THE ILLUSION OF THE PROLONGATION OF YOUTH

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The Illusion of the Prolongation of Youth

Transition to Adulthood
among Finnish and French Female University Students

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FINNISH YOUTH RESEARCH SOCIETY
FINNISH YOUTH RESEARCH NETWORK

In memory of David Gandrille
Forever young …
Thanks for believing in me.

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List of Abbreviations

ALF	Allocation de Logement à Caractère Familial (Housing Allowance for Families)
ALS	Allocation au Logement à Caractère Social (Social Housing Allowance)
APL	Aide Personalisée au Logement (Personalised Housing Assistance)
ARE	Allocation d'Aide au Retour à l'Emploi (Employment Reintegration Assistance)
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BEP	Brevet d'Etudes professionnelles (Vocational Qualification Diploma)
BTS	Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (Higher-Level Technician Diploma)
CAE	Contrat d'Accompagnement dans l'Emploi (Employment Assistance Contract)
CAF	Caisse d'Allocations Familiales (Family Allowance Fund)
CAP	Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle (Vocational Training Certificate)
CAPES	Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement Secondaire (Secondary Schoolteaching Qualification)
CEREQ	Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications
CES	Contrat Emploi Solidarité (Employment Solidarity Contract)
CIVIS	Contrat d'Insertion dans la Vie Sociale (Social Life Integration Contract)
CNOUS	Centre National des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires (National Centre for University and School Implementations)
CROUS	Centre Régional des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires (Regional Centre for University and School Implementations)
DAEU	Diplôme d'Accès aux Etudes Universitaires (Secondary-School Equivalence Diploma)
DUT	Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie (Technological University Diploma)
EEC	European Economic Community
EHEA	European Higher-Education Area
ESA	European Sociological Association
ESS	European Social Survey
EU	European Union

EU15	European Union member states at the end of 1995 (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom)
EU25	European Union member states at the end of 2004 (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom)
EU27	European Union member states at the end of 2007 (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom)
FIPJ	Fonds pour l'Insertion Professionnelle des Jeunes (Funds for Youth Professional Integration)
INSEE	Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies)
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IUFM	Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres (Training Institute for Schoolteachers)
IUP	Institut Universitaire Professionnalisé (Professional University Institute)
IUT	Institut Universitaire de Technologie (Technological University Institute)
KELA	Kansaneläkelaitos (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland)
MA	Master of Arts
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PACS	Pacte Civil de Solidarité (Civil Union Pact)
PAIO	Permanence d'Accueil, d'Information et d'Orientation (Information and Orientation Service-Provider Agency)
STS	Section de Techniciens Supérieurs (Higher-Level Technicians' Section)
TOAS	Tampereen seudun opiskelija-asuntosäätiö (Tampere Student Housing Foundation)

Finnish Summary

Onko nuoruuden pidentyminen todellinen ilmiö? Lykkäävätkö nuoret aikuistumistaan? Nyky-yhteiskunnan muutokset vaikuttavat nuorten tapoihin siirtyä nuoruudesta aikuisuuteen, mutta ovatko vaikutukset samanlaiset kaikille nuorille?

Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan nuorten naispuolisten yliopisto-opiskelijoiden siirtymää aikuisuuteen ja heidän sosio-taloudellista integraatiotaan yhteiskuntaan. Tutkimuskohteena ovat opiskelijat Suomesta ja Ranskasta. Näillä eurooppalaisilla mailla on tietyiltä osin erilainen yhteiskunnan rakenne, poliittinen kulttuuri ja historia.

Keskeiset tutkimuskysymykset ovat: Millä tavoin suomalaisten ja ranskalaisten naisopiskelijoiden siirtymä aikuisuuteen eroaa? Mitkä ovat heidän integroitumisensa strategiat? Seuraavatko he vanhempiansa tässä suhteessa? Millaisia uusia ratkaisuja he tekevät?

Tutkimuksessa analysoidaan aikuistumista kiinnittämällä erityistä huomiota korkeakoulujärjestelmään, työmarkkinoihin ja perheeseen. Tutkimuksen kohde ei siten ole ranskalaiset tai suomalaiset naisopiskelijat, vaan yhteiskunnallisten instituutioiden toiminnan tarkastelu yhteen ryhmään kuuluvien yksilöiden näkökulmasta. Vertailtavuuden varmistamiseksi tutkitut opiskelijat ovat suunnilleen samanlaisia sukupuolen, iän, koulutustason, oppialan (yhteiskuntatieteellinen ja humanistinen) ja sosiaalisen taustan osalta.

Aineisto koostuu 22:sta 21–30-vuotiaiden naispuolisten yliopisto-opiskelijoiden teemahaastatteluista Ranskasta ja Suomesta vuonna 2008. 11 haastattelua tehtiin Lyonissa, ja 11 Tampereella. Haastateltavat olivat lopettelemassa opintojaan ja siirtymässä työelämään. Haastatteluaineistoa tuetaan erilaisilla tilastoaineistoilla.

Aineiston analyysi tuottaa uutta tietoa nuorten naisten uudenlaisesta yhteiskuntaan integroitumisesta. Teemahaastatteluista selviää, nuoret suomalaisnaiset ovat tyytyväisiä yliopistojärjestelmään

ja mahdollisuuksiinsa sijoittua työmarkkinoille valmistumisen jälkeen. Ranskalaiset ajattelevat, että järjestelmä on aikansa elänyt, eikä se anna tarpeellisia työkaluja sijoittumista varten. Molempien maiden haastateltavat odottavat työltä ammatillista tyydytystä. He eivät suunnittele työuraansa rahan ansaitsemiseksi. He korostavat myös sitä, miten työ sopii yhteen heidän intressiensä ja arvojensa kanssa. He ovat tietoisia vaikeuksistaan työelämään siirtymisessä – ranskalaiset nuoret naiset ovat huolissaan ja melko pessimistisiä. He kokevat kahtalaisen haasteen: perheen perustaminen ja työelämän yhteen sovittaminen on vaikeaa. Lähellä lasten hankkimisen ikää olevien naisten syrjintä työmarkkinoilla askarruttaa heitä. Suomalaisille opiskelijoille kotoa muuttaminen ja itsenäistyminen ovat helpompaa. Tämä johtuu paremmin toteutetusta opintotuesta ja mahdollisuudesta työskennellä osa-aikaisesti opiskelun ohessa. Ranskalaiset nuoret tukeutuvat taloudellisesti suomalaisia enemmän vanhempiinsa. Ranskassa opiskelijan tulot muodostuvat vanhempien avustuksesta ja palkasta, kun taas Suomessa opiskelijan tulot koostuvat opintotuesta ja palkasta. Tutkimus osoittaa, etteivät nuoret naiset kiirehdi lasten hankkimista. He haluavat kokea elämää ensin. He lykkäävät tietoisesti ja tarkoituksellisesti äitiyttään, jotta olisivat kypsiä siihen. Kokonaisuudessaan tutkimus osoittaa, ettei aikuisuus ole enää samalla tavalla merkkipaaluihin sidottu. Sen pohjana ovat yhä enemmän psykologiset tekijät, kuten kokemukset omasta kypsyydestä ja vastuullisuudesta. Nykynuoret eivät venytä nuoruuttaan, he pyrkivät entistä enemmän löytämään uusia tapoja yhteiskuntaan astumiseksi. Aikuiseksi kasvamisen prosessi vaatii siten tutkimukselta uudenlaista ajattelua, uusia käsitteitä ja lähestymistapoja. Muutoksessa saattaa olla aikuisuus nuoruuden sijaan.

French Summary

La prolongation de la jeunesse est-elle un phénomène réel ? L'entrée dans l'âge adulte est-elle différée ? Le contexte socio-structurel des sociétés occidentales a subi de grands bouleversements ces dernières années. Cela a simultanément provoqué des perturbations dans le processus de passage à l'âge adulte. Cependant, tous les jeunes ont-ils été touchés de la même manière par ces changements ?

Le but de cette recherche comparative est l'analyse de la transition à l'âge adulte et du processus d'insertion sociale et économique qui en découle, au travers de l'exemple de jeunes femmes qui étudient dans des universités françaises et finlandaises. Malgré des similitudes infrastructurelles et une appartenance commune à l'Union Européenne, la France et la Finlande se différencient notablement sur le plan de l'organisation socio-structurelle et politique ainsi qu'en termes d'histoire.

L'étude s'est basée sur les questions suivantes : Quelles sont les différences et similarités dans le passage à l'âge adulte des jeunes étudiantes en France et en Finlande ? Quelles sont leurs stratégies d'insertion ? Suivent-elles un chemin menant à l'âge adulte qui diffère de celui emprunté par leurs parents ? Si oui, quel nouveau modèle de transition adoptent-elles ?

Le processus actuel de transition à l'âge adulte est analysé au travers de certaines institutions : le système d'enseignement supérieur, le marché du travail, et les politiques familiales. Cette étude observe néanmoins les divergences entre les institutions des deux pays du point de vue d'un groupe d'individus, plutôt que d'examiner les différences entre plusieurs sous-groupes de jeunes. Les personnes interrogées ont donc été sélectionnées sur la base de leurs caractéristiques communes, tels que leur sexe, âge, niveau d'éducation, discipline d'étude (sciences humaines et sciences sociales), et origines sociales.

J'ai donc conduit des entretiens avec des jeunes femmes âgées de 21 à 30 ans, en fin de cursus universitaire et bientôt prêtes à intégrer le marché du travail. Vingt-deux entretiens approfondis ont été menés en 2008, dont onze en France à Lyon, et onze en Finlande à Tampere. Une analyse quantitative basée sur des statistiques vient compléter les données fournies par les entretiens.

Les entretiens approfondis ont permis d'apporter de nouvelles informations pertinentes concernant les stratégies d'intégration sociale et économique des jeunes femmes. Premièrement, les jeunes Finlandaises sont plutôt satisfaites du système universitaire finlandais et des possibilités d'insertion sur le marché du travail après l'obtention de leur diplôme. Les jeunes Françaises considèrent le système français comme désuet et lui reprochent de ne pas les préparer à une insertion équitable sur le marché de l'emploi.

Deuxièmement, les jeunes femmes des deux pays souhaitent obtenir un emploi qui leur procure de la satisfaction. Elles ne désirent pas avoir un travail simplement pour gagner un salaire ; cet emploi doit répondre à leurs valeurs et centres d'intérêts personnels. Toutefois, elles sont conscientes des difficultés pour entrer sur le marché du travail, surtout les jeunes Françaises, qui expriment leur inquiétude et leur pessimisme à ce sujet. Toutes les participantes ont néanmoins fait part des contraintes sociales, économiques et individuelles partagées par les femmes qui souhaitent travailler et fonder une famille. Les femmes sont en effet victimes de discrimination lors de la recherche d'emploi, par rapport aux possibilités de maternité.

Troisièmement, le départ de chez les parents et le processus d'indépendance semblent s'effectuer plus facilement en Finlande qu'en France grâce aux aides financières équivalentes attribuées aux étudiants, et les meilleures circonstances pour associer travail et études. Alors qu'en France la plupart des étudiants assurent leurs revenus avec l'aide de leurs parents et d'un emploi, en Finlande, le marché du travail et l'état sont leurs sources principales de revenus. Concernant la fondation d'une famille, les jeunes femmes interrogées ne désiraient

pas avoir d'enfants dans l'immédiat. La plupart souhaite devenir mère, mais seulement quand elles se sentiront prêtes et assez matures.

Enfin, concernant le passage à l'âge adulte, elles insistent sur le fait qu'être adulte de nos jours ne se limite plus à acquérir des repères sociaux, mais c'est avant tout posséder certaines caractéristiques psychologiques, notamment être mature et responsable. Les jeunes d'aujourd'hui ne prolongent pas leur jeunesse mais tracent de nouvelles routes d'insertion dans la sphère sociale. De nouvelles recherches plus approfondies sont nécessaires pour comprendre les changements au niveau du passage à l'âge adulte et du concept de l'âge adulte. En effet, ce qui en train de changer n'est pas autant la jeunesse que l'âge adulte lui-même.

PREFACE

The structural climate in which the majority of young people experienced their youth in the 1990s sounds very gloomy. Twenty-six per cent unemployment among 15–24-year-olds in France; constant threats of an economic downturn; a breakdown in family structure, with a continuously rising divorce rate; the demand for more educational credentials, but no guarantee of being able to join the labour market, even with advanced diplomas; and the feeling of a bleak future. Today, the term *Génération Précaire* (Precarious Generation) is often used by French experts, and even by young people themselves, to refer to the situation of youth. Young people's socio-economic conditions have not changed much since 1995; indeed in some respects they have worsened. While I was growing up, I really wondered how this situation could be possible, what the roots of these predicaments were, and what the solution to socio-economic stability could be. Many sleepless nights and years later, the call to explore young people's situation in depth was stronger than ever. I

analysed the contemporary phenomenon of the prolongation of youth for my Masters thesis, and decided to carry the investigation further into doctoral research comparing Finland and France. To narrow the scope of the study, I decided to concentrate my analysis on young academic women studying at university.

Young people are at the heart of many debates today. Discourses from policymaking to youth research focus on the current process of the transition to adulthood and the prolongation of youth. However, it often seems that young people themselves are not directly involved in the discussions. Debates about youth do not always refer to young people's own perspectives on the situation, and therefore might fail to distinguish the key issues. Young people express their views by participating in demonstrations or in dialogue on Internet forums, but rarely seem to be in direct contact with experts in the field.

As a member of the *Génération Précaire*, I felt called to explore the reality behind the discourses: in particular, what young people genuinely thought and felt, and how they perceived their transition to adulthood. When I started this research on youth transition, it felt logical to include some young people in the study, and to base my work on their experience. I wanted to investigate whether the process of transition was being prolonged; whether young people were deliberately rejecting adulthood, and if so, why; and whether they were affected by the 'Peter Pan Syndrome'.

On a practical level this theme was difficult to tackle. It was necessary to break the abstract topic down into a more accessible and tangible design. I decided to analyse and compare the extent of the phenomenon in two European countries, Finland and France. The present European Union setting, alongside standardising European policies that apply to member states, increasingly encourages cross-national examination. I conducted 22 in-depth qualitative interviews with female university students from the humanities and social sciences who were about to experience the transition to working life in the two countries. This dissertation is based on the analysis of

interview material, and simultaneously refers to wider cross-national perspectives. The scope of the study therefore covers young women's situations and attitudes, but also extends to the larger societal context experienced by young people in Finland and France.

The highlight of the study was when I met and interviewed the young women. Getting into the field provided access to the young people's reality, world and vision. This palpable aspect of the research also emphasised the purpose and importance of my work. It became a study about young people, through some young people's eyes, and for young people as well as youth experts. Being in touch with the young people, and becoming immersed in their societal reality, emphasised my duty as a social researcher. This study offers up-to-date knowledge and understanding of young people today.

This dissertation traces the new patterns of transition followed by the young, highly educated women I interviewed, and contextualises them in the wider societal frameworks of Finland and France. Micro- and macro-level aspects and factors constantly overlap with and influence each other. This dissertation highlights how the wider environment shapes young people's process of transition, with a focus on young academic women. It also examines how many of them react to the fluctuating socio-economic structure, what coping strategies they use, and how those strategies in turn help to reshape the current process of transition.

This study has been conducted within a cross-national framework. Chapter 1 introduces the theoretical perspectives on young people's transitions to adulthood that were used as research background. Chapter 2 offers a detailed overview of the research questions, the research design, the decision to conduct a cross-national analysis, and the methods used to explore the processes of youth transition in Finland and France. This chapter also gives an insight into the fieldwork and conduct of interviews. Chapter 3 gives a general overview of the two countries' historical and societal backgrounds, as well as

an account in figures of the process of youth transition, referring to the main markers of adulthood. The four subsequent chapters focus on empirical findings. Chapter 4 explores young women's perceptions of their respective university systems. It also provides an overview of the educational systems in Finland and France, and the welfare support offered to students. Chapter 5 concentrates on young women's expectations of working life, their strategies of integration into the labour market, and the assessment of the dilemmas faced by female workers. Chapter 6 explores patterns of independence and semi-independence across the two societies. It focuses on young women's living arrangements, their strategies to become financially autonomous, and their plans to start a family. The final empirical chapter, Chapter 7, assesses young women's perceptions of their own transition, the prolongation of their youth, and their conceptions of adulthood. The discussion concentrates on the subjective and mental aspects of adulthood. Chapter 8 summarises the process of transition to adulthood among Finnish and French female students, and proposes new patterns of transition that increasingly apply to many young adults today. Finally, Chapter 9 offers a vibrant discussion of the emergence of new models of transition, and suggests a reconceptualisation of the notion of adulthood. Structural factors, concepts and models are malleable, and are both a response to and an instigator of wider socio-historical transformations. As such, wider forces such as the globalisation of the economy affect current societal structures. When the societal equilibrium alters, the internal organisation is likely to be shaken. As a consequence, old archetypes, such as the transition to adulthood experienced by the previous generation, is strongly liable to modifications. This study offers a fresh insight into current developments in the process of transition, and the confusion around the phenomenon of the prolongation of youth. It might indeed be sensible to ask whether the transition is really being prolonged, or is simply evolving.

This research would have never seen the light of day without several special people. First, I am deeply grateful to Anja-Riitta Lahikainen for initially accepting my application to pursue my doctoral studies at the University of Tampere in Finland, in the Department of Sociology and Social Psychology. Anja-Riitta's decision brought light back into my life. This was the beginning of a fresh, brand new life, after many years of struggle.

Shortly after my arrival as a newcomer at the University of Tampere in 2005, I met Eriikka Oinonen, who immediately invited me to take part in a project she was starting with Helena Laaksonen, 'Twenty-Five and Something: Transition to Adulthood in Europe'. I will never forget this gesture, which simultaneously cemented the first concrete steps of my doctoral studies and my career as a social researcher. Eriikka became the supervisor of my doctoral research, as well as a mentor and friend. During all these years she has offered me amazingly thorough comments and advice. I wish I could do something more to thank her than simply say '*Muchas gracias*'.

My work also could not have evolved without the equally valuable guidance I received from my second supervisor, Matti Alestalo. Matti always provided bright and insightful comments that helped me to progress in my work and evolve as a sociology researcher, but also enlarged my vision of the world and ultimately helped me grow as a person. I deeply value the knowledge and experience Matti passed on to me, and feel fortunate to have been able to work with him. Moreover, I had the chance to taste Matti's wonderful cuisine! Thank you very much for everything, Matti!

I am particularly indebted to all the young Finnish and French women who agreed to participate in my study and offered remarkable information. Without them, this dissertation simply would not be. Thank you so much for sharing your insightful ideas with me!

I also wish to thank Helena Laaksonen, for being such a nice and supportive colleague. I really appreciated our working together

Last but not least, I would like to give special thanks to my family in France, in particular my mum Ginette and my brother Alexandre. The value of such emotional ties cannot be described, and it certainly helped me keep going when the tides were low! Also, thank you to all my dear friends from all around the world, in England, Finland, France, Germany and elsewhere. You certainly have had a greater impact on my life that you may think or even know.

Tampere, 1st September 2012.

A young woman who has now reached adulthood,
according to her own terms,

Aurélie Mary

I.

THE NEW PATTERNS OF TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD:

A THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

I think being an adult is (…) being responsible for
yourself, (…) admitting your own mistakes, and
being responsible for your actions.
Piia (24, Finland)

What is being an 'adult' today? 'Eighteen years old': this age symbolises the first concrete step into the status of adulthood in many countries. Turning 18 is the first of several legal and social qualifications for adulthood. More than a mere rite of passage, reaching this age officially entitles young people to civil rights and additional opportunities and responsibilities, from voting to getting married, but also brings new socio-cultural expectations, such as entering work or starting a family, or being accountable for inconsiderate behaviour.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2011), an adult is a) a grown up being, having reached the age of maturity, and b) a person characteristically mature in attitude, outlook, etc. From a contemporary socio-cultural perspective, a fully fledged adult is a person who has completed his or her studies, has left the parental home, has attained residential and financial independence, has obtained a

permanent job, is married or in an intimate relationship, and has a family and children (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Jones 1995).

However, do all young people turning 18 feel adult? Do they think that the accepted qualifications for adulthood really make them eligible for adult status? Age and normative social prescriptions play a great role in defining and determining social categories such as adulthood. However, a growing number of young adults aged 18 and over do not meet the norms attached to their social status. Indeed, many of them still live at home, study, depend financially on their parents, are single, and experience great difficulties in entering the labour market and finding a stable job. Reaching 18 is the first indicator in the change of status, yet young people aged 13 to 19 are categorised as teenagers. Thus in terms of age, the status of young adults begins with an overlapping contradiction. Socially constructed classifications, young people's life conditions and opportunities, and socio-politico-cultural expectations overlap, diverge and contradict each other. One might wonder how the young people manage to cope with such a tangle.

These statements lead to a famous question that many youth experts have pondered during recent decades: 'When do young people become adult, then?' (e.g. Shanahan et al. 2005). This question was one of the starting points of the present study. The debates around young people focus on the phenomenon of the extension of youth and the lengthening transitional path to adulthood. Several experts claim that young people delay their entry into adulthood and even reject the status. They prolong their youth well into their 20s or some-times early 30s. Nonetheless, if this is the case, it might be sensible to readdress the question. Rather than wondering when young people become adults, asking why young people 'choose' to become adult later seems more appropriate, assuming that they do 'want' to access the next stage of their life later. Finally, the issues attached to young people are generally considered by adult experts who experienced youth and the transition to adulthood in a different socio-historical context. Their view of young people's situation might no longer be

accurate or relevant. However, the present societal apparatus offers young people limited space to defend their viewpoints. Thus it will be pertinent to interrogate the concept of adulthood itself, to examine what constitutes an adult these days, and to explore how young people perceive their own processes of transition.

1.1 Birth of a New Transitional Stage?

The life course starting from infanthood, continuing into childhood, adolescence, adulthood and then to old age (including the gerontological categories of the third age, or active independent life after retirement, and the fourth age, when elderly people become increasingly at risk of physical and psychological dysfunction and increasingly dependent upon others), represents the standard lifespan in advanced societies (Giddens 1997: 40; Pilcher 1995: 89). People simply go through these specific stages during their existence. These concepts are taken for granted, and rarely questioned. Yet they have not always existed.

Ambiguous social status

According to Philippe Ariès (1962), the first recognition of and interest in childhood emerged in the 16th century, resulting from alterations in the perception of children among higher social classes. The status of childhood was socially constructed alongside the development of the modern world and new theories propelled by the Enlightenment. Similarly, John Gillis (1981: 98) explains that adolescence as a segment of life for people aged 14–18 developed at the end of the 19th century. The industrialisation process led to profound socio-economic transformations, mainly the shift from agriculture to

manufacturing, upon which the economy became dependent. These changes led to further deep socio-cultural changes. One of these was the extension of childhood and the simultaneous 'invention' of the adolescent (Stevens-Long and Cobb 1983: 36). The new legislation around compulsory schooling contributed to these developments and the recognition of the new life stage of adolescence.

The statuses of childhood and adolescence are now deeply anchored in the foundations of society. Youth as a concept developed later, reaching a peak in the 1950s and 1960s. The societal framework at that time engendered new socio-cultural transformations such as the women's and environmental movements, and also youth emancipation and changes in the importance given to the status of youth. New sectors developed around the status of youth in terms of socio-politics, industry, consumption, education and popular culture (Galland 1990). However, unlike adolescence, youth is a social concept which lacks a physiological base. It covers a broader period, from the teenage years to the mid-20s, but the physiological and social processes of maturation overlap with and contradict each other (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 42).

Following these arguments, several authors (e.g. Arnett 2004; Heath and Cleaver 2003) suggest that a new transitional stage is emerging, located between adolescence and adulthood. Such statements are at the heart of current debates. The acknowledgement of a new phase of development implies further socio-political changes and adaptations around the new status. Current legislation and societal arrangements are not designed for such a transformation. A growing number of young people are in an ambiguous position, being neither adolescents nor adults, because they do not meet the appropriate markers associated with any of the available statuses. Their social identity is filled with ambiguity: their age entitles them to be adults, but like adolescents they might still be financially dependent on their parents, study, live at home and be single. Many young people are

located in an undetermined social category. It seems, in fact, that the process of transition to adulthood itself is undergoing a transition.

Arnold van Gennep distinguished three phases during rites of passage: separation, margin (or limen), and reaggregation (cit. Turner 1992: 48). The first stage separates social beings from their initial status, the second involves a period of liminality, when they belong to neither status, and the third confers them with the new status. One might argue that many young people in advanced societies today are caught in an extended period of liminality, experiencing a prolonged period of void, belonging to the sphere of neither adolescence nor adulthood.

Several youth experts have acknowledged young people's increasingly delayed transition to adulthood. This claim generates the idea that young people are hedonistic individuals who prefer to enjoy the state of youth and reject adult responsibilities. The boundaries between youth and adulthood are blurred: youth seems to extend into the early adult years, although young people legally become adults in their late teenage years. According to some studies, an 'in-between' period, or separate stage, is taking shape within the life course, between the stages of adolescence and adulthood – for instance, 'youthhood' (Heath and Cleaver 2003) or 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett 2004). The transition to adulthood has lengthened and become more complex, and follows unpredictable patterns. Rather than being synchronised into consecutive sequences, many young people's routes deviate from the post-war pattern. Their transition is unconventional, fragmented, unsteady, and might follow a reversal of circumstances (see Bradley and van Hoof 2005; Jones 1995; Walther et al. 2006). They no longer follow the sequence of markers of adulthood that was typical of the last decades of the 20th century, i.e. leaving school, getting a permanent job, becoming financially independent, leaving the parental home, settling down, getting married and starting a family. Compared to previous generations, they become autonomous later, study for longer, and postpone marriage and family formation. They

fulfil all the characteristics of adulthood eventually, but in a deferred and/or unconventional order. For instance, some work and live as a single-person household, and some start a family while studying at the same time (see Bradley and van Hoof 2005; Holdsworth and Morgan 2005; Miles 2000).

Contemporary context of transition

Young adults' life courses are entangled in a web of external structural forces. The post-industrial transformations that advanced societies have undergone at the social, political, economic, educational and cultural levels since the 1960s have generated new situations that challenge young individuals' life prospects. Recent economic restructuring and fluctuations no longer guarantee young people's stable position on the labour market. Ulrich Beck (1992) depicts the present societal framework as 'risk society', resulting from modernisation, postmodern changes and global forces. In earlier times, life trajectories were foreseeable because they were anchored in a stable and constant societal framework. Today the future has become unpredictable, outcomes hazardous and life insecure, which has engendered the notion of risk.

The cyclical patterns of the life course, in which consecutive cohorts used to follow each other through the same predictable and familiar routes, can no longer be viewed as the only model (Roberts 1996: 232). The 'normative' patterns of transition, when people find a job, leave home and get married, were actually created during the 1950s and 1960s, when economic prosperity provided a secure framework and encouraged independent lifestyles (Jones 1995). Different generations have different needs and priorities, depending on their position within the social structure (Mannheim 1952). Whereas the 1960s generation rebelled against a variety of socio-cultural and political structures that were no longer suitable to their requirements,

today's youths seem trapped in the framework instituted by their elders. Individuals from the previous generation – who are also the parents of today's young people – are referred to as the baby boomers. In Finland, baby boomers generally correspond to the cohort born just after the Second World War, during the spike in birth rates that took place in 1945–1950. In France, the baby boomer generation refers to individuals born between the end of the Second World War and the mid-1960s (Daguet 1996). In Finland too the birth rate remained fairly high until the mid-1960s; after 1965 it started to decline, and it stabilised from 1975 onwards at a much lower level than in the 1950s or early 1960s (Karisto 2005: 18). The same general pattern occurred in France, although less rapidly than in Finland (Koskinen et al. 2007: 87). For this reason, in the present study baby boomers refer to the generation born between 1945 and the mid-1960s.

As a generation, baby boomers grew up in a radically different political and socio-economic context. They completed their transition to adulthood at a time when advanced societies were experiencing exceptional economic prosperity and provided secure economic conditions, full-time employment and significant opportunities for upward professional and social mobility. In parallel with the economic boom, important social, political and cultural transformations took place, such as the implementation of strong welfare systems, new social values, women's rights, the spread of higher education, and the development of youth culture (Chauvel 2002). The baby boomers were nonetheless the children of a 'sacrificed' generation that had suffered a variety of socio-economic upheavals related to the two World Wars, national restructuring, and the economic recession between the wars. The generation born between the wars and the baby boomers were thus brought up in a society where deprivation was common at first but then came to be replaced by abundance (Chauvel 2002: 201; Häkkinen et al. 2005).

By contrast, the baby boomers' children – in other words, today's young people – were born into abundance, an established welfare state that provided for citizens' needs, and the idea that they would attain a social position equal to or higher than their parents'. However, today's youth are caught in economic upheaval and industrial restructuring, and their independence is being compromised by the fixed-term contracts, low-paid and part-time work generated by the service-based economy. They are trapped by the consequences of ongoing economic stagnation, and have great difficulties entering the labour market or attaining stable social positions. The present generation is experiencing the discrepancy between the ideologies generated during 'The 30 Glorious Years' after the Second World War and the current structural climate resulting from the economic downturn of recent decades (Chauvel 2002; 2006: 44).

The labour market has become increasingly demanding in terms of competencies. Sue Heath and Elizabeth Cleaver (2003) acknowledge that the spread of the single lifestyle is a response to the inconsistent market, which requires young people to be geographically mobile, flexible and temporarily available workers. Employment opportunities increasingly dictate young people's living arrangements and residential independence. As such, many young professionals prioritise their career and delay starting a family, even though living as a couple and founding a family are their ultimate goals in life (Bynner et al. 1997; Heath and Cleaver 2003).

A growing polarisation among the young population in terms of prospects and success on the labour market has been observed by several authors (e.g. Bradley 2005: 99–113; Bynner et al. 1997: 119–128). The gap between 'winners' and 'losers' has widened. A significant proportion of young people manage to acquire a high level of education and social and cultural capital, whereas others, mainly those from disadvantaged social backgrounds, often attain inadequate educational qualifications and skills, live on very low

income, and are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Nonetheless, intermediate economic groups of young people take shape between 'losers' and 'winners', for some apparent winners also face problems of insecurity and low income. The gap between 'winners' and 'losers' on the labour market extends to the sphere of consumption, as a stable and well-paid job provides the financial resources necessary to access the consumer lifestyle. Therefore, disadvantaged young people are deprived not only of socio-economic integration, but also of access to cultural capital and cultural participation (Bradley 2005).

Since the 1960s, the number of students has considerably expanded in advanced societies, resulting in the phenomenon of mass education and the multiplication of the number of young people obtaining higher-education qualifications. Simultaneously, this process has initiated the development of student culture (Galland 1996). Patterns of education have been prolonged into young people's late 20s, even early 30s. Student status is increasingly an indicator of transition, often marking young people's first departure from the parental home. It is increasingly coming to represent a normalised stage between adolescence and working life (Heath and Cleaver 2003: 71). A large number of young people thus do not leave home because they can afford financial independence or are getting married, but in order to study. However, students often rely on their parents for financial support and therefore remain in a 'semi-dependent' position (Galland 1996; Van de Velde 2008).

Steven Miles (2000: 60) argues that the staying-on rate in higher education and training has been increasing as an alternative to unemployment in the labour market. Many young adults choose to invest in the academic path both as an attempt to enhance their chances of entering their preferred profession and as a shelter from labour uncertainty (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 27). At the same time, continuing higher education is being promoted and facilitated by education policies in many European countries (Reiter and Craig

2005). Nevertheless, access to higher education varies in each country, depending on tuition fees, entrance exams and the availability of study grants (Vossensteyn 2004).

With regards to living arrangements, for Heath and Cleaver's (2003) respondents in the United Kingdom, the single lifestyle was associated with independence and commitment to a particular way of life, rather than merely being an intermediary stage of life. Shared accommodation among young single adults is now widespread in several advanced societies. The authors add that prolonged dependency and changes in domestic and housing transition patterns are also closely linked to the rise in housing costs, labour market upheavals and cuts in welfare expenditures. In many European countries, housing costs have risen as a result of both inflation and privatisation. Having a place to live and a job are not enough. Steady employment and housing are preconditions for young adults' independence and ability to start a family (Jones 1995).

Different welfare systems operate across advanced societies, according to the historical and socio-cultural background on which those societies are founded. Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990) distinguishes three main types of welfare regime: liberal, conservative-corporatist and social-democratic. Young people receive different types of support and benefits according to the regime operating in their country. This consequently helps to shape their life trajectories and processes of transition (Anxo et al. 2010).

Multiple transitions

A variety of structural factors influences young people's patterns of transition and life trajectories, from socio-economic restructuring to welfare regimes. However, more inherent characteristics, such as social class, gender, ethnicity, religious background or geographical locality, also impact on their life direction, and might exacerbate the

dilemmas perpetuated by wider structural dynamics. Hence both micro- and macro-level structural factors affect transition processes (Müller and Gangl 2003: 6–7). These are also sources of inequalities within the youth population. Pathways to adulthood are thus multiple and heterogeneous rather than uniform (Miles 2000: 11).

There is a strong association between social status and the degree to which people's lives follow either their parents' transition type or a 'de-standardised' transition (see Bynner et al. 1997; Heath and Cleaver 2003). Harriet Bradley (2005) claims that working-class young people are 'losing' on the market, both in the workplace and in respect of the quality of their jobs. Mainstream middle-class men tend to be the 'winners' in the 'new economy'. Deprivations inherited from childhood continue to exercise a powerful effect on individual chances and occupational outcomes in adulthood, as well as further participation and inclusion in wider society. The impact of social class varies across societies, depending on the societal structure and welfare systems. Class structure also exerts an influence in terms of ideologies, for instance in relation to parental support (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005). Depending on social class origins, young people receive more or less assistance from their family. Parental support varies according to the level of welfare support and the type of family structure (e.g. single-parent vs. two-parent families). The considerable variations regarding the way family resources are conceptualised and provided deserves closer observation, for it plays a major role in young people's processes of transition and life prospects.

Although the trend of apparently postponed transition applies to both males and females, the age of leaving home differs by gender. While young men live in the parental home for a longer time than young women do, women are more dependent upon their partners than upon their parents. Both young men and women, however, tend to leave home for the first time to study or work rather than to engage in a relationship (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005). Young women tend to lose out on the labour market, being more often in

non-permanent and part-time jobs than men, and also more at risk of unemployment. Both sexes hold similar values regarding work, related to their specific social backgrounds. However, the growing number of women entering the labour force is increasing the competition faced by young men (Bradley 1996; 2005). The major dilemma for young women lies in the conflict between work and family life. Their dual identity as mothers and members of the labour force is difficult to combine in the face of increasingly demanding requirements from the labour market. Popular culture exacerbates the problem by promoting contradictory messages concerning women's success with regards to their occupational status and their responsibilities as mothers. Young women thus experience internal conflict over whether to commit their energies to a career or a family. Those who wish to have children are also constrained by the biological issue of age (Arnett 2004).

Furthermore, the predicaments arising from differences in young people's ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds remain an important feature that needs attention. Young people from ethnic minorities often lose out on the labour market in comparison to the mainstream population (Bradley 1996; Craig et al. 2005). The combination of young people's cultural origins with their social class origins and geographical location is often likely to worsen their disadvantaged position and engender social exclusion. Social background can also compromise educational attainment, for instance in countries with significant tuition fees (Arnett 2004; Vossensteyn 2004). Finally, cultural background influences parental support, values, attitudes, and ultimately pathways to adulthood.

1.2 Premises for New Theoretical Perspectives

The process of youth transition has apparently been scrutinised extensively. Yet it seems that some aspects of this context have been omitted, misunderstood and neglected. The awareness of this theoretical flaw was another starting point for the present study. This subchapter offers an overview of the divergences between the generation born after the Second World War and today's youth. It also introduces the routes into adulthood taken by a growing number of young people, leading to new models of transition.

Generations and generational divergences

The present study is linked to the issue of generation, since it discusses young people and their common experiences of socio-historical circumstances such as socio-economic restructuring. According to Mannheim (1952), a generation comes into shape when individuals of the same age and belonging to the same cohort participate in an intense shared historical experience, such as war, when they are young. In such cases they also share a common trajectory. However, the concept of generation in such a specific sense is difficult to apply at the population level. For instance, baby boomers are widely recognised as a generation that experienced tremendous historical changes and participated in building a new societal structure. Nevertheless, according to Matti Alestalo (2007: 153), not every individual supposed to belong to the baby boomer generation took equal part in that socio-historical reconstruction. Some had different goals and identified with different ideologies. Indeed, the baby boomer generation includes several subgroups that benefited from or were affected by those events in different ways. In reality, only a small group of baby boomers participated in the social movements of the 1960s and can be identified as the '1960s generation' (Purhonen 2008). Similarly,

not all young people today are equally affected by socio-economic fluctuations. Many struggle to enter the labour market, but some have adapted quickly to the new situation and benefited from the changes, such as some young entrepreneurs.

Antti Karisto (2005: 25) argues that the term 'generation' is mainly sociological rather than genealogical in meaning. A sociological generation is a social concept which only potentially represents a generation per se. The concept of generation in terms of cohort and common experience therefore remains difficult to apply. It might seem that an entire generation is involved in the major events of its socio-historical context, when in fact only some groups of individuals are really being affected by those events. As a consequence, the concept of generation in Mannheim's terms is not applicable to my study. I refer to the concept of generation from a broader perspective, and I assume that most young people are concerned with wider structural transformations. Nonetheless, I cannot presume that the latter equally affect all young people. Different groups of young people react differently to the same events, and draw on different resources to deal with their circumstances.

The baby boomers nevertheless experienced their transition to adulthood in a radically different socio-economic context than their children. They benefited from advanced societies' exceptional structural affluence and secure conditions. By contrast, young people today are enduring the consequences of economic restructuring. The outstanding development of several advanced societies after the Second World War gave the impression that full employment, economic prosperity, generous welfare systems and an abundance of natural resources were standard conditions that would last long into the future. In reality this phase was specific to a particular epoch, and available only to the generation born after the Second World War. However, the exceptional trajectory of this generation became a normalised cultural model that still predominates today, even though

it is increasingly irrelevant to many young people's opportunities for achievement (Chauvel 2002).

Experts' discourses generally portray the prolongation of youth as a threat to the established order, as young people are expected to take responsibility for sustaining and continuing the present system. However, their difficulties in the labour market, and further in society itself, compromise their ability to maintain such a system. Young people are therefore considered more as a social burden than as active citizens. They are also depicted as a rather 'passive' generation with hedonistic characteristics who prefer living in the present to actively preparing for the future. Yet planning is impossible for many young people, because of economic fluctuations and upheavals. Consequently, in order to avoid hazardous outcomes, they prefer to wait for events to come to them, rather than engaging in risky decision-making (Hutson and Jenkins 1989: 106). Young people also appear passive and indifferent because of their lack of engagement in the political sphere. As a matter of fact they do participate, but they direct their involvement to different sectors, such as environmental activism, street demonstrations, or grassroots movements (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 157–159). Today's youth's apparent lack of interest in politics and weak social commitment is regarded and analysed according to the values and situation of the previous generation. However, young people's apparent socio-political withdrawal might be a strategy to demonstrate the inadequacy of the present societal model with regards to their needs and expectations. Indeed, the present establishment was built to respond not to their requirements, but to those of their parents. Their 'active' elders rejected the previous generation's societal framework and thoroughly participated in the construction of a new one according to their own needs. The present system now fails to offer suitable solutions to improve young people's situation, as it is not adapted to current socio-economic dilemmas. Nor can it provide them with a clear sense of social identity, and this results in feelings

of alienation (Edmunds and Turner 2002). The generations following the baby boomers have been made destitute by the comparative lack of structural opportunities. Today's young people grew up in a sphere of socio-economic instability, uncertainty and intensive competitiveness on the job market. Ironically, cultural heritage perpetuates the ideology of achieving higher socio-professional positions than one's own parents. The system does not always match today's young people's potential for accomplishment (Bourdieu 1980; Chauvel 2002). The present structural context hence compels them to follow new routes to integration into society.

Emergence of distinctive pathways to adulthood

Olivier Galland (1990: 56) points out that youth was already extending into the early adult years as early as the 1980s, and that this period of life was increasingly becoming a time of experimentation. For a growing number of young people, early adulthood is now an intermediary status in which they prolong their studies, experience precarious employment for an indeterminate period, still live in the parental home, delay partnership and parenthood, and invest in the exploration of identity and personal experimentation (Arnett 2004). In doing so they are setting the pace for a new process of transition, establishing new qualifications for adulthood, and engendering a need to redefine the concept of adulthood itself (Blatterer 2007a; 2007b; 2010). Concepts and patterns of transition tend to be considered fixed features. Today's authorities, policymakers, youth experts and socio-cultural ideologies are still shaped around the definition and the markers of adulthood that took shape mainly in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the recent structural transformations, as well as the construction of childhood and adolescence prior to and during the industrial revolution, prove that neither societal apparatuses nor

social concepts are permanent edifices. They are malleable, and can change alongside wider transformations.

The transition process too might simply be taking a new turn, rather than being extended. Young people adapt and react to their structural environment, rather than intentionally choosing to disrupt their own entry into adulthood. They find ways to cope which then divert their life trajectories onto unexpected paths. Youth experts consider this problematic. One might nonetheless question whether it really constitutes a problem if patterns of transition diverge from those set by the previous generation. In any case, are young people actually prolonging their youth? It might be wise to explore their vision of adulthood and their positions in the current societal context. Adulthood is defined by the attainment of socio-cultural landmarks. However, where do the moral, psychological and subjective aspects of adulthood fit in this definition? It may be sensible to investigate whether young people view themselves as immature because they do not qualify for their parents' social definition of adulthood (Blatterer 2007a; 2007b; 2010; Westberg 2004).

Exploring innovative models of transition

The most influential studies on contemporary patterns of transition to adulthood and of the prolongation of youth come from the United Kingdom (e.g. Bynner et al. 1997; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Jones 1995) and North America (e.g. Arnett 2004; Booth et al. 1999; Côté 2000; Kiley 1983; Settersten et al. 2005; Shanahan 2000). The extended transitional model occurring in these countries is generally presumed to be young people's pathway to adulthood in other advanced societies too. The global impact of socio-economic, political and cultural changes on young people's lives encourages a belief in the standardisation of youth transition across all advanced countries. But is the period of youth transition to adulthood prolonged in other

societies too? Assuming this is valid, are the same factors causing the phenomenon? Seen from a distance, all industrialised societies have a somewhat shared structural apparatus and living standard. Nevertheless, each national structure presents specific societal variations that greatly influence young people's patterns of integration into the wider establishment. In parallel with a focus on the recent enlargement of the European Union, the implementation of increasingly uniform policies directed at individual European countries tends to overlook member states' structural divergences. For such reasons, a social phenomenon, such as the prolongation of youth, that appears to be common to all advanced societies deserves deeper investigation within individual societal structures, in order to elucidate its actuality, source and extent.

A variety of national and comparative studies have discerned different patterns of transition to adulthood across advanced societies and between European countries (e.g. Heath and Cleaver 2003; Holdsworth and Morgan 2005; Oinonen 2004). The different politico-cultural ideologies prevailing in each country continue to regulate young people's lives. For instance, social origins have a stronger impact on life prospects in the United Kingdom, while in Scandinavia the universal distribution of welfare counterbalances their effects. Likewise, entering the Finnish higher-education system entitles each student to financial benefits, whereas in France financial support is means-tested and based on parents' rather than students' income (see Vossensteyn 2004). In-depth comparative examinations of different societies is likely to yield surprising insights concerning patterns of transition.

