfair’ dismissal (unjustified, automatic, without pre-notification) from 45 days’ salary per year worked to 33. They included a new open-ended contract for enterprises with fewer than 50 employees, launched in 2012, with one year of probation and subject to employer’ discounts in social security and subsidies. The reforms also removed the required administrative authorisation for

collective dismissals (ERE), which acted as an incentive for firms to negotiate collective dismissals (Banyuls and Recio, 2014). On the other hand, the reforms introduced a new scheme for working time reduction. Table 1 shows how the risk of job loss has spread to permanent contracts after 2010 in comparison with the first phase of the crisis. This is especially the case for men, but also for women who in 2007-2010 had only experienced falls in temporary contracts.

(Table 1 about here)

The changes introduced in collective bargaining modified the existing structure of collective bargaining suggesting a movement towards ‘disorganised decentralisation’ (Marginson et al, 2014). Priority has been given to company-level agreements over multi-employer agreements in working conditions, and the capacity of the employer to change working conditions has been enhanced by allowing changes to be made in anticipation of future losses. Equally, the changes have allowed for employers to have the unilateral prerogative to introduce internal flexibility without having to negotiate. Finally, the reforms concluded with the so-called ‘ultra-activity’ of the collective agreements (the validity of a finished agreement until a new one is agreed), establishing that a collective agreement will cease to be in force two years after its finishing date. All the above mentioned elements have led to the collapse of collective bargaining in Spain (Fernandez Rodriguez et al, 2014). Concretely, collective bargaining has reduced from 5000 agreements and almost 11 million workers covered in 2010 to only 2501 agreements and just over 5 million workers covered in 2013<sup>1</sup>.

Public spending has also been deeply affected by the economic recession and policies to reduce the deficit. In the case of Spain two of the tiers of the Spanish Welfare state, namely education and health, have experienced significant cutbacks (Muñoz de Bustillo and Antón, 2013:15). The main reforms affecting employment in the public sector have been a 5% wage cut in 2010 and wage freezes up to 2015, an increase of working time, and a virtual freeze on new hiring. The latter has an important effect on the careers of public sector workers, as is shown in Table 2. This is due to the high rate of temporary contracts and paths characterised by years of temporary contracts until obtaining a permanent position. The table shows the strong impact of cuts in temporary jobs in the public sector, with men and women showing a decrease of about 25% of temporary employment from 2010 to 2014. Moreover, it demonstrates the higher impact on women’s careers as their share of temporary jobs was higher (a third in contrast to less than 20% for men).

(Table 2 about here)

These changes have created unexpected employment changes in workers’ lives. The key questions then are how individuals have lived and managed with this situation and what are the effects of these changes on their careers?

## Methods

The aim of this article is to analyse the impact of the institutional changes discussed above on labour market trajectories in Spain. Hence, the purpose is, first, to discern how institutional changes have increased insecurities in working lives by breaking career paths and increasing redundancies and changes in working conditions. The second objective is to identify how individuals reacted to these changes. The analysis is based on narrative biographies. As has been remarked by Furlong (2009), biographies help us to understand peoples’ lived experiences, but they also highlight the way in which reflective projects are underpinned by structural constraints. Equally, Denzin (1989) has pointed out that biographical methods help us to understand human experience as it occurs within social and cultural contexts, and Bertaux and

Thompson (1997) have highlighted the strengths of the biographical method in capturing the complexity of individual lives and the impact of events on them. Thus, narrative biographies permit us to understand how an ‘unexpected event’ has broken a certain trajectory, the new direction that this path has taken, and the role of the individual in managing the transition.