New European policy directives related to young people increasingly aim to standardise their life trajectories. For instance, the purpose of the Bologna Process (2007–2010) is to found a standardised European Higher-Education Area (EHEA) in order to simplify international student and staff cooperation and academic mobility. However, such a procedure implies that individual member states'

wider structural backgrounds are sufficiently flexible to adopt the new directives. It also suggests that young people's patterns of transition and living conditions are homogeneous across Europe. Yet clear distinctions between European countries are visible at the social, political, economic and cultural levels. These affect young people's living arrangements, their integration into the wider system, and indeed their pathways to adulthood. For instance, labour regulations, training schemes and programmes to encourage educational participation vary across European societies (Müller and Gangl 2003). This indicates the necessity to examine how individual countries' societal backgrounds and structural factors affect young people's transition and integration.

The present study concentrates on two European countries, Finland and France. The purpose is to identify how structural factors specific to each country influence patterns of youth transition. The research focuses more precisely on female university students' processes of socio-economic integration in these societies. It simultaneously investigates the differences and similarities in young women's transitions, living arrangements and strategies of integration, and their own assessment of their current and future socio-economic situation and opportunities. Twenty-two young women provided insightful accounts during qualitative in-depth interviews conducted in the two countries. The study is framed around the post-war markers of adulthood. Young women therefore evaluated their country's higher-education system, their chances of entering the labour market, their plans to become independent and start a family, and their processes of transition to and perceptions of adulthood. This research is the outcome of their invaluable contributions.

2.

COMPARING FINLAND AND FRANCE: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter offers an account of the methods used in this study to examine the process of youth transition in Finland and France. This research is thus based on cross-national comparison. I also combine qualitative and quantitative empirical strategies, and in-depth interviewing. The chapter further provides an insight into the fieldwork and the practical aspects of conducting research with informants in two countries.

2.1 Research Strategies

Research results tend to be regarded as the main part of social research. However, the other part of a research project's output, which involves methods of analysis, is no less significant. Research findings

arise from the choice of appropriate methodological approaches for a given study, such as qualitative or quantitative strategies or cross-country comparison.

Research design

This dissertation focuses on young academic women experiencing the transition to adulthood in two European countries, Finland and France. The goal of this study is to add to our knowledge and understanding of the transition to adulthood, from a group of young people's own point of view. The research investigates four distinct questions: 1) What are the differences and similarities between female students' transitions to adulthood in Finland and France? 2) What are their strategies for social integration? 3) Do they follow different transitional routes to adulthood than their parents? 4) If yes, what new model of transition do they adopt?

One of the roles of sociology is to challenge 'common-sense' assumptions, to break myths, and to either construct new theoretical ideas or build upon existing ones (Cartmel 2003: 99–100). This study discusses whether the prolongation of youth is predominant outside the Anglo-American and English-speaking countries where the most influential studies on current patterns of transition have been done. Comparative research is an appropriate way to investigate this issue, and particularly so within the European Union, in light of the latter's current plans to increase the standardisation of policy across member states. Charles Ragin (1987: 3–5) discusses case-oriented comparative research and its use of macrosocial units in his explanatory statements on comparative social science's goal to both explain and interpret macrosocial variations. Case-oriented methods generally stimulate the development of new substantive theories on the basis of an analysis of why different cases or units experience similar outcomes (Ragin 1987: 45). John Stuart Mill established

several methods related to empirical social research in the 19th century. One of these was the 'method of difference'. This method can be used to compare social or political systems that share a number of common structural features, in order to neutralise some differences while highlighting others. The cases share particular characteristics, but vary with respect to the presence or absence of some key explanatory factors. The 'method of difference' is used in four different types of comparative research: comparisons over time, over areas, within nations, and in counterfactuals. One kind of application sets up a certain number of contextual variables by selecting states or policies that are relatively similar with respect to key variables, such as wealth, regime type, religion or culture (Allardt 1976: 79–86; Eskola 1966: 125–135; Moses and Knutsen 2007: 98–99).

This cross-societal study investigates the patterns of youth transition in two non-English speaking European countries, Finland and France. Mill's 'method of difference' is suitable to the study of these two countries. Although France is considered to be at the centre of Europe and Finland at the periphery, they present sufficiently similar background structures in terms of general features such as economic system, governmental form or infrastructure. They also display subtle yet distinctive structural variations that are not immediately discernible from a distance, but which have a significant impact on patterns of youth transition (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed account of Finland's and France's structural and institutional developments).

In order to answer the questions outlined above and to examine current pathways to adulthood, the following institutions have been used as the basis of analysis: the higher-education system, the labour market, and the family structure (including state support for families). The main goal of this study is to examine one group of individuals' perceptions of these institutions. The purpose is to observe the differences not between individuals, but between the different societal institutions in Finland and France. When one is looking at the effects of institutional structures, it is preferable to have only the smallest

variation in individual characteristics in order to avoid losing the initial focus. Analysing individuals presenting similar characteristics in two different countries enables us to reflect upon the different institutions in these societies. It mainly highlights the differences in the institutions' functioning and how those differences impact upon individuals. Examining cases in context is therefore crucial. It helps to uncover illusory differences and commonalities, and to determine how different combinations of conditions can have an equivalent causal significance and/or how apparently similar causal factors can pull in opposite directions (Ragin 1987: 46–49). In other words, it is necessary to examine the contextual background in which young people experience transition, in order to evaluate more accurately their pathways to adulthood and the similarities and differences in that process. The combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis is a suitable approach to evaluate institutional variation and how this influences individuals' attitudes.

This further involves an 'individualising comparison', where the specific occurrence of a given phenomenon – in this case the prolongation of the transition to adulthood – is compared and contrasted in order to identify the peculiarities of each case. The technique of looking for variations also applies within the scope of comparative analysis. It consists of distinguishing variation within a given phenomenon by exploring differences in the contexts within which the phenomenon occurs (Tilly 1984: 81–82). For instance, examining the types of assistance offered to young people entering the labour market in Finland and France might reveal variations. The researcher can then interpret how each country's particular variation impacts upon patterns of youth transition. In cross-national research, the countries examined can represent the objects of study, the contexts of the study or the units of analysis (Cartmel 2003: 86). In this study, Finland and France represent both the objects and the contexts of the study. The transition to adulthood is examined within the cases' societal frameworks. Simultaneously, structural aspects are scrutinised

and become objects of comparison, thereby establishing patterns of similarities and differences between the two countries and providing a framework for patterns of youth transition.

The research informants were selected according to shared characteristics, so as to obtain comparable data. Most came from a lower- or higher-middle-class background, and they were all of the same gender (young women), belonged to the same age group (20–30-year-olds), lived in large provincial cities (Tampere in Finland and Lyon in France), and were academic young women studying at university (see Table 2.1). They were from the fields of the social sciences and humanities, had reached the end of their courses (either Bachelors or Masters programmes), and were about to enter working life or (in the cases of those who were just completing their Bachelors) further study. The research participants needed to be consistent between the two countries so that the comparison of institutions would be systematic. I am nevertheless aware that the choice of the informants has influenced the results of this study. Analysing another group of individuals, for instance upper-class young men, lower-educated young women or simply students from another discipline, would have produced different conclusions. Indeed, according to Pekka Räsänen and Terhi-Anna Wilska (2007), it is not only gender or age that impact on young people's perceptions of specific phenomena or issues. Those authors analysed university students' attitudes towards commercialised sex. They noticed that gender influenced the variations in attitude, but that fields of study did so too. The same occurs with individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds. They display divergent attitudes, for instance towards work, and also follow different routes to adulthood (e.g. Jones 2002). This leads to a reflection on Pierre Bourdieu's (1979; 1984) work on cultural distinction. The outcomes of his study might have been different if it had been based on a different sample. The selected individuals mostly belonged to the upper and middle classes. Individuals from poorer socio-economic backgrounds were underrepresented, and

farm workers were excluded from the investigation. Therefore the sample did not represent or describe the entire French population, but provided a picture of two different social classes (Bourdieu 1984: 505). However, in order to maintain consistency in his examination of the institution of class, Bourdieu had to select a specific sample.

Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches

Case-oriented comparison encourages a research design that includes the use of different methods of data collection, or mixed methods. The gathering and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data allows a better interpretation of the existence and diversity of a specific phenomenon. Furthermore, qualitative and quantitative approaches complement each other in producing in-depth knowledge of a specific issue. The quantitative approach to measurement is strongly context-oriented, whereas qualitative research produces in-depth knowledge; it is case-centred, and anchored in empirical measurement and evidence. Qualitative empirical research thus allows us to pay attention to details within the cases observed, and to make interpretations based on measurement (Ragin 2008: 78–81). In short, the quantitative approach reveals *what* is occurring, and the qualitative approach investigates *why* and *how*. In that respect, sampling and examining a small-scale population helps us to understand what other kinds of data, such as statistics and larger surveys, disclose. In the present study, cross-national comparison and sources of pre-existing data and statistics on youth transitional patterns provide a macro-dimensional overview of young people's situation. The empirical dimension of the research, generated by interviews conducted with a small-scale population, offers a micro approach to the phenomenon, with a focus on young academic women.

The study utilises international and standardised socio-demographic statistics produced by Eurostat, the OECD, the ILO and

the United Nations, and cross-national comparable surveys such as Eurobarometers (Melich 1997: Young Europeans; Christensen 2001: Europeans Opinion Research Group) and the ESS (European Social Survey) Round 3 – 2006. Engaging in cross-national research implies an equivalence of research design between the countries regarding measurement, sampling and dissemination (Cartmel 2003: 92). National statistics from Finland and France, produced by Statistic Finland and INSEE respectively, helped me to analyse national events within those countries that international data sets did not cover. Existing sources of data and literature provided contextual information regarding the socio-economic situation of young people in Finland and France. This allowed me to examine the main differences and similarities related to the characteristics of youth transition across the countries, and provided the basis for the questions to be addressed during the empirical process of interviewing. It is necessary, however, to be aware of the appropriateness of a particular method for particular issues (see Bryman 1988). In this research, interviewing was a means to investigate the issues raised by the literature on youth transition and the various data sets. Interviewing was also a means to give a voice to one particular 'object' of contemporary policy debates, that is, highly educated young women.

Giving a voice to youth

I chose to conduct qualitative in-depth interviews in order to give space and freedom to the informants to express their points of view. This technique is flexible in terms of the questions asked and the length and depth of reflection. It also produces rich, insightful and detailed answers. The interviews were semi-structured, and I prepared lists of questions to guide the respondents. Semi-structured interviewing helps to obtain in-depth responses and uncover respondents' attitudes, behaviour or perceptions (see Bryman 2001: 313–314;

Gillham 2000: 9–11). Many new questions emerged during the interview process as I reflected upon informants' statements. Transcribing the data is a tedious and time-consuming task, as is data coding and interpretation. However, the richness and distinctiveness of the data is worth the effort.

The primary data in my research comes from 22 qualitative in-depth interviews carried out with young female university students in their 20s who were at the end of their studies and approaching the transition to work. Eleven interviews were conducted in France in spring 2008 (in French), and 11 in Finland in autumn 2008 (in English), in two comparable medium-sized cities, Lyon in France and Tampere in Finland (see Appendix 1). The selected cities were both provincial cities, similar in size and accessible in terms of the practical matters of time, cost and location. Social research tends to be conducted in capital cities; the choice of provincial cities thus also allowed a change of focus from capitals. The interview questions (see Appendixes 2 and 3) followed the new theoretical approaches discussed in Chapter 1. They were organised around four themes: 1) Young women's evaluation of the education system; 2) Views on their integration in the labour market; 3) Becoming independent and plans for starting a family; 4) Entering adulthood, and their perception of the concept of adulthood. The questions asked were divided into three stages. First, the informants were asked to evaluate their present and near-future socio-economic situation in relation to the aforementioned themes. They were then encouraged to assess their peers' current socio-economic situations. Finally they were asked to evaluate, according to their own perceptions, their parents' socio-economic situations and transitions to adulthood at the same age.

This research is comparative across two countries. It was not possible within the scope of this study to analyse institutions in two countries and different groups of individuals, such as men and women belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds or even to different study disciplines. Analysing both men and women would

have entailed a cross-gender comparison too. The presentation of results would have had to cover a large range of issues in a superficial and unwieldy manner. The focus on one gender and one group of young women only – in this case, academic young women – allowed me to deepen my examination with regard to the effect of structural institutions on their pathways to adulthood. In addition, a more complex set of comparisons would have been unrealistic in terms of time, material and cost. It was necessary to narrow down the population I was going to investigate to one gender. I therefore chose to interview young women.

This choice of gender focus was based on changes in women's lives since the Second World War, mainly women's entry into the labour force, their attainment of emancipation and new rights, their access to higher education, and their access to a more independent social status. The current socio-economic restructuring nevertheless concerns both men and women. Advanced societies still essentially function with the idea that economic fluctuations cause more damage to men because they are the family breadwinners. A family with an unemployed husband or father is in danger of poverty and social exclusion. However, in many cases nowadays women's position is as important as that of men concerning family provision (see Bradley and van Hoof 2005; Müller and Gangl 2003). This study focuses on young women's opinions regarding women's role on the labour market, motherhood, societal attitudes to gender-role attribution, and their own integration into the labour market.

The focus on university students became sensible and pertinent when I started to investigate the debate around the prolongation of schooling and the transition to working life. In addition, the number of higher-education students is constantly rising. Degrees are losing their significance on the market, since a growing number of young people possess tertiary credentials, and competition between graduates for professional positions is increasing (see Chapter 4). The common

belief is that the higher the educational level, the easier the integration on the labour market. However, this is not true for all graduates.

Twenty-two in-depth interviews might seem limited in terms of the size of the studied population, but this is justified by the amount of information obtained, as well as by the time needed to find the informants, conduct the interviews, transcribe them and analyse the results. The interviews lasted for one to two hours (on average, an hour and a half). The quality of the information provided by the respondents itself justifies the size of the sample chosen. Indeed, there is no absolute rule that dictates the number of interviewees necessary for any given study. The appropriate size depends on the nature of the population, the nature of the behaviour to be analysed, and the time and funds available (Armer 1973: 58–62; Chadwick et al. 1984: 69). The goal of the research is not to generalise findings across the whole youth population, young women or students, as variations do exist across genders, social backgrounds, and educational levels, or even among academic women. The interviews offered significant perspectives on Finnish and French societal institutions, and evidence of contemporary young highly educated women's social behaviour.

Practical issues and challenges

Conducting qualitative in-depth interviews entails a number of ethical issues. Interviewing includes informants' agreement or consent to be interviewed. It is crucial to explicitly explain the purpose of the interview, and how, where and when the data will be used (see Denscombe 1998: 109, 126). Respondents must be notified that the data will be appropriately processed exclusively for scientific and academic applications. Before each interview, I therefore gave a sheet to the participants with information on the interview process, data protection, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality (see Appendix 2).

Preface

Preservation of the data involves meticulous protection, in particular regarding privacy and confidentiality. The transcripts of the Finnish interviews have been stored in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive for further scientific use after completion of this study and after any private information has been removed and the informants have given their permission. The French interviews will be archived there too in the near future, after editing. I recorded the interviews digitally. This required the respondents' consent too, for ethical reasons. I asked permission to record the discussion from each participant before interviewing them. I also explained the reasons why I had chosen that method. They all agreed, and none made any objection to it. Recording the interviews allowed me to concentrate entirely on the discussion and the research participants' comments and statements. Taking notes misses much valuable information, and can lead one to omit the most important accounts and to misinterpret the data. Technology allowed me to obtain an acute transcription of the data.

I carried out the interviews in two different countries, and in two different languages. In France, I conducted them in French, which is also my native language. There was therefore no ambiguity concerning language issues for the respondents. However, since my Finnish language skills were not as developed as my English, I decided to condcut the interviews in Finland in English. Most highly educated young people in Finland are very articulate in English, so I was not worried about potential informants' ability and willingness to discuss in this language. Nevertheless, I chose to carry out the interviews with help from a Finnish research assistant who was a female university student at the time. She was present during the interview process, and ready to help the interviewees in case of language difficulties. This meant that the interviewees felt comfortable and knew that they could use their native language when they could not remember English terminology or expressions. While in France I was alone with the interviewees in face-to-face meetings, in Finland there were three of us in the interviews, the researcher, the research assistant and the

informant. At first I was afraid that the presence of two researchers would put pressure on the informants and make them feel uncomfortable. However, since we were also young women, students, and about the same age, they did not feel intimidated, and they let the discussion flow. They even felt reassured, since they could use Finnish vocabulary and specific terminology when needed.

Although the interviews generally went smoothly in the two countries, I am conscious that the Finnish young women were put at a slight disadvantage, since they could not express themselves in their native language, unlike their French counterparts. The French respondents had more liberty to use national jargon and expressions, for example. In addition, even when a non-native speaker is an expert in a foreign language, they may still be influenced by their own language in respect of ways of thinking and expressing themselves. Similarly, two languages might use the same word to refer to a specific issue, but the term might bear different connotations in each language. The interpretation of vocabulary, depending on the meaning associated with the words, can vary across societies and even across subcultural groups within a single country (Grimshaw 1973: 27). Informants using a different language, such as the young women speaking English rather than Finnish, might use the borrowed language in accordance with native language connotations and culture (see Armer 1973: 51). For instance, the term 'family' has a different conceptual definition in Finland than in Spain. In Finland it refers to the nuclear family (parents and their children) living in the same household, while in Spain it might refer to a larger group of relatives not necessarily living under the same roof (Oinonen 2004: 49).

Bearing these issues in mind, I had first of all to carefully formulate the interview questions. In order to avoid biases, it is necessary, for instance, to translate questionnaires or interview questions into equivalent cultural and conceptual terminology. It is not enough to focus on the wording (Cartmel 2003: 92; Temple and Edwards 2006). Since my research was to be conducted and written in Eng-

lish, I wrote the questions in this language. I translated them into French rather easily, knowing the cultural conceptual equivalences. The research assistant also translated the questions into Finnish, in case we might need them when carrying out the interviews in Finland (all the interview questions are included in Appendix 3). The same process occurred when I translated quotes from the French interviews (included in Chapters 4–7). It was not sufficient to translate expressions and vocabulary. Interpreting and translating the meaning of what the informants said, the conceptual ideas and the feelings they expressed, was just as crucial. The interviews would otherwise lose their value and provide rather shallow evidence. At first glance, language might appear to be a secondary characteristic, but it is a central aspect of cross-national research. Conducting interviews with non-native English speakers, and being myself a non-native speaker, could be a disadvantage in some circumstances. However, the goal of the interviews was to engage not in discourse analysis, but in content analysis. Forms of expression, vocabulary used, time taken to answer the questions, hesitations and so on were not the focus of this study. The research concentrates essentially on what the young women had to say and what they thought of the issues discussed. The emphasis remained on the informants' messages, rather than on particular ways of transferring the information. Although the young Finnish women could not express themselves as native speakers, they had enough skills in English to convey their attitudes and communicate their opinions.

Being an outsider-insider

I was aware that the researcher's identity has a considerable impact on the interview process. The age, gender, status and ethnicity of the researcher matter (Denscombe 1995: 116). Researchers who are close in age and able to participate in their subjects' milieu are advantaged,

as they can better understand the participants' behaviour and attitudes by virtue of belonging to the same age group (Roberts 2003: 24). In this study, the interviewees were roughly the same age as or a little younger than myself. They were aged between 21 and 30 at the time of interview, and I was 29–30. Several times they implied that they felt I could understand their situation, thanks to the age factor, my experience of the same socio-economic context, and my being a young woman from the university milieu. My belonging to the academic world and therefore sharing the same status than them, albeit at a higher stage (that of a doctoral student), also facilitated my interaction with the research participants. As for ethnicity, I was a French woman among French informants in France, and a European citizen who had lived several years in Finland. The Finnish interviewees knew that I was not a newcomer to Finland, which I believe had an unconscious impact on their trust in me. Finally, gender can have an impact on the information respondents may reveal. Gender similarity can encourage informants to express their views, whereas the opposite might prevent them from disclosing information. Several studies have proven that same-sex interviewer-interviewee relationships ease the interview process. In some cases, female researchers have found it easier to interview women, with whom the reciprocity in interaction was higher thanks to a sense of having a more equal relationship. The same goes for male researchers interviewing men. The impact of gender nonetheless depends on the research subject and whether it touches ethical and sensitive issues (Alasuutari 1995: 87–89; Song and Parker 1995).

Finally, in some cases it is challenging to gain access and obtain adequate cooperation from individuals in 'host societies' (Armer 1973: 58). However, this study was based in Finland, the 'host' country with which I was comparing France, my country of origin. It was thus easier to negotiate access with research participants in both cases: being French on the one hand, and living in Finland, my 'host' country, on the other. This facilitated my access to knowledge of Finnish societal

structure, culture and language. It accelerated the process of approaching informants and conducting the interviews. Neither country was foreign to me. In neither of them was I an outsider, but at the same time I was not a full insider either, as a French citizen living in Finland. In addition, I lived and studied in Great Britain for four years. I studied for my Bachelors and Masters degrees there, before moving to Finland to pursue my doctoral studies. This position gave me the advantage of distance from both Finland and France, and also from Great Britain. Living outside one's own society provides a perspective on the societal peculiarities of one's own country. The same occurs when a foreigner lives in a new socio-cultural framework. Indirectly, by merely living in Finland while belonging to France, I became a participant-observer in both societies. The method of participant observation is primarily used in ethnographic research. It mainly consists in analysing and discovering the meanings of existence in a given country or ethnic group as from an insider's position (see Jorgensen 1989). Moreover, the experience of young people within a single societal context makes it difficult to generalise conclusions. However, cross-societal analysis gives space to a wider approach and broader perspectives (Cartmel 2003: 87–88). This study design gave priority to neither the ethnographic approach nor the technique of participant observation. Nonetheless, indirectly, this position gave me access to societal knowledge, and at the same time sufficient detachment to identify particular issues that local researchers might not immediately distinguish.

2.2 Into the Field:
Conducting Interviews and Data Description

Building the research design, choosing methods of analysis and empirical strategies are but one important part of investigating a phenomenon. The practical sides of empirical work are no less central. However, they remain too often hidden in the shadow of the research results. Findings represent the essential part and goal of a study. Yet without preliminary empirical enquiry, results would not materialise. This subchapter highlights the concrete steps of conducting research in the field, carrying out interviews and interpreting the material.

Field intervention

Before starting interviews, one must take two important steps: formulating clear, unambiguous and explicit questions, and finding research participants. Outwardly, these stages appear to be logical and simple. However, when engaging in empirical qualitative interviewing, every step of the process is equally crucial. The conduct of a successful interview starts with thinking about the background theoretical issues, producing suitable questions, finding the informants, and remaining alert throughout the process. It depends on the researcher's abilities and, as I explained previously, his or her age, gender and ethnic origins, as well as on the interview topic. This is all part and parcel of qualitative data collection: the process is bound to remain rather unpredictable, since it relies exclusively upon interactions between individuals. Before going into the field, I thoroughly considered the interview questions, and tested how they were understood among my circle of colleagues and acquaintances at university. I also did a pilot interview in order to test the questions, the length of time needed to conduct the interview, and the respondent's reaction, as well as merely to practise interviewing.

I went to Lyon in France in April–May 2008 in order to find young women to participate in my study and become part of my wider comparative analysis. The young women I met were studying at different universities or technological university institutes in Lyon. To recruit the first participant, I visited one of the universities and randomly asked a young woman if she would be interested in answering a few questions, explaining my position and the purpose of my research. She agreed, and we met later to carry out the interview. I met the other young French women through interviewees' acquaintances and the students I encountered in Lyon. I decided to use the snowball technique to find random informants within a short period. Relying on social contacts between individuals is a good way to find additional respondents (see Bryman 2001: 323). I also contacted young female students who were members of the hospitality exchange and social network CouchSurfing. Several of them responded positively to my request. People who subscribe in the CouchSurfing network tend to be open to other people and cultures, and usually travel a lot. It might sound biased to select informants from a hospitality exchange network; however, I expected to have more chance of finding respondents willing to contribute to my study that way than to keep asking random students in the university courtyard and obtaining negative answers. I was in Lyon for a limited time period, and therefore had to collect the data as fast as possible. Using different techniques to recruit respondents was highly efficient; in a few weeks, I had completed the interviews in France. I transcribed the interviews after my return from France, as I had neither the time nor the adequate software to proceed there. Transcribing was not difficult per se, but it is a slow, long and tedious process, demanding a high level of concentration. It took me the best part of the summer.

In autumn 2008, I started working with a research assistant. She assisted me during the interviewing process, mainly for language reasons. Immediately we became a good team. I consider this aspect one of the main reasons why the interviews were successful. It was a

pleasure to work together, and share ideas, impressions and insights when reflecting upon the interview material. The Finnish interviews took place in October–November 2008 in Tampere. I recruited the informants by a similar method to that used in France. A sampling equivalence across the two countries was necessary to provide an equal level of information (see Armer 1973: 62). However, this time I could also access student email lists. I did not use this system in Lyon because I was not a member of any university. Several young women found in this way agreed to participate in the study; indeed, these consituted most of the interviewees. I found a few informants by using the snowball technique and sending messages through CouchSurfing too, but this was less successful than in France. The research assistant transcribed the Finnish interviews and translated the fragments of Finnish speech into English.

After each interview, I wrote a diary entry with memos on the interview process and my impressions, and noted the key aspects that stood out. Writing fieldnotes helped me to pick up on relevant information that the mp3 recorder could not, such as the interview venue, the atmosphere, non-verbal communication, the general context, and other clues (see Denscombe 1998: 120).

Breaking the ice

In France I conducted most of the interviews in the informants' homes. I completed some of them in the place I was renting in Lyon, and two in a café. The café setting did not disturb the interview process, as the informants were very relaxed. However, on one occasion the atmosphere was rather noisy. The interview transcription was tedious, because some parts were difficult to hear, and a few fragments of speech were inaudible. In Finland too I carried out a few interviews in the informants' homes. Most were conducted in my office at the university. The informants felt comfortable coming

there, since they were on campus during the daytime. I thought the choice of venue was a little austere at first, so I added decorations and altered the room's layout prior to the interviews. The participants felt comfortable in such an informal-looking and friendly atmosphere. It turned out to be pleasant to conduct the interviews there. In Lyon I had decided to offer the research participants fresh pastries before starting the interviews. In Tampere I maintained that little 'tradition', and offered pastries, biscuits and sweets. I wanted to thank the young women for helping me with my study, but it also became a very good icebreaking technique. We would have tea or coffee, a piece of cake, and a little chat before proceeding. The informants became more relaxed, as did I. The atmosphere became friendly, comfortable and very pleasant. The interview process generally went smoothly, like a conversation.

The informants who replied to my request showed considerable willingness to contribute to the research. Most of them provided fruitful information. However, it seemed a little more difficult in Finland than in France to recruit participants. It took me only three weeks to find interviewees in France, and about the same time to interview them. In Finland it took over two months. The fact that the interviews were conducted in English certainly dampened some of their motivation to get involved in the study. However, background culture can play a role too. People are generally more introverted in Finland. While most French informants eagerly divulged their opinions and sometimes tried to change the interview subject, it felt that some Finnish interviewees were afraid of revealing too much. Some young women were shy and seemed to prefer to merely answer my questions, without elaborating too deeply. I had to delve, by using probes and asking additional questions, to encourage them to make more insightful observations. Nonetheless, in general the interviews proceed very well. The young women were happy to provide their help, and revealed their ideas freely. The young French women seemed especially happy to share their perceptions, mainly of the topics that

they contested. They seemed to derive satisfaction from divulging their critical opinions to an official social researcher. Some were also willing to help me with my study in other ways, mainly by finding new informants. They provided me with contact details of potential interviewees or acquaintances, who in turn helped me to meet further participants. Their initiative surprised me. I have never studied in a French university and hence felt a little apprehensive about entering the field there at first. Overall meeting the informants and conducting the interviews was a very fruitful, successful and enriching experience. In both countries, I continued to meet some of the young women after completing the interviews, and have stayed in touch with them.

Opening the treasure chest

After the period in the field, it was time to start examining the data. Conducting and transcribing interviews is but one fragment of the process. Coding and interpreting the data is the largest part of the task. I proceeded with the necessary systematic analytic coding, breaking the data down into units and categorising the fragments. Coding differs from the analysis process; it consists in breaking the data down and generating an index of terms and concepts, which helps one to reflect upon and interpret the material, before engaging in thorough content analysis and theory building (see Bryman 2001: 398–399; Denscombe 1998: 210–211). However, I soon realised that technique alone is not sufficient in the process of data scrutiny and theory construction. It takes practice, extreme concentration, and almost a meditative state of mind to let the hidden meaning of the data emerge. Once the coding steps were achieved, I felt suddenly overwhelmed by the data; it seemed that I could not reach the true essence of the interviews. I therefore started to take some distance from the huge amount of information I now possessed and tried to

understand the process that was going on. The interviews were like a large chest with a treasure locked inside. The fragments of interviews were simply a riddle, a mysterious puzzle, and their meaning was the real 'treasure'. In order to open the chest, I needed to answer a variety of riddles. I needed to be able to see through the words as if they were transparent, so as to get the necessary keys and tools that would allow me to access the 'treasure', that is, the true meaning of what I was searching for when I started this study. Coding gave me the keys and tools that helped me solve the riddles and open the treasure chest. The next step consisted in organising the 'treasure', in other words, categorising and classifying all the segments and units under new concepts. The last stage was the selection of quotes to include in this dissertation (in the empirical Chapters 4–7). I translated the French quotes into English. The process was tedious, as I had to translate not just the words used, but also the expressions, feelings and conceptual ideas, so that the message would be equivalent to the original statement (see Armer 1973: 51–52).

Going into the field consisted in meeting 'real' people and being in contact with some of the young people I was examining for the purpose of my research. My work became more substantial when it became connected to the reality portrayed by surveys and literature. Interviewing is based on social exchange and sharing. Immersing myself in this process proved that I was truly involved in social research.

Presenting the informants

This study is constructed upon the information the research partici-pants, all female university students, offered. Throughout this dis-sertation, especially in the chapters based on empirical data analysis (Chapters 4–7), I present theories built from informants' statements. I include illustrative quotes that reveal the young women's opinions.

In order to give a better picture of who the respondents are, Table 2.1 provides general information about them. All the names used in this study are fictitious, for reasons of ethics and confidentiality. Table 2.1 includes the interviewees' ages, educational levels, living arrangements and marital information, their parents' occupational background, as well as their working situation at the time of the interviews.

The Finnish informants were a little older than the French. Most of the Finns were in their mid- to late 20s, while the French were in their early to mid-20s. This is related to the organisation of the university system in the two countries (discussed in Chapter 4). Some informants were completing their Bachelors, and others their Masters or equivalent degree, such as CAPES (*Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement Secondaire* – Secondary Schoolteaching Qualification), the teaching degree in France. Those finishing their Bachelors degree could decide to start working or engage in further studies, such as pursuing on a Masters. Those completing a Masters or equivalent degree were preparing to enter the labour market. One informant was taking a gap year before starting a Masters degree. If we take their parents' occupations as the criterion, the majority of young women came from the lower- and upper-middle class. A few were from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Interestingly, only one had a parent who had been a farm worker. Most of the young Finnish women were living alone or in shared accommodation, some with their partners. In France, most of the respondents were living with their partners, some on their own or in shared accommodation. Two young women were married, and one had a baby. Most respondents had a part-time job. Some young French women were working as part of their Professional Masters degree, for training purposes. In France a distinction is made between an academic Masters degree and a Professional Masters, which includes a work-based curriculum. Some of the informants were pursuing a Professional Masters, either at university or within a professional university institution. The respondents were from the fields of the humanities and social sciences.

Table 2.1. Finnish and French informants according to age, study level, parents' occupational background, living arrangements and working situation, 2008.

Country of origin	Fictitious names	Age	Study level		Parents' occupational background		Living arrangements				Working situation	
			BA	MA	Father	Mother	Alone; shared accommodation	With partner	Married	Children	Working part-time	Casual work, summer jobs, voluntary work
	Anna	28		X	Carpenter	Secretary	X				X	
	Elina	26		X	Repairman	School cook			X		X	
	Emmi	25		X	Primary schoolteacher	Works at Nokia		X			X	X
	Johanna	26		X	Manager	Housewife	X					X
	Maria	30		X	Metal worker	Manual worker	X				X	
Finnish informants	Piia	24		X	Engineer	Medical doctor	X					X
	Päivi	25		X	Priest	Nurse	X				X	
	Sanna	24	X		Medical doctor	Medical doctor	X					X
	Suvi	25	X		Farm worker, then factory worker	Librarian		X			X	
	Tiia	26		X	Self-employed electrician	Assistant nurse		X		X (1)		Maternity leave
	Tuuli	25		X	Engineer	Secretary	X				X	

French informants	Name	Age			Occupation (self)	Occupation (partner)	Parents' home	Independent		Plans	Other
	Alice	23	X		Engineer and consultant	Nurse	X (partly in parents' home)			X[3]	
	Audrey	26	X[2]		IT engineer	Language teacher		X		X	
	Caroline	25	X		IT engineer	Counsellor			X	X[3]	
	Céline	23		X	Accountant	Social worker, local mayor		X		X	
	Florence	22	X[2]		Veterinarian	School-teacher		X		X	
	Marie	24	X		Skilled manual worker	Cleaner		X		X[3]	
	Nadège	21		X	Accountant	Civil servant	X				X
	Natalie	22		X	White-collar technician	Nurse	X			X	
	Nicole	21		X	Nurse trainer	Nurse		X		X	
	Sabrina	23	X[2]		Accountant	Shop assistant	X			X	X
	Valérie	23	X[1]		Specialist advisors (created an organisation to help people in need)	Parental home					

[1] BA completed: taking a gap year at the time of interview, and starting a Masters programme in the following academic year.
[2] Preparing a CAPES (Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement Secondaire – Secondary Schoolteaching Qualification, equivalent to Masters level).
[3] Internship: part of the work-based training on their Professional Masters curriculum.

3 .

IN THE CENTRE AND AT THE PERIPHERY

Finland's and France's national structures are founded upon demo-cratic ideologies, both countries are advanced societies, and both are members of the European Union. At first glance these two Western European societies seem to share many features at the social, politi-cal, economic, educational, cultural, religious and historical levels. They have shared various historical developments in Europe, such as industrialisation, the development of capitalism, the shift from an industrial to a service-based economy, and important socio-structural transformations after the Second World War.

Yet on closer inspection, there are differences between them on all structural levels, from history to religion to welfare. Finland and France share common historical traits, yet the two countries have been shaped from almost opposite directions. While France has been an empire, Finland has belonged to other empires. There are diverging traditions in the two societies regarding internal func-

tioning and organisation. In addition, they have adopted different types of welfare system, based on ideologies and principles specific to their socio-historical traditions. The next subchapter offers a historical glimpse of the internal structural developments of Finland and France. The subsequent subchapter presents data on several aspects of youth of transition in the two countries, as well as in other European countries.

3.1 An Overview of Social Structures

It is necessary to examine the societal context in which young people become adults in order to understand the particularities of their processes of transition. This subchapter explains some of the socio-historical factors that led to the present shapes of the case-countries and the welfare regimes they implemented.

Historical developments

Since the Second World War there has been a marked process of social and economic convergence among the countries of western and northern Europe. However, Finland's and France's present societal frameworks are rooted in diverse historical transformations and fluctuations, in some cases pulling in opposite directions. France is a central European country that has always held strong sovereign power within Europe. Finland is a peripheral country that has been ruled by other powerful nations. While Finland belonged to the Swedish and then the Russian empires, France built its own colonial empire, conquered lands and established colonies in Africa, America and Asia. The French colonial empire reached its peak in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and then declined (Goubert 1988). Finland was part of

the Kingdom of Sweden from the Middle Ages onwards, and existed merely as a territory. During the 19th century the Russian empire conquered several territories that belonged to Sweden, including Finland in 1809, when the country gained the status of an imperial Grand Duchy with governmental, financial and religious autonomy (Alapuro 1988: 22–23). Almost all Swedish civil laws continued in Finland. The country thus functioned with a combination of the old Swedish system and the new agreements conferred by the Russian empire. Finland gained independence in 1917, and was proclaimed a republic in 1919.

Finnish class structure came from the Swedish model and was built upon a free peasantry. The nobility dominated through the bureaucracy rather than through land ownership. As a result, relations between the different social classes were not based on feudalism or a strong hierarchy (Alapuro 1988: 20). In addition, most members of the upper classes were Swedes and Russians. When Finland gained independence, the Finnish-speaking upper class represented only a minor group. By contrast, France's social structure was essentially feudal from the Middle Ages until the French Revolution in 1789. The population was divided into three main hierarchical strata. The clergy and nobility comprised the first and second estates, corresponding to the upper classes. The third estate included those at the bottom of the feudal pyramid, such as artisans, bourgeois, peasants and the poor (Goubert 1988: 7–8). The clergy and nobility held considerable power and control over the third estate, and possessed most of the land on which the peasants worked. The feudal system, along with the French monarchy, collapsed during the French Revolution. The church lost its power and privileges when France was transformed into the French Empire under Napoléon I (Goubert 1988: 183–190). France's religion remained rooted in Roman Catholic traditions, but the church and state thenceforth functioned separately. To this day, the church does not interfere in political decisions. The Catholic church nevertheless retained its educative role in France, and provided

instruction until the foundation of the modern Republican School in the 1880s. These laws imposed the secularisation of the school system and the separation of education from religious instruction. Teaching staff had to obey the principle of *'laïcité'* (secularisation) and conceal any religious affiliation (see Cousin 1998; Langan 2008). The French Revolution abolished the feudal hierarchical pyramid, but parts of the structure persisted, including the stratification of social classes. Bourdieu's work (1979) fundamentally concerned the French class structure, and demonstrated that classes continued to distinguish themselves from one another with regard to cultural and consumption habits. Here we can also refer to Sweden, whose social structure bears close similarities with Finland (see Alestalo and Kuhnle 1987). Research on class mobility in different countries shows that upward mobility appears to be lower in France than in Sweden (Erikson et al. 1979). In the early 1980s, it was easier for Swedish men from poorer economic origins to achieve upward social mobility into service-class positions than their French counterparts. France also had the largest petit bourgeoisie (Erikson et al. 1982: 23, 27). One might therefore argue that the French Revolution did not eradicate the class structure, but merely obscured its apparatus. Finland, which was a part of the Swedish empire, was greatly influenced by the Swedish class structure and political apparatus. Even under the rule of the Russian empire, Finland preserved its autonomy and its Swedish-based societal apparatus.

Like other Nordic countries, Finland adopted the Protestant faith, before converting to Lutheranism in the 16th century during the Protestant Reformation. The church in Finland held an important position at both the religious and the political levels until the 19th century, when the Nordic nation-states were established. Following the Reformation, the church and state played complementary roles. While the governing estate aimed to maintain peace and order, the religious estate worked to educate the people of Finland. The church's role comprised both educative and social functions (Thorkildsen

1997: 138–139). The church exerted control over education until 1869, when the church and state separated (Opetushallitus 2009). Finland is a secular society in which church membership remains optional. Church members are nevertheless required to pay a tax as a financial contribution to the church.

Both Finland and France had agricultural economies before the take-off of the industrial revolution; however, the two countries modernised at different paces. France had the advantage of rich agricultural production, and some parts of the country started to industrialise shortly after the rapid changes in Great Britain in the early and mid-1800s. France had already been involved in international trade from early in its history. Colonialism and industrial developments accelerated the process, and helped the economy to develop greatly at both the national and international levels (see Goubert 1988). During that time Finland's main resources were agrarian. The Finnish economy remained weak, both within and outside the country. Its participation in the market for industrial products in particular remained small. Furthermore, industrialisation began later in Finland than in France, in the second half of the 19th century, at about the same time as in Eastern European countries. However, the Finnish non-feudal class structure differed from that of the Eastern European agrarian economies. Indeed, the peasants were essentially the upper stratum, and owned and profited from the majority of the country's main industrial resources, which consisted in wood and forestry. Finnish peasants managed to retain a good position during the industrialisation process, thanks to the exploitation of these resources (Alapuro 1988: 29–33).

Finland's and France's structural development after the Second World War is comparable. The service and information sector greatly expanded, and overtook the manufacturing sector. The processes of modernisation at the social, political, economic and cultural levels followed a parallel course. Finland underwent major economic restructuring from the 1950s onwards, and started to prosper sufficiently

to be able to compete strongly on the international market. Until the 1970s, the Finnish economy was primarily based on agriculture, forestry and the paper industry. During the 1970s and 1980s the focus of production shifted to technology, high-quality design and service provision. Small peripheral states like Finland retained an unequal position, and were politically, economically and culturally oppressed by more powerful nations. They therefore had to modernise rapidly and invest in innovative sectors in order to compete on the international market (Alapuro 1988: 88). In 1973, a trade agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC) nonetheless provided Finland with the economic advantages of membership, while allowing it to maintain its neutrality without any serious political implications (Singleton 1989: 153–156). Finland's economic prosperity is closely linked to European economic expansion. However, rather than becoming a 'colonised' supplier of raw material to more powerful and advanced countries, Finland retained a strong position on the market. Industrialisation started rather late, after the leading societies had already experienced the first phases – and both the constructive and the harmful effects – of the process. Latecomers benefited from the second industrial revolution, with cleaner energies, enhanced technologies and better social awareness (Pollard 1981: 232–234).

France actively participated in the construction of the European Union, starting with post-war European integration and especially the Rome Treaty of 1957. France and Germany played a crucial role in furthering the development of the European Union (see Burgess 2000). The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, 200 years after the French Revolution, marked an important stage in the expansion of the European Union. The 1992 Maastrich Treaty followed this event. It included 12 member states, but not Finland. Finland kept its neutrality. In 1995, three new member states joined the European Union, including Finland (Raunio and Tiilikainen 2003). In 2001, both Finland and France converted their national currency to the common European curreny, the euro.

Post-war prosperity and economic recession

After the Second World War, Finland and France, as well as other advanced societies, experienced an unprecedented period of economic prosperity that lasted for about 30 years, from 1945 to 1975, and was dubbed *'Les Trentes Glorieuses'* ('The 30 Glorious Years') by Jean Fourastié (1979). Angus Maddison (1982: 126) describes this phase as the 'Golden Age' of capitalism and economic growth. During this period, every level of society underwent major transformations. Standards of living and healthcare services greatly developed and expanded, welfare regimes were implemented, national infrastructures were modernised, and transport, technology and information mechanisms enjoyed unparalleled progress. The societies' economies began to shift to a service-based economy. The service sector overtook the manufacturing sector, with the focus shifting to the production of services rather than end products. In short, these transformations involved a shift from Fordism to post-Fordism (Walther et al. 2006: 22). Alongside these developments, other aspects of society changed at the socio-economic, political, educational and cultural levels. Mores and values became more permissive, women became emancipated, and children gained further rights and protection. Moreover, the social framework characterising the concept of youth altered considerably. Youth emancipation and changes in the status of youth led to an inversion of the traditional forms of social organisation in which adults dominate the structure and ideologies. The youth of the 1960s constructed themselves in terms of politics, industry (with the huge development of products and services aimed at children and young people), popular culture, education and social recognition (see Galland 1990).

The era of 'The 30 Glorious Years' was mainly characterised by full-time employment, a very secure economic context, and unprecedented opportunities for upward mobility (see Chauvel 2002). Young people could therefore expect to reach higher levels of professional

occupation than their parents, and they could simultaneously rise to higher social classes. Louis Chauvel (2002: 212, 233) identifies this period of economic boom as a historical exception, and as a lifepath model for one generation only. However, it is necessary to point out a difference between Finland and France in this process. While in Finland the sons of farmers, agricultural workers and lower-skilled manual workers alike attained higher-level qualifications and higher levels of professional occupation than their parents, in France it was mainly workers' sons from the lower social strata who moved upwards (Pöntinen et al. 1983: 52). In addition, this flourishing period gave the illusion that a bright socio-economic future was guaranteed. However, 'The 30 Glorious Years' did not eradicate the laws of capitalism and economic cycles. The economic boom started to slow down after the oil crises of the 1970s, which provoked a destabilisation of the newly established socio-economic edifice. Economic growth continued to decline in the 1980s in several advanced societies. After any peak, the economy tends to turn downwards, often as the result of a fall in demand, leading to a fall in production and a rise in unemployment (Lipsey et al. 1984: 568–569). Economic fluctuations are also accelerated by the phenomena of globalisation and international competition. Although today's crises are not as sudden or brutal as earlier crises like the Wall Street Crash of 1929, they last longer. They are characterised by 'creeping' inflation as prices continue to rise and living standards to diminish for a large part of the population. Productivity remains high, but only a few groups of individuals reap the benefit (Aglietta 1976: 311). New categories of jobs are created, but the threat of unemployment spreads. Rather than being limited to a specific and predictable section of the population, such as manual workers, unemployment now touches everyone, regardless of age, sex, educational credentials or profession.

Both Finland and France were affected by the worldwide economic slowdown following the oil crisis of the 1970s, but in France the economic decline continued into the 1980s, whereas the Finnish

economy continued to grow. The public sector developed further, as did the level of social security and services offered to the population. However, Finland's economy was greatly affected by the collapse of communism, which led to the breakdown in Soviet trade (see Alestalo and Flora 1994; Oinonen 2004: 59–60). The fall of communism in the early 1990s caused signficant turmoil in the worldwide economic structure too. France was not so harshly affected by the consequences of the fall of communism, but the lasting worldwide economic recession continues to have a harmful impact. The cyclical fluctuations of the capitalist system in patterns of prosperity and depression gave way to the crisis of Fordism, and ended the 'golden era' (Lipietz 1992: 14–17).

Alain Lipietz (1992: 35; 1997) compares advanced societies with an hourglass, in which the proportion of people located in both the higher and lower social strata is increasing, while the middle stratum is shrinking and being squeezed. The population in the middle, representing the middle class, is likely to decrease, while the number of poor people is rising. This leads to further increases in social division and exclusion. The worldwide stagnation in economic growth has simultaneously put strong pressure on welfare systems in advanced societies (Alestalo and Kuhnle 1987: 38). Today's prolonged recession is threatening the socio-economic structural apparatus introduced in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in terms of welfare provision and individuals' integration into the labour market. Indeed, welfare systems' efficiency and performance depend heavily on a strong and stable economic apparatus. According to Esping-Andersen (1999), industrialised societies' welfare systems are slowly eroding, and are experiencing difficulties of reorientation. The systems are being squeezed between the requirements of a growing population in need, the necessity to improve the economy, and welfare state ideologies. The stagnating economic apparatus has greatly weakened and challenged the Finnish and French welfare systems. Economic decline and high rates of unemployment have led to a growth in total social insurance

expenditure to provide for people in need, while the number of tax-payers has continued to fall (Alestalo and Flora 1994: 66).

Advanced societies are caught in the globalisation process in relation to economic development, fluctuations and financial provision. They struggle to maintain increasingly fragile welfare systems on which a growing number of people continue to depend. In the Fordist period, pathways to work were prestructured, predictable, and ensured access to regular paid employment. In the post-Fordist era, the future has become uncertain: young people's transition to work is no longer linear, but follows individual orientations and is constantly threatened by risks and instability (see Beck 1992). Labour markets require workers' flexibility, and simultaneously generate a diversification of career paths and structural risks. Such risks involve unemployment, the uncertainty of getting work, and insecure working lives. In addition, part-time and temporary employment has spread, and youth unemployment in particular has become a generalised phenomenon slowing down young people's access to a stable adult life (Walther et al. 2006: 23). Today's young adults, such as the young women I interviewed, grew up in a context described as a 'risk society' by Beck (1992). At the time of the interviews in 2008, they had only just started to become aware of the financial crisis, and of the new wave of economic instability that was about to disrupt advanced societies' economic apparatus even further – and also to disrupt patterns of transition to adulthood.

3.2 Patterns of Youth Transition

Patterns of youth transition, including the phenomenon of the prolongation of youth, have been studied intensively in the last few decades. Diverse sources and data sets offer a valuable overview of young people's present situations and transitional pathways to adulthood. This subchapter provides general information on Finnish

and French youths' living arrangements, patterns of leaving home, financial resources and family orientations, and refers to the European context.

Legal rights

Finland and France share similar legislation concerning age requirements to access various civil rights, such as the age of majority and rights to marry, drive, vote or work. In both countries, young people reach majority and can obtain a driving licence, vote, get married and receive a full salary from the age of 18. There are slight differences regarding the age of consent (16 in Finland, 15 in France) and legislation related to work and wages (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Age requirements for different legal rights in Finland and France in the first decades of the 2000s.

Rights	Finland	France
Majority	18	18
Driving licence	18	18
Voting	18	18
Age of consent	16	15
Marriage	18	18
Work	15 (after completion of compulsory school curriculum) - Between 13 and 15: only light and part-time work that does not disturb schooling - Between 15 and 17: can work full-time, but restrictions concerning overtime	16 (after completion of compulsory school curriculum) - Between 14 and 16: only light and part-time work that does not disturb schooling
Salary	- Full wage: 18 - 70–90% of the minimum wage for workers younger than 18. The variation depends on collective labour agreements in different sectors.	- Full wage: 18 - 80% of the guaranteed minimum wage (SMIC) for workers younger than 17 - 90% of the guaranteed minimum wage (SMIC) for workers aged 17–18

The table is based on information from the following sources: Finlex (2001; 2002); Legifrance (2010); Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Santé (2010a); Työministeriö (2005); Työsuojeluhallinto (2011).

Living arrangements

Several studies have pointed out that in many advanced societies, young people today move out of the parental home later than the previous generation did. However, in Finland and France young people still leave the parental home relatively early compared to the EU average. Existing data even shows that they tend to move away from home at similar ages in the two societies, with a median age of 20 for women and 21 for men in Finland, and 21 for women and

23.5 for men in France. This is lower than the EU 25 average, which is 23 for women and 27 for men (Eurostat 2008: 26).

In Finland, the proportion of young people leaving home at an early age actually seems to have increased in the last 20 years. The change in student status in 1994 affected this trend. Before 1994, even if they studied in one municipality and lived in another, students could not register as permanent residents in the town where they attended higher-education institutions. They continued to be registered in their home town, most likely at their parents' home. After a change in the law concerning students' home registration in 1994, more young people appeared in the statistics to have left the parental home earlier, but this does not mean that students were not living independently before 1994. In fact the rate is likely to be similar and stable (Nikander 2009).

The median age for leaving home in 1982 among young French women was between 20 and 21, and among young French men between 22 and 23 (Galland 1990: 63). These figures are nearly identical to the current figures. The age of leaving home in France has thus remained fairly stable. Catherine Villeneuve-Gokalp (2000) confirms this, but adds that gaining full independent status now occurs later. Young people can attain residential independence because they receive financial support from their parents. However, they are financially dependent for longer on their family, because they study for longer and experience a longer period of precarity and job instability before accessing their first permanent job.

Table 3.2. Young people's living arrangements according to gender and age in Finland (2007) and France (2005).

	Living with parents						Living alone[1]						Living in consensual union or as a couple[2]					
Age	20–24			25–29			20–24			25–29			20–24			25–29		
Gender	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T
							Percentages											
Finland	11	24	18	2	3	3	36	37	37	27	35	31	53	39	46	72	63	68
France	50	65	58	14	28	21	22	21	22	18	21	20	28	14	21	68	51	60

[1] In Finland, includes living alone or in a rented room. In France, also includes young people living in shared accommodation.
[2] Includes married couples, registered couples, and couples with and without children. In Finland, also includes the category 'other family forms', which comprises lone parents and those living in shared accommodation.

The data is taken from the following sources: Finland: Myllyniemi (2007: 14); France: INSEE (2007). The table is based on Eurostat definitions, where a consensual union means that both partners live in the same household. It can be a consensual union with a legal basis, when the partner is a legal spouse or registered partner, or without a legal basis, when the people are 'de facto' partners, cohabiting (Eurostat 2009d: 32).

Note: F stands for Female, M for male, T for Total. These initials will be used in subsequent tables.

However, the proportion of young people in their 20s living at home with their parents, especially those in the 20–24 age group, remains higher in France than in Finland (see Table 3.2). In both countries, more young men than women live in the parental home. Young females tend to move out earlier. More young Finns also tend to live alone than young French people, since more young French people still live with their parents. More Finnish young people live as a couple, especially in the 20–24 age group. The figures for the two countries are similar for the 25–29 age group. Nonetheless, in both Finland and France, a greater proportion of females than males live in a couple. In addition, more Finnish young people lived in a union in 2005–2007.

Accessing the housing market

Young Europeans' main reasons for not moving out of the parental home were a lack of financial resources and affordable housing (Flash Eurobarometer 2007: 72). This applies to Finland and France, with slight differences. Finnish youths gave three major reasons why young people might continue to live with their parents (see Table 3.3) (the young age of some of the informants also might have had an impact on the figures). They stated almost equally that young people could not afford to move out, could not find affordable lodging, or simply enjoyed home comforts. The latter statement was not widely supported in France. French youths stated that they simply could not afford to move out, and also gave as a dominant reason that they could not find affordable accommodation. Most European youths insisted on the unaffordability of moving out. The housing market itself is thus causing young people's prolonged residential dependency. However, in respect of welfare state provision and support for young people moving out, the situation slightly differs in the case-countries. In addition, because of the high housing costs, choice of accommoda-

tion can sometimes compromise employment opportunities. Young people generally have more opportunities to find work in capital cities. However, large cities such as Paris or Helsinki are also the places with the most expensive accommodation. The lack of affordable accommodation thus might hinder access to work in some cases. Young people are caught between the contradictory demands of the labour market, which requires great flexibility in terms of adaptability to economic restructuring and geographical mobility, and the housing market, which is economically demanding and inflexible (Kesteman 2010: 118).

Table 3.3. Reasons for living in the parental home for longer among young people aged 15–30 in Finland, France and the EU 27, 2007.

	Finland	France	EU 27
Main reasons for living with parents for longer		Percentages	
Can't afford to move out	36	30	44
Not enough affordable housing available	31	43	28
Home comfort without responsibilities	27	16	16

The data comes from Flash Eurobarometer (2007). Other reasons are not listed here, because they are not relevant in this context.

The Finnish housing market rests on a dual model that supports both supply and demand. It functions through cooperation between public actors (the state, the housing fund, municipalities) and market actors (owners, developers, construction companies, banks) (Huovinen et al. 2005: 6). Home ownership has been promoted in Finland through tax relief on mortgage interest. The stock of rental housing is rather limited, which tends to lead to an increase in demand for owner-occupied housing. Half of the rental dwellings in Finland are state-subsidised. Municipalities and companies own most of them.

The rest of the rental market comprises free-market rental dwellings that belong to private individuals and/or households. In recent years, construction of private rental housing has been limited. There is also a social-housing rental sector in Finland for low-income households (Asumisen rahoitus- ja kehittämiskeskus, ARA 2009). The private rental sector supply has decreased, while demand has remained stable. Consequently, demand has proportionally increased, and prices have risen. This is a problem for students, who need to work more in order to afford the higher rents (Helsingin Sanomat, International Edition – Metro 8 August 2008).

French housing prices have significantly increased since the mid-1990s. This has also been caused by low supply and high demand. As in Finland, the housing system has shifted to an owner-occupier model, with an increase in availability of social housing for low-income groups. The social-housing market represents 17% and 16% of dwellings in Finland and France respectively. The private rental sector is therefore squeezed in the middle. State involvement is strong in the French housing system too, both in renting and owner-occupation, with the provision of subsidies, benefits, tax breaks and various policies (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, RICS 2007: 37). Owner-occupation has been strongly encouraged by the government through subsidy schemes and low-interest loans, mainly for low-income households and first-time buyers.

Table 3.4. Occupied housing stock by tenure (percentages) in Finland and France, 2002.

Dwelling stock according to tenure	Finland	France
	Percentages	
Owner-occupied	64	57
Rented	32	37
Other	4	6
Total	100	100

The data is taken from National Agency for Enterprise and Housing (2004: 39).

Table 3.4 indicates that rental-sector occupancy is similar in the two countries, but that the owner-occupied sector is slightly larger in Finland. The average number of persons per dwelling in Finland and France in 2002 was 2.2 and 2.4 respectively (National Agency for Enterprise and Housing 2004: 42). The increase in single-person and lone-parent households has had an impact on the demand for housing too, especially in the rental sector. The increase in single-person households is due to a change in attitudes to living alone, a shift in living arrangements, and a change in economic resources (Heath and Cleaver 2003: 111–112). Living arrangements include delayed marriages, higher rates of divorce and single-parent families, and childless individuals living alone. The proportion of young people living alone has greatly increased among the professional and intermediate classes.

Welfare states

Finland's and France's societal apparatuses are the results of divergent historical occurrences and developments. The different traditions and ideologies in the two countries greatly contributed to the construction of their present structural edifices. Two different types of welfare regime therefore operate in the case-countries.

Esping-Andersen (1990) has analysed the existing types of welfare systems in advanced societies and distinguished three major types: liberal, conservative-corporatist and social democratic. Liberal welfare states, such as the United Kingdom, depend on the market as the main source and provider of assistance. State support is modest, means-tested and mainly distributed to low-income individuals. This model is based on a liberal work ethic, according to which the limited provision of welfare persuades people to seek work instead of relying on benefits. Liberal regimes aim to minimise the role of the state, increase individual responsibility and promote market

solutions. The regime discourages eligibility for welfare assistance (Esping-Andersen1990: 26; 1999: 75–76).

The continental or conservative-corporatist regime emphasises both status segmentation and familialism. The states maintain individuals' status differences in the distribution of welfare. Eligibility for assistance is means-tested. The state also encourages the family unit to remain the main provider of support for its members. France has adopted this regime. However, familialism is less dominant in France than in the other countries belonging to this type of regime, because France's welfare ideologies are partly guided by republican and anticlerical principles. The family is perceived as a central caregiver, but the state places an emphasis on compulsory social insurance too. It has been demonstrated that family policies are less generous in countries where familialism is very strong. By contrast, in France, families receive generous benefits. Nonetheless, this maintains the family unit as the major source of support for individuals (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27; 1999: 81–84, 92–93).

The third type of welfare regime is the Scandinavian type, or social-democratic system. The system promotes equality, as it is founded on universal and egalitarian principles in terms of social support. Everyone is entitled to the same rights and benefits. The purpose is to offer each individual the opportunity to attain self-sufficiency and independence without having to depend on the family unit (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27; 1999: 78–81). Finland's welfare regime is founded on social-democratic principles, which favour the universal distribution of support and services, egalitarianism between individuals, comprehensive risk coverage for all, and generous benefits (Alestalo and Flora 1994).

Finnish young people therefore have direct access to public services and benefits when they move out of the parental home and start studying or working. In France, the state generally provides support to young people on the basis of their parents' income and allocates the benefits to the young person's family, which then redistributes

the aid to its members. Aid and allowances for young people include, for instance, student benefits, study grants, study loans, housing allowances and unemployment benefits.

Starting a family

Trends in family formation are similar in the two countries. In the *ESS Round 3–2006*, the 18–29 age group answered that the 'Average ideal age to get married and live with a husband/wife' would be 24 or 26 in Finland and France respectively, and that the 'Average ideal age to become a mother/father' would be 25 or 26 in Finland and France respectively. In both countries, the mean age at first marriage and birth of first child (for women) has increased throughout the years (see Table 3.5). In 1980 in Finland, women were 24 and men 26 at their first marriage. In 2008, women were 30 and men 33. In France in 1980, women married for the first time at 23, and men at 25. In 2008, they married at 30 and 32 respectively. The age at first marriage has increased throughout the decades in the EU 27 too, but not as much. Delays in marriage might be occurring because people are entering relationships later than before, but also because many couples cohabit before marrying. The age of women at first childbirth has also risen, reaching 28 in Finland, 29 in France, and 27 in the EU 27 in 2008. Nonetheless, fertility rates have remained fairly constant in Finland and France, and are higher than the EU 27 average. The figures for new socially accepted trends such as births outside marriage are noteworthy. In France, more than half of births occurred outside marriage in 2008, which is more than in any other country. One might consider France a pioneer with regard to this tendency.

Table 3.5. Indicators of family formation in Finland, France and the EU 27, 1980–2008.

Indicators of family formation		Finland			France			EU 27		
		1980	1995	2008	1980	1995	2008	1980	1995	2008
Mean age at first marriage	Women	24	28	30	23	27	30[1]	23[2]	26	28[3]
	Men	26	30	33	25	29	32[1]	26[4]	28[5]	31[6]
Mean age of women at birth of first child		26	27	28[7]	27	28	29[7]	24[8]	26[9]	27[7]
Total fertility rate		1.6	1.8	1.9	2.0	1.7	2.0	2.0	1.5	1.6
Proportion of births outside marriage (of all live births)		13	33	41	11	38	53	8[10]	22	35

[1] Preliminary data.
[2] Without Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia.
[3] Without Ireland, Italy, Netherland, Portugal, Spain, UK.
[4] Without Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia.
[5] Without Slovakia.
[6] Without Ireland, Italy, Netherland, Portugal, Spain, UK.
[7] Data from 2005.
[8] Without Austria, Luxembourg, Slovakia, UK.
[9] Without UK.
[10] Average based on Euro Area 16 countries.

The table is based on the information from the following sources: Daguet (2002); Eurostat (2010c); Oinonen (2004: 36; 2008: 13); UNECE (2011a; 2011b; 2011c).

More Finnish than French young people were in a union in 2006. However, in both countries, more youths lived in a consensual union than in a formal marriage (see Table 3.6). Also, more young women than young men lived in a couple. The EU 27 rates concerning married young people were similar to those in Finland and France; however, the level of cohabitation was much lower than in the case-countries. In that sense, the trends in Finland and France are somewhat parallel.

Table 3.6. Share of young people (percentages), among 15–29-year-olds, living in a consensual union, with or without legal basis, by gender, in Finland, France and the EU 27, 2006.

	Finland		France		EU 27	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
Type of union			Percentages			
Formal marriage	17	9	15	10	16	8
Consensual union	32	26	25	21	13	10

The data comes from Eurostat (2009d).

On the basis of survey data collected in the 1990s, Patrick Heuveline and Jeffrey M. Timberlake (2004: 1226–1228) indicate that the percentage of cohabiting couples who went on to marry was lower in France than in Finland. In Finland, 81% of cohabiting couples subsequently married, compared with 46% in France. Cohabitation in Finland might replace marriage in some cases, but in most instances it represents a stage prior to marriage. By contrast, in France cohabitation is increasingly becoming the norm and replacing marriage. In Finland there are two forms of consensual union: marriage (*avioliitto*, legal union through marriage) and registered partnership or cohabitation (*avoliitto*). Registered partnership has

been established for same-sex couples. It has also become common practice for heterosexual couples to cohabit rather than marry, and to be considered registered partners. However, legally they are not recognised as such. Registered partners are entitled to similar rights, protections and legal obligations as married couples in specific areas, such as maintenance, inheritance, relationship breakdown or widows' pensions. However, they have fewer rights in other areas; for instance, they cannot adopt children (Ministry of Justice, Finland 2001; Oikeuslaitos 2011a; 2011b; Oinonen 2008: 95). In France there are three forms of consensual union: marriage, Civil Union Pact (*Pacte Civil de Solidarité,* PACS), and registered partnership or cohabitation (*union libre* or *concubinage*). The PACS came into effect in 1999. It is a legal contract leading to officially registered partnership, which entitles partners to similar rights and obligations to married couples. It is also independent of the partners' genders; thus same-sex partners cannot get married, but they can get 'pacsed'. The PACS recognises the diversity of lifestyles and the principle of equality in the law, but it gives fewer rights than marriage in some areas, such as adoption (Legifrance 1999; Le Site Officiel de l'Administration Française 2007; 2011). Registered partnership in France is a *de facto* union between two partners, regardless of gender. It is not legally recognised, although it has become common practice prior to or instead of marriage. Partners' obligations, rights and protections are limited in comparison to married or pacsed couples. A growing number of couples choose to get pacsed rather than married. The number of marriages has therefore slightly decreased. More and more couples who choose to cohabit also choose to make their union official with a PACS. In 2009, for every three marriages contracted, two PACS were signed (Pla and Beaumel 2010). The majority of PACS were contracted by young couples aged 27 to 31. A total of 3% of 18–39-year-olds got pacsed in 2009 (Davie 2011).

The increase in births outside marriage accompanies the increase in cohabitation. The figures have continued to rise since the 1980s,

as shown earlier in Table 3.5. In 2008 in France, there were more births outside than inside formal marriage – 53%. This trend is thus becoming the new norm there. In Finland, a significant proportion of births also take place outside official union, but this is not yet dominant – 41% in 2008. Compared to the EU 27 average, the rates in the two countries are much higher, as the EU 27 average only reached 35% in the same year.

Young people's attitudes towards the family are rather similar in Finland and France. They do not strongly perceive the family as the foundation of society. The figures are lower than the European average. This could be explained by the welfare regimes that operate in the case-countries, which provide a rather protective social framework for individuals. However, Finnish and especially French young people perceive the family as an important element of their life development and achievement. More than 70% of Finnish and French young people plan to have children. The trends are comparable with the European average (see Table 3.7).

Table 3.7. 16–29-year-olds' attitudes towards the family in Finland and France, 2007.

Attitudes towards the family (agreeing with the statements)	Finland	France	Europe[1]
	Percentages of the corresponding age group		
Family is the foundation of society	39	35	47
A good life means having a family	62	72	65
Planning on having a child in the next 15 years	70	72	67

[1] No details provided regarding which European countries or group of European countries.

The data comes from Ciccheli (2008: 95). The percentage of agreement is calculated on the basis the persons who gave the scores six or seven (on a scale from one to seven).

3.3 National Contexts Still Matter

Superficially the two countries appear similar, but on closer inspection subtle differences emerge at every level of their societal orders, from infrastructure to ideologies. The socio-economic and cultural apparatuses described above represent the contexts in which Finnish and French young people experience the transition to adulthood, and the framework upon which the informants reflected during the interview process. Young people in Finland and France are offered different opportunities and responses to their needs and predicaments. One cannot ignore the implications this might have for their patterns of transition and routes of integration into the wider socio-economic sphere. In the era of the European Union, the transition to adulthood is generally considered to be a uniform process across all countries. The implementation of common policies imposed on individual member states shows that internal structural differences within each state are overlooked to some extent. However, the historical characteristics of each country have not all faded away. Specific historical traits are embedded in national contexts and carried into the present. These national peculiarities still have an implicit but considerable impact on individuals' life trajectories, choices and opportunities.

Patterns of transition regarding leaving home and starting a family are noticeably similar in the two countries. Young people leave the parental home at about the same age and within a comparable contextual framework with regards to the housing market. In relation to starting a family the trends converge too, and depart from the European average. In both Finland and France more young adults live in a consensual union than in a formal marriage, the ages at first birth and first marriage are similar, the fertility rates are higher, and the number of births outside marriage is significantly higher, especially in France. Slight differences appear in relation to patterns of cohabitation and marriage. While in Finland young people use cohabitation as a stage prior to marriage, a growing number of French young people

cohabit instead of getting married. In both countries, cohabitation is accepted and has become common practice.

These patterns of transition concern young people in general. My research is based on empirical data collected from in-depth interviews with young female students. They clearly belong to the framework highlighted in this chapter. However, their transition patterns might be different from the average, thanks to various social factors such as social origin, educational level or gender. The interviews explore deeper aspects of transition that quantitative surveys cannot capture, and investigate new sets of issues. The four following chapters reflect my empirical analysis. They discuss young women's considerations of their own transitional paths, with a focus on their position in the university system; their views on integration into the labour market; their perspectives on leaving home, becoming independent and starting a family; and their perceptions of the meaning of adulthood. The informants certainly provided valuable additional information regarding patterns of transition to adulthood. They also offered a great deal of significant knowledge about young people's attitudes and positions within the contemporary societal structure, and indeed within the current paradigm of transition.

4.

STUDYING AT UNIVERSITY IN FINLAND AND FRANCE

The field of higher education has undergone a transformation in the European Union in the wake of the Bologna Process. Member states' higher-education systems are increasingly shaped by a common framework that facilitates academic members' cooperation and mobility. Nevertheless, in Finland and France the educational systems continue to reflect the background ideologies that constitute the basis of those countries' wider structures. The higher-education systems thus mirror the historical and social ideologies that shaped the very foundations of the two societies.

Subchapter 4.1 provides an overview of the Finnish and French higher-education systems. Since the ideologies founding the systems diverge, the position of students within each educational structure also differs, as does the public and financial support offered to them. The divergences in the provision of support are also generated by

the operation of the different welfare regimes. Finland's welfare state is based upon social-democratic principles of equality, and France's upon conservative-corporatist principles that maintain existing class differences (Esping-Andersen 1990; 1999; Esping-Andersen and Korpi 1987).

The interview questions on higher education relate to the reasons why the participants and their acquaintances decided to study at university, and their opinions about the university system. The interview results concerning these issues are presented in subchapters 4.2 and 4.3. The differences in opinions and values often refer to deeper societal implications. Young women's reasons for going to university and their integration into the system are connected to educational structures, and to wider processes of the transition to adulthood. Indeed, socio-economic contexts greatly influenced the young women's decisions to enrol in tertiary education. The informants' views on their respective university systems mirror the tertiary education systems and broader structural conditions. The Finnish societal structure aims to decrease differences between individuals and provide support on a universal basis, whereas in France, selective and hierarchical principles continue to predominate within the internal structure of the education system. The informants' comments reflect these wider ideologies, which constitute the two countries' contextual backgrounds from the political to the cultural levels, as well as their welfare regimes and educational systems.

4.1 Education Systems and Student Support

This subchapter compares the Finnish and French higher-education systems. First, I provide a description of the structures of the institutions themselves. Second, I analyse the ideologies that constitute the

education systems and explain how these implicitly operate in their organisation. Third, I explore the financial support schemes offered to students.

Higher-education systems: An overview

The Finnish and French education systems converge at the first cycle or elementary school level, but start to diverge at the second cycle or upper-secondary school level. The tertiary education systems differ significantly. The Finnish education system is divided into three parts: basic education, upper-secondary education and tertiary education. Basic education or comprehensive school lasts for nine years. Pupils' attendance is compulsory from the age of seven until they complete the nine years of study. The upper-secondary education stage lasts for three years and is divided into two sections: general upper-secondary schools, which offer broad and general academic knowledge (*lukio*), and vocational schools (*ammattikoulu*), which offer vocational training and qualifications. At the end of the three-year programme, students from the general stream pass the Matriculation examination, and those from the vocational branch are entitled to vocational qualifications. Similarly, the French education system is divided into three stages: primary, secondary and higher education. School is mandatory for all children aged six to 16. Upper-secondary school is divided into three distinct streams: general and technological, vocational, and apprenticeship. After completion of the three-year programme, students receive the Baccalaureate or an equivalent diploma, depending on their study stream (Ministère de l'Education Nationale 2009) (see Appendix 4 for more detailed explanations).

In both countries, all secondary-school graduates are eligible to apply to a higher-education institution. Tertiary education in Finland is free; students are not required to pay any tuition fees, just the student membership fee, which represents a small sum and

entitles students to healthcare services. In France, students must pay mandatory health and administrative fees, which are low and vary among universities. However, other institutions require tuition fees, and the amount varies greatly between institutions. Finnish students are required to pass an entrance examination to enter university. The Finnish entrance exam requirement is based on a rather strict *numerus clausus* system that regulates the number of students admitted to university each year (Kivinen and Rinne 1996: 298). Previous study records, including the national Matriculation examination or vocational school qualifications, and an entrance examination are used as student selection criteria. In universities of applied sciences, school achievement and work experience as well as entrance examinations determine students' enrolment. This requires that students study for the entrance exam and know which discipline they want to enter (Eurydice 2007b). There are no entrance exams for university in France: the Baccalaureate is the only requirement for admission. Nonetheless, for other types of institution, and depending on the establishment, students are selected on the basis of secondary-school credentials, written applications, entrance examinations or competitive selective examinations (*concours*). Young people or adults who have not obtained the Baccalaureate but who need it to enter competitive selective civil-service examinations, to obtain a job promotion that requires higher-education skills, or to enter university, can study and pass the DAEU (*Diplome d'Accès aux Etudes Universitaires*), an equivalent of the upper-secondary school Baccalaureate (Ministère de l'Education Nationale 2009).

The Finnish higher-education system follows a dual model, divided between universities offering academic degrees and universities of applied sciences (*ammattikorkeakoulu, AMK*), providing vocational degrees (see Figure 4.1). Universities offer Bachelors degrees (of a minimum three-year duration), Masters degrees (a minimum two-year duration) and postgraduate Licentiate and Doctoral degrees (four years or longer). Universities focus on academic and scientific

curricula, and thus provide theoretical knowledge and education and promote academic research. Nonetheless, students are required to take part in an internship scheme for several months as part of their degree, in order to receive a minimum of practical training. Universities of applied sciences are professionally oriented and governed by municipalities. They are all multidisciplinary, and accounted for 30 institutions in the country in 2009. Vocational higher education focuses on practical knowledge and skills, and industry development projects and research. The first cycle of degrees is the Bachelors, completed in three and a half or four and a half years. The second and highest degree offered by these institutions is the work-oriented Masters degree. Students are expected to have accumulated at least three years' relevant work experience in their field in order to be eligible for the latter. It takes two years to complete, and can be combined with work related to the field of study.

There were 20 universities in Finland until 2010, all state-owned and financed. Half were multi-faculty universities, and half specialised in particular fields. However, a new Universities Act, which was passed in June 2009 and came into effect on 1 January 2010, changed the status of universities. It is argued that the reform extends their autonomy, and they become either independent corporations under public law or foundations under private law. In other words, the Act leads to a separation of universities from the state, and gives them more power by reducing the state administration's control over them. The reform applies to the network of universities and other higher-education institutions. Some universities have also been merged. There have therefore been 16 universities since 2010 (Opetusministeriö 2008–2009; Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2010b; Virkkunen 2009).

There have been many political discussions concerning a reduction of study time for the completion of both Bachelors and Masters degrees to five years. This proposal is in line with the Bologna Process, which gives incentives to higher-education systems to merge into a

common European system and increase competiveness at the national and European levels. This entails internal restructuring, such as the harmonisation of degrees into the 3–5–8 structure (three years to complete a Bachelors degree, two for a Masters and three for a Doctorate) (Rinne and Koivula 2008). There are also many discussions around the suppression of the gap years that many students take between secondary school and higher education. The entrance exam scheme might be reviewed in order to facilitate students' passage from secondary school to higher education, so that students can complete their studies earlier and enter the labour market at a younger age. Today most students start working in their late 20s (Hölttä 2010).

Figure 4.1. The higher-education systems in Finland and France, 2009.

Finland
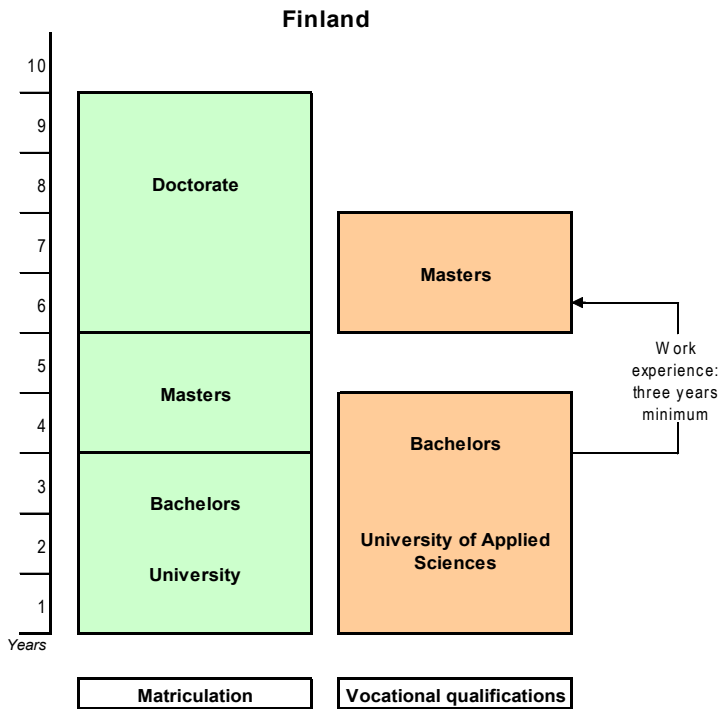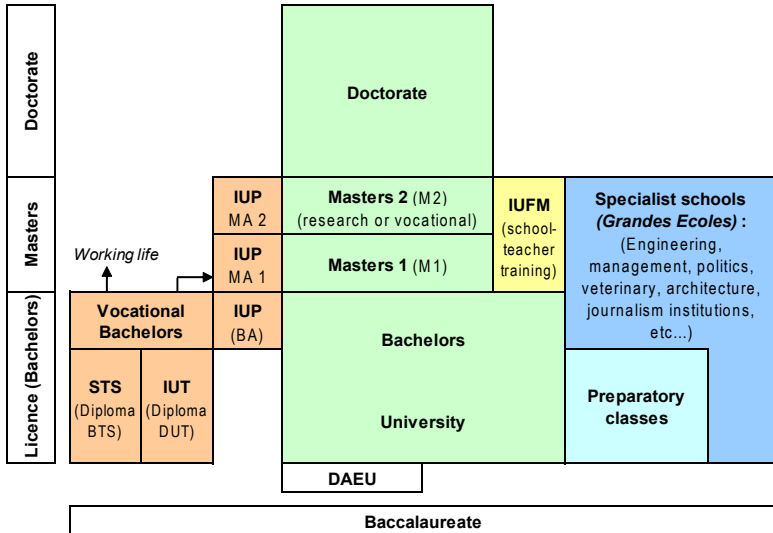
France

These figures are based on information from the following sources: Ambassade de France en Irlande (2007); La France en Suisse – Ambassade de France à Berne (2009); Ministère de l'Education Nationale (2009); Opetushallitus (2009); Opetus-ministeriö (2009); Site de Ressources et de Formation des Directeurs d'Ecole de la Marne (2008).

BA: Bachelor of Arts
BTS: Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (Higher-Level Technician Diploma)
DEAU: Diplôme d'Accès aux Etudes Universitaires (Secondary-School Equivalence Diploma)
DUT: Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie (Technological University Diploma)
IUFM: Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres (Training Institute for School-teachers)
IUP: Institut Universitaire Professionnalisé (Professional University Institute)
IUT: Institut Universitaire de Technologie (Technological University Institute)
MA: Masters
STS: Section de Techniciens Supérieurs (Higher-Level Technicians Section)

The French higher-education system offers short and long curricula in either broad or professionally oriented disciplines (see Figure 4.1). It is divided into three types of organisation: universities providing theoretical academic knowledge and focusing on research; vocational institutions offering professional training; and specialist schools (*Grandes Ecoles*) preparing students in specific fields for high-ranking white-collar positions. These three main branches are split into several specialised sub-branches. There are nearly 600 higher-education institutions in France. This includes 84 public and state-funded universities, which are all multidisciplinary. The current university system and initial secondary-school system were established by Napoléon in the 19th century, followed by new reforms in 1968. Universities offer long study programmes and focus on academic knowledge and research, such as in law, social sciences, the humanities and medicine. Since 2006 French universities have adopted the Bologna Process model, with Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate degrees obtained respectively in three, one or two, and three or more years, unless the students repeat a year. As in primary and secondary schools, failed years can be repeated and exams retaken (see Appendix 4). Admission from one year to another is not automatic and depends on biannual exam results. A stricter selection is made for Masters 1 programmes, and then another for Masters 2, as the two years are not necessarily consecutive.

The IUFM (*Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres* – Training Institute for Schoolteachers) is a separate institution, but is part of university. To enter the IUFM, students need to obtain a Bachelors degree and then go through a selection process. At the end of the two-year training, they undergo a strict competitive selective examination that will entitle them to exercise their profession as a teacher. They do not receive the teaching diploma automatically, and are not employable until they have passed the examination, which can be taken only once a year. Many students attempt it several times before passing it. The IUFM is specific to France. In Finland, students

wishing to become schoolteachers need a Masters degree in the field they wish to teach, as well as training to enter the profession.

Three kinds of institution provide vocational and technological higher education in France, in different fields, at different levels, and leading to different types of diploma. They offer theoretical knowledge, practical skills and professional training. First, the STS stream (*Section de Techniciens Supérieurs* – Higher-Level Technicians' Section) entitles students to a BTS diploma (*Brevet de Technicien Supérieur* – Higher-Level Technician Diploma). The curriculum is offered by secondary schools, and specialises in industry and the service sector. The degree is obtained in two years. Currently, an additional study year is available for those who wish to specialise further and acquire the vocational Bachelors, a higher-level diploma. Students must submit an application to be admitted. Second, IUTs (*Institut Universitaire de Technologie* – Technological University Institute) are part of the university system, although the instruction is offered in separate establishments. They provide syllabuses specialised in the technological sector. Students obtain a DUT (*Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie* – Technological University Diploma) after completion of a two-year curriculum, and can also carry on to a specialised course for a year and obtain a vocational Bachelors. Admission to IUTs is not automatic, as it is to universities: students are selected on the basis of their previous study records, entrance exams and sometimes competitive selective examinations. Third, IUPs (*Institut Universitaire Professionnalisé* – Professional University Institute) are part of the university system too. They have been designed to meet the specific needs of the labour market and businesses. IUPs offer specialised technological Masters degrees in management in the service and industrial sectors, leading to intermediary white-collar positions between the BTS and higher-level white-collar managers. The Bachelors is obtained in one year, and is a continuation of prior vocational degrees such as the BTS or DUT. The Masters degrees are completed in two years. The entrance selection process in IUPs

is strict. Previous study records, written applications, entrance exams and/or competitive selective examinations determine admission. Students must also have obtained a BTS, a DUT or a Bachelors at university, or have attended a preparatory class before applying. Those who have obtained sufficient credits prior to application can enter the Masters-level curriculum; others will first need to get the IUP Bachelors. IUPs are designated higher vocational institutions, but can be equivalent to some specialist schools (*Grandes Ecoles*) of management or administration (Ambassade de France en Irelande 2007; Ministère de l'Education Nationale 2009; Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche 2009–2010). Tuition costs remain low in all these public institutions, which are state-funded. In private institutions, fees can be significant. They also vary from one institution to another.

There is also a parallel system to university institutions in France: specialist schools, or *Grandes Ecoles*. Most of these were created prior to and after the French Revolution. *Grandes Ecoles* are elite institutions like the *Institut d'Études Politiques* or *'Sciences Po'*, distinctive business schools like INSEAD (*Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires* – the European Institute of Business Administration), or schools of government like the ENA (*Ecole Nationale d'Administration* – National School of Administration). They can be public or private. White-collar executives such as senior managers, administrators, politicians, engineers, architects, humanities scholars or specialists in the arts have often studied in *Grandes Ecoles*. Specialist schools are highly selective, and tuition fees are more or less high, depending on the status of the school. The selection process mostly operates through competitive examinations, for which students prepare on two-year courses. Only a small number of students are admitted each year. Preparatory classes, which are also selective, do not guarantee admission to the *Grandes Ecoles*. They only train students for the selective examinations. They provide a broad and multidisciplinary curriculum, and the studies are very intensive. Those who pass receive a three-year education in a

Grande Ecole, and gain a diploma entitling them to the highest positions in the labour market, primarily in the private sector. *Grande Ecole* diplomas function as social elevators and represent a legitimate source of access to social prestige and elite positions (Curtis and Klapper 2005; Ministère de l'Education Nationale 2009; Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche 2009–2010; Ministère des Affaires Etrangères 2007).

While in Finland the higher-education structure offers equal opportunities to students, in France the organisation of the system is selective, and this has an influence on students' future processes of integration into working life.

Students within the higher-education system

In Finland, the proportion of students choosing to study at either university or vocational higher institutions is not straightforward, as a significant number of students take gap years between upper-secondary school and tertiary education. Among those who completed secondary school in 2005, about 20% went directly to university, 20% went into vocational higher education, and almost 60% took a gap year, started working life or took part in other types of activities such as voluntary work. Many secondary-school leavers choose to take time off, but for many this is because of the way entrance exams are organised. Not all applicants get into university in the year they take the exams; many do so two or three years later (Kaukonen 2009). French students rarely take gap years, and tend to go into higher education straight after the completion of secondary school. The process of entering university is facilitated by the absence of entrance exams.

In 2005, 50% of French young people who had obtained the General Baccalaureate between 2002 and 2004 were studying at university, 15% were in preparatory classes or specialised schools,

and 10% were not in higher education. Forty-four per cent of those who achieved a Technological Baccalaureate were in STS or IUT, and 30% did not join any higher-education institutions. Among the vocational Baccalaureate holders, 28% carried on to STS or IUT, and 67% were supposedly integrated into the labour market. Of all Baccalaureate holders, a third were studying at university, a third went into the labour market, a quarter were in vocational higher institutions, 9% were in preparatory classes or specialised schools, and 10% were in other types of higher-education institution, such as agricultural schools (INSEE 2009a).

Consequently, students are younger in France than in Finland. The median age of French students in tertiary education was 20.6 in 2007, compared with 24.5 for Finnish students (Eurostat 2009c). Approximately 50% of new entrants to Finnish higher education are younger than 23, and one fifth are over 28 (Kaukonen 2009). Following this trend, the Finnish young women I interviewed were on average older than the French interviewees. The French informants were aged 21–26, and the Finnish 24–30. The age of graduation from higher-education institutions varies between the two countries too (see Table 4.1). While it is common for students to graduate in their late 20s or early 30s in Finland, students graduate in their early-to-mid-20s in France. Young people studying at university graduate later than those in vocational higher education. Students studying on university academic programmes such as medicine or architecture graduate later than those in vocational higher education, which offers shorter curricula. Those engaging in Doctorate studies or advanced research programmes graduate later in general, but the age differences between Finland and France are still significant.

Table 4.1. Graduation ages in tertiary education in Finland and France, academic year 2003–2004.

Type of tertiary education	Vocational higher institution	University			Advanced research programme (University)
		3 to less than 5 years	5 to 6 years	More than 6 years	
Finland	21–22	25–29	25–29	30–34	29
France	20–21	21-22	23-24	25	25–26

The data comes from OECD (2006).

In both Finland and France, as well as in the European Union, the percentage of women among all tertiary students at university in 2007 (excluding the field of education) was larger than that of men, reaching 55% (Eurostat 2009b). The larger proportion of female students among the student population applies particularly to the 20–24 age group (see Table 4.2). The student population is proportionally larger in Finland than in France or the European Union. The differences are visible among all age groups. This also shows that students are older in Finland than in France. The number of 25–29-year-olds and 30–34-year-olds still in higher education is also higher in Finland than in France or the European Union.