In this regard, the selection of workers for the sample has been threefold. First, the individual should have been affected by redundancy, unemployment and/or a drastic change of working conditions. Second, the ‘event’ should have happened after 2010 and should have been related to changes in the institutional context. And last but not least, this event is narrated and identified as a ‘turning point’ by the interviewee (Hareven, 2000). Therefore we are looking at significant working transitions (Potter, 2015) in a context of more and unexpected changes in which individuals and households are expected to have an active role. Thus, our analysis considers the capacity to plan and manage after the ‘turning point’ in a context of a more insecure and changing employment scenario. The interviews are part of a wider project that analysed the impact of recession and austerity in working lives in Spain and the UK. The interviewees selected were aged between 30 and 55 years at the time of interview and the interviews were carried out between 2013 and 2014 in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona. The interviews covered the period from the beginning of working life until the moment of the interview. The interviews recorded information of interviewee’s social background. In total 15 interviews (7 men and 8 women) of workers with different profiles were carried out (see Table 3).

The analysis of the interviews is organised as follows. First, the process of the event is described and the insecurities provoked in the individual trajectories is analysed. Second, the characteristics of the new path taken after the event are considered and the factors related to different capacities and planning options are discussed.

## Results

Table 3 provides information about the characteristics and main effects of institutional changes in the interviewees. Most of them have been affected by redundancy from a permanent contract, with tenures that vary from 3 to 30 years. Equally, drastic changes in salary, working time and shifts are also reported by the individuals in the sample. Furthermore, they have also been affected by career breaks in the public sector, in terms of the ending of temporary contracts and a downgrading of working conditions.

(Table 3 about here)

### *The event and the spread of insecurities*

Employment insecurities provoked by the recession have been reshaped by institutional changes during the austerity turn. This has spread the risk of job loss in permanent contracts by modifying redundancy procedures and costs. Several of the workers affected by redundancies emphasise the unexpected nature of the event. Take the extreme case of S, redundant after 15 years as a restaurant waitress:

‘I arrived to work and they called me to the office. They told me that I was fired, and that they have already transferred the money to my bank account (...) then they ask me to sign [it implies acceptance of redundancy conditions] and of course I said no. Then two of the personnel department escorted me to pick up my things (...) not allowing me to talk with anybody. And the same happened to another worker the same day (S, waitress)’

Traditionally, the negotiation of the process of redundancy in Spain (between employers, individuals and organised labour) has been based on its conditions (mostly payment) while other measures such as part-time redundancies have been less common. In our sample, redundancy as a unilateral process imposed by the employer is especially related to obtaining the statutory minimum payment (20 days). This was the case for A, a builder with 3 years tenure and J, a part-time waitress with 6 years tenure; and it was also the case when the company was affected by company default, as happened with C2, a research consultant with 7 years tenure, and E, a shop worker with 11 years tenure. In other cases, the company tried to pay the minimum, but due to worker resistance workers obtained substantial increases (up to 45 days). This was the case for S mentioned above, who appealed to the courts against the dismissal with the support of the union and obtained 45 days payment after the dismissal was declared invalid. It was also the case for N, an airport worker, who protested with other workers and obtained 45 days payment. The latter shows the capacity of direct action (Martinez Lucio, 2011) in a context of demise of joint regulation: '[...] we dressed as clowns and with trumpets and drums protested around the airport during different days [he laughs] so at the end they accepted what we asked for' (N, airport worker).

In other cases, redundancy was collective and negotiated with unions. In these cases, the payment obtained varied mostly from 22 to 25 days, but in one case the worker obtained 42 days. These differences show the different capacity of unions at the workplace level. The extreme is represented by CA, a car factory worker with 4 years of tenure. In the situation of the recession the union used the different tools available to try to assure a certain degree of workers' security or, at least, that they would obtain high redundancy payment in case of dismissal. The unions agreed to wage cuts, to working time intensification and to temporary lay-offs to avoid redundancies. In spite of that redundancies did occur, following which the union succeeded in negotiating higher redundancy pay-outs and the prioritisation of redundant workers for any new vacancies. However, as CA noted:

'I think that the union didn't confront what the company was saying in terms of production (...) Just after I was made redundant a new collective agreement was reached making the wage cuts permanent and with a double wage system for new entrants (...) yes, it was to get the new [car] model (...) and surprise!, some months later they announce that they need to recruit new staff. (...) I am now temporary and with a salary about 15-20% lower' (CA, factory worker)

Several workers in the sample suffered drastic changes to their working conditions. In most cases, this was the first step towards redundancy, as happened to CA. In the case of E, a seller in a furniture shop, the employer unilaterally cut his salary and increased his tasks. Wage reductions and part-time redundancies agreed with unions preceded the redundancy of M, CA, C2 and P. For C2, part-time redundancy coexisted in time with unpaid salary and a degradation of working conditions in which the company tried to take advantage of the situation:

'So the company asked us to work full-time while we were formally unemployed to overcome the difficulties (...) and this was the biggest negative part as most of us refused (...) If I had thought this will have helped I would have done it, but they were not doing anything to change the situation' (C2, research consultant)

This case and the above mentioned case of CA suggests that some employers used the tools of joint regulation to avoid redundancies (see Marginsson et al, 2014) with the aim of strengthening work intensification. Therefore, these kinds of measures should be understood in context and against the variable balance of power between labour and capital and how they are implemented in different institutional contexts. An extreme case of this trend was reported by P,

a hotel clerk with 30 years seniority, affected by a 50% part-time redundancy (formally agreed with unions) and a shift change from day to night working:

‘It was agreed with the union but not with the workers [the interviewer shows surprise] (...) Let me explain. The company hired 8 new workers and then they call for union elections and these 8 changed the union delegate, who is now the manager of the administration section and then they were redeployed to other jobs (...) They communicated the part-time redundancy by a letter. Nobody asked us. I mean it’s legal but not moral” (P, hotel clerk).

Cuts in public spending have had a strong impact on public sector workers. The interviewees reported career breaks, including a delay in the transition to a permanent contract, scarcer and shorter contracts, the non-renewal of temporary contracts, and being offered a contract with considerably reduced conditions. The cases of C and V illustrate the break and delay in career options in education and health. In the case of C, a secondary teacher working on temporary contracts for several years, the promise of further stabilisation has since been delayed indefinitely. At the same time, she was affected by the pay cuts affecting the public sector and, furthermore, as the changes increased working time of permanent teachers, the substitution contracts became more scarce and shorter. Similarly, V, a nurse who had a range of temporary contracts and transitioned to unemployment, was faced with long-term unemployment. She was having a similar path, in the sense that after several contracts she was expecting to get a permanent job.

On the other hand, L and M2 faced a significant change in their lives when the 5 year lecturing contract in the University ended. This type of contract is the first step in the academic track to a permanent position, and before the crisis the possibility to participate in a competitive tender for a permanent contract was expected. The halt in public sector recruitment had broken this promise. In both cases the University offered them positions as part-time assistants. L decided to accept the new part-time position and simultaneously receive unemployment benefit. Conversely, M2 refused the position and preferred to move to unemployment:

‘I refused because it was unfair. I had to do the 75% of the teaching I was doing for the 25% of the salary (...) and it was also a fraud, so I decided to take unemployment with an income twice as high, and then to think about my future’.

#### *New directions in the trajectory and the capacity to plan and act*

The workers in our sample had relatively stable jobs before being made redundant and to different degrees had access to unemployment benefits. Following Barteleheimer et al (2011) the interviewees confirm that, in Spain while receiving unemployment benefit, individuals experience relatively low controls. But this relatively low control by public employment services reproduces previous existing inequalities (author). These different capacities are shaped by elements such as gender, social inequalities and household circumstances.