Table 4.2. Students' participation and enrolment in tertiary education by age and gender (as percentages of the corresponding age group) in Finland, France and the EU 27, 2007.

Age groups	20–24			25–29[1]			30–34		
Gender	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T
Percentages of the corresponding age group									
Finland	44	36	40	23	22	23	11	10	10
France	32	26	29	6	5	6	5	4	5
EU 27	32	25	28	9	9	9	5	4	5

[1] Average calculated based on the only data available: data for 26- and 28-year-old students, rather than for the whole 25–29 age group.

The data is calculated on the basis of the following source: Eurostat (2009a).

Educational ideologies

The Finnish and French education systems reflect the different ideologies underlying their structures, that is, the Nordic model in Finland and the Napoleonic model in France. Risto Rinne and Jenni Koivula (2008) offer a typology of the main types of educational systems. The Nordic model emphasises the principles of equal opportunities and homogeneity. Higher education is free and accessible to all. Higher-education institutions are also regulated by the state, and there is no competition between the various institutions. The Napoleonic model emphasises the principle of the academic freedom of researchers, and there is also very little competition between universities (for more information, see Appendix 4). The main differences between the two systems currently lie in the school curriculum delivery and the transmission of knowledge (Kupiainen et al. 2009) (see Synopsis 4.1).

First, the Finnish model is based on flexibility and diversity in the delivery of the educational syllabus. A common core curriculum and guidelines instituted by the Ministry of Education must be followed, but schools retain considerable autonomy concerning the delivery of the curriculum. This principle confers local flexibility and diversity. By contrast, in France schools and teachers must follow a strictly imposed common curriculum established by the Ministry of Education (Kupiainen et al. 2009).

Second, the Finnish model emphasises pupils' knowledge and skills acquisition, but also individual growth, creativity and autonomy. Pupils are provided with clear objectives, tools and learning plans to meet these targets, and can use their own methods to reach them. They are given responsibility for their own achievement. The focus is simultaneously placed on individual progress and social, civic and economic participation and interaction (Salo et al. 2008: 12). The Nordic model places pupils at the centre and encourages individualisation. It is based on progressivist and individualist educational

ideologies that regard pupils as active. Egalitarianism holds a strong ideological position in the system, and highlights individual responsibilities and prosperity (Carlgren et al. 2006).

Synopsis 4.1. The major foundations of the educational systems.

FINLAND	FRANCE
Flexibility and diversity Teaching curriculum regulated by schools, based on Ministry of Education guidelines	**Standardisation and conformity** Standard core curriculum imposed on schools and teachers by the Ministry of Education
Emphasis on individual development Equal importance given to intellectual development and individual growth and creativity	**Emphasis on academic knowledge** Focus on assimilation of the syllabus and intellectual development

The synopsis is based on Kupiainen et al. (2009).

While the Finnish system is 'student-oriented', the French system concentrates exclusively on the assimilation of academic knowledge through standardised learning methods (Opetushallitus 2009; Opetusministeriö 2008–2009). This can be explained by the position of pupils in the system. After the reforms following the French Revolution, children's role was that of the pupil, receiving and assimilating knowledge without questioning it, and respecting the authoritarian figure of the teacher. The system initially aimed to transmit the republican ideals put in place after the Revolution. The republican school was thus more of a political than a pedagogical project. The goal was to solidify and diffuse the newly born Republic's ideologies, in order to counter the *ancien régime*. Subsequently, the French educational model was based on the hierarchical transmission of knowledge, and encouraged pupils' homogeneity rather than individual creativity or

diversity (Pugin 2007; 2008). The French school system became an effective means of conveying moral codes, the French language and patriotic values. The role of the school became simultaneously that of promoting intellectual and academic development and constituting young people into citizens on the basis of republican values. The school system maintains a distance between school and juvenile life, keeping pupils in a subordinate position with no autonomy or individual responsibility (Cousin 1998; Langan 2008).

Financing studies

The financial support available to students in European countries is based on two distinguishable principles that reflect the individual countries' welfare regime ideologies (see subchapter 3.1): financial independence versus targeted assistance (Eurydice 2007a). There are three major categories of student support: financial support provided to students, financial support for the payment of administrative fees and contributions to tuition costs, and financial assistance to the students' parents. The first model, based on the principle of individual financial independence, applies in Finland and other Nordic countries. Financial support is exclusively directed at students with the purpose of promoting their financial autonomy, regardless of their parents' income. Students' parents do not receive family allowance or tax relief. The support is universal. Every student, regardless of background, is entitled to assistance. The second model, based on the principle of financial dependence and targeted financial support, operates in France. Students are considered to be dependent members of their family and the responsibility of their parents. Support is awarded to students from poorer economic backgrounds on the basis of their parents' income. Parents can receive extended family allowance and/or tax reliefs. The aim of the student support system is to help academically qualified students from socially disadvantaged

backgrounds to access higher education (Esping-Andersen 1990; 1999; Eurydice 2007a).

Students' financial support in Finland was initiated in 1969, including family support and a loan system. Today financial support to students is provided in three streams: a study grant, a housing supplement and a loan. The study grant system in operation today was introduced in 1972. The loan, grant and housing supplement system was adopted in 1977. Financial aid was available to students for seven years (Opetusministeriö 2005). In 1992, the system was changed to a higher-education study grant, available for 55 study months (between four and a half and five study years, excluding summer months); a housing supplement; and government-guaranteed study loan, market-based but lower than the market rate, up to a maximum of €300 per month. The study grant is allocated for a determinate period, but university students can take longer than that period to graduate. In that case, they finance their studies themselves. Other types of support are available for the length of time required to complete Bachelors or Masters degrees (Vossensteyn 2004: 30–32; Kela 2009a; 2009b). Every student older than 17 who has been admitted to a post-compulsory institution, whether in upper-secondary or higher education, and is in need of financial assistance is eligible for financial aid. There is no age limit for entitlement. The study grant and the housing supplement are government-financed benefits, paid monthly to the students. This income is taxable. Housing supplement covers 80% of the monthly rent, up to a government-set threshold of €252. The rest has to be paid by the students (Kela 2009a; 2009b).

Finnish students receive income from four sources. The first source is the study grant and the housing supplement, which often complement each other. The second source is work. More than 50% of students work part-time or full-time to boost their income. However, for such students to be entitled to the study grant, their gross income must not exceed €660 per month, or €1970 during aid-free months, such as in the summer (Kela 2009a; 2009b). Many students

choose to work part-time or full-time and do not receive any grant. The third financial source is parental support, the extent of which is difficult to measure, since most of it is support in kind. The fourth support option consists in taking out a loan.

Undergraduate and Masters students receive benefits in kind, such as public transport concessions, meal subsidies in their study environment, or concessions in museums. The student housing foundation also provides moderately priced accommodation for students, cheaper than that offered by the housing market. Higher-education students are required to pay a healthcare contribution as part of the student membership fee. This entitles them to use the free health service provided by the Finnish Student Health Service centres (*Ylioppilaiden terveydenhoitosäätiö, YTHS*) (Vossensteyn 2004; Kela 2009a; 2009b).

Doctoral students are not entitled to the financial support scheme. They can access student housing foundation accommodation, but are not entitled to study grants. However, they might be entitled to General Housing Allowance, which is intended for low-income households. The amount is not fixed: it is based on marital status, family situation and household assets (Kela 2009). Doctoral students usually get support from personal grants or scholarships provided by private foundations, stipends, funding offered to the research projects in which they are taking part, graduate school positions, assistant salaries, state grants, or mobility grants (Helsinki School of Economics 2009).

Students' financial support is provided on a different basis in France. There are different sources of financial aid. The major source of student support is means-tested state grants, which are available to students whose parents have a low income. Students have to apply before the start of each academic year. The amount of the grant is based on parents' income, the number of dependent children in the household, and the distance between the higher-education institution and the parental home. Only full-time students who are attending a

higher-education institution and are not older than 26 are eligible. Merit aid grant is a merit-based complementary grant for students who are eligible for the means-tested grant and who obtained the highest grades in the Baccalaureate (high honours). It is a small grant paid for the duration of the Bachelors or Masters degree. Students who are willing to study or receive training abroad can also apply for mobility grants. Eligible students are selected by their higher-education institution. Emergency aid is a recent and personalised type of support, provided immediately or for the duration of an academic year, to students facing sudden financial difficulties, for instance following family crises. The *Aide Personalisée au Logement* (APL, Personalised Housing Assistance) and *Allocation au Logement à Charactère Social* (ALS, Social Housing Allowance) are housing allowances distributed by the *Caisse d'Allocations Familiales* (CAF, Family Allowance Fund). They are means-tested according to income, family situation and type of housing. These allowances are aimed at people who are on a low income, including students, and who live in privately rented accommodation (not belonging to their parents). The APL and ALS cannot be combined. Eligible individuals can apply for one or the other. Student loans are available to students not eligible for state grants. Student loans or '*Prêts d'Honneur'* (Honours Loans) are interest-free and means-tested government loans, allocated by educational institutions. Loans must be repaid within 10 years (Ministère de l'Education Nationale 2009; Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche 2009–2010).

French families with children who are studying full-time can receive tax deductions and child allowances until the children turn 26. Students are also entitled to a variety of discounts, such as on public transport, student meals or cultural activities. Many students receive regular financial support from their parents, and are thus partly financially dependent on their family. However, this kind of aid is not measurable, since the support offered is in kind and/or in cash. Parents might pay for rent, food or various other expenses. The

amount received also varies greatly among students. A large number of students work part-time or full-time alongside their studies, to support themselves (Kaiser 2007; Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche 2009–2010).

Until the academic year 2009–2010, doctoral students' main source of support was state-funded doctoral grants provided by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. Since that date, doctoral students have had to sign a three-year doctoral contract (*contrat doctoral*), which is equivalent to an employment contract and entitles the students to similar rights in respect of matters such as salary and termination of contract. The contract can be prolonged for an extra year for health reasons or in case of maternity leave. Some research areas have been given priority over others. This implies that doctoral projects are selected according to the priority of the subject areas. More than half of those receiving support before the reform were studying on science and technology programmes, one third in law or economics, and less than a fifth in the social sciences or humanities. Some students in some *Grandes Ecoles* such as public administration institutions already received a salary, and were required to work in the public sector for a particular number of years (Chevaillier and Paul 2006). There is no information yet available regarding the selection (or absence of selection) of doctoral students according to subject areas since the 2009–2010 reform.

Conclusion: Homogeneity and heterogeneity

The Finnish and French higher-education systems are very distinct from each other. The Finnish system presents a straightforward and homogeneous structure, while the French system has a complex structure based on a separation between sectors. In Finland, students can choose between two paths, academic or vocational. Each is given roughly similar value in terms of diplomas obtained and occupational

status. In France, students can choose between various streams, all leading to different occupational sectors and different social positions. Some streams and institutions are given considerable weight and value. Fields of study and institutions thus determine the social status of future graduates. The Finnish higher-education system thus helps to level graduates' future social positions, whereas the French system reproduces the hierarchy among socio-economic groups through the division of the system into universities, vocational higher institutions and elite specialist institutions (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). The two countries' educational systems clearly embody the social class ideologies that shape their social structures and welfare regimes. The Finnish model is based on flexibility and diversity in terms of the transmission of knowledge and students' intellectual development, while the French system encourages standardisation and conformity (see Synopsis 4.1). If homogeneity and unity can be perceived between the people and the state in Finland, in France the welfare regime, and particularly the education system, to some extent perpetuate the divisions between different social groups (Alapuro 2005). The ideologies of homogeneity and heterogeneity are visible at the level of students' financial support schemes. Support is universal in Finland, provided to all students regardless of their social background. In France, support is selective and means-tested, and is offered according to apparent economic need.

The young women that participated in the research appeared to be similar: all in their 20s, university students, at the end of their study programmes and about to start working life. Yet the answers they provided were very different in the two countries. In fact, their statements greatly reflected the prevailing structural differences. The next two subchapters are based on my interview analysis, specifically on the reasons why the informants chose to study at university and their perspectives on the university system.

4.2 Motives for Studying at University

At first, the young Finnish and French women explained that their and their peers' main reasons for studying at university were their personal interest in a specific subject. However, when they emphasised that studying at a higher-education institution was logical, it became apparent that their initial 'choice' had been influenced by different social factors. The informants also showed awareness of current labour market requirements, and tried to respond strategically to the current economic restructuring by adjusting their study choices.

While many Finnish students take one or several gap years before entering tertiary education, French young people go straight into study. For some of these students, university offers a shelter for 'lost' young people who do not know what to do after upper-secondary school. The institution represents a stage of experimentation when students figure out their study programme and, in a sense, have *de facto* gap years. Some interviewees in both countries regarded going to university as a way to gain time, both for the construction of individual identity and before facing integration into the labour market.

Logical path

Although Finnish and French informants indicated that going to university was their choice, they pointed out three factors that might have influenced their initial decision. First, several of them stressed that going into higher education simply appeared as a logical step on their educational path, because they were good at school and it seemed normal to pursue higher education. Second, some explained that their parents and/or siblings had been to university, and that it simply seemed natural to follow the same route. Their family thus directly or indirectly encouraged them to pursue their studies. Third,

obtaining tertiary education qualifications was also considered a means to achieve a higher social position, particularly in Finland.

R[1]: And why did you choose to go to university?

I: I think, to be honest, I never really thought about it too much … school was always really easy for me. (…) [And] if you're smart, they think you should go to university. (…) I never questioned it myself. (…)

R: So it was just a normal path.

I: Yeah, I just went there. Didn't really think about it.
Päivi (25, Finland)

I think I've always been, you know, the one with 'koulupää' [good academic abilities], I've always been the reader of the family and pretty good at school, and it felt like a natural choice.
Elin (26, Finland)

I: It's funny, it's never been a question that occurred to me! It was clear that since I passed the Bac …

R: That you would carry on?

I: Ha, yeah yeah yeah! All my brothers and sisters carried on, (…) they all went into higher education, so really it wasn't a question …

R: You followed the same path?

I: I followed the path.
Valérie (23, France)

I never really thought about stopping studying [after secondary school]. I always liked it.
Nicole (21, France)

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1. The initials 'R' and 'I' stand for Researcher and Informant. These abbreviations will also be used in subsequent chapters.

Today, it is expected that many young people will carry on to tertiary education. This path has become a social and cultural norm. In both Finland and France, university has become an extension of secondary school and the next logical educational step (Felouzis 2001; Honkimäki 2001). This is one of the results of the expansion of education. The development of higher education is rooted in post-war educational policies and political ideologies. The great development of the service sector in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the development of the welfare state, also contributed to the expansion of higher education (Välimaa 2001: 25, 29). The service and public sectors increased the demand for highly educated people and provided white-collar jobs that needed higher qualifications, in contrast with the blue-collar jobs offered by the industrial sector. In addition, one crucial issue on the agenda in the late 1950s was to create equal access to higher education, alongside the promotion of democracy throughout the whole of society (Kivinen and Rinne 1996). During the 1960s, the reduction of social inequality and the creation of equal educational opportunities were on the political agenda across Western European societies (Teichler 2007: 26).

Higher education became accessible not only to lower socio-economic groups, but also to women. Their enrolment rate rose steadily from the 1950s onwards. While at that time women represented about a quarter of the total number of higher-education students in Western Europe, today they represent more than half the student population. In 2007 in Finland and France, respectively 54% and 55% of tertiary students were females. These figures follow the trends in most European countries and the EU 27 (Eurostat 2009b). Galland (1996: 21–22) claims that the massification of education is simultaneously a feminisation of education. This is because of the new centrality of work in women's lives, the increasing need for qualifications, changes in the socialisation of girls, and the change in women's status. However, the proportions of men and women remain unequal within subject areas (Furlong and Cartmel 1997:

22). There are still gender differences according to educational sectors and markets. For instance, in the field of humanities most students are females, in the fields of science and engineering most students are males, and white-collar professions in the public sector tend to be female-dominated (Kivinen and Rinne 1996; Teichler 2007: 32). The gender differences are not striking from a democratic point of view in terms of access to education, but they continue in the choice of subjects, and can affect future prospects on the labour market.

Family influence

I: I think most of my friends went to uni 'cause their parents went to uni. And (…) [most] of my friends who've studied at university (…) have had parents who've studied at university. Or they have older siblings who went to university. (…) It was just really clear to me from [when] I was very young, that I would go to university, because my mother went, my father went, my brother went, both of my sisters went … So it was just …

R: Logical?

I: Yeah, logical to go.
     Piia (24, Finland)

R: And in the first place, why did you choose to go to uni?

I: Why? I don't think it was really a choice, I think I didn't have any other choices, it was quite evident for me that I will go to university. That was kind of the only option, yeah.

R: Why? Because you were obliged by someone, or …?

I: No, no! I just felt 'that's the place I want to go.' (…)

R: Mmm … /I: Yeah … /R: Like, work-wise, to prepare/

I: Yeah, work-wise and maybe, because of my parents, no, they weren't forcing me, but they both have a degree from university, so (…) I don't

want to, you know, have a lower position. I mean, subconsciously I think it was something like this.
Sanna (25, Finland)

Well, when I was in secondary school, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. (…) My brother told me, 'really, try university, I think you'll like it.'
Nadège (21, France)

Alice (23, France) told me during the interview that she had planned to end her studies after secondary school because she had had enough of studying, and yet she continued nonetheless.

I have a big brother and a big sister who both went into higher education. My brother went into a specialist engineering school at a rather high level. And my sister went to IUT [technological higher institution] too, then she went to a specialist school to get a Masters. So I've been surrounded by a family who went into higher education, and inevitably, it pulls you up rather than down.
Alice (23, France)

In both Finland and France, the younger age groups have clearly attained higher levels of secondary and tertiary education than the older age groups, particularly women (see Table 4.3). However, the proportion of highly educated individuals is higher in Finland, particularly among older age groups. In Finland, with the exception of the oldest age group, more women than men have achieved secondary-school qualifications or a higher-education degree. The difference in proportion is more pronounced regarding tertiary education. In France, men have attained more qualifications than women, except for the younger age groups in tertiary education, where women predominate.

Table 4.3. Share of the population that has attained at least upper-secondary education, and at least tertiary education (percentages), by age and gender, in Finland and France, 2001.

At least upper-secondary education

Percentages

Type of education	Age groups and gender									
	25–34		35–44		45–54		55–64		Total 25–64	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Finland	84	90	81	87	68	72	51	51	72	76
France	78	78	69	66	62	55	52	40	67	61

At least tertiary education (university, vocational, advanced research programmes)

Type of education	Age groups and gender									
	25–34		35–44		45–54		55–64		Total 25–64	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Finland	30	46	33	42	28	31	25	22	29	36
France	32	37	21	24	19	18	16	13	22	24

The data is calculated on the basis of OECD (2002).

Several Finnish informants mentioned direct or indirect family influence on their decision to go to university. While in Finland parents played the biggest role in terms of influence, in France, siblings may have had a greater impact. That might have to do with the higher proportion of highly educated adults in Finland than in France. The data presented in Table 4.3 reflects the profile of my informants' parents. Half of the Finnish interviewees' parents had a degree from a university or vocational higher institution. However, it was mainly fathers who had a university degree. Mothers mostly had vocational degrees. Also, while fathers had obtained their degree before having a family, several mothers had worked, had a family and studied in higher education at the same time. In France, more fathers than mothers were highly educated. Most of the parents who achieved a tertiary degree did so during their adult life rather than immediately after secondary school. They went to work after school, had a family, and then studied at the same time in order to gain a better job or a promotion. Parents are generally the role models that directly influence their children's views and life direction. Those with parents who went to university might perceive that route as the natural path to follow and try to maintain an equal status to their parents. Parents hope that their children will receive an education equal to or better than their own, and also hope that their economic success will be continued (Kivinen and Rinne 1996; Smith 2004: 199). Parents therefore encourage their children to access higher social positions. Having highly educated parents or siblings can influence one's decision to pursue equal status and qualifications, as Sanna (25, Finland) and Alice (23, France) explained. Young people whose parents are not highly educated automatically upgrade their status by entering higher education, as some of the French informants did. However, one needs to remember that those from higher social classes have the advantage of richer social and cultural capital, which promotes higher education and social upgrading (Bourdieu 1979; Kivinen and Silvennoinen 2002).

Upgrading status

> I think, part of that is, at least when I was young, there was this big speech in the schools that if you educate yourself, the more you educate yourself, the better salary you have, the better job you have, the happier you are. (…) First thing is that, you know, you were told that if you study, you're gonna have a good life.
> *Päivi (25, Finland)*

The Finnish informants clearly mentioned that going into tertiary education, depending on the field and type of institution, was a way to attain a better social status. They also showed awareness that their decision to enter university was partly influenced by the political and economic ideologies of the 1960s and 1970s discussed above. Post-war Finnish educational policy strongly emphasised the benefits of schooling and the expansion of education. It was believed that the expansion of higher education would ensure economic growth (Kivinen and Rinne 1996). European governments' policies encouraged both the production of human capital and the need for higher-educational qualifications and mass education. Educational policies and governments in many European countries promote participation in higher and post-compulsory education (Reiter and Craig 2005: 32). In the 1990s, the Finnish government adopted the rhetoric of the information society and international competition as its guiding principle, calling for a well-educated labour force and capital-intensive services and research centres (Kivinen and Ahola 1999). Several Finnish interviewees mentioned that a major reason for entering higher education was related to status, salary and social position. However, they did not offer this monetary explanation for their own choices, but for those of people they knew, mainly people studying business or economics or in vocational higher institutions.

I think it's also because of the status, they want to achieve something. (…) Manual work, people view it as some kind of … (…) it's not desired, they don't want to do manual work all their life. It seems to be hard, so it's nicer to imagine that you have a nice white-collar work and you work in an office. (…) Maybe also society creates this, that they valuate more people who have gone to *lukio* [secondary school] (…) than vocational school.
Sanna (24, Finland)

Tiia (26) also stated that university seemed more attractive than vocational study because of the job opportunities it promised, such as intellectual rather than manual work. Anna (28) added that many people bet on their higher-education qualifications to win better jobs and salaries. Tuuli (25) maintained that most of her friends who were studying at vocational higher institutions 'just have in mind to get a well-paid position', but she clearly pointed out that most students from her own field of study did not think like that. They went to university to gain additional knowledge, without aiming for a high salary at the end of their degree. The interviews suggest that Finnish young people still have faith in the benefits of education, even if they are aware that their degrees will not lead to a direct or secure place on the labour market and that they will need additional skills to attain their desired positions.

In France, upward social mobility was barely mentioned. Obtaining tertiary qualifications was seen mainly as a means of entry into the labour market; in other words, as a tool. Some informants slightly diverged from the rest of the group, stressing that university could lead to a better social position. Marie (24) just pointed out that some young people studied in order to obtain a better job than a blue-collar position. Alice (23) emphasised that aspirations for money, getting an interesting job and attaining a comfortable lifestyle pushed people to study. Nevertheless, university was not perceived as a route to attain a higher social status than one's parents or peers. As Céline

(23) mentioned, those who wish to attain a prestigious job study at specialist schools (*Grandes Ecoles*) rather than university, or even in technological or vocational higher institutions, which increasingly guarantee access to the labour market and oppportunities to upgrade one's professional and social rank.

Educational inflation: Awareness and response

R: Do you think it was easier for people back then, when your parents were young, to find work, than nowadays?

I: Yeah … I think those days you didn't have to have a paper [stating] that you're qualified to something, because you could, like my mum … she's been just working and going to better places, like that. (…) Now I think it's more difficult, because you have to have a qualification for everything.
Emmi (25, Finland)

R: Do you have an idea about what pushes young people to go to university today?

I: Well, I think it could have something to do with the inflation of degrees, so if you are an engineer, it's nothing; you have to be a [qualified] engineer. If you don't study, you're easily left jobless. (…) And (…) Finland is so much an [information] society, that in order to survive, you have to study. (…) Because everybody else does it, you have to also, so that you won't be any less than anyone else.
Elina (26, Finland)

There's the problem of those who don't have any diploma and can't find work, and the problem of those who have too many diplomas and who can't find work either.
Natalie (22, France)

I: [My mother] was from a rather disadvantaged family, so she went to a teacher-training college, she didn't study further after that. She became a teacher at a very young age.

R: There weren't any selective exams back then?

I: No, there weren't any of those. She doesn't even have the Bachelors level actually. (…) It's so difficult to manage to become 'just' a teacher [nowadays], they ask us to get unbelievable qualifications!
Audrey (26, France)

Educational inflation, degree inflation and overqualification are at the heart of contemporary socio-economic and political discussions. But what does it mean? Degree or qualifications inflation refers to the consequences of the demand for qualifications to get a job in advanced societies. Tertiary qualifications previously provided the opportunity to upgrade one's social position, especially for the baby boomers' generation (Chauvel 2002; Karisto et al. 2005). Diplomas became the basis of job eligibility, not just for higher-status professions but also for lower-status ones, and were the key to securing one's position on the labour market. However, the outcomes promised by the educational system in the 1960s and 1970s no longer match today's labour market opportunities. As Bourdieu observed as early as 1980, young people with higher diplomas often attain lower social positions than did their counterparts in the previous generation (Bourdieu 1980). This is connected to the restructuring of the labour market and the rise in unemployment and job competition (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). The number of people obtaining university degrees has multiplied beyond all proportion with the number of positions available on the labour market. Simultaneously, qualifications have lost some of their value. This is most visible among white-collar professions. Competition is therefore fiercer and employers more demanding, contributing to the phenomenon of qualifications inflation (Chauvel 2002).

A side effect of this phenomenon is overqualification, when individuals obtain too many diplomas, or qualifications too high for the occupation they wish to enter. Some informants pointed to this problem, such as Natalie (22, France). Tuuli (25, Finland) explained that when her parents were young, having a university degree was much appreciated, and it was very easy to find work and keep a secure position. Today she feels that young people overeducate themselves because of the scarcity of jobs, and that because too many people are becoming educated there is an increase in job competition. Obtaining more qualifications is therefore a response to the battle for jobs. Caroline (25, France) stated that integration into working life was 'difficult and frightening for those without diplomas, and for those with the highest diplomas, because sometimes we can be overqualified [and] be completely rejected. It's completely paradoxical.' Grégoire Tirot (2008: 39) indicates that young people have never obtained as many diplomas or been as competent as they are today. And yet, since many diplomas do not lead to predefined professions, many employers refuse to employ young people with a degree in the humanities, for instance. Many young people with a Masters or PhD can experience degree devaluation and work in low-paid jobs for an undetermined period. They end up accepting lower-paid and precarious jobs which require qualifications below their actual level of education (Baudelot and Establet 2000).

However, although educational capital no longer ensures direct access to economic capital or fully protects individuals against unemployment, it still provides them with human capital, which is an important competitive tool on the labour market (Bourdieu 1979). Higher-educational qualifications no longer distinguish highly educated individuals, but they still differentiate them from young people with lower educational diplomas or no qualifications at all. The highly educated group is less at risk of unemployment and downward social mobility than less educated groups (Kivinen and Ahola 1999). The fiercest competition therefore takes place among individuals within

the same highly educated group. These individuals increasingly need to strive for new skills that will help them to stand out and increase their chances on the labour market.

The young women in my study showed awareness of the phenomenon of educational inflation and the loss of value of diplomas, but rather than simply acknowledging and contemplating these facts, they reacted to them strategically. Most Finnish participants and some of the French informants clearly stated that they had modified their programmes during their studies at university expressly to adapt to labour market demands and future career opportunities. Their choice to change courses or fields of study was nevertheless closely related to their recently developed interests in particular fields. In that sense, they had strategically combined their personal interests with future professional opportunities.

I: I was studying sociology, [then] after I finished my Bachelors degree I decided that (…) international politics [would be] (…) more useful for me. (…) So I just switched.

R: And you enjoy that better?

I: Yeah. Yeah, and it's also (…) labour-wise, I think later on, it's gonna be more useful for me.

R: In what sense?

I: Ummm …

R: Work-wise?

I: I mean, the employers, as far as I've understood, in my field of work, they appreciate the degree of international politics better than sociology.
Päivi (25, Finland)

R: I'm gonna ask you, to start with, what you are studying?

I: Social work.

R: Ok. And you said you changed?

I: From French.

R: So you were studying languages?
I: Yes, yes.
R: And why did you decide to change?
I: Well, because I think I'll have a better chance to find a job with social work, and it's also more interesting.

Sanna (24, Finland)

At the University of Tampere there is a major and minor subject system, which entails that students study a major subject but can also select minor subjects from other disciplines. Therefore they can have a broader study base. Some enter university on a particular programme but later change their course in line with a preference for the minor subject. Tuuli (25) selected minor subjects in order to expand her field of knowledge in different domains. Her major subject was French, and she studied history, Spanish and administrative science as minor subjects. She did not like the jobs available to graduates with French language degrees, so she decided to combine her areas of expertise, and was hoping to work in a body such as a Non-Governmental Organisation. In France, Alice (23) stated that she went to a technological higher institution (IUT) to pursue her studies after her technological Baccalaureate. She chose fairly non-specialist subjects, as she was not sure in what domain she ultimately wanted to work, but she preferred technological institutions, which are more structured than universities. She obtained a Bachelors and then became interested in the field of sustainable development. She described this field as relevant, related to current environmental issues, and as leading to new study disciplines, new occupational opportunities and a whole new employment sector. She described it as 'tomorrow's profession', and was happy to have entered 'the jungle'. The other informants who were completing a Masters 2 in sustainable development had entered that field despite the fact that their initial secondary-school studies and early higher-education paths had been totally different. What led them to their final choice was a combi-

nation of their personal preferences, the new opportunities offered by the higher-education system with the creation of new study and research programmes, and the labour market, with the opening up of a new occupational sector.

Such thinking involves strategic planning and personal flexibility. In that respect, university is both an educational service and a tool for integration that young people use for their own benefit. Higher education increasingly functions as a market, and the users of this market can be perceived as 'players' who utilise higher-education credentials as human capital and marketable commodities (Kivinen and Silvennoinen 2002; Oblin and Vassort 2005: 53). Students choose subjects related to their personal preferences and also to what they think will be useful for their future career (Honkimäki 2001: 98). The stimulus of working life and competition plays a large role in today's study strategies. Many young people manage to adapt to the labour market's requirements and use the education system strategically. However, others become victims of economic restructuring and eventually fall into the circle of precariousness. Young people's responses and adaptability to the current economic situation are heterogeneous, and contribute to the polarisation between successful and marginalised youth (see Bynner et al. 1997).

Visible and invisible gap years

University students in Finland need to be sure what subject they want to study, as they are required to pass entrance exams. The system compels them to have an idea of the academic field they want to study. Some students enter university straight from secondary school, but as I explained in subchapter 4.1, many are on waiting lists because of the *numerus clausus* system that regulates the number of annual university admissions. As a result, many secondary-school leavers are forced to take one or several gap years. Some also take voluntary gap

years, during which they gain work experience or realise personal projects such as travelling or participating in a voluntary organisation. The informants indicated that they had gained extra-curricular experience and knowledge between secondary school and higher education. Most of them had taken gap years, during which they had prepared for the university entrance exams and also worked, in Finland or abroad. During that time they had become familiarised with the labour market, gained additional individual skills, and figured out what they really wanted to study and which profession they wanted to work in. Suvi (25) was studying social policy and political science because she was interested in the integration of immigrants in Finland. However, she did not find that path straight after secondary school. She went to a vocational higher institution first, and realised that that professional orientation did not suit her at all. Her current interest grew while she was working and reflecting on her future career plans. She gave that as her reason for going to university and changing her initial plans. Similarly, Maria (30) had worked for several years before finding her true interest and realising that she would like to become a social worker and organise support groups. She had also worked voluntarily in that sector. To obtain a suitable job in that field she needed a university degree, which was why she was studying.

The Finnish informants entered university having already chosen the subject they wanted to study, because in most cases they had had time to think about it, mainly during gap years. By contrast, the French respondents explained that they went to university straight from secondary school, both because it was the expected path and because they were not sure what they wanted to study. The general secondary-school stream leads to tertiary studies. As in Finland, the diploma obtained does not provide any vocational qualifications. Moreover, young people rarely take gap years in France. University provides broad knowledge, is multidisciplinary and free, and above all does not require any entrance exams. These aspects appeal to sec-

ondary-school leavers who are not sure what to do after graduating. Most of the French young women said that university was mostly a place for 'lost' young people. They go to university without any pre-defined study objectives, choose courses randomly, try out different modules and repeat academic years, until they either find what they really want to study or drop out of the system. In the latter case, they might work, return to university the following year, or enter vocational higher education instead. In a sense, they take unofficial gap years during their studies, within the university structure.

University is free, whereas most other institutions demand tuition fees. Those whose family cannot help or who cannot get a study grant might not be able to afford the costs. University is therefore the last resort for many young people. It can also be a waiting room for those wishing to study in other institutions that require entrance exams and exercise strict selection. Many students go to university not by initial choice, but because it is the only alternative left to them (Felouzis 2001: 22, 51–54). Some would have preferred to study elsewhere, such as in a specialist school (*Grande Ecole*) or vocational higher institution, but these require entrance exams or selective examination. Sabrina (23) stated that for a majority of students at university, their presence is the result of a 'last-resort orientation'. Florence (22) revealed that she went to university after secondary school because she did not know what to do. She had failed her entrance exam for the specialist school she had chosen. She therefore went to university as a last resort, and she studied history for a year, a course chosen 'by feel' on the basis of personal interest. She gave up history after a year and discovered that sociology and economics suited her better. However, she also mentioned implicit social pressure to carry on studying, which persuades young people to push themselves in the system: 'You get pressure from your family, society, teachers, to do something after secondary school. And the first simple plan when you don't have any ideas is going to uni.' For the reasons discussed

above, university can be viewed negatively, as a dumping-ground (Felouzis 2001: 52). Several informants reinforced that perspective.

> In my opinion, university is a big ragbag! Mainly for the first years. (…) It's a big ragbag for all those who don't know where to go, or, well, who don't know what to do.
> *Natalie (22, France)*

> Uni always convey this message that it's an easy option if you don't know what to do. (…) But uni is not prestigious! Schools of economics are prestigious.
> *Céline (23, France)*

University is therefore a stage of experimentation in different fields of study, and is also where many young adults negotiate and construct their identities. Drawing on interview research with French students, Georges Felouzis (2001: 55) suggests that university can be seen as a liminal institution or structural threshold that leads young people with no fixed status into a more stable phase of life. This connects with the theories of liminality developed by van Gennep (Turner 1992: 48) (discussed in subchapter 1.1). The first stage separates individuals from their original status, the second involves an interval away from any traditional status, and the third confers a new status (Davies 1994: 3). The middle stage between the two statuses, 'liminality', is a phase when people are temporarily positioned on a threshold, belonging to neither one status nor the other. In this respect, university embodies a kind of intermediary stage during which many young people seek and eventually find their path. The years spent at university are thus a decisive phase regarding their career plans and future orientation.

Buying time

The rise in unemployment in advanced societies has greatly contributed to the phenomenon of young people prolonging their studies, entering higher education and gaining tertiary diplomas. Paradoxically, this phenomenon has given rise to the issue of qualifications inflation, discussed previously. Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel (1997: 27) suggest that many young people decide to start an academic career in order to multiply their chances of getting an adequate position on the labour market, and to avoid some of the risks associated with the period of uncertainty in the transition from school to work. Oinonen (2004: 297) emphasises that this phenomenon can be justified by the job-queue effect rather than the real value given to education itself. Prolonging education is a tactic to diminish and avoid hazardous potential outcomes. Obtaining additional higher-education qualifications is also part of the strategy to gain access to the labour market. Higher-education diplomas do not guarantee work, but they provide better chances in terms of employability and the attainment of higher socio-professional positions.

The pursuit of study as a way to guard against uncertain outcomes on the labour market has been acknowledged in previous studies of the transition from school to work (e.g. Bradley and van Hoof 2005; Miles 2000: 60). However, higher education might have another function for some young people. What if some do not want to enter working life when they are expected to do so, because they are simply not ready? One might also wonder whether some young people are merely seeking alternative pathways to adulthood.

According to the informants, Finnish young people go to university with rather precise ideas of the degree they want to study for and the profession they want to enter. Depending on the field of study, some do change their degree programmes, but unlike their French counterparts they seldom enter university in order to find out what they can study. Nonetheless, a few informants diverged in their views

and pointed out that university could be used to figure out one's life and to 'buy' more time for that purpose. Päivi (25) mentioned that for some people who are not sure what to do in life, university could be used like secondary school rather than to study for a specific profession. Johanna (26) had a similar opinion.

> I didn't want to enter working life at that point, I was still not feeling quite ready for it (…) so I decided to come back to university. (…) Here, just studying and getting [the grant], you can sort of live a free life for a couple more years, and [studying humanities] was maybe my choice because it's a subject that allows you to think and ponder about things, and I was still not sure where I was really going, but now it's getting clear! (…) Studying (…) in the humanistic field, it's not really a way to a high career (…), it's more thinking of what you're actually going to do with your life, like, more years to think about things.
> *Johanna (26, Finland)*

Anna (28, Finland) stressed that some of her fellow students were not yet ready to enter full-time working life, and were trying to prolong their studies. Although many students work alongside their studies in Finland, they do not always consider student jobs to be real working life, as such jobs are only part-time and temporary. They were thus attempting to delay their entry into the labour market, trying to remain a little longer at university, which offers a familiar structure and secure environment. In that respect, university is a safe haven where young people can hide for a while before trying their luck on the labour market. As Caroline (25, France) indicated, university has the function of a 'buffer', and prolonging one's studies is usually 'due to the anxiety of entering directly onto the labour market. It's frightening, because we think we are not prepared … studying, well, it's a bit of a buffer, [pushing] away [entry on the labour market].' Furthermore, many young people need more time to experiment

with life and develop their identity, and simply do not feel ready to enter working life. Marie (24, France) pointed out that many young people opt to study merely because they are not prepared to face the labour market. Nadège (21, France) did not feel ready to enter professional life and still wished to acquire additional intellectual knowledge, and she was therefore planning to continue studying. Nicole (21) explained that she enjoyed studying, learning and having free time, like most of the students that she knew. In her opinion, having a permanent job could be restricting. Tuuli (25, Finland) shared similar thoughts.

R: And are you in a hurry to finish your studies and enter working life?
I: No, noo! I'm fine the way it is now, because I have some work, some free time, interesting studies, and I like doing my [Masters thesis] (…) because it's an interesting subject for me, so I'm in no hurry!
      Tuuli (25, Finland)

Individual development does not necessarily coincide with expected social development. University can be a way to smooth the transition to adulthood, and being a student can itself be a stage of transition, on both the individual and social levels.

Conclusion: Participation in tertiary education: Personal and socio-economic reasons

Most informants stated that going to university was their choice. However, this 'choice' was greatly influenced by educational, political and economic policies dating from the 1960s onwards, which greatly encouraged the expansion of higher education. The path to higher education appears 'logical', but it is also linked to family influence and the attempt to attain a higher social status, especially in Finland.

However, this varies by study area and type of institution. Young women were also aware of educational inflation, and that diplomas no longer offered direct access to good jobs. They responded to that issue strategically. In Finland they tended to modify and adapt their degrees to employment opportunities, and in France some tried to choose the type of tertiary institution and field of study that would open doors on the labour market. Furthermore, Finnish young women entered university knowing what programme they wanted to study, unlike most of the French informants. In France, it is common to enter university and then decide on the course of study while at university. French students rarely take gap years after secondary school, unlike their Finnish counterparts. However, since they usually repeat their first university years while searching for the right programme, they undertake *de facto* gap years. Finally, according to traditional views on the transition from school to work, university provides a shelter from economic uncertainty and unemployment. The informants agreed with that, but their comments also suggested an alternative view. Contemporary theories about the prolongation of youth tend to focus on the socio-economic factors that lead to that prolongation; however, perhaps more studies should concentrate on individual causes and choices. Some students seem to prolong their studies simply because they are not personally ready to enter the labour market. They need additional time to experiment with life and think about future possibilities. The development of each individual does not necessarily match the expected level of growth and maturity imposed by the societal structure.

4.3 Evaluating the University System

R: And what do you think about the Finnish university system in general?

I: Well, I think it's quite good, and what I like in Tampere is that we can choose what we study. We can study free minors, it's great. (…) It's (…) flexible. (…) And you can also change your major if you want to. Of course, you have to do work for it.
Suvi (25, Finland)

One of my teachers (…) told me that the French [university] system was in complete disrepair, that it couldn't carry on any more. (…) And it's true that I feel that I don't fit into the system or what it requires.
Céline (23, France)

I'll never regret having been to uni. (…) I think there's really a great cultural profusion [there]. (…) But then, as for its usefulness for getting work, I think it's rather limited, because the courses are extremely theoretical, rather disconnected from reality.
Sabrina (23, France)

Finnish and French young women alike indicated aspects of university that could be improved, such as the provision of more guidance and career advice before and during studies, and the improvement of teaching methods. However, these quotes illustrate the thoughts commonly expressed by informants when I asked their opinion of the university system. The Finns showed satisfaction with the system and their studies in general, and the French were critical and pointed out several negative aspects. These results are in line with the *ESS Round 3–2006* findings for the question 'Please say what you think overall about the state of education in your country nowadays' (on a scale from zero to 10, 10 being the best). The mean score among 20–34-

year-olds was eight in Finland and five in France. Clearly, the data shows satisfaction in Finland and disappointment in France. Nevertheless, although the data shows positive outcomes for Finland, the informants expressed clear concerns regarding the policies and reforms that took place in 2010 to restructure the university system.

Lack of guidance

In both Finland and France the informants complained about the lack of guidance at university. However, the young Finnish women referred to a lack of guidance during university studies, whereas in France they complained mostly of a lack of guidance before higher education, in secondary school.

Some of the Finnish interviewees felt that they were left to choose their courses, conduct their studies and organise their degrees on their own. Some students can feel lost in that process. Anna (28) liked the flexibility of being able to choose free minor topics. However, she felt that there was a lack of guidance regarding how one's studies could be organised and planned to make them more relevant to the labour market. Elina (26) also thought that the university system was comprehensive and flexible, but that students were left on their own. Piia (24) stated that more assistance was needed.

> What people should pay attention to is guiding students more. I think you're pretty much left alone, and to make your decisions … (…) I personally need much more guidance than they give!
> R:	Like, people explaining about the courses?
> I:	Yeah, and what do you have to do, which are the compulsory subjects and all this.
> R:	So you felt a bit left alone?
> I:	Yeah.
> *Elina (26, Finland)*

> I think that the guidance …Well, (…) when I started (…) I thought the guidance system was a bit crappy, 'cause you had the freedom to do whatever you wanted, but if you would have wanted someone along to give you tips and advice … I personally felt that that was lacking.
> *Piia (24, Finland)*

A large number of the French interviewees emphasised a lack of guidance and career advice, especially in secondary school. They mentioned that students are not provided with adequate knowledge of the various study options after the completion of secondary school. Céline (23) gave an example of this.

> [In seconary school] we meet so-called career advisors who … who are completely useless! There's no psychological or sociological approach at all.
> *Céline (23, France)*

The respondents also emphasised that upon arrival there was not enough information about the general functioning of the university system or on planning one's studies. Many students feel isolated and neglected when they enter university (Felouzis 2001: 60). Galland (1996: 36–37) points out that a survey conducted in 1991 among secondary-school students showed that the lack of career advice was already a major problem. Consequently, some students choose a study path on the basis of scraps of information they get from friends and family. Others enter university without knowing what they want to study, and discover their field of interest by trying out different disciplines (see subchapter 4.2).

Isolation during study and lack of teaching skills

Several Finnish and French informants pointed out negative aspects of the teaching methods at university, although they pointed to different issues. The Finns highlighted a lack of contact with the teaching staff, and the French pedagogical weakness. Depending on the field of study, the learning method in Finnish universities is rather peculiar. Students can take part in taught courses, but also in book-exam sessions. The latter consist in reading and analysing a few books on a particular subject, and then answering questions based on those books during a prearranged exam. This way of studying offers a lot of freedom and flexibility, but it requires motivation, independence and responsibility. It is simultaneously isolating and individualistic, since no exchange with teachers or other students occurs. Suvi (25) wished she could participate in more courses with specific assignments to do, and with a lecturer.

> I would like to have more contact teaching. (…) [For] my minor, (…) nearly everything, I've studied myself, in books. (…) Now I did one course and it was great, it was in English, and I think I've learned a bit different things, because the teacher has always personal views. (…) I would like to have more teaching or writing essays, because it's a lot easier for me to read three books and go to [an] exam. [If] I have to write a 10-page essay, it's a lot more work for me, and I would like to be a better writer.
> *Suvi (25, Finland)*

Emmi (25) was studying two different subjects in two universities, one being the University of Tampere. She was aware that the subject one is studying can affect the learning and teaching methods used, but she still felt fairly isolated.

> When you study arts you have to do a lot of practice, and you have to be there, and with the same class all the time. And here, (…) you just go to exams. (…) It's really free here, but also it's really a kind of lonely studying, 'cause you don't know people so much, and you just read at home.
> *Emmi (25, Finland)*

The French informants criticised the method of teaching at universities and other higher-education institutions. However, their complaints were directed more at the lecturers' lack of pedagogical skills and lack of interest in teaching. Natalie (22) had studied for a year in a preparatory class, and appreciated the level of teaching there. She went to university on the basis of her career choice: she needed a Bachelors in order to enter the IUFM to become a schoolteacher. She was disappointed with the university system and the level of teaching, and had therefore decided to study by distance learning. She expressed her frustration during the interview.

> [It was] really weird, because there [at university] lecturers didn't give a damn at all! (…) Often, I would go to classes, teachers wouldn't come. They turn up late, leave early, during exam periods they go and buy the newspapers … It showed so much disregard and indifference towards what we do.
> *Natalie (22, France)*

Sabrina (23) liked studying at university for the knowledge she acquired, but also expressed concern at teachers' lack of pedagogical skill and motivation. She recognised that there are good researchers who do not know how to transmit their knowledge. Valérie (23) mentioned the same issue, and pointed out that in specialist schools the problem can be similar. She also had very good lecturers at university who were passionate about their subject. Felousiz (2001:

62–63) discusses the ambiguous relationship between students and lecturers. The relationship is generally hierarchical and broken, with students considered to be in a lower position. The distance and lack of interest displayed by lecturers could be a negative consequence of the massification of higher education. One's integration into the university system is thus based not only on one's motivation to study and adapt to new learning methods, but also on an understanding of the general functioning of the system.

The bridge and the tower

Finland and France are in opposite positions regarding the transition from school to work. While the Finnish university system seems to work alongside the labour market and to guide students into working life to some extent, in France the university system and the labour market seem to operate independently of each other.

In Finland students are able to design their own degree programmes according to their personal preferences and career plans. As discussed in subchapter 4.2, the respondents had used the flexibility of the university system to adapt their degrees to labour market demands and opportunities. In addition, a large number took one or more gap years between secondary school and higher education, during which they gained work experience and became familiarised with the labour market. Although the courses were described as rather theoretical, in fact all students are required to get an internship related to their field of study. They thus obtain a minimum of professional training as part of their curriculum. In this respect, the Finnish university system can be likened to a bridge that carries young people onto the labour market. One must bear in mind, however, that labour opportunities differ according to fields of study. Higher-education qualifications no longer guarantee integration into the labour market (see subchapter

4.2). Nevertheless, the system allows students to access both theoretical and practical knowledge, which eases their transition from university to working life.

The French informants were rather critical of the university system. They described it as obsolete and out of step with current employability requirements, and they emphasised its inaptness to prepare students for entry into the labour market. They stated that university offers solely theoretical knowledge, with no practical and professional experience at all. By contrast, vocational and technological institutions provide much better-adapted qualifications and training. The French university system can be likened to a tower that leads students to accumulate theoretical knowledge and diplomas, and to build up individual capital. This contributes significantly to the phenomena of degree inflation and overqualification highlighted previously. However, outside of the tower, many graduates are no longer credible and face problems with integration, as their qualifications are not always convertible into concrete employment.

Students in smaller institutions, such as vocational and technological establishments, accumulate work experience through professional training with businesses. Their diplomas also provide potential employers with a visible and comprehensible 'label', especially in terms of skills and qualifications (Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques 2007: 84). Alice (23) was completing her Masters 2 at a technological institution (IUT), and she was very satisfied with her choice. She stressed the problem of having to learn lessons by heart at university, which she described as illogical and in contradiction with labour market expectations, which require autonomous and practical thinking.

To me, university is not a good up-to-date system, maybe it was before, but now, I think it's a bit 'out', because (…) firms are looking for people that are operational, who know about organisational environments, (…) who have already acquired experience. (…) Be-

ing in something both theoretical and practical with my work-based education, I often realise that theory is 100,000 miles away from what is really going on within companies.
Alice (23, France)

University and the labour market tend to operate as two separate entities, two different worlds that work in parallel with each other rather than together, as Caroline (25) pointed out. This young woman was completing a Masters 2 that combined both theory and training, and she considered it a good way to close the wide gap between university education and professional life.

[University] is a system (…) [which is] a bit … closed! (…) which doesn't really open towards the outside world. I think that bridges are missing actually, between university and the world of work in general. (…) We can have broad general knowledge, and I think it's essential, (…) [but] this type of training [combining both practical and theoretical knowledge] should develop, in order to try to make a bridge between the two worlds [university and the labour market], because it's almost two worlds.
Caroline (25, France)

Table 4.4 presents the differences in unemployment rates between holders of diplomas from tertiary education. In both countries, women are more at risk than men. Individuals are generally more at risk of unemployment in France than in Finland. However, the trends are reversed between the two countries concerning types of higher education and unemployment. Whereas in Finland vocational institution degree-holders are more at risk of unemployment than university degree-holders (including those with Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate degrees), in France the latter are more at risk than graduates from vocational higher institutions.

Table 4.4. Unemployment rates (percentages) among 25–64-year-olds by type of higher education and gender, in Finland and France, 2005.

Higher Education	Finland			France		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
	Percentages					
University	4.4	3.7	4.0	6.6	6.3	6.4
Vocational	5.1	4.4	4.9	5.4	5.3	5.3

The data comes from OECD (2007b).

Several French informants voiced their frustration with the university system in terms of job prospects. They felt that students from other types of higher-education institution had better chances of integration into the market, and that they also had more choice, rather than being confined to the public sector.

> [University] is a very good system for general knowledge. But after, concretely, in terms of job opportunities, (…) to be honest, I think it's a bit catastrophic. (…) Frankly, when you graduate from university, I wonder, apart from going into teaching, what you can do.
> *Florence (22, France)*

> I've got friends, it's incredible! (…) I have a friend who got out of IUT [technological higher institution], he got a job immediately, and he's got opportunities to upgrade his position within the company. (…) It's really in total contradiction with what we hear.
> *Sabrina (23, France)*

As early as the mid-1990s, Galland (1996: 46–47) stated that many students criticised university because it inadequately prepared them for professional life. The university syllabus does not provide a clearly defined content of competences and skills, and courses remain abstract and theoretical. Consequently, young people obtaining a degree at

university find themselves destined to work predominantly in the public sector, while those graduating from specialist schools (*Grandes Ecoles*) mostly join the private sector (Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques 2007: 56, 71). Students graduating from technical or vocational higher institutions find their way into industry. In 1996 they already represented the largest employed segment of highly educated young people (Galland 1996: 53, 56).

Work or study, you have to choose!

The Finnish informants made positive remarks concerning the organisation of their study schedules. The system was perceived as comprehensive and flexible, and as helping them to gain work experience, related to their studies or otherwise. Students can even interrupt their studies for a determinate period, for instance if they decide to apply for work. During that interval, their enrolment remains valid, but they are not considered full-time students, and cannot register any credits or receive student benefits (University of Tampere 2009). The young women who were working alongside their studies appreciated the ability to arrange their study and work schedules, although having a job was also mentioned as a possible reason for prolonging one's studies.

> I've been working all the time when I've been studying. I've been working in different bars, and in schools. And it's because we don't get that much money from the government, and I didn't wanna get any loan, (…) so I was working all the time, and of course sometimes that makes your studies last a bit longer.
> *Emmi (25, Finland)*

In Finland, students need to accumulate credits to receive their Bachelors or Masters degree. They are not constrained by academic

years; the total of credits is what counts. Students can also take part in regular prearranged exam sessions related to the independent study of books. This method offers flexible study time, but as explained previously, it can also lead to isolated learning. The French students are provided with more courses and contact teaching. They are compelled to fulfil a certain number of courses during the academic year, to actively contribute to those courses, and to pass biannual exams if they want to be admitted to the subsequent academic year. As a result, the study burden is rather heavy. Some young women stressed the difficulties of combining studies and part-time jobs.

> The university system (…) is badly adapted to studying and having a job in parallel. But I'm sure that there are hundreds, thousands of students that are either obliged to juggle the two, or are obliged to choose between the two, which is terrible. (…) It's not adaptable at all.
> *Marie (24, France)*

Marie (24) also gave the example of a female friend who had worked alongside her studies but had had to quit her job because she could no longer concentrate on her studies. She could continue studying because she received unemployment benefits for a while. Florence (22) stated that at some point during her studies she got a 20-hour-a-week part-time job, and sometimes had to simply miss lectures in order to be able to combine the two.

Finding part-time jobs in France can be difficult. It is sometimes easier to get a full-time job. The respondents clearly mentioned that there was a lack of flexibility from both employers and the study schedule that made it hard to combine study and work. This is one reason why many students leave university and cannot finish their studies. While the Finnish system to some extent bridges the gap between studies and professional life by offering the opportunity to combine study and work, the French system does not encourage such arrangements. From that perspective too, university and the

labour market act as two separate entities which do not complement each other.

Flexibility and rigidity: Educational service or school institution?

One reason for going to university, both in Finland and in France, is that it is seen as a logical continuation of secondary school (see subchapter 4.2). Felouzis (2001: 52) claims that in France, secondary school has become merely a step on the educational path to higher education, which is the 'natural' step to reach. The massification of both secondary schooling and higher education has led to the transformation of the meaning of tertiary education itself, from being the privileged preserve of the higher social classes to being the conventional path for all to follow. Sanna Honkimäki (2001: 91–92) stresses that in Finland too, university today is often considered an extension of secondary school by many students. Studying in higher-education institutions has become commonplace, a new social norm. Is university therefore becoming just another school institution?

The flexibility of the Finnish system made it appealing, and the informants considered it a service for mature adults, rather than a school institution. They appreciated the freedom to choose various minor subjects, and some had even changed their major subject. Emmi (25) was taking courses in two universities and enjoyed the possibilities this offered in terms of opportunities, courses, environments and learning methods. The research participants explained that they selected their minor subjects on the basis of not only personal choice, but also future career plans and prospects (see subchapter 4.2). They had all been able to construct their own personalised degree programme, and were clearly satisfied with that aspect.

> I like the fact that (…) you're free to study any minor that you want, especially in Tampere, (…) so you can have a very interesting com-

bination of different subjects and you're not confined to the major
you have; you can do other things.
Piia (24, Finland)

The Bachelors degree at the University of Tampere consists of basic
and intermediate studies in a major subject and additional, less
extensive studies in minor subjects. It is clearly stated that 'students
may, in many cases, choose their minor subjects *fairly freely* and even
take course units or modules from another university' (University
of Tampere 2009, my emphasis). There is a 'Flexible Study Rights
Agreement' (*Joustava opinto-oikeus*, JOO) in Finland, which allows
both undergraduates and postgraduates to take part in courses at other
universities and incorporate the credits obtained into their degrees
(Joustava opinto-oikeus 2010; University of Tampere 2009).

In addition, students are responsible for arranging their own
timetable, and hence for the development of their own studies and
degree: 'the Finnish system of academic education *gives students a lot
of freedom to plan and schedule their studies*. This means that plan-
ning the schedule for the academic year, i.e. choosing the subjects
and course units, matching the times of lectures and keeping the
schedule intensive throughout the studies, requires a lot of *activity
and responsibility on the part of the student*' (University of Tampere
2009, my emphases). The research participants were aware of their
role and responsibilities.

We have this academic freedom, (…) you can study what you want,
(…) teachers can teach what they want, and you can (…) make your
own schedule, choose what courses you're taking, and everything like
that. For example, in England, that was totally different, it was really
(…) like at school. People were telling [us] what to do (…). But of
course there's the other side that when you are told what to do, then you
don't have to have so much self-discipline as you have to have here.
Maria (30, Finland)

While Finnish students benefit from academic freedom and flexibility, in France students must follow specific courses according to their study discipline. Some of the informants criticised the rigid approaches to teaching and learning, comparing them to secondary-school methods. Several young women explained that they still had to learn lecture notes by heart and regurgitate them in exams. Céline (23) stressed that as in secondary school, knowledge tended to be imposed on students rather than leading them to develop their own positions on issues. She was afraid of getting low grades, which would affect her future study path and opportunities. As in secondary school, grades are given considerable weight. The grades obtained for the Bachelors determine access to specific Masters programmes. Unlike in Finland, there is no automatic progression from Bachelors to Masters degrees in France, and students must be selected to enter Masters programmes. However, the young women who had studied in, or who knew someone who had been to, a preparatory class (leading to study in a *Grande Ecole*) before entering university described the learning methods there as strenuous, intensive, competitive and highly supervised. By comparison, they enjoyed having freedom at university and being more autonomous and independent regarding the methods of study.

On the other hand, some young women expressed feelings of 'unavoidable destiny'. They emphasised that once a student is engaged on a specific study path, they are destined for a job related to that path, as it is very difficult to change path unless one decides to start again from the beginning. Audrey (26) knew a male student who had obtained a degree in philosophy, but could not enter the labour market because of the limited prospects in that field. He wanted to do something in a different area, but had to start studying all over again. Nicole (21) felt that now that she had entered a particular discipline, she would have no opportunity to study anything else or to change her field of work after completing her studies. She said that she felt trapped on this particular path. It is therefore important to

make the right choice from the beginning. Many first-year students try out different fields of study, but they have to register as new first-year students each time they change. That prolongs both their studies and their need to find adequate financial support. The student grant system is means-tested, and no longer applies to young adults over the age of 26. Those who have obtained a degree in a particular field, or are halfway through their studies, cannot always afford to change and start again, mainly for financial reasons. In that sense, the rather rigid structure of the university system implicitly restricts one's life direction.

Selection through failure

Once Finnish students are admitted to university, their position in the system is secure. They will not drop out if they do a minimum of study, nor be dismissed on the basis of exam failure or incompletion of courses. Their place depends not on passing annual examinations, but on gaining a certain number of credits. They can even retake book-study exams if they are not satisfied with the initial mark obtained. Students' places at university are guaranteed until they obtain their Bachelors or Masters degree. Those who have completed their Bachelors degree are eligible for admission to Masters programmes related to their major subject or a subject area close to their Bachelors degree (University Admissions Finland 2010; University of Tampere 2009).

By contrast, French students have no guarantee of retaining their place in the higher-education system. University is accessible to everyone, as there are no selective entry examinations. However, selection does operate implicitly within the university system. It operates through failure. Students must pass compulsory courses and exams if they want to be admitted to the next academic year, until they obtain their Bachelors or Masters. It is possible to repeat academic

years in cases of exam failure; students can re-register at the same level of study and have a second chance. Nonetheless, many drop out of university when they fail the exams, because these become more challenging as the academic years progress (Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques 2007: 72). According to Galland (1996: 39), about a third of students dropped out before the end of their Bachelors in the mid-1990s. Others start work and return to study, often in a different field, when they have clearer ideas about their career plans (Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques 2007: 75). The informants were aware of this issue and clearly pointed it out.

> The problem with university is that they let everybody in, so you're in, and each year it gets harder. In the third year not everybody gets their Bachelors, because they start to make it harder. They still let many people into Masters 1, and the problem is that they really select people in Masters 2.
> *Florence (22, France)*

> The peculiarity of the French system is that it's accessible to all. After secondary school, there's no entrance selection. (…) The selection happens at the end, not at the beginning. (…) We weed out at the end.
> *Caroline (25, France)*

For those who wish to pursue a Masters, admission is not automatic. They must go through selection, which is often based on grades obtained on their Bachelors degree as well as on an application process and selective examination. The French system is thus democratic in appearance, as it is open to all, but the structure is implicitly discriminatory and strictly selective during the study path. A student's position within the system is never certain, by contrast with that of Finnish students.

No to business orientation!

The Finnish informants nevertheless demonstrated concern at the new reforms planned for the university system. The new laws have generated discussion and disapproval among students, and teaching and administration staff all over Finland. The Universities Act (see subchapter 4.1) aims to extend universities' autonomy by removing their management from state control. It also aims to reduce study time and to end, or at least reduce, gap years between secondary school and tertiary education. The entrance exam scheme was under discussion during winter 2010 too. Most of the informants clearly stated that they disagreed with the direction the university system was taking. The changes were perceived as harmful, and as taking the currently well-functioning university system in the wrong direction. This was mainly because it might weaken students' ability to control their own study path, and might also hinder the quality of the service that universities were initially designed to provide. Some respondents feared a loss of freedom, and also felt that the system was being transformed into a business where the focus would be on productivity rather than on providing a good education.

> I don't agree with the current situation that you have to get out of uni in five years, that you first study three years and do your Masters in two years. (…) You shouldn't lose the freedom. (…) When I started at the university I thought that if I graduated in eight years I'll be fine. I have no rush, and if I want to do something else in between, I can do it. I think that's a very good thing.
> *Piia (24, Finland)*

I: I don't like the direction it's going to. (…) I always thought that universities [were] something more like a service than a business. (…) They are sort of directing it towards a business way of thinking

R: How, do you feel?

I: For example, (…) you have to have results, certain kind of results from everything. Well, not all the things in universities are supposed to give very concrete results. For example, (…) arts: I don't know what kind of results they are expecting to get there. (…) You can't have the same rules with everything. So I think universities and science, free scientific [thinking], and free scientific research, is a value in itself. And this (…) way of thinking, directing the university to business-minded thinking, I'm not sure that's the best way to secure it.
Päivi (25, Finland)

The university's change of direction towards 'business-minded think-ing', as Päivi (25) put it, which is implied by the new reform, was clearly stipulated in the June 2009 document *The Universities Act Promulgated*, by Minister Henna Virkkunen (2009): 'The government will continue to guarantee sufficient core funding tied to the rise in costs for the universities. In addition, the universities will be able to apply for competed public funding and use the revenue from their *business ventures*, donations and bequeaths and the return on their capital for financing their operations' (my emphasis). This clearly indicates the goal of the reform and the new direction the Finnish university system is taking.

Conclusion: Divergences between education systems

Finnish and French respondents agreed that the quality of teach-ing could be improved, as could guidance and career advice before and during university studies. However, the young women's general opinions of their university systems strongly diverged on some points. The Finnish informants expressed satisfaction with the system as a whole, and with their studies, the degree of freedom to build their own curriculum, the flexibility of the system for working students, and the compatibility of their studies with labour market demands,

which led to good opportunites to enter working life. By contrast, the French informants criticised the general structure of the system, the rigid organisation of the curriculum, the lack of consideration for working students, the discriminatory and selective aspects of the system, and its inaptness to provide students with adequate tools to join the labour market.

Nonetheless, although Finnish participants showed satisfaction with the current system, they were worried by the new direction it was taking following the Universities Act. In their opinion, the new laws were about to damage a well-functioning institution, making the situation worse rather than ameliorating it. Several young women who had been exchange students in France and England hoped that the Finnish system would not be changed to follow a more European model. Paradoxically, the French Ministry of Education is closely interested in the Finnish education system thanks to the latter's recent success in the OECD Pisa ranking, and is planning educational reforms inspired by the Finnish system (see Jost 2007).

4.4 Different Historical Ideologies, Different Higher-Education Systems

The research informants had gone to university in response to a growing socio-cultural norm: obtaining a higher-education degree. Nonetheless, as discussed above, entering higher education is also the result of economic restructuring, unemployment and degree inflation. The young women were aware of the current situation and tried to adapt to structural flows. They modified their curriculum or chose the type of degree or institution that would provide them with adequate skills and increase their chances on the labour market. At the same time, their attempts to keep control over their own life paths were notable. The French informants suggested that university had become

a stage during which to decide one's life direction. Students use the education system in a way very different from its original purpose: as a stage of experimentation and transition to adulthood, rather than as a merely educational institution. Furthermore, the respondents (both Finnish and French) stressed that many students prolong their studies and take shelter within the known and secure environment of the education system. This can be perceived as a response to the present socio-economic conditions; however, it might also be a way to contest the lack of control over one's own destiny. Prevailing social norms presume that there is a time for studying based on age, a time to enter working life, a time to start a family, a time to become adult. What if this imposed timing did not suit everybody? Some individuals develop at a different pace than others. It might be pertinent to ask whether assumed 'norms' now seem obsolete to a growing number of young people.

The most significant difference between the Finnish and French university systems lies at the level of the transition from school to work. The Finnish university system appears to work alongside the labour market and lead students towards working life. The informants used its flexibility to build their own degrees and take a variety of courses they considered useful for their career plans. Moreover, they had the opportunity to acquire working experience (related to their degree or otherwise) and become familiarised with the labour market, as they took gap years before and/or during their higher-education path and could work alongside their studies. They could also prolong their studies if needed. The system allows students to gain not only theoretical and academic knowledge, but also practical skills. In that respect, it provides students with most of the skills needed on the labour market, and attempts to prepare them adequately to enter working life, like a bridge across a river.

By contrast, the French system is much more rigid, and seems to work separately from the labour market. The informants openly criticised this weakness. They felt that the system did not prepare

them for working life, as it offered only theoretical knowledge with almost no practical or professional skills. Students rarely take gap years before higher education in France, and therefore might gain less work experience than their Finnish counterparts. Many students work alongside their studies or during the summer, but combining studies and work is difficult because of the lack of flexibility in both study and work schedules. The university system does not encourage students to take part in working life. It concentrates essentially on providing academic knowledge and accumulating individual capital. In this respect, the system resembles a solid tower, in which students gain credibility through their status and qualifications. However, their position weakens and loses its power outside the tower, because of their lack of familiarity with the labour market and their difficulties in converting educational credentials into professional occupations.

Finnish and French young women's experiences of university and study vary considerably between the two countries. The Finnish higher-education system offers a homogeneous structure, with only two possibilities: the academic path at university, or the vocational path in universities of applied sciences. In contrast, the French system comprises a combination of various educational apparatuses, all very distinct from each other, which offer various types of credentials and study paths. The system is split between institutions and the different value attributed to them. The students' financial support scheme follows the same model. In Finland, financial aid is universally provided to all students, whereas in France, a selected number of students can obtain a range of aid and allowances on the basis of their socio-economic background and/or study results.

According to Risto Alapuro (2005; 2010), the different historical events that occurred in the two countries led to different social structures, and also to different modes of popular political representation. After the French Revolution, the building of the Republic was the priority, and associations were proscribed because they might have been attempts to revive the group interests that the Revolution

had condemned. In Finland, efforts were concentrated on building the nation. The people, represented by various associations, played an essential role in that process. In France, the state developed as a separate entity, controlling the people through the strict regulation of representative associations, and thereby distancing itself from the people. In Finland, the people and the state cooperated to build the nation. For that reason, Finnish society is more cohesive and homogeneous, and also more transparent. The lack of clear representation of the different groups in France has produced a situation in which society and the people are much more abstract entities. The people's identity is ambiguous and the society is greatly divided, with a variety of coexisting atomised groups. Following this model, the Finnish education system has remained largely consistent and accessible to various groups, whereas the French system is segmented and unequal in terms of the quality of institutions, the value of qualifications, and the representation of different social classes within the different types of institution. Individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds are still under-represented in elite specialist schools (*Grandes Ecoles*).

The Finnish respondents felt that the higher-education system and the uniform financial support offered to students provided equal opportunities and chances to everyone. In France, the informants referred to financial opportunities as a crucial issue. Social class was not openly mentioned, but their comments regarding the financial difficulties of numerous students, uneven financial support, and the tuition fees required by elite specialist schools all suggested an inequality of opportunities according to socio-economic background. This is in line with Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's (1977) argument, which stresses that the French education system fulfils an implicit role of 'social selection' through 'academic selection'. In other words, the education system has a hidden social function: to maintain social privileges and hierarchy. 'Social selection' is legitimated under the guise of the 'technical selection' conducted during course exams, entrance exams and competitive selective examinations. The

privileges of the groups who possess a legal socio-economic monopoly are maintained through the rules of access to elite institutions (Parkin 1979: 58). The chances of entering higher education, and of succeeding and upgrading one's social status, are therefore largely predetermined and implicitly regulated. Educational chances are not equal for everyone. This is evident in the strictly selective and limited access to elite institutions.

The massification of education in France has provided individuals from lower social classes with an opportunity to become highly educated. However, hierarchical selection continues to operate, albeit at a different level, namely through the types of tertiary establishment that young people enter. University seems to be the place for underprivileged social groups, since access is free and effortless, while *Grandes Ecoles* remain primarily privileged institutions for the children of the higher social classes, who can afford the financial costs and possess an adequate cultural background to negotiate their way in. Timothy B. Smith (2004: 199) emphasises that a large number of students get a university degree. However, the university infrastructure has not adapted to the growing number of students. Universities are overcrowded and underequipped, and lack financial resources. Moreover, the value of university degrees is questionable, as they are not always recognised on the labour market or compatible with the market's current needs. By contrast, the number of students in *Grandes Ecoles* is low, there are few graduates, and the infrastructure is smaller and more adapted to both students' needs and labour market demands. The majority of students earn valuable diplomas that guarantee them a secure job and direct access to high-ranking professional positions. The French higher-education system appears divided and hierarchical, and also seems to contribute to and perpetuate existing social divisions and hierarchies.

5.

ENTERING WORKING LIFE

Advanced countries' socio-economic structures have undergone significant changes since the 1960s. Transformations have occurred at the social, political, economic, educational and cultural levels, and have generated a new post-industrial context where life paths are no longer predictable. Traditional strategies of integration into the labour market, and ultimately into society, have become more complicated, particularly for young people. Indeed, as explained in the previous chapter, there is no guarantee of obtaining or keeping a stable job, even with tertiary-education diplomas. The current economic apparatus offers new professional opportunities, yet presents uncertain prospects to young people, who are very vulnerable to economic upheavals. Young people's integration into the wider societal context today is compromised by their lack of opportunities to achieve stable positions on the labour market (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005). The shift from the industrial to the service era has generated an increase in fixed-term

contracts and low-paid and part-time work, which challenges young people's routes to independence (see Jones 1995).

Simultaneously, social values have shifted towards a more individualistic perception of life, and the meaning of work has been transformed, from being a means to survive and earn a salary to being a means of personal fulfilment. A twofold situation is therefore occurring: changes in access to work, and also transformations in the values attached to work (Inglehart 1997).

All informants from both countries clearly said that they wanted to have a job that they liked. In most cases, this was more important than having a good salary. They wanted enough money to be financially independent and live a decent life, but having an enjoyable and interesting job related to their personal values was their priority.

People's lives are increasingly entangled in a variety of structural risks produced by the postmodern development of Western societies (Beck 1992). That development involved the conditions that led to major transformations in the structural apparatus of advanced societies from the 1960s onwards. This major shift has disrupted the traditional foundations of existence and generated new ontological insecurities. Self-identity is increasingly tied to individual choice, self-monitoring and self-reflexivity (Giddens 1984; 1991; Sweetman 2003: 530). Postmodern conditions have brought new dilemmas that challenge individuals' lives. Individuals have to face new constraints, new doubts, and a growing sense of insecurity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). One's destiny seems increasingly to rest with oneself, although it is still undeniably influenced by a web of external structural forces. Indeed, although postmodern theories suggest that life in Western societies has become 'fluid', the socio-economic apparatus still greatly influences individuals. It has changed, but it keeps on operating as a foundation for people's lives. People still construct their identities on the basis of reflections of the environment in which they live.

Young people today are experiencing the transition to adulthood within that context. The informants in my study were all

young women and university students. A large number studied in the humanities or social sciences and planned to work in the public sector. Others followed a work-based curriculum and aimed to join the private sector. These factors greatly influenced their perceptions of the labour market and their expectations of working life. In this sense, how did the young women in my study actually view economic restructuring? How did they situate themselves in the current context? And did their perceptions of the transition from university to the labour market match experts' claims regarding young people's integration into working life?

In the following subchapters I will discuss the labour market as observed by my informants, how they consider their positions in the economic sphere, and how they place their own interpretations within the economic contexts of Finland and France.

5.1 More Than Work: Self-Fulfilment

I think most people want to do something that feels right for them, and not just a random job, [that is,] most people who go to university. (…) Maybe the people who go to [vocational higher education] are less oriented in thinking that they have to do something that really fits their soul.
Johanna (26, Finland)

I don't consider at all doing something I don't like. (…) I won't choose a job just for the sake of it or out of duty. (…) I couldn't … I couldn't!
Céline (23, France)

Finnish and French respondents alike clearly stated that they needed to have a job they would enjoy. That factor was central, more so

than the issue of earnings. Some young women were aware that their preference was specific to university students and by gender. They felt that vocational students, especially young men, were much more career-oriented and focused on financial rewards. The informants did not say that money did not matter at all – they clearly wanted to earn enough to be financially independent and have a decent lifestyle – but their priority was to have a job related to their personal values and interests.

Most informants knew what job they wanted to do. Some were not sure yet what field they would work in, and some (in France) simply did not know at all what they would do. Several informants in both countries planned to work in the public sector and become schoolteachers or social workers. Working for associations such as Non-Governmental Organisations was a popular choice too. Others wished to obtain professional jobs in the private sector, for instance as journalists or translators, for a private company, or as freelancers.

My respondents' perspectives on the labour market and their opportunities for integration were greatly influenced by their current positions as university students, and by their personal values. This in turn guided their future work plans and career expectations. They perceived the labour market in relation to their own subjective goals and positions, rather than impartially.

Furthermore, the division between the working and personal spheres seemed to have faded, with young women choosing their careers on the basis of personal passions and ethics rather than merely in order to earn a living. For instance, those who had humanitarian values wanted to work for Non-Governmental organisations or in environmentally friendly companies. They wished to have fulfilling, interesting and meaningful work that would bring them satisfaction and allow self-development and self-realisation. They pointed out that finding any old job was easy, but getting the job that would fulfil their expectations would be difficult.

Many had changed their study path in accordance with labour market demands, but still related to their personal interests and values. They had to search for a career path that would meet both labour market opportunities and their own requirements for individual fulfilment. Some were aware that their study choices did not always match the best possible chances of future work, but they were determined to find work in their preferred domain. They knew that patience would be required, but were rather hopeful.

Passion and meaning versus salary

As [for] voluntary work, I've done quite a lot of it, but I hope in the future I can actually live on it (…). I'd like to do work that I'm interested in, rather than getting a lot of money for something I don't really care about. (…) I would hate to end up in such a job that I would (…) have to justify myself every morning (…) 'Yes, you do have to go there, because you need to pay the rent (…).'
Päivi (25, Finland)

Most of my friends here are humanists, so they don't get to university because of money. But I know also people who just go [to higher education] because they'll get more salary afterwards. (…) My friends (…) who went mostly to a [vocational higher institution], (…) they just had in mind to get well-paid positions.
Tuuli (25, Finland)

The values attached to work today are connected to the shift from modernity to postmodernity, in which the focus is essentially on the individual. Postmodernity consists in a shift in survival strategies, from maximising economic growth to maximising survival and well-being through lifestyle changes (Inglehart 1997: 23, 338). The transformation of industrial into post-industrial societies generated new sets of

values and lifestyles, particularly among the younger generations. The motives for working have changed too. The emphasis is increasingly on finding interesting and meaningful work, rather than maximising one's income and job security (Inglehart 1997: 44). Young people want a job that is enjoyable, gratifying, and a direct expression of their identities (Arnett 2004: 157). However, that also depends on social origins, level of education, employment sector, and the individual. It does not apply to every social being. Nevertheless, my Finnish and French respondents alike seemed to hold that view.

Suvi (25, Finland) was working part-time alongside her studies, and clearly stated that it was nothing more than a means to earn a living. Once she had obtained her degree she would seek more meaningful work. Tiia (26, Finland) distinguished between working only for money and working for pleasure too.

R: What do you think will be the most difficult in your transition from university (…) to working life?
I: I think it's finding a job which I want, and not a job any more which I have to do. (…) Working is not the problem; finding the work is, (…) and finding one which you enjoy.
      Tiia (26, Finland)

Florence (22, France) explained that it is always possible and even rather easy to find low-skilled and precarious jobs, but it is much more difficult to get a stable and enjoyable job that also allows one to build one's own life and construct something special. The main goal for Caroline (25, France) was to have a job related to her ideals, values and ideas, something that would contribute to her personal blossoming and inner fulfilment. Nicole (21, France) had done many low-skilled jobs, and had suffered from the pressures of productivity and the demanding working environment. She truly felt exploited, and stressed that having that kind of job for the rest of her life was out of the question, as it would be unbearable. According to a survey

conducted in Finland among the economically active population, having an interesting job is the most important thing for most workers, far more than salary levels. Income is necessary for living expenses and leisure activities, but the meaning and level of self-satisfaction generated by one's job is central (Vehviläinen 2010).

> I would like to do a job which is more like a passion, (…) a job that gives motivation and meaning to what I'm doing, not just getting up, doing my office hours and coming back home, but [a job] that gives meaning to my actions.
> *Marie (24, France)*

Like Marie (24, France), Päivi (25, Finland) wanted to work for Non-Governmental Organisations and held strong humanitarian values. She hoped to get meaningful work that would be valuable to society, rather than simply earning money. Both informants had oriented their studies in that direction. Valérie (23, France) wished to work in community associations because of her personal upbringing and values. Her parents had been involved in community work, and she planned to follow in their footsteps. Joining a specific cause and putting her heart into her actions was very important to her.

Elina (26, Finland) indicated that her mother still had a conventional and modern perspective on work. She said that for her mother, work was mostly a means to earn money, rather than a personal quest for self-gratification and achievement. Finnish and French informants alike distinguished themselves from their parents in relation to their views of work. Several of them explained that their parents had started working in a particular sector simply to earn an income. Some of them had later studied or retrained in order to enter another occupation or gain a promotion. Unlike their daughters, they did not go into education specifically to obtain a job related to their values or personal interests. For them, work was a necessity, a practicality, a value in itself, and the logical path of life to follow.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1995 [1904–05]), Max Weber claimed that in order to function and progress, the capitalist system needed people to be devoted to the calling of money (1995: 72). However, in accordance with Protestant ethics, money should be a reward for doing one's job well, rather than being a purely individual reward. Wealth should be pursued as the fruit of one's labour, in response to God's blessings (Weber 1995: 172). The respondents' parents had a different ethic than that portrayed in Weber's model, such that they worked essentially for money, but also for their own needs and enjoyment. Many young people still follow this principle today; nonetheless, a growing number, including my informants, expect new rewards from work. Before the shift to postmodernity, for a large percentage of people work was a tool for the construction of personal and social identity and self-worth (Bauman 1998: 27). Individuals, especially men, primarily defined themselves through their occupation or professional achievements. Occupational status and financial success greatly contributed to one's social and personal identity. This still holds true for a large part of the labour force, but economic upheavals, uncertainty and unemployment are challenging individuals' identity-building and self-value related to work. In addition, the shift to postmodernity brought cultural changes in people's attitudes to work and quality of life. The system of values has acquired new dimensions, such as questioning and searching for deeper meaning in life, and emphasising subjective well-being (see Inglehart 1997). Many people value work today through its capacity to generate pleasure and self-realisation. Work is a matter of aesthetic satisfaction, and is used by the worker as a means to give more meaning to life, rather than being the thing that defines their life (Bauman 1998: 32–36). All the Finnish and French young women I interviewed shared this new set of values. They emphasised getting a job that was not just interesting and fulfilling, but would also give meaning to their lives.

In addition, the young women had integrated certain feminist principles into their everyday lives. Independence, self-realisation, access to professional status and a re-evaluation of family roles are values for which the previous generation of women fought in the 1960s. My informants grew up in a context in which these ideologies, developed by the women's movement, were to some extent already established and/or were perpetuated by their mothers (Aronson 2008).

Work as 'part' of life rather than 'work as life'

Melinda Mills and Hans-Peter Blossfeld (2005) argue that global changes have led to new international uncertainties that have impacted on national structures. National institutional filters, such as the employment system, education system, welfare regime and family systems, have been affected, and have in turn generated new ambiguities at the individual level. Individuals' decision-making and habitus are likely to have been altered as a result. A transformation in young people's values and patterns of transition to adulthood has also resulted from this restructuring.

The shift to postmodernity has increased not just existential insecurity but also insecurities of identity, with the creation of new ambivalences and contradictions (see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Individuals have become more focused on their own identities and quests for personal happiness and self-realisation. At the same time, the concept of identity has become ambiguous. Alongside the rise of postmodern values, the traditional mindset or habitus has been transformed, and the degree of reflexivity has intensified (Sweetman 2003: 542). The era of the reflexive habitus is nevertheless a response to contemporary uncertainties, such as the unpredictability of working life. In this regard Anthony Giddens (1984: 25) mentions the duality of the social structure, which both enables and constrains people.

Before the 1960s, individuals' identities (at the personal and social levels) were fairly stable, and were determined by coherent social practices and structures such as social class, gender and employment (Wagner, cit. Sweetman 2003: 530). Today, autonomous self-construction plays an important role, and is essentially based on freedom of choice and opportunity. Moreover, rather than letting work determine their identity, a growing number of individuals merge their personal values with their occupation. Work is where they can express their values, and it reflects their ethical choices. This is a dual process: work is influenced by individuals' principles, and also offers them a social position.

According to John H. Goldthorpe (1982: 167), the change from Fordism to post-Fordism has given rise to a service class of public sector employees, private economic services and social services. In contrast to waged workers in the manufacturing sector, service-class workers enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in their work, trust (from their employers), and moral commitment to their work and their organisation. This gives rise to a distinction between an instrumentalist orientation and a bureaucratic orientation (Goldthorpe et al. 1968: 38–40; Goldthorpe 1984: 17–18). Both orientations are connected to a process of exchange between employers or organisations and employees. The instrumentalist orientation involves a labour contract. Instrumentalists are work-oriented labourers, for whom work is a means to acquire the income necessary to live. Work is experienced as mere labour, and as a mandatory and instrumental activity. The workers' lives are dichotomised between work and non-work activities. In addition, the labour contract implies direct control by the employers over their employees, in order to maintain an adequate level of effort in their work. Bureaucratics have a different relationship to their work and their employers. Employers agree to delegate their authority to their expert employees, who have responsibilities and a certain degree of autonomy. In return, employees offer their knowledge, expertise and commitment. However, their level of performance

depends on their moral commitment to the organisation. In this case, the labour contract does not involve employers' monitoring of their employees, but rather rests on a strong moral investment from the latter. In exchange for their services and commitment, they receive an income and other benefits. The most prized rewards are personal recognition from the organisation (for being a competent and loyal worker), status and career advancement, rather than mere payment. Career achievement thus becomes a source of social identity. Unlike the instrumentalists, bureaucratics' lives are not divided between work and non-work. Many forge bonds with colleagues that extend beyond the workplace. In addition, individual personality, morals and ethics are not set aside at work, but are implicated in the tasks to be performed (Goldthorpe et al. 1968: 38–40; Goldthorpe 1984: 17–18; 2000: 217–218).

Work is thus still a means of survival, but the subjective dimension is increasingly important in working life. In particular, highly educated young people endorse post-materialist values. While their elders focused primarily on the material dimension of work, young people concentrate on the personal dimension. Their work orientation involves a commitment to the organisation. However, it is important to remember that education levels, gender, social background and employment status impact significantly on that orientation (Epiphane and Sulzer 2008: 57–58). At first glance it seems that young people value work much less than their elders did, and engage increasingly in free-time activities and personal interests. However, in reality they still place great importance on work, but do so in the form of individual commitment, and often in relation to their personal values. They still value work, but from a different perspective than that of their elders, and no less than the other spheres of life. Work is no longer their dominant commitment, but is one of many such commitments (Tchernia 2005: 212–214). All my informants supported these observations. Sabrina (23, France) wished to have a job related to her passions that would not take up too much space or time in her life.

She did not want to be a busy white-collar worker like her father, or to have a stressful job which would affect her well-being and life as a whole. Suvi (25, Finland) and Florence (22, France) clearly stated that work should be a part of rather than the whole of life.

R: What do you think in general about the world of work? How do you view the world of work?

I: What comes to my mind is that it's too central in Finland in peoples' life, and it's like essential for you. I know people who just work and work and work and it's, if you lose your job, it's like you lose [everything]. And I don't like (…) that … (…) I would like that you'd have something else in your life, (…) not just work.
Suvi (25, Finland)

I don't want – and many young people agree with this – I don't want my work to become my whole life. (…) I have many interests, and I want a job [teaching] that will allow me to do what I like and do other things, such as travelling.
Florence (22, France)

According to Jean-François Tchernia (2005: 205–209), young people view work as both a means of subsistence and a means of personal development, and see work and private life as equally important. Work has thus gained a double value. It must bring financial stability but also allow personal realisation. According to the 1999 European Values Survey, among 18–29-year-olds, personal development and salary were valued over working conditions or social dimensions (such as work stability or usefulness to society) in Finland and France alike, with a slight emphasis on salary in Finland (Tchernia 2005: 211). A large number of young people endorse moral commitment as a work value. They seem ready to get involved in work on condition that it give meaning to their lives. They are less ready to get just any kind

of job, unlike most of their elders. They expect their job to bring them satisfaction, self-fulfilment and potential for advancement, to provide for their family, and to give them the opportunity to enjoy their personal lives (Epiphane and Sulzer 2008: 80). The rest of life is regarded as no less important than work, and that presumes that one already has an interesting job.

Ronald Inglehart (1997: 132, 152) argues that individuals' value systems reflect their subjective sense of economic and social security during their formative years. The level of economic security they experienced as children significantly shapes their adult attitudes and beliefs. However, young people are very heterogeneous when it comes to values and attitudes. Young people from lower social backgrounds and those who have attained lower educational levels tend to give a higher value to work. Highly educated individuals who have gained responsibility and developed their professional careers, as well as highly educated youths who are disillusioned with the current labour market, have changed their attitudes towards work and adopted a more individualistic and postmodern stance. In addition, life experience, generation, and the state of the national economy all affect young people's value systems (Tchernia 2005: 218–224).

In 2006, the Swedish polling organisation Kairos Future Institute conducted the *European Youth in a Global Context 2007* opinion survey of values and attitudes with 22,000 young people aged 16–29 and 300 adults aged 30–50 (in order to analyse similarities and differences between age groups) (see Stellinger and Wintrebert (eds) 2008). The survey was conducted in 17 countries, including European and Asian countries and the United States. Finland and France were part of the study. The findings of this survey match my respondents' perceptions of work. The results show that French and Scandinavian youths seek meaning, symbolic rewards and personal achievement from their profession. They value work highly when they feel it offers personal fulfilment. However, this perspective was held primarily by highly edu-

cated young people. Getting a high salary was mentioned most often by lower-educated informants (Epiphane and Sulzer 2008: 64–67).