In the case of the professionals in the sample their capacity to ‘be reflexive’ is embedded in elements such as savings, partner income, long term and maximum unemployment benefit and family support, especially in terms of care. Take the case of M, a construction engineer unemployed for 1.5 years who took a Masters in Renewable Energy while she was receiving the unemployment benefit. This was an option open to her only because her mother took care of her child during teaching hours. Similarly, C2 was unemployed for 1 year, receiving unemployment benefit and taking the Masters course she needed to progress to a Doctorate. This was made possible because she paid for the Masters with part of her redundancy payment. This capacity to plan is also reliant on opportunist, short-term and tactical reactions (Gabriel et al, 2013). M got

a job as 'false' self-employed unrelated to the Master's degree she took: 'very precarious (...) is like a false self-employed. I have to capitalise what remains of the benefit to pay the insurance, if not I will be paying to work', and C2 used her previous contacts to work as self-employed for projects:

'(...) I work together with a company to get a tender and I do it if we get it. I get some because my price is very cheap, basically I blow out prices. I was working on these reports and taking again the unemployment benefit when not working' (C2, consultancy worker)

In other cases, unemployment benefit has been used to complement jobs characterised by low pay and low working hours and less to fund education. This element is the key to coping with the worst working conditions. This was the case for C, a school teacher facing shorter and scarcer contracts, who used unemployment benefit over long periods without income and L, the university lecturer, who accepted the position with inferior working conditions. Significantly both of them did not have family responsibilities and, in the first case, C, the teacher was living in a flat owned by her parents and paying a low rent, while L had his mortgage paid. Furthermore, their strong occupational identities as teacher and university lecturer acted as a coping mechanism that facilitated the adjustment (Mackenzie et al, 2006). But the use of unemployment benefit to complement low incomes is for most a short term solution. This was the case for A, a builder made redundant with 3 years tenure who found a part-time temporary job that was complemented by unemployment benefit after 4 months of unemployment. After the end of this contract he had to live with his parents as his benefit was exhausted and he was unable to find another job.

The capacity to plan is also related to the capacity to resist precarious employment, in some cases showing an active management of one's trajectory and, in some cases, a survivalist reaction. In the first case we find M2, the Lecturer who after the end of her 5-year temporary contract, refused an assistant's position and decided to become unemployed and to carry out work on a self-employed basis. This decision enlarged her opportunities and she moved to Sweden as a Lecturer, a decision made in negotiation with her partner. In the case of N, after being made redundant he has been unemployed for 5 years taking care of the children, bringing and picking them from school and taking care of the house. During this time he was offered several jobs but he refused:

'Economically it is better for me to not work. With the current salaries, if I have then to pay for the childcare, for transport, etc. is not worth it. So basically as I see it they are paying me the 400 euros to not work [laughs]' (N, line job worker)

The case of N illustrates his capacity to negotiate time and space with his partner (full-time employed) and that he was able to negotiate his identity, previously constructed around paid work. A similar pattern was shown by JM, an IT worker made redundant with 4 years tenure. In his case, he subordinated his job to his partner's career, a GP who can be sent to other parts of the country. The cases of M2, N, and JM highlighted the importance of the capacity to negotiate time and space with one's partner after being made redundant together with the importance of adjustments at household level (Gardiner et al, 2007).

The capacity to cope with changes implied in some cases adjustment in terms of personal projects and/or the need for external help to maintain them. We have already mentioned the case of A, who returned to his parents' house. M2 mentioned that she was thinking with her partner about having a baby and with the end of the lecturing contract they rethought the idea. In the case of SO, a clerical worker made redundant after 5 years, she was able to cope with the 1.5 years of unemployment because she was living at one of her parent's houses, but the



relationship with his partner, unemployed too, felt part: 'of course we had some problems before, but being both unemployed was of course what made us split up'. As for V, a nurse unemployed for 1 year and with her husband unemployed the same time, help from her parents in paying the mortgage was vital.