Conclusion: Working for a purpose

Young people do not reject work, but they do not want it to over-whelm their private lives. Work per se has lost its aura and grand value, but has become a domain that can express new values, such as self-realisation and enriching personal development. Young people do not deny work, but they contest and dismiss the conventional social norms attached to it (Tchernia 2005: 226–227).

All my informants considered work as a means to better them-selves and express their individual capacities, and as a way to give meaning to their lives. In their opinion, life could no longer be merely centred on work. Personal life, interests and passions are valuable parts of existence that should be pushed into the foreground rather than kept in the background. The traditionally separate spheres of public and private life (corresponding to work and personal or family life) are therefore increasingly connected. They even seem to merge and complement each other, with work used as a tool to improve personal life and promote personal ethics and values. Highly educated young women do not reject work, but they strongly contest the traditional values attached to it. They want to work, but to work with a par-ticular purpose and meaning, not just for the simple fact of having to earn an income.

5.2 Young Women in the Labour Market

R: How do you view the world of work in general?

I: That's a good question. To be honest, I don't really know, 'cause for me
     it's quite natural to do a lot of things, (…) for example (…) voluntary
     work. And I don't consider it as work, really, it's just something I do.
     (…) But I guess that's work in a way as well. I guess work could be
     called something like an activity that I'm committed to doing.
     Päivi (25, Finland)

     [There was] a time when [you] didn't look for work; work was looking
     for you!
     Caroline (25, France)

How young women position themselves in the labour market, and
how do they perceive their own integration? From a comparative
perspective, there were visible differences between Finland and France
in a number of respects. Finnish and French informants held similar
opinions on numerous points. They were rather critical, and viewed
integration into working life as a complex problem because of the
considerable hostility and demands of the labour market. They clearly
perceived the contradictions between working life and personal de-
sires, such as the desire to start a family. Nevertheless, while the
Finnish respondents felt fairly confident about their integration and
seemed to accept the instability of early employment, the French
displayed rather strong pessimism and fear about their integration
and the future. The last two sections of this subchapter investigate
differences of opinion between informants from the two countries.

Is the labour market hostile towards young women?

Most French and some Finnish informants believed that the transi-
tion to working life was easier for those who had a degree from a

vocational institution, because university degrees were too abstract and lacked practicality (see subchapter 4.3). Private-sector employers in particular perceive university degrees as abstract because students' practical skills are invisible. The demand for university degrees is still high in the public sector, which offers positions such as teaching, social work and the civil service. The path to integration into the labour market is clearer for vocational degree-holders after graduation, because their curriculum leads to specific professions in a particular area of employment, usually in the private sector. Most of my informants wished to join the public sector, and needed a university degree. Others planned to work for private companies. Nevertheless, interviewees from both countries understood the concrete practical difficulties of obtaining work. They complained at having to prove their skills to potential employers more than vocational degree holders needed to do, and at having to constantly 'sell themselves' during job interviews. This was even felt as degrading.

R: What do you consider as the most difficult issue when university students enter working life? (…)
I: I think finding a job, and you know, selling yourself. (…)
R: Do you feel that people now actually, or young people, have to sell themselves often?
I: It depends on the field that they have been studying, but I think, when you don't have specific qualifications for some jobs, then you have to somehow sell yourself.
Elina (26, Finland)

I: When I tell [my parents] I'm looking for a job and I say I've been to job interviews, they say they have never been to job interviews. (…) They don't have any experience of selling yourself, and telling your strong points.
Sanna (24, Finland)

Marie (24, France) described how stressful and even humiliating her job interviews had been, even for simple low-paid jobs or short internships. She had felt as if she were on trial. Nonetheless, she recognised that it was necessary, because of the competition for jobs and the demands of selection.

Some informants raised the issue of the exploitation of young people. Sanna (24, Finland) believed that finding work was more and more difficult, and that it felt as if companies were 'just created to exploit people, like, they are not following the laws, or they find some ways not to'. She added that being a good worker no longer helped to protect one's position, that good workers were no longer rewarded for their work or commitment to a company. She felt people were used and exploited when needed, but discarded when unneeded. Nadège (21, France) and Nicole (21, France) shared the same perspective, feeling that people were used like pawns.

Although the Finnish informants pinpointed negative aspects of the labour market, overall they were more hopeful than their French counterparts regarding their future labour market integration and working life. The French informants who viewed the market negatively still believed they would be integrated into it. However, although some adapted their degrees to market demands in order to increase their working opportunities, they still feared the 'big machine' and the unknown. As mentioned above, Marie (24, France) was frightened by the recruitment system and the pressure put on people to sell their skills, and Caroline (25, France) compared the market to a frightening labyrinth. Alice (23, France) was studying in a vocational higher institution, and was already working part-time as part of her work-based training. Yet surprisingly, she was still afraid of the world of work.

R: What is your vision of the world of work, in general?
I: Well, there are a lot of people around me who don't like it! (…) I think it's a harsh environment. It depends on the occupation, but

in my case, regarding the kind of responsible occupation I'm aiming for, I think it's a rather merciless world. You always need to be rigorous, very professional, and there's always a lot of pressure. (…) It's a merciless [world], (…) a sink-or-swim situation, and there's so much competition too.
Alice (23, France)

The French young women perceived the market as very demanding in terms of qualifications, knowledge and experience, and clearly stated that gaining experience was a problem because internships and training places were difficult to obtain. The labour market was viewed as a big machine that one has to fight one's way into, and once inside it one has to fight again to maintain one's position. For students who are working during gap years or part-time alongside their studies, the school-to-work transition is smoother once they have entered the labour market, as is the case for many Finnish youths. By contrast, those joining the market after the completion of their degree are new entrants, and are therefore more vulnerable to uncertainty, precarity and discrimination from employers. Many French graduates therefore enter badly paid training programmes in order to acquire the experience required by employers and companies, and get involved in work that is below the level of their qualifications (Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques 2007: 20–21; Erhel et al. 2010: 213).

The proportion of women obtaining higher-education diplomas and entering the labour force has greatly increased; however, their integration is horizontal, or in other words, segregated by sector (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 30). Women with less or no education are seriously disadvantaged, and are likely to experience unemployment and precarity. Lower-educated men are losing out too, but not as extensively as women (Baudelot and Establet 2000: 141). According to Alestalo (1991), although the number of women in the Finnish labour force increased considerably between 1970 and 1985, their

proportion in the private sector did not change much. Their numbers rose particularly in the public sector. In addition, within the private sector, women occupied lower-skilled professions, or their proportion rose in professions that were already female-dominated, such as pharmacists, teachers, librarians or social workers. Their number increased throughout the years in previously male-dominated occupations, such as lawyers, university teachers or journalists, but their proportion in these occupations remained significantly inferior to that of men (Alestalo 1991: 24). The labour force is thus concentrated in specific professions according to gender. Men and women hold different kinds of occupational and hierarchical position on the labour market. Horizontal (occupational) and vertical (hierarchical) segregation has diminished, but positions remain divided between men and women in the higher-status occupations. The structure of segregation itself might be changing, with some male-dominated jobs, such as veterinaries or doctors, becoming feminised, but in many sectors segregation continues (Kolehmainen 1999: 8–10, 105–110).

Among 25–64-year-olds in Finland and France in 2008, males dominated in higher working positions, such as lawyers or managers. Among professionals, the number of men and women was fairly even. However, more females than males were in assistant roles, or had a low-skilled (or elementary) occupation (Eurostat 2010a). Osmo Kivinen and Risto Rinne (1996: 302) claim that the divisions between men and women during education are perpetuated on the labour market. Men dominate some sectors and women others, and a larger proportion of women have gained secure occupational status in the wake of the expansion of education. Nonetheless, more women tend to occupy middle-professional levels, while men continue to dominate in higher-status positions.

Compared to older age groups, young people are very likely to have a part-time job, particularly in Finland (see Table 5.1). That might also be because students work part-time. Nevertheless, in both countries, more women than men have part-time jobs, especially in

France. Moreover, while in Finland younger women are more likely than older women to have a part-time job, in France women from both age groups are almost equally likely to do so. More young people have a part-time job in Finland than in France, but the trends are reversed in relation to temporary employment: more French young people have temporary jobs (see Table 5.2). However, this trend is equal among young men and young women in France. In Finland the proportion of young women is higher than men in this category. Concerning the older age group, in both countries more females have fixed-term contracts. This can be related to the types of jobs women perform. Since more females occupy lower-skilled professions – in other words, occupations that are more at risk of restructuring – they are simultaneously more likely to have precarious jobs and temporary contracts. There is a high rate of fixed-term contracts and part-time employment in France, but also a high rate of involuntary part-time employment (Gangl et al. 2003: 281). Many work part-time because they cannot find full-time employment. The 15–24- and 25–29-year-olds with part-time jobs in the two countries gave different reasons for their working conditions in 2007. While the Finns (74% of those aged 15–24, and 60% of those aged 25–29) chose to work part-time because they were in education or training, the French (58% of those aged 15–24 and 56% of those aged 25–29) simply could not find a full-time job (Eurostat 2009d: 121). The same applies to temporary employment: most French young people in temporary jobs could not get a permanent job. Finnish youths either could not find a permanent job or else had chosen temporary work (Eurostat 2009d: 119).

Table 5.1. Part-time employment rates (as percentages of total employment) by gender and age in Finland and France, 2008.

Age	15–24			25–64		
	As percentage of total employment					
Country/Gender	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
Finland	49	26	38	14	6	10
France	33	13	22	29	5	16
EU 27	34	20	26	30	6	17

The data is taken from Eurostat (2010d).

Table 5.2. Temporary employment rates (as percentage of the total number of employees) by gender and age in Finland and France, 2008.

Age	15–24			25–64		
	As percentage of the total number of employees					
Country/Gender	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
Finland	44	35	40	15	8	11
France	53	52	53	12	9	11
EU 27	41	40	40	12	10	11

The data is taken from Eurostat (2010e).

As I explained previously, women tend to work in lower-status occupations than men. The informants in both countries referred to that issue. Elina (26, Finland) did not think that gender made a difference to one's access to the labour market, but pointed out that even in female-dominated professions, such as schoolteaching, it was still men who had access to the highest positions. This phenomenon can be explained by several factors, including difficulties in combining one's family life and professional career. Women with children tend to work less, being either out of work or in part-time employment, for domestic reasons. Motherhood appears to lower one's opportunities to get full-time work, particularly for women with lower-level

qualifications (Joshi and Paci 1997: 37). Combining family and professional life can be challenging for women. Women themselves might take the decision to remain in lower-level positions with fewer responsibilities than their male counterparts, so that they can devote equivalent time to their family. Some informants saw having children as something that would hinder their professional development, and others felt that the market constrained their freedom to both start a family and develop a career. Informants' views were divided on this issue, not between Finland and France, but between those who did and did not think that being a woman made a difference on the labour market.

According to Marie (24, France) and Caroline (25, France), women must prove their value and capabilities twice as much as men, because they have to show that they are able to be both a caring mother and professionally active. Men, on the other hand, only need to demonstrate their professional capabilities. Combining personal and family life with professional life is therefore challenging for women. Sabrina (23, France) was aware of possible discrimination with regard to childbearing.

R: Do you think that being a woman can complicate your future plans? For example, combining family and career?

I: I'll have a civil service occupation, so I won't suffer from discrimination during the hiring process. (…) In the public sector these things don't occur. In the private, it certainly does more. (…) And since I don't (…) want children, for me it won't be an *impairment* [my emphasis]. (…) For women in the private sector, it's more difficult (…) to develop [professionally], (…) be it conscious or unconscious, because (…) when you have children, it's a bit the story of the glass ceiling, you don't necessarily want to move forwards, because it requires further commitment.

Sabrina (23, France)

If you are a young woman applying [for a job], there's always the risk that you're gonna get pregnant, and you know, go home and have children … and it's gonna cost … (…). It's a safer bet [for companies] to hire a young man, (…) 'cause (…) he's not gonna stay at home with the child. (…) Even though they are not allowed to ask if I'm in a relationship or not, (…) if I was single I would probably say it out loud, 'cause I know that it would benefit me.
Piia (24, Finland)

R: Do you think being a woman can facilitate or complicate your life or career plans?
I: Probably it can make it more complicated. (…) And also combining, having kids, (…) this is a really hard question, like 'when is it a good time to have kids?' Because, if you have them right away after your graduation, it's not good for getting a job. (…) It's not very convincing if you have just studied and been at home with the kids.
R: And then after, if you just start working, it's difficult also [to have children].
I: Yeah, if you start working immediately, [then] you might [get] too old to have children! (…) So, that's the thing, you should get a permanent job, but (…) I think some employers are not willing to give you a permanent job, because they think 'Aha, a woman in her 30s and not having kids, so … hmm … she will soon get pregnant!'
Sanna (24, Finland)

Nicole (21, France) joked that young women at job interviews never want to have children. It is not a relevant question during the recruitment process, but it is generally implied. Like Sanna (24, Finland), she added that it was difficult to have children, because during one's studies one is too busy, whereas having a child as soon as one is hired is not a good idea, as women might be made redundant. The only time to have children would thus be around 35–40 years old – which is fairly old, and may even be too late. Having children therefore re-

quires careful planning so that it does not impair one's employability or interfere with career development. At the same time, biological factors also put pressure on women. Choosing a career path puts double pressure on young women, as the job must connect with their identity and personal values but also allow them to balance their dual roles as workers and mothers (Arnett 2004: 149). Current labour market requirements thus leave young women on the horns of a combined personal and social dilemma.

Distance and acceptance

When I asked my informants what they thought about the labour market, how they perceived the world of work, several Finnish and French young women displayed a feeling of distance from or even lack of interest in it. They had participated in the labour market in various ways, but their perception remained abstract and elusive. They had difficulties grasping the concept, yet they were aware of concrete aspects, such as young people's struggles to enter the labour market. Céline (23, France) explained that she had no idea of her future career. She was studying for a Masters, and still had no clear perception of what her early working life would be like.

R: How do you view the beginning of your working life?
I: No idea! I can't even imagine it! I can't do that! No, really, I can't, it's blurred …
Céline (23, France)

R: How do you view the world of work?
I: I know very little about it, to be honest. I view it as something big and something I don't really understand.
R: Even if you have a few experiences?

I: Yes, because my experiences, they are really limited still, and the jobs that I've got are mostly through contacts, I haven't gone and searched for a job, all alone in the world.
      Johanna (26, Finland)

R: How do you perceive the world of work?
I: It's a world that doesn't really interest me!
R: Do you prefer studying?
I: Well, at the moment, I prefer studying. (…) I don't feel that there's anything I'll go into, where I'll feel good … (…) Well, for me, community work for example is a world I'd like to get involved in. (…) At the same time, maybe I'm wrong, but I don't have the feeling that community work really belongs to the world of work.
      Valérie (23, France)

A large proportion of the young women from the two countries had a realistic view of the current economic situation. They showed awareness of the difficulties of labour market integration, unemployment, degree inflation and competition. Nonethelesss, Finnish young women in particular tried to adapt and to respond to current circumstances, and were rather hopeful about their integration into the labour market and future career plans. They emphasised the need to be patient, but retained an optimistic approach. The French young women were also realistic, but took a darker view.

R: How do you view the beginning of your working life, when you finish university?
I: I hope I could get a job in a few months, but I think I might have to (…) go back to the cafeteria for a while, or … be unemployed, 'cause I know it's very hard to get a dream job or something from your own field right away [after graduation]. So I really wanna get it, but I know I have to be patient and not get depressed right away …
      Suvi (25, Finland)

R: How do you view the beginning of your working life, your own integration in working life?

I: My own integration will be hard. (…) It won't be easy, and I'm aware that it will take several years to find my place, so I'm not so stressed about it.
Tuuli (25, Finland)

Caroline's (25, France) vision of the labour market was more pessimistic, but she accepted the situation and had chosen a career path with better future opportunities.

R: How do you view the world of work in general?

I: It's a labyrinth with its opportunities [and] its dead ends. I don't have a ready-made vision of it. I hear what people say, it's quite frightening, but I think that once we're in, we can bend things a little, (…) there are opportunities, we should try to seize them, and adapt.
Caroline (25, France)

Several French informants discussed the uncertain contemporary economic situation, but did not feel personally concerned because of their career choices. This included those who had chosen to become teachers and thus work in the public sector. Teachers in France are employed by the state, and their positions are secure. It is difficult to get through the competitive selective examinations because of the regulation of the teaching staff, but once candidates receive their diploma, they are guaranteed a job as a civil servant. Sabrina (23, France) fell into this category. This young woman was very conscious of the challenges of entering the labour market, but was sure she would find work if she were to fail the competitive selective examinations, whatever she decided to do. Sabrina also mentioned that 'many people do not find work immediately, not because they don't find it, but because they don't look for it!'

Forced versus chosen flexibility

I: The concept of work (…) is changing. (…) Thirty years ago, you
      had this long-time job for life, or at least for the next 10 years. It's
      not quite like that any more. (…) I think the way people see work
      as well, like what they want from it, is changing.
R: Like what do they want, for example?
I: Like, for example, a lot of people seem to like to have flexibility over
      security.
      Päivi (25, Finland)

Surprisingly, some Finnish and French informants saw having a
non-linear working life – in other words, not having the same job
throughout their lives – as a natural aspect of their future working
lives. Rather than seeing this as a problem, they welcomed it. However,
they clearly distinguished between choosing to lead a flexible lifestyle
within a particular field of work and being the victim of restructuring
and precarity and having to take any job.

> Personally, I would be horrified by the idea that I would go to a job
> and stay there for 20 years, in the same place, doing the same thing. So
> I don't mind the fact that it changes, and that I'll only be somewhere
> for a few years and then I'll go somewhere else.
> *Piia (24, Finland)*

Marie (24, France) explained that many people are fearful of the lack
of economic stability and try to resist precarious work. However, at
the same time, people's mentalities have developed alongside the social
context, and many welcome the new conditions and the advantages
they offer.

> To imagine that, today, one might join a firm until the end [of one's
> working life], I think that our mentalities have changed, that we

wouldn't be able to stand that any more, because we would feel …
imprisoned. (…) When [flexibility] is chosen, it's positive, but the
problem is having a precarious job, and in that case we don't choose,
it's imposed upon us. (…) This movement is a good thing if it is
chosen, rather than having to endure it, which unfortunately is the
case for many young people. (…) I don't mind changing jobs, if I
choose it myself rather than having it imposed.
Marie (24, France)

Sabrina (23, France) explained that many students feel the need to
take a break for a few months after graduation and before starting
full-time work. In that case they have chosen to enter a short period
of stasis. However, in most cases this 'choice' is imposed upon them.
They are forced to take a break after their studies, because they simply
cannot find a stable job.

Like an increasing number of young people today, my respond-
ents were no longer seeking lifelong employment, but were seeking
lifelong learning. In any case they were well aware that they could no
longer hope to get a job for life. Rather, they were seeking personal
employability over employment (see Brown and Hesketh 2004: 19).
However, several French informants contested forced flexibility and
imposed geographical mobility. They criticised the constant need to
adapt to economic restructuring and new requirements imposed by
labour market fluctuations, such as imposed geographical flexibility.
The respondents in both countries were clearly fighting to retain
control over both their personal and working lives, rather than having
to follow a path decided by external circumstances.

Irrevocable destiny

The next sections examine two major differences between Finland
and France: the feeling of lack of control over one's own destiny, and

the pessimism regarding labour market integration that is prominent among French respondents. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Alapuro (2005; 2010) argue that there is explicit and implicit social pressure from the hierarchical arrangement of the French education system (see subchapter 4.5). Similarly, Galland argues (2008: 48) that educational qualifications function like titles, rather than constituting human capital that will facilitate entry into the labour market. The education system acts as a social ladder on which levels of attainment are more important than content. This ranking system based on education might contribute to French young people's pessimistic attitudes. They feel trapped within a hierarchical structural system that decides their future and assigns them a social position, with little individual control over one's own destiny (Galland 2008: 48). Young people with few or no qualifications are worse off in terms not only of job opportunities, but also of opportunities to access higher social status. According to Cécile Van de Velde, French youth have the perception that their professional prospects and fate are determined by their level and field of study (cit. Loncle 2008: 122).

Indeed, several French informants mentioned the feeling of being trapped within a particular study and career path once they had committed to a specific curriculum. Audrey (26, France) stressed that her parents' generation had been able to change professional paths easily, without having to restart their studies, while today's young people are compelled to work within the field they initially selected unless they start their studies all over again, which is challenging, especially financially. Nicole (21, France) felt stuck on the path she had entered, and thought that it would be impossible to 'change life' later if she wanted to, because that would entail having to study for a new degree. She pointed out that it was possible to take a risk and change career, but as in a poker game, one could never know what to expect.

Mainly, [before], there were more possibilities to … well, change your life, and simply think, 'I'm gonna start studying again, I'm gonna do something else.' (…) Now (…) I feel that I started off with my studies, and once I'm done, it won't be possible for me to take any time, to study something else, to change direction, because financially it's not possible. (…) We feel stuck, in fact.
Nicole (21, France)

[Before] you could switch jobs more easily, (…) think 'ok, well, after that, I'll change,' while now, once you start off on something, well, here you go! You are off on that, so you'd better have made the right choice!
Alice (23, France)

The feelings of irrevocable destiny were not entirely confined to the French respondents. One young Finnish woman, Emmi (25), was conscious of that phenomenon. She said it was difficult today to change career paths, because of the diplomas that would be required to start working in another field. Like Audrey (26, France), she pointed out that one would need to study all over again. For that reason she felt that young people suffered from the pressure of having to decide at a very young age what they wanted to do later in life. She added that her parents had joined the labour market without thinking that they would be stuck in a particular profession for the rest of their lives, unlike young people today. This view is clearly at odds with the common belief that there are more choices and opportunities available nowadays. Indeed there are, but competition and demands for higher skills have increased too. Consequently, it is more difficult to attain the social positions that are apparently available. Birth may no longer determine one's social status, but individual aptitudes do, as does chance to some extent.

Furthermore, in particular in France, both the education system and the labour market seem to control young people's life paths. To

some degree young people feel that their choices are no longer deliberate. Van de Velde (2008: 139) raised the issue of fear and pressure among young French people, who are afraid of making the wrong choice during their studies, because it determines their future life paths and they will never have another chance. Paradoxically, the fear of precarity generates pressure to make the right decision regarding one's studies and career path from the beginning. Studying for a new degree is very difficult in France, where social conditions do not favour such actions (Van de Velde 2008: 222). Qualifications are competitive tools for social status rather than for jobs (Verdier, cit. Van de Velde 2008: 163). Young French people therefore feel the pressure to choose the 'right' path which will lead them to a secure social rank and a definitive position within the labour market, either as insiders (who have a stable working life) or outsiders (who struggle with precarious working conditions). This is a major difference between Finland and France. In Finland, many students gain relevant professional experience during their studies, and are able to modify their study paths accordingly. The process of labour market integration is therefore smoother. In France, students complete their studies first and then start working life afterwards, when they have little relevant professional practice. That increases their fear of making the wrong choice during their studies. This important issue is examined further in subchapter 5.3.

Pessimism

I: I feel we are all desperate, thinking 'will I manage to find a job with my diploma, will I manage to keep that job, will I retire before I'm 94?' (…) Yeah, I think we'll be the sacrificed generation. (…) And my [80-year-old] grandma reminds me of it regularly. (…)

R: Your grandma?! (…) But in what connection?

I: Well, in relation to work. (…) She told me that in her day (…) we could find work systematically, it wasn't required to leave, to move 300km away to work, [and] we weren't thrown away like an old sock.
Nicole (21, France)

This statement represents a specific feature that emerged among the French respondents: their fatalistic and disheartened feelings about the labour market, and their pessimism and gloom about the future. In a sense, a large number of young people feel betrayed by the current structural system, which cannot keep its promises – such as the promise of access to a decent job and social status – even to those with higher-education qualifications.

Interestingly, the *ESS Round 3 – 2006* presents similar results. Young people aged 20–34 were asked to rate their satisfaction with the state of the economy in their country (at the time of the survey). On a scale from zero to 10 (10 being the best), the mean score was seven among Finnish young people, and four among the French. There was no gender variation, but the difference between the case-countries was apparent. Furthermore, the results among 20–34-year-olds for the statement 'For most people in your country life is getting worse' also showed significant differences between the two countries (see Table 5.3): Finnish young men and women are noticeably more optimistic than their French counterparts.

Table 5.3. Satisfaction with the state of the country among 20–34-year-olds by gender in Finland and France, 2006.

Satisfaction level	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
'For most people in your country life is getting worse'										
As percentage of the corresponding age group										
Country/ Gender	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Finland	2	1	11	13	36	29	**46**	**54**	5	2
France	32	25	**49**	**51**	12	18	7	6	1	0

The data is calculated on the basis of the ESS Round 3 (2006).

The *European Youth in a Global Context 2007* study examined similar issues among 16–29-year-olds. On the basis of these results, Galland (2008: 45–46) argues that the level of youth unemployment and the lack of opportunities on the labour market generate great pessimism among French youth. Many young people have very little faith in the future, and have fatalistic perceptions of life opportunities. No comparisons between young men and women are available, but the difference between Finland and France is again evident, as illustrated in Table 5.4. Finnish young people are not entirely optimistic; however, the French are clearly more cynical.

Table 5.4. Attitudes towards the future and life opportunities among 16–29 -year-olds in Finland and France, 2007.

Attitudes towards the future and life opportunities (agreeing with the statements)	Finland	France
	As percentage of the corresponding age group	
My future looks bright	43	26
Society's future looks bright	18	4
People in my country have the opportunity to choose their own lives	50	26
I have complete freedom and control over my life	38	22
I am confident I will have a good job in the future	38	27

The data comes from Galland (2008: 46). The percentage of agreement is calculated on the basis of the persons who gave the scores six or (seven on a scale from one to seven).

Mills and Blossfeld (2005: 7–8) distinguish two job systems, in which young people have different employment relationships: the 'closed job system' and the 'open job system'. Closed job systems are dual systems that oppose a core of protected workers against a marginal group of peripheral workers. The 'insiders' are highly protected against uncertainty and market restructuring, with permanent job contracts, while the 'outsiders' struggle with precarious and rigid working conditions, and are offered access to the market through training and part-time and/or temporary employment (Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques 2007: 16; Mills and Blossfeld 2005: 8; Tirot 2008: 69). Entering the labour market and becoming an 'insider' within this system is difficult. France has a closed job system, with a high degree of employment protection and centralised wage negotiation procedures for certain social groups, and various forms of flexible and unstable jobs that are highly concentrated among other social groups, such as women and young people (Galland 2008: 47).

In the 'open job system', economic security is low for most professions, precarious employment and market flexibility are more widespread among all social groups, integration into the labour market is relatively easy, and the job mobility rate is relatively high. Finland has an 'open job system'. In this system, which is also adopted by liberal countries, job protection is weak and flexibility is high for the whole population. However, in Scandinavian societies, although flexibility is relatively high, there is a strong level of job protection, with policies and services to help the unemployed. Scandinavian societies offer protection to individuals rather than employment, while France tends to protect employment rather than workers (Galland 2008: 47). The employment-centred French regime provides a high level of protection to the unemployed; however, this protection is selective. The provision of benefits follows principles of eligibility, especially previous employability. This amplifies the division between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The universalistic Finnish regime provides comprehensive coverage, and benefits are offered on the basis of individualised rights (Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques 2007: 49–51; Gallie and Paugam 2000: 6). Individual European countries' job systems vary according to differences in national welfare regimes and societal frameworks.

Conclusion: Paradoxical labour market

The labour market appears to be a paradoxical sphere for young people, especially for young women. It is demanding in terms of individual competences, requires individual flexibility and adaptability, and imposes a certain lifestyle on the basis of those prerequisites. Integration into the labour market varies according to economic fluctuations and levels of employment and unemployment. In the case of my informants, it seems that French young women expected to experience more difficulties in accessing the labour market after

graduation than did the Finns. They anticipated a situation of 'the self against the labour market'. By contrast, Finnish young women had become acquainted with the labour market before and during their studies. Their labour market integration was already underway, leading to a situation of 'the self as part of the labour market'. This is also encouraged by the structure of the education system (as discussed in Chapter 4).

Nevertheless, in both countries, young women faced a similar dilemma concerning the combination of having a professional career with starting a family. The labour market and the social sphere demand opposite achievements from women. The respondents felt that the market condemned women who wanted to have children and to dedicate time and attention to their families. At the same time, social and family policies strongly encourage women to have children, because of the incentive to raise national fertility rates. In addition, experts' discourses indicate disapproval of young women for their increasing postponement of childbirth, which is perceived as a deliberate attempt by young women to prolong their youth. From a personal and biological point of view, most young women wish to have children, which is a natural aspect of human life. However, the economic sphere appears to take control even of that part of life. Nonetheless, the female population has absorbed postmodern values and the right to choose economic independence and professional success. Young women seem trapped between market demands, increasingly postmodern personal attitudes and desires, and family values. The combination of these features requires very tight negotiations at the individual level.

5.3 The Finnish and French Labour Markets: Restructuring and Integration Policies

The previous subchapters discussed young women's perceptions of the labour market, how they viewed their entry into the labour market, and what they expected from their working lives. This section recontextualises the informants' opinions in the light of the current socio-economic situation regarding young people's integration into the labour market in the two countries.

The contemporary socio-economic context

Advanced societies' labour markets have undergone considerable restructuring since the 1960s, as mentioned in subchapter 3.1. Those born after the Second World War have benefited from the 30 prosperous years of development between 1945 and 1975. By contrast, today's young people struggle with the discrepancy between conventional ideologies and the actual attainability of the successful financial and professional life that those ideologies promise (see Chauvel 2002). The recent structural dilemmas produced by the economic downturn have greatly contributed to young people's difficulties in joining the active workforce, gaining independence and establishing a stable lifestyle. Economic restructuring has disrupted post-war patterns of transition. Since getting stable work is no longer guaranteed, access to further life stages, such as attaining financial independence and starting a family, is simultaneously compromised. As has been pointed out (Walther et al. 2006: 41), the flexibilisation and restructuring of the market has led to a destandardisation of young people's transition to adulthood, citizenship, biographical individualisation and subjectivity. Finland and France have reacted to these transformations and attempted to help young people enter working life by means of different measures.

Financial support and integration measures

There are several different subsidies and support systems in Finland and France as part of those countries' strategies to help young people enter the labour market, or to compensate for their lack of opportunities to do so. In this section I will concentrate on the support provided to young people and students graduating from secondary or tertiary education. The support schemes offered to young people in the two societies follow a similar model to the countries' education systems: they are based on different founding ideologies with regards to the distribution of support (see Synopsis 5.1).

Synopsis 5.1. Financial support apparatuses for young people.

FINLAND	FRANCE
Universalist General support scheme aimed at all individuals	**Selective** Different support schemes directed at different social groups
Decentralised Support distributed by the state, provinces and municipalities	**Centralised** Support based on state implementation

In Finland, the government subsidises local authorities and municipalities, which in turn implement and provide services to young people. Finnish municipalities are self-governing and can make their own decisions concerning youth work. The state supports municipalities through special funds (Allianssi 2010). According to the Youth Work Act 1995 (the act preceding that issued in 2006) (Finlex 1995), 'The general administration and development of youth work shall be the responsibility of the *Ministry of Education*. In the provinces, the promotion of youth activities and the development of young

people's living conditions shall be the responsibility of the *provincial state offices*' (my emphases). Responsibility for youth work and youth integration measures is thus shared among the government, local authorities and youth organisations (Finlex 1995). This set-up is similar to that of the education system, in which the Ministry of Education issues the core curriculum, but municipalities and schools retain autonomy regarding the transmission of the syllabus.

Youth support, funds and integration measures are more centralised in France, and like the education system are exclusively directed by the state. There are also a number of national and local networks (mainly apprenticeship programmes) that help young people to enter the labour market, although these are still based on the state's initial provisions.

Finnish students who finish school or university and do not yet have work are eligible for different types of allowance. Basic Unemployment Allowance and the Labour Market Subsidy are provided by Kela, the social insurance institution of Finland. In order to be eligible for Basic Unemployment Allowance, applicants must be aged 17 to 64, be seeking a full-time job, and have worked for at least eight months during the two years preceding unemployment. The allowance is paid for a maximum of 500 days. Those who are still unemployed after that period and the long-term unemployed can claim Labour Market Subsidy. This benefit is also aimed at new entrants onto the labour market, and at unemployed people who lack recent work experience. The benefit is means-tested and can be decreased if the unemployed person shares a household with a working person, such as a spouse or parent (Kela 2009–2011).

Young people in Finland can also participate in various measures for labour market integration and promotion offered by the Employment and Economic Development Office (Työ- ja elinkeinotoimisto 2010a). Job-seekers receive the unemployment benefit to which they are entitled through their participation in labour market integration measures such as training, self-directed study, and various

work experience schemes. Labour market training is funded by the labour administration and intended for unemployed job-seekers. Unemployed people who wish to engage in self-directed study receive financial assistance to complete the programme. However, in order to be eligible, job-seekers must be over 25 when starting the course, and must study full-time (Kela 2009–2011).

The main goal of the Finnish Youth Act (issued in 2006) is to finance youth work, support systems and policies. Local authorities and youth organisations receive funds to initiate activities and services for young people (Opetusministeriö 2006). The 2006 Youth Act applies to young people under 29. The Ministry of Education supports youth work by local authorities and municipalities, youth and youth work organisations, and all kinds of projects related to youth and youth work, such as youth workshops or local youth councils. Youth workshops offer training and work experience to unemployed young people under the age of 25. These are financed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour (Opetusministeriö 2006). The *Sanssi-kortti* (Sanssi Card) is a new piece of legislation that was implemented in spring 2010 to respond to recent economic fluctuations (Sanssi 2010). This card is aimed at 18–29-year-olds who have recently graduated and are registered as unemployed. It provides them with greater opportunities to find their first job after graduation by giving employers incentives to hire them, as the state makes a contribution to salary expenses of €550 per month for 10 months (Työ-ja elinkeinoministeriö 2010b).

The French scheme offers a variety of support measures. New entrants on the labour market are not entitled to the *Pôle Emploi* (Employment Centre) unemployment benefits, since one must have worked for a minimum of four months in order to receive the allowance. However, they can join a number of programmes for labour market integration. The *Contrat d'Insertion dans la Vie Sociale* (CIVIS, Social Life Integration Contract), created in 2005, is not in itself an employment contract, but is a measure to help obtain a permanent

employment contract. It lasts for a year and can be renewed. It is aimed at young people aged 16 to 25, particularly those who have no diploma or only minimum qualifications and who experience great difficulties in entering the labour market. The CIVIS is distributed by local offices of the PAIO (*Permanence d'Accueil, d'Information et d'Orientation* – Information and Orientation Service-Provider Agency), which was established especially for young people and provides assistance with social and labour market integration. Young people receive a small sum of money each month (Ministère du Travail, de la Solidarité et de la Fonction Publique 2010b). The FIPJ (Fonds pour l'Insertion Professionnelle des Jeunes – Funds for Youth Professional Integration) was created in 1994. It provides services to students to help them integrate into the labour market (Demuynck 2009).

There are various state measures and funds for businesses that employ young people, and new apprenticeship measures for youths aged 16–25 that aim to facilitate their integration into the labour market (Ministère du Budget, des Comptes Publics et de la Réforme de l'Etat 2010). *Contrats Aidés* (Assisted Contracts) are aimed at young people and those who have difficulties entering the labour market. These contracts increase recipients' employability by subsidising employers' salary expenses. The state provides employers with financial support to reduce the costs of recruitment, so as to encourage them to train and employ young people (INSEE 2009b). The *Contrat d'Accompagnement dans l'Emploi* (CAE, Employment Assistance Contract) was established in 2005 as a replacement for the 1990 *Contrat Emploi Solidarité* (CES, Employment Solidarity Contract). It is an assisted contract for the public sector only. Employers receive bonuses, exemptions or assistance with training when hiring an unemployed person (Le Site Officiel de l'Administration Française 2010). The *CAE Passerelle* (CAE Footbridge) is aimed at young people aged 16–25 to help them get training, initial work experience or reorientation (Ministère du Travail, de la Solidarité et de la Fonction Publique 2009). The *Allocation d'Aide au Retour à*

l'Emploi (ARE, Employment Reintegration Assistance) is for those reaching the end of their employment contracts. One must have worked for a minimum of six months to be eligible, and must be seeking a full-time job. The amount varies according to one's previous salaries. The allowance is based on the number of months in employment before the end of the employment contract (Ministère du Travail, de la Solidarité et de la Fonction Publique 2010). These measures aim mainly to support young people who have few or no qualifications or are unemployed.

The road to integration into working life

Table 5.5 shows that more young women than men are in higher education in both countries, and that more young men are in employment. Unemployment rates are somewhat similar between the genders. The major differences are between the countries rather than the genders. More young people are unemployed in France. That might be explained by the larger number of 25–29-year-olds in Finland who are still in higher education and work part-time alongside their studies. Also, more young people go into tertiary education in Finland than in France. The divergence is even greater among 25–29-year-olds. This is because higher education lasts longer in Finland than in France (see Chapter 4). Moreover, the student age during the first year of study is much lower in France (19 years old) than in Finland (23 years old); thus French students graduate at a younger age (Eurostudent Report 2005: 28). However, the same number of 25–29-year-olds have a job in both countries. Many Finnish students work part- or full-time alongside their studies. In 2007, the age at which at least 50% of young people were already on the labour market was 19 in Finland and 21 in France (Eurostat 2009d: 107).

Table 5.5. Higher-education rates (2007) and employment and unemploy-
ment rates (2008) by gender among 20–24- and 25–29-year-olds in Finland
and France.

Age groups	Finland						France					
	20–24			25–29			20–24			25–29		
Gender	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T
	As percentage of the corresponding age group											
Higher Education	44	36	40	23	22	23	32	26	29	6	5	6
Employment[1]	62	68	65	74	84	79	49	55	52	73	85	79
Unemployment	11	12	12	7	6	7	16	18	17	10	9	9

[1] Includes full-time and part-time employment.

This data is taken from Eurostat (2009a; 2010b; 2010f). According to Eurostat defini-
tions, employed persons are those aged 15 and over who performed work, even for just
one hour per week, for pay, profit or family gain during the reference week. The data
does not include young people who are both out of education and out of employment
or unemployment schemes (for instance, young women on maternity leave).

According to the *Youth in Europe* report (Eurostat 2009d: 209–210),
more French youths aged 24 and 29 were economically active in 2007
than Finnish youths (Table 5.6). However, only a small proportion
of French young people (10% of those aged 24 and 29) were com-
bining their studies with full- or part-time jobs, unlike the Finns,
who tended to study and work at the same time (35% and 26% of
24- and 29-year-olds). Thus more Finnish youths were in education,
but they were also economically active. Combining education and
work is more common in Finland than in France.

Table 5.6. Studying and working arrangements of young people aged 24 and 29 in Finland and France, 2007.

	Finland		France	
Age	24	29	24	29
Studying and working arrangements				
	Percentages			
Working (and not in education or training)	43	61	69	78
In education or training and not working	15	4	10	2
Combining studying or training and working	35	26	10	11
Inactive (and not in education or training)	7	9	10	9
Total	100	100	100	100

The data comes from Eurostat (2009d). Gender comparison was not available.

Most of my Finnish informants had a part-time job at the time of interview. In France, some were working part-time, some did not work, and some were receiving training as part of their work-based studies. Most of the Finnish respondents had also taken gap years during which they had worked, and had thus gained work experience and a foothold in the labour market. The French respondents pointed out the problem of their lack of relevant experience when seeking work, and noted that employers discriminate particularly against university graduates because they lack employment skills. Many students work part-time and/or during the holidays, but do so in low-skilled jobs that are often irrelevant to their studies. In Finland, a large proportion of young people stay in higher education and training until their late 20s or early 30s, but they often work at the same time. By contrast, French young people remain in full-time education until their early or mid-20s, and start working afterwards (Couppié and Mansuy 2003: 84).

Finnish young people thus experience a gradual transition to the labour market, especially those who work in connection with their studies. This model appears to be part of the national educational culture, and is embedded in university education (Kivinen and Nurmi

2003: 92, 97). Drawing on the 1999 *Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Europe* (CHEERS) survey, Osmo Kivinen and Jouni Nurmi (2003: 94) found that almost 30% of Finnish students found work after graduation without having to look for it, whereas only 12% of French graduates were in the same position. In their ongoing study, Kivinen and Nurmi (2011) show that French university students start their studies between the ages of 18 and 20, while Finns do so between 18 and 22 on average. French students generally need five years to complete their studies, and Finnish students up to six years. However, French students need more time after graduation than Finns to attain a position on the labour market that matches their qualifications (at Masters level). French graduates' economic position remains imbalanced in this way for more than three years, whereas Finns find a relevant position more than a year after graduating. French young people on average are aged 28 when they start working in a job related to their studies, and Finns aged 30. Although Finnish young people enter university at an older age, and study for longer, they experience faster integration into the labour market.

The youth unemployment rate is lower in countries where young people's integration into the labour market starts before they complete their studies, as in Scandinavia (Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques 2007: 20–21). Finnish graduates have an advantage when they enter the labour market, as they have had time to accumulate both theoretical and practical skills. Indeed, my Finnish informants felt more confident than the French about the start of working life.

> I have experienced work, (…) I've had three years of only working life, I've already tried it, so it doesn't seem so scary, because I kind of know what it's like.
> *Anna (28, Finland)*

Tiia (26, Finland) too had already worked, and was looking forward to starting working life and moving on. She was not afraid of the

transition to working life, because she had always managed to find work. Emmi (25, Finland) was confident about getting work because she had previous experience related to her studies, which she had obtained during a gap year and in part-time jobs during her studies. The French young women who planned to become teachers felt confident about getting work once they had passed the difficult selective examinations, since teachers' positions are guaranteed by the state and belong to the 'insider' group.

Education increases one's chances on the labour market, but it no longer guarantees one's integration or the attainment of one's preferred job. Young people are required to gain additional individual capital in order to stand out from the crowd. To secure an advantage they need extra competitive skills, and often these come from work experience and familiarity with the labour market (Kivinen and Silvennoinen 2002). Sue Heath (2007) argues that gap years are increasingly a means of 'gaining the edge' over other students. During gap years, young people gain life experience and relevant personal attributes. They acquire greater maturity too. In short, gap years can become a new competitive tool on the labour market.

Minna Viuhko (2006: 56–57) found that 27% of Finnish students had a job related to their studies, 19% had one that was quite connected, and 21% had one that was connected in some respects. Thirty-five per cent worked in areas unrelated to their studies. Students gave two main reasons for working during their studies. Financial motives were the main reason, either to afford to live, or simply to improve their lifestyle. The other reason was to gain work experience, essentially relevant practice. Some students forge connections and plan to remain in the same workplace once they graduate. They prepare their labour market integration in advance, so as to already be 'insiders' in the market upon entry.

Antero Puhakka, Juhani Rautopuro, and Visa Tuominen (2010: 49) claim that two thirds of Finnish graduates have already accessed working life while studying. The transition from school to work there-

fore occurs during studies, rather than following a clear-cut pattern as seems to be the case in France. The *Aarresaari Network* (Academic Career Service) conducted a national survey in 2006–2007 among Finnish students who had graduated in 2001 and 2002, and analysed their integration into the labour market. The results indicate that the transition from school to work is shorter in Finland than in the rest of Europe. One third of graduates had been unemployed after graduation, with a median length of three months among vocational graduates and six months among university graduates. Eighty-three per cent of graduates were employed five years after they graduated. About 2% were unemployed, 2% had returned to education, and 10% were on maternity leave. The transition was slightly smoother for vocational graduates. Indeed, the informants themselves had pointed out that integration into the market was more difficult for university graduates (Puhakka et al. 2010; Sainio 2008).

An equivalent study was conducted in France by the *Centre d'Etude et de Recherches sur les Qualifications* (CEREQ). This was the *Génération 2004* survey, which analysed higher-education graduates' integration into the labour market between 2004 and 2007. After three years of working life, 74% of them were employed (including part-time and temporary employment), 8% were unemployed, and 7% had returned to education or training (Calmand et al. 2009: 18). However, as in Finland, graduates from vocational institutions had entered working life more easily, and had gained better-remunerated jobs. The unemployment rates were similar for those with a Doctorate or a short professional degree. Graduates from *Grandes Ecoles* were clearly in better positions. Many university students also obtained jobs in the public sector. The higher the diploma, the better the chances of obtaining a white-collar job. However, except in the cases of graduates from *Grandes Ecoles*, high diplomas did not necessarily guarantee better access to permanent jobs. More than 70% of young graduates (including those from all types of institutions) obtained permanent positions, with students from *Grandes Ecoles* being at a

clear advantage. The situation was different just after graduation: more young people had a part-time or temporary job. Moreover, depending on professional field, more highly educated young women than young men had temporary jobs. The gap was wider among lower-educated youths. The same situation applied with part-time work (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications 2008; Joseph et al. 2008).

In relation to professional skills acquired during university education, 69% of Finns (with a variation between university and vocational students) compared with 28% of French respondents stated that they could make great use of the knowledge acquired during their studies in their present job (Puhakka et al. 2010: 50). The difference is noteworthy. It also corresponds to the views of the French informants', who described the French university system as too theoretical and not adapted to the labour market's requirements. According to Kivinen and Nurmi (2003: 100), after graduating, a large proportion (65%) of Finnish graduates had found a job in their own field of study, 20% had found one in a related field, and 15% had found one in a different field. In France, fewer than 30% of graduates had obtained work related to their initial field of study, 45% had obtained one in a related field, and more than 25% had obtained one in a different field. This varied according to the fields of study. Finnish students felt that their curriculum prepared them well to enter the market, in contrast with the French, who felt that only some of the skills they had accumulated could be applied in their professional life.

Conclusion: Smoother versus rougher transition

In both countries, the state provides support and integration measures for young people. However, as with the higher-education systems, there are contrasts in the provision of those measures and the ideolo-

gies that underpin them. In addition, young French people seem to be at greater risk of unemployment, and to have more difficulties in entering the labour market. This results largely from the organisation of the countries' higher-education systems. Finnish students start to enter working life before and/or during their studies, and thus experience a smoother transition when they graduate. By contrast, the French go through higher education, graduate, and then attempt to enter the labour market. In that sense, French youths are at a disadvantage, because their position is that of new entrants. The transition in Finland results from a combination of practical experience and theoretical knowledge, which makes it smoother. The transition in France is more traditional, with the spheres of education and working life being separated, but entry into the labour market is more chaotic. The informants' perceptions of their own transition to the labour market clearly reflected these features.

5.4 Two Different Paths to Integration

Postmodern ideologies, as well as feminist principles, have been absorbed into the informants' values and attitudes towards work. Rather than seeking mere monetary reward, Finnish and French young women alike expected something more from their professional lives. Their expectations and values were also influenced by their position as highly educated individuals, and by their gender. Self-fulfilment, self-development and a purpose in life were the main things the respondents expected from working life. They wanted to have a job and be financially independent, but above all their profession had to be related to their personal passions and interests. It also had to conform to their personal values and ethics: for instance, the company they would choose to work for should be environmental

friendly. Increasingly, the public (or work) and private (or personal) spheres are merging, with the two sharing similar principles and following a similar ethos.

In relation to the labour market itself, the respondents had a rather critical stance towards it. They felt that young people's integration into working life was being compromised by new sets of demands and requirements. For instance, people are constantly being pushed to acquire additional skills and display high-level competences. The labour market was perceived as being hostile towards young people, and to women in particular. The informants clearly felt that women had to fight harder than men for their positions in the job market. This is because of traditional ideologies that generate the idea that women are not as skilled as men, or that they belong to the private sphere. Therefore they have to prove their professional abilities more than men. However, most young women hope to become mothers. This adds to the pressure on young women to demonstrate their ability to be both a capable mother and a competent member of the labour force. Combining professional activities and family life is one of the biggest challenges faced by contemporary young women. The informants from both countries contested the situation, especially discrimination by employers against childless young women during the recruitment process. Nevertheless, they were aware that women themselves might slow down their own career development in order to focus on their families. New opportunities for women have emerged alongside the postmodern and feminist movements. However, they have generated new dilemmas for and expectations by women. Achieving financial independence, developing a professional career, starting a family and attaining self-fulfilment are ideological demands that put pressure on young women and require constant negotiation, at both the individual and the social level.

Finnish young women were conscious that young people and young women face difficulties in entering the labour market, but they remained rather confident about their access to a stable working life.

They knew that it would require time and perseverance, but since they had already obtained work experience before or during their studies, they also knew what to expect from the labour market. Some had had jobs related to their studies, which increased their employability and thus their chances of integration. The French respondents were much more pessimistic concerning their integration into and futures on the job market. They felt that the state of economy in France was deleterious, and they were concerned at the lack of opportunities even to enter the labour market, let alone to obtain a stable job. Those destined to work in the public sector would be in a safer position. However, even those who had obtained some work experience in their field of study remained sceptical. In addition, they had the impression that their destiny lay outside their own control. They explained that once one has begun a study curriculum leading to a specific career path, it is almost impossible to change direction. This increased their feelings of mistrust and cynicism about the future. These perceptions among Finnish and French respondents were not peculiar to my informants, but matched national and international data from surveys on these specific questions.

The differences between Finnish and French young people in their opinions and attitudes towards the labour market are rooted in the organisation of their higher-education systems. The previous chapter (Chapter 4) investigated the different ideologies that underpin those systems and influence their functioning. The analysis suggested that the Finnish university system was like a bridge leading young people onto the labour market, while the French education system resembled a free-standing tower, acting independently of the labour market. According to the findings from my informants and from previous studies, integration into the labour market is more difficult for new market entrants in France. The reason for this is precisely that they are new entrants. The spheres of higher education and working life are extremely separate in France, whereas they tend to cooperate in Finland. A large proportion of Finnish students work during their

studies, and do so in jobs that are more or less relevant to their studies. Many French students work too; however, those who do not follow a work-based training curriculum often work in odd jobs unrelated to their studies, just to earn a living. Studies last longer in Finland, and many students claim that this is because they work at the same time. However, their integration into the labour market is faster and more relevant once they graduate. This is thanks to the professional experience they have accumulated during university life. In France, students graduate at a younger age than do Finns, but their path to integration into the labour market is more arduous and takes longer. They are more vulnerable to unemployment and work precarity too. In the end, they attain a stable working life at about the same age as Finnish university graduates do. Furthermore, feelings of irrevocable destiny were stronger in France. Finnish informants did not mention feeling stuck on a specific path by the structural apparatus of the labour market or education system as much as the French did. This inevitably raises questions about the genuineness of the freedom of choice and opportunities that postmodernity seems to offer.

Higher education and the transition to adulthood seem to take longer in Finland, but students are better prepared both individually and professionally when entering the market. French students follow a shorter and more straightforward transition, in which they first study and graduate, and then enter the labour market. However, they struggle more than the Finns during their integration process once they have complete their studies, as they are not as well prepared prior to entry. Current leaders' and experts' discussions strongly criticise the prolongation of the transition to adulthood. The phenomenon is perceived as something that is negative and harmful to society. Governments attempt to shorten the transition to adulthood and to control transitional patterns in line with those of the previous generation, which were shorter and more linear. For instance, the Finnish government is trying to do away with gap years and reduce study time, in order to mould the Finnish higher-education system

according to the requirements of the Bologna process (see Chapter 4). That would mean less time for students to work during their studies, and less accumulation of relevant professional experience. As a result, Finnish students' entry into the labour market might become more chaotic, like that of French graduates.

Integration into the wider socio-economic structure is the goal of every individual. But is the method or time taken by young people to achieve this really a problem? The transition might not actually take longer than it did before, but might simply be different, involving a mixture of features such as studying and working at the same time, rather than following clear-cut patterns. 'Which type of transition is more beneficial to young people today?' is a more pertinent question that youth experts might wish to tackle, rather than focusing entirely on the lengthening of the transition.

6.

BECOMING INDEPENDENT

Becoming independent, particularly in terms of residential independence, is compromised by inadequate integration into the labour market and a lack of suitable housing (see Bradley and Van Hoof 2005; Jones 1995). The previous chapter (Chapter 5) examined the difficulties young adults face in obtaining a stable job after finishing their studies, and the period of precarity they might experience. In such cases they might remain dependent on their parents for longer. Depending on the family's socio-economic background, parents are still a safety net for such young people (see Arrnett 2004). In some countries, such as France or Mediterranean countries, the principles and measures of welfare regimes presume parental support for young adult children (see Bradley and Van Hoof 2005). The literature often states that young adults today live in the parental home for longer than the previous generation. Both economic and cultural changes have contributed to this process. Today, in numerous cases, the re-

lationships between parents and adult children rest on companionship rather than hierarchy. This encourages young people to remain at home for longer (see Heath and Cleaver 2003; Holdsworth and Morgan 2005).

Finland and France have different types of welfare regime, and thus provide different types of support. France's ideologies privilege the family unit, while Finland's privilege individuals. The variation in support distribution affects young people's transitions to an independent lifestyle. However, their ability to obtain a stable job after graduation has an even greater influence on their ability to obtain independent accommodation and start a family. Young people's living arrangements have been analysed by youth experts in recent decades, because young people increasingly seem to live in the parental home for longer and to delay starting a family. However, becoming independent is not only a question of one's personal preferences. Being able to afford one's own accommodation is at the heart of the issue. This rests on one's ability to access an adequate, stable job. Starting a family falls within the same dynamic: it is necessary to obtain permanent employment with a suitable salary. It also depends on welfare ideologies. Family-friendly policies might encourage young women to start a family.

In the present study, the concept of independence refers to two characteristics. First, it involves the achievement of residential independence and leaving the parental home, for instance when going to university. Second, it encompasses financial independence and the means employed by the informants to reach that status. Is it possible in practice to become both residentially and financially independent while one is a student? Achieving residential and financial independence raises the issue of starting a family, in terms of both one's opportunities and also one's desires to do so. The following subchapters discusss young women's plans for these issues after graduation. Are they planning to concentrate on developing their careers, or on starting a family – or both?

6.1 Independence or Semi-Independence?

Most of the young academic women I interviewed lived independently. They had left home after finishing secondary school, either to study or to work during their gap year(s). They also tried to be financially autonomous, and used different means to achieve this goal. Most of the Finnish young women received a state study grant and/or worked alongside their studies. The French received financial support from their parents and/or worked too. The respondents had access to different types of financial resources to enable their autonomy, depending on their country of origin. Nevertheless, there were convergences in their patterns of leaving home. Divergences appeared among the young women in general, rather than between the case-countries. While some young women emphasised living in their own accommodation, settling down and starting a family, the others did not attach much importance to having permanent accommodation or starting a family, as they expected to lead a more flexible lifestyle.

Living arrangements and parental support

The Finnish informants all lived in shared flats, either with their partners or with friends. Most lived in privately rented flats, some in flats belonging to TOAS, the student housing organisation in Tampere (*Tampereen seudun opiskelija-asuntosäätiö* – Tampere Student Housing Foundation). Respondents in France lived in privately rented apartments. Most lived with their partners, some on their own, some in shared accommodation, and one with her parents. The main reason why Finnish respondents had left home was to study, or to work (in Finland or abroad) if they had taken gap years. Most had left home after secondary school, at age 19 or 20. Many had come from different cities, but those from Tampere had also been able to move away

from home, because they had access to student accommodation. In France almost all of the respendents had left home straight after secondary school, at 17 or 18, in order to study in different cities. They had thus been slightly younger than the Finnish young women when they left home. The respondents in both countries were younger than the average age at which young people leave home, which in 2007 was 22 and 23 for Finnish women and men respectively, and 23 and 24 for French women and men (Eurostat 2009d). In France, those studying in the same city stayed at their parents'. At the time of the interviews, one young woman was living in the parental home. However, she had moved out early to study abroad, had returned home to continue studying in the same city, and was about to move again to complete her studies in another city. A few other French respondents had also experienced such non-linear residential transitions during their studies.

Among my informants, most of the Finns received a student grant and worked alongside their studies. They were fully independent of their parents. Some stated that their parents helped them occasionally to buy expensive goods, and that they could have money if they asked for it. Only one received a small amount of money on a monthly basis. Most French respondents received financial support from their parents, and some had part-time jobs. Some received significant parental financial support, and some only partial support. None received a study grant, but they had housing allowances, the amount depending on their income. One young woman no longer received parental help. She worked part-time as part of her work-based curriculum, and was thus fully independent financially. Almost all the French young women explained that without their parents' help they could not have pursued their studies, or perhaps could have pursued only a short course. Some, like Marie (24, France), stated that they would have tried to work alongside their studies, which the organisation of the university system makes very difficult because it requires daily attendance at many courses (see Chapter 4). Parental support had

enabled them to study and live independently, but unlike the Finnish young women, who no longer needed to rely on their parents, the French young women remained in a state of semi-independence. They were residentially independent, but continued to depend on their parents financially.

Young women knew that their parents would help them if they fell on hard times. The Finnish informants clearly stated that they could ask for help if necessary, but that they did not want to do so. They were proud of being financially autonomous, and Päivi (25, Finland) and others felt that it was normal to be self-reliant. Sanna (24, Finland) mentioned that her parents helped her occasionally, but she managed with her study grant.

R: Have your parents maybe helped you a little bit?
I: No, no. Not at all, actually. (…) You know, they were not very rich themselves. (…) But it's also like, if I'm independent in every other way, I can't expect someone to be financing me, it just doesn't make (…) sense. And since (…) I'm able-minded, I'm able-bodied, I can just work (…) beside my studies. I don't see it as a problem.
Päivi (25, Finland)

R: And do your parents help you?
I: Yes, they do help me, well, basically they help me if I need to buy something, for example, if I want to buy some furniture, (…) but they don't give any specific amount of money monthly.
Sanna (24, Finland)

The French informants received either a small regular sum of money from their parents to top up their income if they worked, or a large sum to cover all their living expenses such as rent, transport costs, food and bills. This is the common trend in France, but they were aware that not all students had the same good fortune; some parents simply cannot afford to support their children. However, several

French informants expressed feelings of embarrassment, pressure and even guilt over their economic dependence on their parents.

> My parents are lovely and I could study until I'm 30, they'd pay for me, but I really feel guilty actually, 'cause I have friends who live in Cité U [university halls of residence], [who do not get any help,] and it feels a bit absurd to live in so much abundance. And also I need to be independent a bit. I mean, like, what I have, I owe it to myself.
> *Sabrina (23, France)*

Nicole (21, France) expressed similar feelings, and found it difficult to have money in her bank account that she had not earned herself. The position of semi-independence generated feelings of subordination and lowliness among these informants. Vincenzo Cicchelli and Claude Martin (2004: 620) confirm that students dislike receiving assistance and try to find ways to limit or avoid it. Natalie (22, France) also felt indirect pressure from her father, who paid for all her expenses. Studying was not the problem, but succeeding was. She had failed to obtain her Bachelors and had to repeat her third academic year. She knew that delaying her entry into the labour market entailed the delay of some of her parents' plans, because of the budget needed for her studies. Financial dependence thus sets up an invisible contract between students and their parents. To some extent parenting continues, and the young person feels obliged to act responsibly, regarding both the management of the money they are provided with and their academic results (Cicchelli and Martin 2004: 620).

Perspectives on property ownership and settling down

The informants had opposing views on ownership and settling down. The differences were not between the case-countries, but across the young women in general. Some wanted to buy their own accommoda-

tion, either a flat or a house, and settle down. This view was stronger among the French respondents. Others did not view property ownership as part of their future plans. They were not sure about acquiring their own accommodation, felt it was not important for them, or simply saw it as a burden. This group also did not know where they wanted to live. They wished to live in different places, even abroad for a while, rather than having to settle down in one particular location. Feelings of imprisonment connected to always having to live in the same place emerged from their discourses. Partnership status did not affect their views. Some respondents were single, some had a partner, and respondents in either category might intend to settle down in a particular area, or to live in different locations with their partner.

Elina (26, Finland) and her husband were planning to buy a flat, and later a house.

> We don't want to take, or we can't take (…) [such a] big loan that we could buy a [house]. And it's not wise in this situation either, to take a really big loan. (…) We start from an apartment and then hopefully someday we'll have [our own house].
> *Elina (26, Finland)*

Tiia (26, Finland) and her partner had a child and lived in student accommodation. They planned to get their own accommodation, but it did not seem urgent.

R: And later on, do you plan to have your own flat or [house]?
I: Well, at the moment, we've been thinking of buying a flat. But, who knows, it's not really a current issue, so it might change.
   Tiia (26, Finland)

Céline (23, France) and Natalie (22, France) wanted to be able to acquire their own houses. They both were from the countryside and

were used to living in a house. For Natalie, having her own accommodation represented a safe haven.

R: Later on, would you like to buy your own flat or house?
I: Yeah, yeah, I'm dreaming about that! Well, ok, it's a dream, having a big house, things … [but] yeah, really invest in a place to live, in fact.
Céline (22, France)

Yes, ideally, yes. If I could buy a house it'd be … (…) I love travelling, but I don't want to settle down somewhere else, actually. I want to settle down in France, even in Lyon; I like this place very much. I want to be able to leave … a month here, a month there, but come back here after.
Natalie (22, France)

Some young women had only vague opinions about whether they wanted their own accommodation. It was not a priority, nor very important to them.

R: Later on, would you like to buy your own flat or house?
I: Maybe later … It's not that … I mean, I don't have a boyfriend and I'm in no hurry to have children, or anything like that. I think I'm gonna be renting for quite a long time. And then, later on, maybe get an apartment or a house. But I can't see that happening in years, so maybe when I'm over 30 or something.
Piia (24, Finland)

Maybe someday, I don't know. It's not, well, not in five, not in 10 years, I don't know, I have something else in my mind, and [a house], it's not (…) the first thing I have to have.
Suvi (25, Finland)

Caroline (25, France) and her husband were conscious that they were paying high rent to a landlord every month, and were thinking that it might be worthwhile to buy a flat and then sell it after a few years. However, they did not know where they wanted to live. They wanted to move abroad for a while. Caroline also said that she did not want to live in the same place all her life. Päivi (25, Finland) also mentioned that acquiring her own flat or house would entail knowing where she was going to work and live, and for how long.

R: And later on, would you like to buy your own flat or have your own house?

I: I guess at some point … [but] considering that I want to work for NGOs, which will never pay me a very good salary, I don't see that coming. (…) On the other hand, I don't know if I will be working in Finland, or if I will be working in the same place for very long.
Päivi (25, Finland)

Some young women even contested the principle of ownership itself, viewed it as a financial burden, or felt alienated from it. Sabrina (23, France) even said that it would tie her down and force her to always live in the same place. Her and Valérie's (23, France) comments conveyed feelings of imprisonment, in contrast with Natalie (22, France), who considered that having her own place would be a secure haven.

I don't know. Buying, no. I'm afraid of everything that can be a ball and chain. It feels that if I buy [accommodation] I'll stay always in the same place all my life. It just doesn't appeal to me.
Sabrina (23, France)

I don't really think about it, but when I do … For example, my sister has bought a house, (…) and I thought 'wow, she bought a house, so she's settling down, she's gonna spend her whole life there.' So,

becoming a property owner, (…) well, [my parents] do not own their house. (…) So, the concept of home ownership, it's completely foreign to me! And that's why it kinda makes me freak out to think, 'wow, I'm gonna buy a house!' (…) No, it's not in my career plans.
Valérie (23, France)

Some Finnish informants mentioned that attitudes towards and experiences of ownership differed greatly between students on the one hand and, on the other hand, young people who were not at university and already worked and/or had a family. Tuuli (25, Finland) explained that most of her friends from Tampere were students who lived in student or shared accommodation. However, her childhood friends who had followed a different path and were already working were thinking of buying, or had already bought, their own houses. In her case, having her own accommodation was not a priority. Elina (26, Finland) also discussed the differences between the residential situations of students and working young people, with working people being more willing to settle down and get their own place. Having a permanent job is therefore a crucial factor not only in one's access to residential stability, but also in one's attitudes towards home ownership.

Among my informants, the issue of housing affordability was not raised systematically. However, Päivi (25, Finland) explicitly stressed that private housing costs were very high and kept on rising. She had personally witnessed the increase in costs when working as a housing officer. Nicole (21, France) stated that a 26-year-old male friend from Paris had wished to move into his own place for several years, but had not been able to afford the high rents during his studies and work training. He was about to get his own accommodation at the time of the interview. He had been working for a year, had a stable job, and had been able to save enough funds to do so.

Conclusion:
Residential independence versus individual independence

There are similar policies in the two countries concerning housing support (see subchapters 5.3 and 6.3). However, entry into the labour market and the distribution of study grants differ in Finland and France. The dynamics of the countries' welfare principles have a strong impact on students' ability to reach fully autonomous status. French students might have residential independence but remain financially dependent on their parents. Finnish youths reach full independence once they leave the parental home, earning a living by working and receiving study grants. Nonetheless, to some extent their autonomy depends on social assistance. The state removes the burden of student financial support from the parents, but what would be the situation if there were no social aid? Are Finnish students truly independent, given that they depend on state support? They might no longer depend on their family, but their autonomous status is intrinsically linked to state assistance.

The informants across both countries expressed two different views on the question of settling down. Some wanted to have their own accommodation and settle down. It provided them with feelings of security. Others had adopted post-materialist views on property ownership and settling down. Owning accommodation was not important for them, and they resisted the implication that they would have to live permanently in a specific location. They chose a more flexible lifestyle that offered opportunities to live in different areas, even different countries. Both views were expressed by single young women as well as those in a relationship.

6.2 Perspectives on the Family

The young women I interviewed were all university students; therefore their priorities focused on graduating, finding a job, and achieving full financial independence. However, the question of starting a family arose strongly during the interviews. The informants talked about their transition from university to working life and developing a career, but also about becoming a mother. Indeed, parenthood is considered one of the key features of the process of transition to adulthood.

Being able to start a family is intertwined with one's abilities to achieve financial autonomy and obtain a stable job. However, combining a professional career and motherhood – in other words, assuming a dual role – can generate dilemmas for young women. The significant transformations in the labour market have given women new openings, choices and life opportunities, such as career opportunities. It has become a norm for young women to work and seek career prospects similar to those of men. Yet at the same time they are expected to retain their conventional role as mothers and family carers, while also being influenced by postmodern, feminist and individualistic values, such as being fully independent and achieving self-fulfilment (see Chapter 5). Today's young women are thus pulled between contradictory individual and social options and expectations.

The informants' discussions around their own roles as future workers and mothers focused on the dual-role dilemma. Some were more career-oriented, and others planned to both work and have children. Opinions were divided, not between the Finnish and French informants, but across them. Some women in both countries wanted a family and wondered how they would lead a career at the same time. Others expected their job schedule to allow them to care for their family. Most of them said that they wanted a family, but only several years later, after they had acquired more life experience and enjoyed the freedom of youth. A few simply did not plan to have a family at all.

Are young women contesting the ideology of marriage?

The respondents had different living arrangements. Some of them were single or seeing someone. Some had been in a relationship for several years and shared a flat with their partner. Informants in both countries had different views regarding the issue of marriage. Two were married, one had a child, some wanted to get married, some had not considered the subject yet, some rejected the institution of marriage, and some simply did not see the necessity of getting married. Most of them fell into the latter category. They told that living together with a partner – in other words, cohabiting – was sufficient. They felt that the ritual of marriage was not necessary, but they highlighted the importance of relationship stability, compatibility with one's partner, and 'finding the right person'.

I: If I would find the man of my dreams, (...) if I'd meet the right person … It wouldn't be a problem to have children and move on quite quickly, but I don't really see that happening. (...) I think it'll take a few years before I start thinking about anything like that.
R: Like getting married? Or would you like/
I: I don't know if I wanna get married! (…) I have nothing against marriage … and I want to have children. So, if I have children it would be a lot easier if we were married with the father of the child, with all the legal stuff. (…) I don't know … Depends whether I find the right person …
Piia (24, Finland)

R: And you'd like to get married?
I: Well, not necessary married, but find a man and have children. I want to have children too, but getting married, it's not like … compulsory.
Maria (30, Finland)

Céline (23, France) hoped to get married in a more traditional and romantic way, following the example of her parents.

> Secretly, yes, I'm dreaming … Yes, to get married … But well, it's because I have the image of my parents, (…) it's a bit of a model for me … It's always been the thing that made me dream …
> *Céline (23, France)*

Sabrina (23, France) had an interesting perspective on relationships. She maintained that having a partner was only of secondary importance in her life; it came after her own priorities and life plans, such as working abroad and travelling. Nadège (21, France) referred to her feminist ideologies, and was against having to prove her love for her partner through a legal contract.

In the 1960s young French people married at an earlier age than their parents had done. From the mid-1970s onwards, the age at first marriage increased again (Galland 1990: 65). This suggests that the age of marriage is older today only by comparison with the baby boomers' generation. Young people nowadays might get married later than those in the 1960s, but not significantly later than the previous generations. Stephanie Coontz (2005) provides a similar interpretation. She argues that rates of marriage in Europe had been lower for 100 years than they became in the 1950s. The new model of marriage established during the 1950s produced a new cultural consensus regarding age of marriage (Coontz 2005: 4). The end of the Second World War reinforced the appeal of the model of marriage in which men are breadwinners and women are homemakers. At the same time, the age of marriage fell and rates of marriage rose. This surge in marriage engendered new patterns (especially in terms of age) and forms (the nuclear family) of marriage that became the new norms in advanced societies. Unlike earlier generations, young people in the 1950s and 1960s did not postpone marriage until they had achieved economic independence. Marriage thus became a strong

marker of adulthood, rather than merely reflecting an adult status that had been already achieved. Changes in the age at first childbirth followed the changes in marriage, with women having children at a younger age than in previous generations (Coontz 2005: 222–227). However, the 1950s ideologies and patterns of marriage started to crumble in the 1970s. Young people began to delay marriage, and to reject the rigid conventions it embodied. They wished simply to live in a relationship rather than in an institution (Coontz 2005: 247).

However, consensual union nowadays cannot be compared with marriage in the early or mid-20th century. Today there are several alternatives to marriage, such as cohabitation. In Finland there are two options: legal union through marriage *(avioliitto)*, and registered partnership or cohabitation *(avoliitto)*. In France there are three options: official union through marriage, official union through PACS (*Pacte Civil de Solidarité* – Civil Union Pact), or registered partnership (cohabitation) (see Chapter 3.2 for more details). The institution of marriage has lost its moral appeal, religious authority and aura in the eyes of many young couples. A large number of people undeniably still wish to marry, but most test the relationship first by cohabiting. On the one hand, cohabitation can be a test for marriage, a trying-out period. In that case, it is a transition to marriage. On the other hand, cohabitation can be a substitute for or alternative to marriage, when cohabiting people commit to the relationship as if they were married (Arnett 2004: 198; Galland 2004: 154). Traditional marriage may have lost its appeal in some instances, but this is not true of union as a loving and intimate relationship between two individuals. In that sense, cohabitation has acquired the same moral value as marriage (Coontz 2005: 278). By contrast with many marriages contracted in the past, most recent unions are based on the feelings of the individuals and the compatibility of the partners. Young people today focus on the ideology of love rather than on the legal marriage contract per se. Consensual unions have become a primary source of emotional support, and the central focus is on individuals' subjective

happiness and their expectations of relationships (Arnett 2004: 98; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 72). Some respondents, such as Piia (24, Finland), explicitly referred to that issue.

Furthermore, the shifts in women's attitudes towards the post-war societal establishment, the women's movement, the rise in female labour force participation, the separation of marriage from childbearing and parenting, and the change in women's social roles and positions from the 1960s onwards have had a substantial impact on the institution of marriage itself. Many young women postpone marriage because they choose to focus on professional goals and self-fulfilment before entering a relationship, including most of my informants. A growing number of them also wish to preserve their professional and social autonomy. Before the 1960s, women's social roles and positions were essentially determined by marriage and motherhood. Today many still define themselves as mothers, but not necessarily as wives or married women. In addition, they define themselves through the professional position with which the labour market provides them. They no longer depend on the institution of marriage to acquire social status. The post-war model of marriage was a system of asymmetrical complementarity, with one active partner and one inactive and dependent partner. The new model is a system of symmetrical association in which each partner is active and autonomous (Galland 2004: 157-158). My respondents unmistakably aimed for the latter type of union.

New priorities: Self-fulfilment

If attitudes towards marriage and relationships have changed for a segment of the population, so have attitudes towards the family. While the majority of young people still wish to start a family, in 2007 more than 30% of young Finnish, French and European people (aged 16–29) were not planning to have children. Similarly, the

majority of young people did not consider the family the foundation of society (see Table 3.7 in subchapter 3.2). Most of my informants were finishing their studies, and they mostly prioritised finding work over starting a family. Their current socio-economic situation greatly influenced their priorities at the time of interview. However, some mentioned that both were equally important to them, and they planned to start working and then to have children soon afterwards. One young woman already had a baby, and was focusing equally on her family and on finishing her studies so that she could start working. Some were single and mentioned that that had had an impact on their decision to concentrate on a professional career. They stressed that if the situation had been otherwise, their opinions about starting a family in the near future might have been different.

Catherine Hakim (2000: 157–168) distinguishes three main patterns regarding family orientation among women. In the first group, some women are family-centred and renounce work in order to care for their family. In the second group, women are work-centred and reject family commitment. These two groups are a minority. Most women belong to the third group: the adaptive women, who combine family and working life. To reconcile the two roles, some choose a job that allows them to spend time with their family, such as schoolteaching, or accept at the outset that their professional career will be a modest one. In terms of Hakim's typology, most of my informants fell into the adaptive category: they planned to combine work and family. Those who did not want children fell into the work-centred category. However, another group seemed to emerge during my analysis. My data is too limited in size to make any generalisations; nonetheless, the issue is worth highlighting. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the respondents stressed that having a job related to their passions was more important than earning a good salary. They wished to achieve financial autonomy, but mainly in order to be able to focus on their personal interests. Salary was not directly mentioned and seemed to

be taken for granted, but it was the basic resource that would allow one to enjoy one's free time.

Emmi (25, Finland) showed strong resistance to the traditional gender role expected of and imposed upon women by the wider social structure. She had other plans for her life.

R: What is your priority between finding a job and starting a family? Or have you started thinking about that?

I: No, 'cause I think it's really like a, I'm kind of … fighting against it, that when you're almost 30 you have to start to think about that: 'I have to own a house, and then I have to own a car, and then I have to have two kids and a dog.' I don't want that kind of things, at least not at the moment, 'cause [mainly], I would like to live for myself and just be free. And then later on, I'll check what happens, but I don't want to hurry with the family. But also, I think work is not that important.
Emmi (25, Finland)

R: What is the priority for you, to start a family or/

I: Ah absolutely not! That, honestly, I really don't want! Since one of my plans is to travel all around the world, I want children, but after! (…) So, as a priority, that's why I want to start working life, because I want a job that'll allow me to save money, so that I can have long-term projects.
Florence (22, France)

In her research with highly educated young people from Helsinki, Kaisa Ketokivi (2004) found that many educated young men and women delay starting a family until their late 20s or early 30s, in order to focus on their personal life. Jeffrey J. Arnett (2004) presents similar results from his informants in North America, who considered the 20s a time for experimentation and the exploration of identity.

Galland (1990) drew comparable conclusions from his research with French youth. A growing number of young people wish to enjoy a free lifestyle before taking on heavy commitments such as starting a family. Experimenting with life is increasingly becoming a norm, and is increasingly socially accepted. In addition, since the 1960s family ties have become increasingly about emotional ties. Partners and children are the centre of care and attention, rather than simply being there because of conventional and biological occurrences.

Audrey (26, France) wanted to pass the competitive selective examinations in order to become a teacher, but was not sure about wanting to work immediately. She still wanted to travel, live abroad for a while, and experience a free lifestyle. Independence, self-fulfilment and enjoyment are becoming more important than working just to earn money. Work must bring meaning to life (see Chapter 5), but the issue of starting a family is also being questioned. Rather than starting a family simply because it is the conventional path and because motherhood is the role and identity assigned to women, some informants were questioning the importance of those things in their lives. Some even rejected them and felt that other paths could provide them with a more appropriate sense of identity. Individualistic values influenced their decisions, but mostly it was a question of what felt right for them. Most stated that they did not feel external pressure regarding their decisions to delay having or to refuse to have children. Others felt some biological pressure, and a few mentioned family and indirect peer pressure. Those who did not want children were not necessarily single. Some were in a stable relationship which they found satisfying and sufficient.

Controlled fertility

Today's young women might still see the family as a strong factor in identity and focus on both family and work. However, some contest

the limitations that a family would impose upon them. The contemporary social context is much more favourable to women's freedom of choice. The shift to postmodern values, attitudes and expectations, both professional and personal, does not necessarily translate into a refusal to procreate and start a family, but the act is more pondered over, evaluated and rationalised (Devienne 2007: 81–82). It has become a choice, and a calculated choice. Some respondents confirmed these views, especially in France.

Marie (24, France) really hoped to have children, but she thought it should be carefully planned, otherwise it might compromise or hinder her life course. She thought that things should come in a logical order, one at a time. Starting a family requires tight negotiations to ensure that career ambitions, personal happiness and the desire to care for one's children are coordinated and do not compromise each other too much. Marie was therefore going to control and decide upon the timing of her fertility.

> I've always thought, first my studies, I finish them, then I find a job, and after, I can think about starting a family. (…) I want to have a family, (…) but I know it requires sacrifices. (…) Even though I want to have a family and children, what has always frightened me is that it might happen during my studies, and that it might hinder my ambitions, and then as a result I would become frustrated later on, or I would have regrets.
> *Marie (24, France)*

Nicole (21, France) referred to a friend who had calculated the exact time when she would have a child, so that it would not compromise her career as a lawyer. She had had a baby during her studies and training and taken the parental leave at the same time, so that when she started working the child would be old enough to attend nursery. She knew she could not have a baby at the beginning of her legal career. Nicole added sarcastically that if one takes into account fin-

ishing one's studies, starting a career and establishing oneself in the labour market, the right time to have children is now around 35–40 years old, which is biologically difficult, if not too late altogether. She felt that women's fertility was being controlled and compromised by socio-economic activities and structures.

A growing number of young women today do not want to have children, and plan to remain voluntarily childless. Women are heterogeneous in that matter. This formerly unusual decision has become more common in the wake of women's access to the labour market. Some women simply choose to remain independent and focus on their career. Childless women and couples are less and less deemed a deviant group, but are simply considered to have chosen a different lifestyle (Hakim 2000: 55).

In relation to the reasons for voluntary childlessness, Hakim (2000: 44, 55) emphasises the psychological and social role of contraception for women. Contraception gives women personal and independent control over their fertility, and also over their life course. Women can therefore decide when to bear children, and how many to have (Coontz 2005: 253). Having a child has become a voluntary act, rather than a life hazard. The greatest numbers of childless women are in countries with egalitarian and family-friendly social policies, such as Finland and France. Paradoxically, France and the Scandinavian societies have the highest fertility rates. This indicates that women are given the freedom of choice to have children. The highest proportion of voluntarily childless women is among highly educated women and white-collars workers, mainly in professional and managerial occupations (Hakim 2000: 51). Some of my informants fell into that category, as they were highly educated, were hoping for white-collar occupations, and were planning to remain childless. Indeed, several respondents stated that they did not want children. Others were not very keen on the idea, but still believed that they would probably like to have children later. Some felt pressure to want

children because their acquaintances were starting to have babies, and others were shocked when their friends had their first child.

Suvi (25, Finland) expressed the implicit pressure she had felt when some of her friends had recently had children.

> I felt that I [was] a bit an outsider, 'cause I don't see a newborn baby as a very pretty thing. (…) I don't have this baby fever. I don't know what it is. I've been trying to get it, 'cause everybody is 'ok, now I have a baby fever.' No, I just want a dog!
> *Suvi (25, Finland)*

Päivi (25, Finland) had chosen to remain childless for personal reasons, and because children might compromise her career opportunities.

> I can definitely see myself starting a career, but I can't really see myself starting a family. (…) I know I'm quite young, so it may change, (…) who knows, but at this point I just [don't] want children. (…) I just don't feel the overwhelming motherly feeling towards [babies]. (…) If I have a six months old baby in my arms, and a really great opportunity rises up, I'm not sure that I'll be able to take it, (…) at least it's going to be more difficult if I have a partner and (…) a child. [If] I get this great opportunity [to go] to Cambodia to do whatever for the next two years, (…) if I have a long-term partner, my decisions are not only mine, but it's still sort of flexible. But if there's a child involved, it gets less flexible.
> *Päivi (25, Finland)*

Valérie (23, France) felt shocked when her closest friend had a baby, mainly because she did not feel ready to have children herself, or even to live with a partner. Sabrina (23, France) was shaken for different reasons.

> It's traumatising, I'm dreading it! (…) Because I have the feeling that, as a result, I'm gonna lose my friends. They'll stop going out, they'll play the doting parents, and I won't see them any more.
> *Sabrina (23, France)*

When I asked if she planned to have children, she answered negatively.

> No, I don't want to have children. I have a rather negative image of children. (…) When I see a kid, I don't go all gaga, it has never appealed to me, I've never imagined myself as a mother. (…) I don't think about it, and the more time passes, the more I think that I won't have children.
> *Sabrina (23, France)*

Céline (23, France) wanted children later in life, but had also developed an aversion to children and childcare because of her student job as a babysitter. Babysitting had strongly curtailed her desire to have children, because it had revealed to her the negative aspects of children's behaviour and needs, and of childcare responsibilities.

Debra Mollen (2006) discusses similar issues. In her research, she found that many women resisted and rejected women's social roles and gender-prescribed expectations such as motherhood, just like Päivi (25, Finland). Others based their choice on their own mother's dissatisfaction with family life. This point of view was put forward by Sabrina (23, France). She explained that her ideology of full independence had been transmitted by her mother. Her mother had entered the traditional family apparatus in her early 20s, and had stayed out of work in order to take care of her children. She had remained financially dependent on her husband, and wished her life could have been different. She strongly discouraged her children from following the same path. Some women, like Céline (23, France), might also develop an aversion to childcare responsibilities – for

instance, through negative experiences related to childcare – without actually disliking children. In addition, many women enjoy having freedom and time to focus on their own interests; in other words, their focus is their own self. Others choose to concentrate their energies on both their career and their intimate relationships. For some couples, having time and devotion for each other is crucial, and they are dubious about the addition of another person to their relationship. Finally, monetary costs and obligations can contribute to women's reluctance to have children. External factors such as worldwide or environmental fears and concerns can enter the equation too (Mollen 2006). The 2008 Finnish *Family Barometer* survey provided similar explanations. The main reasons for the voluntary childlessness of 25–34-year-old Finnish men and women were lifestyle preferences (they did not want or feel the need to have children), not being able to find the right partner, a desire to develop their career, and concern at present and future socio-economic uncertainty and insecurity (Miettinen and Rotkirch 2008: 95–97).

The 30 age limit

Nonetheless, some informants pointed out, directly or indirectly, that the age of 30 marked the point at which to stop experimenting and start settling down and starting a family (for those who planned to have children). This was essentially rooted in biological factors. Maria (30, Finland) clearly stated that she wanted children and was conscious of the limited time left in which to have them. She also wanted to start her career, which added to the time pressure. Anna (28, Finland) felt pressure too, but mostly external and social pressure.

I: (…) One of my friends, a student friend, has children. And she's married too.
R: Does it put pressure on you?

I: She's not so close to me, but it's not her that makes the pressure, it's society in general, that makes [you feel] that when you're 30 … Like I have two years' time [left], and I should have more things done.
Anna (28, Finland)

Céline (23, France) was thinking that in five years' time she would be 28, and she would like to be officially married and not to have children too late, so that she would not be an old mother. The pressure was both biological and psychological. Florence (22, France) and Valérie (23, France) said that they wanted children, but not before they were 30. They wanted to acquire life experience and enjoy their freedom before starting a family, as well as finishing their studies, travelling, and focusing on other personal interests. They did not feel any external pressure. Emmi (25, Finland) had very similar ideologies. She was not sure about having children, and was thinking about adopting. This removed the biological pressure, as she said that it was acceptable to be a little older if one was adopting. Alice (23, France) felt she had to get the most out of life, both personally and professionally, before having children.

I have the feeling that I should make the most if it now 'cause after [having children] I won't be able to. I see people around me, like my [older] sister. (…) She tells me 'make the most of it, and so on, 'cause honestly, after you have children, it's nice, but it's no longer the same.'
Alice (23, France)

Several authors have discussed the 30 age limit. Young people today have gained freedom over whether and when to marry. Personal choices may outweigh social pressure in that context. However, the age limit for marriage for young women remains 30. It serves as a biological deadline for those who want to have children. Young women are thus compelled to adjust their plans to biological factors

(Arnett 2004: 100–103). Van de Velde's (2008: 50) Danish interviewees took a similar view. The 20s are a stage of experimentation, but 30 is the limit. At 30, one should settle down and start following adult patterns, such as having a stable job, establishing a career, and starting a family.

Adaptive young women: Combining career and family

Combining family and career can be difficult, not just in terms of time but also regarding women's values. Both family and career require time, dedication and financial considerations. In order to 'solve' the dilemma, some women decide to stop working and stay at home in order to raise their family. They choose the option of being a housewife. Others decide to carry on working, but change their career prospects by working part-time or seeking only lower-level jobs. This allows them to reconcile their professional and family lives. In the 2003 INSEE *Histoire de Vie* (Life History) survey, the first reason offered by French women for working part-time was to take care of their children. These women have two roles to fulfil, and are able to combine them. Women and sometimes men from different socio-professional groups, depending on their professional field, experience more or less difficulty in combining work and family. For instance, people working in the public sector find it easier to reconcile family and work (Garner et al. 2006: 34–36).

The interview questions on combining work and family life uncovered interesting perspectives. Several young women had not thought about whether they really wanted children, or were not sure, and therefore had not considered the question of combining the two spheres. The issue was still very abstract to them. Some mentioned that their job flexibility would enable them to handle both activities with ease. Several young women planned to be teachers, and stated that it was one of the best jobs to combine with having children. However,

they had not chosen that profession specifically in order to have a family, but had done so out of individual preference. There were also some who had chosen that occupation and wished to remain childless. The issues of financing and supporting a family also arose.