Other interviewees faced lower options and developed what Nico and Caetano (2015: 12) call 'pragmatic reflexivity', a form of reflexivity that is mainly activated for practical everyday matters. In the interviews this seemed especially important when family support was not available. For example, in the case of J, a waitress made redundant after 6 years, she combined her unemployment allowance with informal and sporadic low paid jobs while she rented out a room to a student in her 50 m<sup>2</sup> flat which she shares with her partner. Equally, S thought that if she did not find a job soon she was going to declare herself as her mother's main carer, so she would be able to obtain state support for long term carers.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

This article shows that the erosion of employment security in Spain provoked by the recession has been reinforced by institutional level changes. The role of the State and the legitimacies provided by European level have been crucial in accelerating the transition to weaker employment protection. The findings reveal how the weaknesses of union capacity to regulate at the workplace level in Spain, a feature already identified before the crisis (Martinez Lucio, 1999), has been reinforced by the priorities given to company level agreements. Employers' power at the workplace level has been reinforced and job securities have been eroded. The article provides insights into how the erosion of security provoked by institutional changes has impacted on the capacities of workers to develop their working lives.

The findings suggest that despite the general context of increasing unemployment and redundancies the workers in our sample lived through the change as an unexpected event. Moreover, despite the different paths, timings, ages and life cycles of the interviewees they were all at a point at which they considered their paths stable. Crucially, they conceptualised the changes as a 'turning point' in their trajectories, a break of institutional and organisational certainties. Thus, we should understand that the institutional change provoked a paradigmatic shift in workers' lives, a sort of demise of the role played by institutions and organisations to institutionalise working lives. This kind of de-institutionalisation does not, however, provoke de-standardisation. Certain resources and social backgrounds are key factors that affected the capacity to plan and manage the aftermath of redundancy (Atkinson, 2010; Nico and Caetano, 2015), therefore embedding class and gender inequalities. But even in the cases in which the capacity to plan was possible (notably for professionals), the precariousness of the available jobs led to more opportunist, survivalist and short term strategies than the literature on unemployment about professionals and managers suggests (Gabriel et al, 2013). The findings also support Gardiner et al (2007) who suggest the need to recognise the importance of the ways in which individuals experience and manage the relationship between paid work and life outside work within specific biographical transitions.

The stories of the interviewees show how, in the management of change, individual's options are underpinned by financial capacities. Elements such as savings, family support and, specifically, redundancy payments and unemployment benefit can fund the capacity to act. In these cases unemployment benefit and redundancy payments have played a key role permitting, especially for those with no access to other capital, some time to manoeuvre. Thus, elements such as lower access to unemployment benefits due to the increase of temporary and scarce jobs, the reduction of redundancy payments, and the demise of the role of unions in the workplace (that traditionally improved redundancy conditions) are eroding the institutional supports underpinning the capacity to plan. Market dependency is consequently reinforced.

The findings show that, after redundancy, the workers in our sample attended, according to their different possibilities, formal education and training for the unemployed, in most cases because they had actively sought this out. In the Spanish context, which is characterised by a lack of jobs, the obsession with up-skilling suggests a certain form of displacement (Dobbins et al, 2014), in which the only possible employment policy has to be developed by individuals themselves, while organisations and institutions disappear from the employment relationship. This element is especially relevant when dominant career theories have traditionally not paid attention to the importance of some form of organisation for career development, especially for the low skilled (Roper et al, 2010). Furthermore, the findings reveal that the capacity to adjust to change is made possible only by sacrificing personal projects and career paths. Therefore, the danger in the use and abuse of the concept of resilience should be treated with caution (Harrison, 2012), especially with respect to the case of the impact of recession and austerity on women.

Crucially, the article demonstrates that the erosion of securities associated with the standard employment relationship has led to unexpected turning points and career breaks. In these critical moments institutions and organisations are increasingly transferring responsibility to individuals, without providing them with sufficient support and resources. Accordingly, a new pattern of employment regulation is being defined in which the collective dimensions of work are significantly reduced and self-made paths of education and work, based on class and gender inequalities, are becoming more critical in defining the status of work in society.

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<sup>i</sup> Statistics of collective agreements (<http://www.empleo.gob.es/estadisticas/cct/welcome.htm>), consulted the 11/01/2016