R: How do you think you will be able to develop your professional career, have a family, and take care of your children at the same time?
I: It depends on what my future husband or boyfriend will do for a living, basically! If he has a secure job and we have some income, I don't think it'll be a problem, but (…) if I only have [irregular] contracts, (…) it's going to be financially quite difficult to have children and provide for the family. (…) But then again, as a journalist, I don't think it's going to be an obstacle for me if I stay at home for a few years and stay with the child. It won't cut off my professional career. (…) But yeah … financially it could be quite difficult.
Piia (24, Finland)

Piia (24, Finland) also had the role model of her older sister, who managed to combine family and working life and still had personal interests and diverse activities with friends. Piia therefore felt rather confident about managing to combine not just professional and family life, but also personal activities. Several young women felt that they would manage in the same way as other people did. Tuuli (25, Finland) claimed that firms and workplaces should be more flexible towards women and encourage them to have children, rather than doing the opposite. Elina (26, Finland) said that she would do what most Finnish people did: she would use day care services. Also, she was going to become a teacher, and expected that adjustable work shifts would allow her to take care of her children. Natalie (22, France) and several other French informants also mentioned that being a teacher would allow them to care for and spend time with their family.

From the perspective of being a schoolteacher, it's rather simple. (…) For a start, we have school holidays, so concerning my children, I'll share all that time with them. (…) Maybe I'll be able to spend all the time they are not at school with them, because I won't be either.
Natalie (22, France)

Tiia (26, Finland) already had a child and was studying. She managed to combine the two in a satisfactory way.

It has its challenges, and it's something you really need to get used to. When I was on maternity leave, I could concentrate on the baby. Now the situation has changed and I have to do other things as well, which is really good and it gives you a sense of purpose for the other part of your life. (…) Combining those things, it needs some thinking, it takes time. (…) But I think I've managed ok. (...) I don't feel I've had to give up many friends, (…) and I don't feel that I've had to 'give up' things. (…) It's a question of attitude.
Tiia (26, Finland)

The Finnish young women seemed rather confident and optimistic about managing to combine family and professional life as well as personal interests. By contrast, several French respondents expressed concerns about this aspect. They seemed less certain than their Finnish counterparts that they would be able to manage the situation. Sabrina (23, France) mentioned that many professional women choose at some point in their life to prioritise family life and thus to suspend their career (see subchapter 5.2). Indeed, Alice (23, France) spoke about slowing down her career and readjusting or reducing her work schedule when she had children.

R: How do you think you'll manage to combine family life, work and leisure activities?

I: Well, that I don't know. Sometimes I really question it. I think about what I'm getting involved in. I'm destined to have a job with responsibilities, and I think, 'oh, I'm gonna come home late in the evenings, wouldn't I prefer to privilege family life, do I really want to privilege professional life over personal life?' (…) But well, (…) I think that until your 30s, you can work, (…) base everything on your career, and after, why not [reduce your working hours]; this type of thing.
Alice (23, France)

Coontz (2005: 267) mentions that from the early 2000s onwards, some of her students started to maintain that fathers could care for their children and do household chores, rather than holding women solely responsible for those roles. The issue of salary arose too. The students thought it was logical for the partner with the highest salary to carry on working and for the other to stay at home, regardless of gender. A couple of my informants addressed the issue of gender roles and shared responsibilities for taking care of the family. They expected their husband to participate in family life as much as they did, both in household chores and in bringing up the children.

I haven't really thought about [combining working and family life], (…) but I think it's possible, and I've even thought that if I get married, then (…) [my] husband could also stay at home for a while, (…) I feel it should be that way too, that it's not only women's responsibility.
Sanna (24, Finland)

Well, I hope that my husband will help me! I'm not so sure, I haven't really thought about that. It will come as it will come. (…) You always find solutions when the moment comes. (…) Also, I don't want to sacrifice everything for my family. (…) I think I've integrated May '68 [ideologies] pretty well, and being the housewife (…) is not at all the model that I want to follow. (…) I believe I'll make concessions, but I believe everybody does.
Valérie (23, France)

In Chapters 4 and 5, I examined the differences between Finland and France regarding the university system, integration into the labour market, and student support. In terms of residential independence and housing support, regardless of students' sources of income, the situation was similar in the two countries (see subchapter 6.1). In terms of family-related policies, Finland and France offer very similar types of support. Both states offer generous assistance to families. However, in Finland the aid is targeted at individuals, on the basis of the universalist principles of the welfare regime. In France, the distribution of support presumes the family unit as a care provider for its members. Family assistance is thus underpinned by different ideologies, although the provision is closely comparable (for more detail on types of support, see Appendix 5).

Finnish female students who become mothers have the same rights as other women concerning maternity leave. They are also allowed to receive maternity allowance. Those who receive student benefits can combine the allowances. Finnish students are allowed to interrupt their studies and register as 'absent'. In the same way, student mothers can take maternity leave and interrupt their studies (University of Tampere 2009). In France the situation is different. Female students who become mothers are a minority group, and their status lacks recognition. They are categorised as students or as mothers, but not as student mothers. Therefore the university system does not acknowledge their specific needs, such as to postpone their exams because of childbirth. They can take a term off, for instance, or simply try to combine studies and motherhood. Some of them also work. Financial support, however, is comparable to that in Finland. They can combine student benefits, maternity and other allowances (such as housing allowances) (Studyrama Budget 2010).

Conclusion: Convergence of family ideologies

Finnish and French young women present many similarities in their current living arrangements and plans to start a family. The respondents were divided between those hoping to have a family and combine it with a job, those eager to concentrate exclusively on their career and remain voluntarily childless, and those wishing to have children only after obtaining other life experiences. The young women who expected to combine work and family life had different strategies in mind. Some expected their job to enable them to combine work and family timetables. Others were more worried about the potential demands of a career, and were thinking of aiming for more modest professional goals. Some were confident about managing to work, care for their children and even carry on with most of their personal interests, because they already knew others who had managed to do so. Finally, a few mentioned using day care and sharing domestic chores with their husbands, thus highlighting the importance of gender role equality.

However, several young women emphasised the need to calculate the timing of having children, entailing control over one's own fertility. Some of them held postmodern values in relation to women's identity, and no longer looked to the institution of the family to define themselves. They drew on other socio-economic areas to gain a sense of identity and social position, such as a specific professional career, individual ethics and personal interests.

Most informants also intended to live in a registered consensual union – in other words, cohabitation – rather than getting married. Some wished to get married, but they all directly or indirectly emphasised compatibility and harmony between partners over the mere legal contract of marriage.

Finland and France are two of the few European countries with a sustainable fertility rate. Although their welfare ideologies differ, their family-related policies converge. The two states provide equivalent

generous support to families. However, this support is essentially targeted at individuals' well-being in Finland, whereas in France it is targeted at the family unit so that parents can take care of their children. Nevertheless, these policies seem to have a strong influence on the motivation to have children.

6.3 Patterns of Leaving Home in Finland and France

The two previous subchapters (6.1 and 6.2) presented the respondents' living arrangements, means of financing their expenses, and attitude towards starting a family. The present subchapter offers more general information on Finnish and French students' living arrangements, patterns of leaving the parental home, financial resources and family formation.

Moving out of the parental home

Finnish and French students' living arrangements differ (see Table 6.1). Most French students live either with their parents or in private accommodation, usually a rented flat, on which parents pay the rent in many cases (see Galland 1996). In Finland most students live in rented accommodation, and a large number live in student accommodation. Age and relationship status are also important influencing factors in the choice of accommodation.

Table 6.1. Students' living arrangements in Finland and France, 2005.

Students' living arrangements	Finland	France
	Percentages	
With parents	5	42
Student accommodation	31	16
Private accommodation	64	42
Total	100	100

The data comes from Eurostudent Report (2005). As specified in Eurostudent III 2005–2008 (it is not stated as explicitly in the 2005 Eurostudent Report), the sample included university students only. Students from higher vocational institutions, doctoral students and exchange students were not included in the study; only national and permanent students were included (Orr 2008: 16–20).

Every Finnish city with a university has a student accommodation service (e.g. TOAS in Tampere) that manages and provides student lodgings. The accommodation provided can be in halls of residence, or in flats such as one-room apartments, individual student rooms in a shared flat, or larger apartments for couples with or without children. There is not enough student accommodation for the number of students, so many students rent from the private sector. Many also prefer that option, including my informants, because it offers more privacy, more comfort in some cases, and more diversity in living arrangements. Almost all of my informants were living in private lodgings.

In France, the CNOUS and CROUS (*Centre National* and *Centre Regional des Oeuvres Universitaires et Scolaires* – Regional and National Centres for University and School Implementations) are national and regional networks providing services to students such as halls of residence, cafeterias at university, assistance with applications, and the distribution of government study grants (Les Services de la Vie Etudiante 2010). However, the amount of student accommodation available does not match the number of students. Moreover, students are victims of massive increases in housing costs. Prices vary depending

on the place of study, such as between provincial cities and metro-politan areas. Thirty-five per cent of French students stated that it was difficult to find accommodation (including individual lodgings and student halls of residence) in 2006 (Observatoire National de la Vie Etudiante 2006). Also, students from the middle social classes are discriminated against, as social assistance is means-tested. They usually have incomes that are too high to be eligible for state study grants or the student lodgings provided by the regional CROUS, which are intended for students from low-income families. Even the latter do not necessary secure CROUS lodgings, which are limited in number (L'Etudiant 2010). Most of my French respondents were in this situation, and could not access study grants or student lodgings. Almost all were living in privately rented flats.

While Finnish student accommodation resembles private ac-commodation in terms of services and comfort, basic French student accommodation often entails living in individual bedrooms in halls of residence, with a shared kitchen and/or bathroom. It is fairly cheap, but does not provide adequate privacy or quiet. Whereas 73% of Finnish students liked living in student accommodation, only 40% of French students did so (Eurostudent Report 2005: 79–80). There is also a small amount of more comfortable student accommodation in France, but the prices nearly equal those on the private market. Marie (24, France) felt lucky because she had never had to live in *Cités U* (university halls of residence). She had always managed to find small one-room flats. She described *Cités U* as depressing, depending on the cities and universities in question, with unhealthy and difficult living conditions, a lack of privacy, and ageing buildings. Sabrina (23, France) stated that she felt privileged compared to some of her acquaintances who had stayed in *Cités U*, because of the poor liv-ing conditions in the halls of residence. Finding lodgings, let alone acceptable lodgings, is a battle for many students and young people who wish to move out of the parental home, especially in large cities. Many of them are compelled to live in poor accommodation, alone

or sharing, or even end up squatting (L'Etudiant 2010). A group of young people (including students) who had fallen victim to this situation created the *Jeudi Noir – Les Galériens du Logement* collective (Black Thursday – the Galley Slaves of Housing, a reference to the Wall Street crash of 1929), in order to denounce the housing crisis, the lack of available and affordable housing, and the explosion of housing prices (Jeudi Noir 2010). Being able to leave the parental home therefore depends on several factors, mainly on obtaining an adequate and stable job, but also on finding acceptable and affordable housing (see subchapter 3.2). Experts' discourses convey the idea that young people do not wish to leave the parental home and voluntarily delay residential transition. However, the real situation that many youths face regarding the housing market should be taken more deeply into account. The decision to leave home is closely associated with achieving financial as well as residential independence (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005: 144–148).

Main financial resources

Galland stressed as early as 1996 (58–60) that many students live on their own or in student lodgings and are therefore residentially independent, but that in many cases their parents pay the rent and provide additional funds for living expenses. Many French students have an ambiguous status, being neither dependent nor independent and only partly autonomous. Clearly, parents are an important source of income in France, more so than in Finland (see Table 6.2). The labour market is the major financial resource for Finnish students. The state contributes equally to young people's resources in the two countries, through grants, student benefits and housing allowances. French students receive income from three sources fairly equally but with an emphasis on parents. In Finland they rely exclusively on paid work and state grants. It is not specified what 'other' implies.

According to the *Eurostudent Report* (2005: 90), more French students (both those living with their parents and those living on their own or in a couple) than Finnish received financial support from their parents (see Table 6.3). A large number of Finnish students received financial contributions from their parents too, but the proportion of money they received was smaller than that received by the French, especially for students who were running their own households. In Finland students received occasional help from their parents, while in France they received regular support, generally on a monthly basis. Familial support represented 43% of students' monthly income in France, whereas it represented 11% in Finland (Kesteman 2010: 114).

In both countries, about half of students living at home and maintaining their own household received income from paid employment in 2005 (see Table 6.3). However, the Finns received somewhat higher income from work. Most Finnish students, whether living at home or on their own, received income from state assistance, but the financial support was greater for those living on their own. Those living at home are entitled to less financial support because they live with their parents (Kela 2009a; 2009b). In France, nearly one third of students living at home received financial support from the state. As in Finland, the majority of students living on their own received support. However, the amount was smaller than that received by the Finns. It is important to remember that not all French students have access to study grants. Their eligibility depends on their parents' income and financial needs. Moreover, students are not all offered the same sum, depending on the eligibility criteria they fulfil. Nevertheless, in 2005 the total contribution (in euros) offered both to students living with their parents and to those living on their own was higher in France than in Finland. French students living at home received greater family and state contributions. Those maintaining their own household received greater support from their family too, in fact, twice as much as the Finns. The current differences in income

between Finnish and French students thus arise from differences in state assistance, but primarily from parental support.

Table 6.2. Sources of students' income (shares in percentages) for students living with their parents and students maintaining their own household in Finland and France, 2005.

	Living with parents		Living in own household	
	Finland	**France**	**Finland**	**France**
Income sources	Percentages			
Family / Partner	14	42	11	38
Work	63	36	52	33
State	18	23	30	29
Other	5	–	7	–
Total	100	100	100	100

The data comes from Eurostudent Report (2005). As specified in Eurostudent III 2005–2008 (it is not stated as explicitly in the 2005 Eurostudent Report), the sample included university students only. Students from higher vocational institutions, doctoral students and exchange students were not included in the study; only national and permanent students were included (Orr 2008: 16–20).

Table 6.3. Financial sources (average amount per month in euros) for students living with their parents and students maintaining their own household in Finland and France, 2005.

Financial sources	Living with parents		Own household	
	Finland	France	Finland	France
- Proportion of students (%) receiving contributions from *family / partner*	57	74	50	68
- Contributions in euros	120	212	122	369
- Proportion of students (%) receiving contributions from *paid employment*	45	48	54	46
- Contributions in euros	411	293	581	534
- Proportion of students (%) receiving contributions from *the state*	71	29	79	72
- Contributions in euros	120	304	339	270
Total contributions in euros	651	809	1042	1173

The data comes from Eurostudent Report (2005).

In Finland, the hypothesis of early independence tends to refer to the good welfare provision, the favourable position on the labour market and the good residential provision. However, Henna Isoniemi (2006: 251) indicates that young people are expected to move out of the parental home in order to pursue their studies or simply to work. It is a cultural norm to live independently and learn to live on one's own. Managing one's own life at a young age and learning the value of money are strong Finnish moral and cultural principles. This is based on historical factors too: it is only recently that parents have been able to afford to financially support their adult children. Nonetheless, the fact that the state provides financial support to young people removes the burden from their parents (Kalliosaari 2010).

Van de Velde (2008: 51–55) affirms that young people's independence is guaranteed by the state in Denmark and Finland, thanks to the principle of defamilialisation. Most young people receive a study grant and also work during their studies; therefore they can gain full financial autonomy during their studies, even with student status. In France the situation is different. Young people depend on their parents financially because they receive less support from the state, and the funds they get are based on their parents' income rather than on their own individual needs. Students are considered their parents' responsibility, and parental support is expected. This is founded on French corporatist-conservative ideologies, which emphasise the institution of the family (Van de Velde 2008: 154–156). However, increasing parents' responsibilities to help and finance their children simultaneously reinforces young people's economic dependence on their family, even after they leave the parental home (Erhel et al. 2010: 214). Nevertheless, like Finnish students, French students are entitled to housing support. The allowance is based on their own income, not their parents'. In this case, the state encourages and even participates in young people's residential independence, and adopts partial defamilialisation policies. Leaving home in France thus takes place within a hybrid system based on contradictory principles, which generates and maintains a model of semi-independence (Van de Velde 2008: 158). The Finnish system creates a model of full residential autonomy, and the French system a model of relative residential autonomy in which young people receive parental financial support that contributes to their residential independence (Bendit et al. 2009: 10–11). Drawing on this analysis and on my informants' situations at the time of interview, Synopsis 6.1 presents the models of independence in the two countries.

Synopsis 6.1. Students' autonomy in Finland and France.

FINLAND	FRANCE
Independence (from parents) Residential and financial autonomy	**Semi-independence** Residential autonomy, but financial dependence on parents
Market and state support Study grants, part-time or full-time jobs, housing support	**Family, market, and state support** Parental financial support, part-time or full-time jobs, selective distribution of study grants, housing support

In both Finland and France, young people receive housing support from the state. In Finland, students get *Opintotuen asumislisä* (Housing Supplement for Students) as part of their study grant, paid by Kela, the social security office. All of my Finnish informants received this. It covers 80% of the rent, based on a maximum rent of €252 per month. Any costs above that amount are not taken into account. This allowance is paid during the months of study and when students are living in student or rented accommodation. Young people who own their own property are not eligible. If students are living in shared accommodation, they can all apply and receive Housing Supplement. Students who are not entitled to study grants or housing supplements can apply for *Yleinen asumistuki* (General Housing Allowance), which is intended for low-income households. It is available for both rented and owner-occupied homes (Kela 2009–2011).

Most French respondents received housing allowance, the amount of which differed and sometimes came to only a small sum because of their income. Housing support is provided by the *Caisses d'Allocations Familiales* (CAF, Family Allowances Fund). Three types of means-tested benefit are offered to low-income households, including students. The funds cannot be combined: people can only apply for one of them at a time, depending on their situation and

type of accommodation. The allowance provided is calculated according to individuals' incomes (which must not exceed a certain amount), type of accommodation and rent. As in Finland, property owners are not eligible. Also, students cannot receive the allowance if the accommodation belongs to their parents. Couples must apply together and provide their individual incomes, and those living in shared accommodation can all apply and receive funds. The *Allocation de Logement à Caractère Social* (ALS, Social Housing Allowance) can be paid to students who live alone or in a couple without children. The *Allocation de Logement à Caractère Familial* (ALF, Housing Allowance for Families) can be paid to students who live alone or in a couple with children. The *Aide Personalisée au Logement* (APL, Personalised Housing Assistance) can be paid to students who live alone or in a couple, with or without children (Caisse d'Allocations Familiales 2010a). These funds are not provided automatically to students. They need to apply to the regional CROUS to which their university is linked.

Conclusion:
Similarities in leaving home and plans to start a family

Patterns of leaving home and starting a family are remarkably similar in Finland and France. Finnish and French young people leave home at similar ages, and do so younger than the European average. Yet their living arrangements differ. Parents are the largest source of income for French students. State assistance is an important source of income in both countries; however, the distribution differs. All Finnish students can receive a student grant, unlike in France, where support depends on eligibility criteria. Finally, students in both countries have access to the labour market to cover their expenses, and often have a part-time job alongside their studies, especially in Finland.

6.4 Leaving Home in Finland and France: Convergences

Convergences in patterns of leaving home and plans for starting a family are visible among the respondents. The age at which residential independence is achieved is similar in the two countries. In comparison with some other European countries, young people leave home early in Finland and France. Finnish young women appear to be both residentially and financially independent once they leave home. However, their fully autonomous status is open to question, since they partly depend on state assistance to achieve financial independence. French young women reach early residential independence too, but remain financially dependent on their parents. Even if they leave home early, their parents often pay their rent and other living expenses. They are thus in a position of semi-dependence on their parents.

The Finnish informants received student allowance and housing allowance, and most worked alongside their studies. The French respondents did not receive student benefits, but most received a small housing allowance. Some had a part-time job, but their earnings were not sufficient to reach full financial independence. Therefore they needed their parents' help. The more flexible and accessible university system and labour market in Finland seem to ease young people's transition to autonomy. French youth have more difficulties in gaining full independence, mainly because of difficulties in accessing the labour market during their studies, but also after they graduate. While most Finnish students enter working life before graduation or soon afterwards, French students tend to experience a period of unstable working life and precarity after completing their studies. Many of them return to the parental home during that period, or depend on their parents' assistance.

Very similar measures and services are offered in the two countries to families with children. However, as mentioned in Chapter 5, some young women expressed worries concerning labour market discrimination against young women who wanted to have children.

The Finnish university system offers more flexibility and more options for students who want to work alongside their studies and also to have children. Finnish student mothers' needs and status are recognised by the university system, while in France their needs and status are not acknowledged. It is therefore more difficult to combine having a baby with studying in France, in the same way that it is more difficult to work alongside one's studies.

In Finland, going to university, working and starting a family tend to be interwoven and synchronous. Young people can study, work and start a family practically at the same time. The various institutions and policies are sufficiently flexible to allow this. Students' transitions to adulthood are thus smoothed. Discrimination against young women in relation to childbearing by employers and companies nonetheless still occurs, depending on the sector. The French institutions mainly operate independently of each other, as separate spheres. The education system appears to work independently of the labour market, and young women who want to have children seem to struggle with both the university system and labour market ideologies. Some have to compromise their careers to some extent, in order to combine family and work. Just as institutions in France seem to be separated, French students' patterns of transition to adulthood are also more linear and separated. Students study and graduate, become residentially independent during or after their studies, seek a job and obtain stable work, achieve financial autonomy, and then start having a family. This is a generalisation from the patterns followed by the majority of students. Patterns of transition that are closer to the Finnish model do occur for a minority. Conversely, some Finnish students' patterns of transition are closer to the French model. Nevertheless, most students experience a different kind of transition to adulthood in Finland and France, particularly because of the divergent ideologies and structural arrangements operating at the wider structural level.

7.

NEW CRITERIA FOR ADULTHOOD

The previous chapters discussed highly educated young women's opinions on the university systems in their countries, entry into the labour market, leaving home and becoming independent, and starting a family. This chapter focuses on the concept of adulthood itself. It examines young women's perceptions of the meaning of adulthood, and of the markers of adult status. Young women from Finland and France shared common attitudes regarding the concept of adulthood. However, this could be specific to their gender, their status as university students, and the values acquired from their disciplines of study, which were in the humanities and social sciences.

The markers of adulthood include completing one's studies, finding a stable job, moving out of the parental home, acquiring accommodation, getting married and starting a family. The literature on youth transition often refers to a prolongation of youth and a delay in meeting those markers. Experts claim that young people are

studying for longer, are entering the labour market at a later age than their parents did, and are consequently becoming independent later. The process of starting a family is also being postponed. However, rather than being a deliberate choice, the prolongation of youth is rooted in socio-economic restructuring. A large number of young people experience precarity and difficulties in integrating into the labour market. As socio-economic contradictions emerge in young people's lives, they are forced to face and adapt to the situation with the means available to them. Thus they might study for a higher degree in order to ensure a better and more stable position on the job market (see Furlong and Cartmel 1997). In addition, cultural transformations have affected young people's values and aspirations. Jeffrey Arnett (2004), Harriet Bradley and Jacques Van Hoof (2005) and Heath and Cleaver (2003), among others, talk about a new stage in the life course: emerging adulthood, an 'in-between' status, or youth-hood. Young adulthood is increasingly a time for experimentation and exploration, including engaging in hedonistic values and delaying commitment.

Most studies of advanced societies analyse the transition to adulthood through the social markers mentioned above. However, we might wonder whether these are still entirely relevant in the context of the current restructuring, and whether adulthood is truly determined by these aspects alone.

The respondents' visions of adulthood essentially rested upon abstract qualities. They still considered the markers of adulthood to be relevant, but stated that these no longer encompassed the whole meaning of being an adult. They mentioned other criteria that are not officially recognised, such as mental and psychological development, as the main aspects of the process of transition to adulthood. The informants addressed a particularly significant issue regarding the current concept of adulthood. They identified the contradiction between the 'social' criteria determining the status of adulthood and the 'subjective' perception of the concept that different individuals might have.

7.1 Transitions in Awareness

The young women discussed their own transitions during the interviews, and displayed lucid understandings of their situations and positions in the process of transition. In particular, they gave a clear account of the challenges they expected to face on the road to adulthood. They were all highly educated at university level, mainly with a social sciences or humanities background, which might also explain their level of knowledge and awareness of the process of the transition to adulthood.

The most difficult aspect of transition: Losing temporal freedom

Most young women, especially in Finland, felt that the hardest thing for them and their acquaintances when they graduated and entered working life would be the change in lifestyle. They considered that starting a new life phase, moving on and, in particular, losing temporal flexibility and freedom would be the most difficult steps. The schedule of a student lifestyle is flexible and diverse. Many students work alongside their studies, participate in clubs or other groups, have several hobbies, or belong to a sports team. To some extent students organise their working hours around their studies, or vice versa. This is strongly the case in Finland. It is probably the reason why more Finnish young women felt that moving on from a rather free and diverse lifestyle to an unyielding work schedule would be challenging. Student life can seem to be a free-floating lifestyle which ends abruptly with the rigid beginning of working life.

> It seems to me that the most difficult thing [is] to accept that this is it, now. (...) As a student, when you have (...) a side job, (...) you know that you're only going to have it [for] as long as you study. And you know that when you study, everything's still open. Anything can

happen, it's not fixed. Your life can be anything you want to. (...) But (...) after the transition from university, it's (...) 'ok, so, this is not actually something I do meanwhile, this is something I do, period.' (...) I think the biggest thing [is] the psychological change, (...) accepting that this is the end of the (...) probation period.
Päivi (25, Finland)

R: What do you think will be the most difficult in your transition from university to working life?

I: It will be the working hours, because [at] university it's so free to choose when you want to (...) work, (...) it's more free. And then [afterwards] you'll have to adapt to working hours, five days a week and eight hours a day. You can't take trips when you want, stuff like that.
Anna (28, Finland)

Natalie (22, France) said that she knew she would enjoy working as a schoolteacher; however, she was in no hurry to start her professional life.

Now as a student, I'm really lucky to get financial help, and to have 'time'! Usually you either get one or the other. (...) Well, (...) my resources are limited, but I still have some resources, which allow me ... Yeah, I really appreciate being able to do whatever I want during the day, go wherever I want, be introduced to many things, decide when I work, etc. ...
Natalie (22, France)

Alice (23, France) and Nicole (21, France) were afraid of losing the social networks they had built up with their fellow students. Nicole stressed that being able to meet many people at university was very enriching and brought important and stimulating intellectual opportunities. She felt that working life might be isolating in that respect. Alice referred to the loss of temporal flexibility, also of lifestyle diver-

sity. She felt sad at losing the opportunity to learn and gain additional knowledge when studying. Finally, she stressed that she was afraid of losing her friends and entering an isolating lifestyle.

I: I'm afraid to lose the friends I have right now, that I have at school. Because at school, you've got friends, you're in a different atmosphere, you're more relaxed. (...) Whereas after, I can see it in working life, it's not the same any more. I laugh much less ...
R: It's more serious?
I: Yes, you're more serious. And actually, I'm afraid of losing that, afraid not to feel like laughing any more, or having fun any more. The atmosphere [in my present workplace, compared to the previous one] is much more serious, and it scared me [at first]. (...) I realised that the work sector can also be much more serious, much stricter, even if I work with nice, (...) decent people.
Alice (23, France)

Networks of friends increasingly represent a family of choice for many young people today, involving strong emotional and social attachments (Heath and Cleaver 2003: 49–50). This is a response to a changing society, and to experiences of insecurity and emotional flux. Friendships have become frameworks for negotiating everyday life hazards (Weeks et al., cit. Heath and Cleaver 2003: 49). Friendship networks provide mutual support and solidarity. Clare Holdsworth and David Morgan (2005: 142) also acknowledge the importance of such networks, and of friends as providers of emotional support.

Several young women also said that entering the labour market, and especially finding a job they liked, would be the most difficult aspect of their transition. More French than Finnish young women highlighted this aspect. I will not examine this issue further here, as it would be a repetition of a previous discussion (in Chapter 5) of young women's plans, worries and hopes for their professional life.

Finally, a few young women said that transition itself would be the most difficult aspect for them. They simply worried about facing new challenges, managing and handling them, and facing the unknown. Tuuli (25, Finland) simply said that the uncertainty of the life situation between graduation and entering the labour market would be the most challenging aspect.

R: And what do you think will be the most difficult thing when you will end your studies and start working life?
I: The unknown, because this [student life] is now safe. When you start a new year, you know what you'll do. You have (...) work and you just go to lectures. (...) But if I change, if I graduate, then I don't know what will happen, (...) that's a big change. But then again, (...) when I get [a job] and really start that life, then change will be over and I'll just start a new phase. (...) When you end your studies, you really don't know what you will do next month. (...) The gap between studies and work (...) [is] the most stressful thing.
Tuuli (25, Finland)

R: What do you consider will be the most difficult thing when you end your studies and start working life?
I: It's transition actually, because it's really about opening your eyes, similar to – I don't want to exaggerate, but there's a shock that occurs at birth, and I really think that there's a shock that happens when you enter the labour market, because you are being challenged.
Caroline (25, France)

Living in the present: Strategies to face the unknown

When I asked the informants about their future plans, few of them had precise ideas. Most knew the field in which they were going to work, but some did not know at all what they were going do in the

years to come, especially those in France. They hoped to have a job they enjoyed and that was related to their studies, to start a family, or to live abroad for a while. However, they stated that such plans were simply in line with other people's expectations. In truth they felt they could not plan ahead, because it was impossible to anticipate what would actually occur in the future. They preferred to live in the 'present' and face the immediate future without worrying too much about the unknown. This lifestyle, to some extent, was a strategy to cope with uncertainty and instability. For Päivi (25, Finland) planning too far ahead was even illogical.

R: Do you have an idea where you see yourself in five or 10 years?
I: No, not much. I will be doing something somewhere, we'll see about it then (laughs). I hope I'll be working, (…) but working where? I'm not sure. (…) I try to keep my options open. (…) That's nice (…) to think ahead a little bit, (…) but I don't want to do [it] too much (…) 'cause at the moment there's nothing I can do about my future career. (…) It's a bit the same [when] people ask 'ok, in 10 years, do you think you'll get married?' How can I know? I don't even know if I'm gonna meet this person … I can't plan to meet this person. (…) I can't plan to get married, and I think with working life it's a bit similar, it (…) often depends what kind of jobs will be open, and what kind of opportunities will come my way.
Päivi (25, Finland)

Tuuli (25, Finland) and Johanna (26, Finland) refused to build scenarios or plan their lives, simply because they felt from previous experience that to do so was ineffective.

R: How do you view your life in five or 10 years?
I: I don't know … Well, I will probably be working in some way or form. Not studying any more. I don't know anything else. I think plans don't work. I've had plans before and then years afterwards I

found myself in places I had never imagined! So it doesn't work, (…) you can't plan.
Johanna (26, Finland)

Caroline (25, France) and Sanna (24, Finland) agreed that it was frightening to think too far ahead. Valérie (23, France) and Audrey (26, France) preferred to live 'day by day'. When I asked Audrey about her future plans for acquiring a flat or house, she had not thought about it yet, and showed a lack of interest in the matter.

> Actually I don't think about that at all (laughs). Honestly, this is the type of stuff I don't think about at all, you see, I live rather day by day. That's also partly the reason why I'm in this [somewhat uncertain] position now, because like many young people, I don't think enough about the future.
> *Audrey (26, France)*

Nicole (21, France) felt that she was forced to live day by day. She wished she could make plans, but explained that it was impossible to predict anything in the current socio-economic context. Work unpredictability and geographical uncertainty prevented her from anticipating her future life.

R: How do you see your life in five or 10 years? Do you have an idea?
I: Not at all! I don't know where I'll be, I don't know what I'll do. (…) That's also the problem I think, that we can't settle down, we can't think ahead. And not necessarily 10 years ahead, but even one or two years ahead. (…) Even if we have a job, we can never be sure if we'll keep it. (…) We can't lead a stable life, I think it's generally more and more difficult to acquire stability.
Nicole (21, France)

Inglehart (1997: 37) emphasises that when people feel their survival is threatened, they react with stress, which stimulates coping strategies. Today, structural uncertainty and new hazards prevent young people from planning ahead and constructing long-term projects. Thus highly educated young women's preference for living day by day, rather than planning their future in vain, may simply be a coping mechanism. Robert K. Merton (1968: 204) revealed in his studies on crime that 'ritualism', or lowering one's level of aspiration, was a device for alleviating social anxieties related to competition and the lack of access to promised social positions. The informants did not lower their ambitions or goals, but changed their approach to reaching them. Rather than actively fighting against the situation, they seemed to accept it, and simply dealt with any opportunities that would lead them to their goal. Life trajectories today are socially asynchronous, fragmented and individualised (Blatterer 2010: 59). Socio-economic restructuring has meant a curtailment of people's long-term plans for social achievements, because of the impossibility of projecting one's life beyond the immediate future or the here-and-now.

More options, more questioning, more confusion

During the interviews, I asked the informants their opinions about the state of the world today, and whether they thought life had been easier or more complicated for young people 30 years ago, when their parents were young. I also asked whether they believed their generation was special or different, and whether they felt they belonged to a specific generation. In general, they answered that it was difficult to make comparisons, because they had not experienced those times. They thought that life had not necessarily been easier; people then had just had different kinds of worries from people today. Life circumstances and the socio-economic situation simply differed. Values had changed too, alongside cultural and political contexts. Päivi (25,

Finland) and Marie (24, France) said that it was the social context that had changed, rather than people themselves. However, these transformations in turn had influenced the way people thought, and had created new expectations, for instance regarding working life or women's social roles.

Almost all informants said that some things were better 30 years ago, mainly the ability to get a stable job. They emphasised direct and certain integration into the labour market in the past, which had made life easier. However, they felt that other aspects of life had remained similar, and that people in those days had had to face a variety of challenges too. For instance, today women with young children receive more social support than they did in the late 1970s. Florence (22, France) and Nadège (21, France) thought it had been more difficult back then. They described their parents' particular cases, and how life circumstances had forced them to face heavy responsibilities and manage their own lives from an early age. However, they both mentioned that social background also played an important role in young people's current life difficulties. Most informants displayed a rather realistic approach to life, even if they described the present context as gloomy. Moreover, socio-cultural values have evolved, and today the relationship between parents and grown-up children resembles friendship or companionship (Arnett 2004; Heath and Cleaver 2003). Some respondents' parents had experienced much more pressure from their own parents regarding their life directions and values. Social norms and ideologies were more conservative in those times, while the current context has become generally more liberal. Rather than simply following a predetermined life trajectory as their parents did, young people today, especially highly educated youth, deeply examine their life possibilities and prospects. Indeed, the interviewees pointed out that young people questioned and assessed their own lives, and life in general, much more today than previously.

R: [So] do you think young people back then, 20 or 30 years ago, had more possibilities than now?

I: I don't know, the number of possibilities maybe (…) is higher these days. (…) Maybe (…) [it was] more straightforward, they weren't thinking of all the millions of possibilities around them, (…) it just happened, they just started to work. And they didn't think so philosophically about it; 'is this really the right thing for me?' (…) Maybe it was simpler, but I didn't live then, so I can't really say! (laughs)
Johanna (26, Finland)

I: They knew that when they graduated they would have jobs. (…) The situation for them was much clearer. (…) It was very clear-cut, 'this is what you do, and in this order.' And I don't think that (…) they felt pressure, 'cause they knew that that was what you did. There wasn't as much variety as to what you did. (…)

R: Just following the path/

I: Exactly. I don't think they felt that the path was in any way wrong or bad.
Piia (24, Finland)

In contrast with our parents, who were moving on straightforwardly without wondering about it, I think that young people today analyse things much more.
Sabrina (23, France)

The young women were conscious of the dilemmas brought by the freedom of choice and the range of possibilities with regard to life trajectories.

Nowadays we have more freedom of choice, and we can do more things, it's not so confined, (…) but (…) freedom brings with it the stress of not knowing what you want, and not knowing what you wanna do.
Piia (24, Finland)

I: Having less options can be seen as more difficult or easier, because, in a way, you don't have to think (…) so much, you don't have all the pressure (…) [about] finding your way. Your way is 'there', (…) you just go!

R: Yeah, you don't question it (…)/

I: Yeah, but on the other hand, if you want to do something [else], [it's] not very easy [within] those limits. (…) Nowadays it's very easy to find all sorts of options, but (…) you have to choose between them …

Päivi (25, Finland)

There were fewer opportunities and choices 30 or 40 years ago regarding life trajectories, and therefore life appeared simpler. However, people were not as free as they are today to follow alternative paths and uncommon ideologies. Building one's identity was strongly embedded in the wider socio-cultural sphere. Today, identity construction is still attached to the contextual structure, but with a great emphasis on individual reflexivity (see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991; Inglehart 1997). The abundance of options generates freedom and endless possibilities, but also contradiction and confusion (Blatterer 2010: 50). On the one hand, people have much more choice regarding their life trajectories, but on the other hand, they have to choose between the numerous possibilities. This in turn puts pressure on young people to choose the 'right' options and make the 'right' choices. In addition, many youth suffer from disillusionment because of the impossibility of reaching their goals and transforming their ideas or qualifications into concrete achievements (see Bourdieu 1980). For instance, it appears democratically possible for any individual to become a high-status white-collar professional. However, this requires not only academic capabilities, but also a certain financial background, and sometimes even a certain social background, as in the case of French young people wishing to study in the elite *Grandes Ecoles*. Competition on the labour market

also hampers one's aspirations. In that sense, structural factors still greatly shape individuals' destinies, although the current cultural tendency is to believe that destiny lies solely in people's own hands.

Conclusion: Different times, different contexts

According to most young women, moving on from the student lifestyle to a stable work status was the most demanding aspect of transition. In other words, transition itself was the greatest challenge they had to face. Young adults' stances towards and personal perceptions of the transition process are not recognised in experts' discourses, yet they are a core feature of transition. If young adults cannot cope with uncertainty, socio-economic fluctuations or the increasingly demanding labour market, how can they simply grow into adults and efficiently integrate into the wider social sphere? The informants were conscious of living in a different social context than their parents did at their age. They did not perceive their parents' youth as having been fundamentally easier than their own. Life might have been simpler in some respects, but people then had had to handle life challenges too, which were both similar to and different from those faced today. For instance, finding a stable job was certain, but people had fewer life options. The informants could opt between a large number of possibilities regarding their life direction, but the freedom of choice brought confusion as to what option to select.

7.2 Assessing the Post-War Markers of Adulthood

R: In your opinion, what is being an adult?
I: Well, when I was a child, being adult meant turning 18. (…) But at 18, I realised that I didn't feel adult at all. And now I am barely starting

to feel adult, so, one needs time; I'm 24 already. (…) Because (…) even if I left home at 18, there's the fact that I'm still dependent on my parents, to some extent. But at the same time, (…) being adult, can it only be reduced to being financially independent? I doubt that.

Marie (24, France)

The respondents made a clear distinction between being a legal adult on the basis of age, and becoming a social adult by meeting the social criteria of financial and residential independence, getting a job, being married or living with a partner, and having children. Their parents had fulfilled these roles, which had officially made them adults, at an earlier age. However, the young women unexpectedly questioned their own parents' adulthood. They recognised they had been forced to become legitimate adults and take on heavy responsibilities at an earlier age, but they asked whether they had been equally adult on the moral or psychological level. The social markers of adulthood seem no longer sufficient to grant adult status. The informants predominantly discussed the notion of subjective adulthood.

Inconsequentiality of age

A person becomes a legal adult at the age of 18 in both Finland and France. At that age they gain new rights, such as to vote, drive or get married (see subchapter 3.2). I did not ask the respondents at what specific age they felt that one became an adult. Instead I focused my questions on their understandings of adult status. Only a few mentioned the importance of age, stating that they felt more adult than some of their younger acquaintances, albeit mostly because they had had time to accumulate more life experience and knowledge. Age was not mentioned as a distinctive characteristic. Marie (24, France) stated explicitly that this legal criterion for adulthood does

not turn a person into an adult. Youth might be related to age, but it is not necessarily determined by it (Miles 2000: 11). Regardless of age, some informants felt adult, some somewhat adult, others 'in-between', and some not yet adult. What made them feel adult (or not) was their sense of responsibility, their ability (or lack of it) to handle their own lives, and being self-sufficient and no longer dependent on their parents.

Similarly, the *ESS Round 3 – 2006* data shows that the legal age of majority does not have a strong impact on young people's feelings of adulthood. When asked to state the 'Average age that a person becomes adult', the 18–29 age group answered 21 in both Finland and France. Manuela Du Bois-Reymond (1998: 65–66) argues that there is no longer an age limit that marks the passage from adolescence to adulthood. The statuses can be reversible and asynchronous. For instance, young people might return to their parents' home when a job contract ends, or they might have a family and still be studying at university. Rather than being considered an adult according to physical characteristics, one might feel adult on the basis of one's life plans and feelings of adulthood (Du Bois-Reymond 1998: 75). Different areas of life might be blended, rather than separated and set in chronological order as they generally were for previous generations. Furlong and Cartmel (1997: 42) distinguish the physiological from the social process of maturation, and consider the concept of youth to be an abstract concept that lacks physiological basis. In line with the distinction of 'emerging adulthood' as a new phase in the life course, Arnett (2004: 207) states that this extended transitional phase lasts roughly from the age of 18 to 25, although the upper age limit is flexible. Twenty-five is an estimate, and does not necessarily apply to all young adults. The end of transition might occur earlier or later, depending on the individual, and on the way one defines adulthood.

Throughout history, institutions and social regulations have transformed 'chronological' age into 'social' age (Buchmann 1989:

25–29). Chronological age is based on the individual's physical age. It started to be transformed into social age when age started to define individuals' roles and social positions. Social age determined individuals' identities, and the frameworks within which they constructed them, by assigning them specific roles according to their age and status. This arrangement generated distinct social categories such as childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. These assigned social roles guided individuals into their social destiny and status across the life course. However, social roles were affected by the tremendous socio-cultural transformations at the end of the 1960s. Cultural movements guaranteeing women's emancipation gave rise to new possibilities for and desires of women. In addition, the process of globalisation has engendered new opportunities and dilemmas, and accelerated socio-economic restructuring. These profound changes have reverberated in people's social roles, their positions in society, and processes such as the transition to adulthood.

Are young people today becoming adult at a later age than their parents?

Arnett (2004: 216) speculates that 40 or 50 years ago, the majority of young people considered themselves adults as soon as they were thrust into adulthood, in their early 20s, when they achieved the social milestones of adulthood. It was unlikely that they would go backwards and return to youth, as many young adults do today. The possibility did not even arise, because of the structural context of the time. The framework of adulthood, including residential, professional and relationship transitions, were fairly connected and standardised for baby boomers (Molgat 2007: 495). However, they became increasingly disrupted by economic restructuring and socio-cultural movements, such as women's emancipation and changes in social status.

Several young women, in both Finland and France, thought their parents had become adults at a younger age than themselves. However, they explained that their parents had had no choice but to grow up very fast. They had become adults at an earlier age as a result of life circumstances. They had been forced to undertake the adult role, and had had to face great responsibilities at an earlier age than young people do today. For instance, they had worked straight after the completion of compulsory schooling, and they had also married and had children in their early 20s. They had been compelled to grow up faster by social circumstances, their own life course, and existing social norms. Nonetheless, the respondents stressed that having early responsibilities did not mean that their parents had necessarily been more mature psychologically, or more ready to face such obligations. The life course was less individualised then than it is today, and such challenges were more commonly experienced. They said that the situation was not drastically different today, but that the transition to adulthood now seemed to be experienced on a more individual basis. Today's young people could decide their own life directions more easily, while their parents' lives had been deeply entrenched in prevailing social norms, mores and expectations. The young women's parents were either baby boomers or slightly younger. They had experienced their transition in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the parents had received only basic education, vocational education or vocational higher education, and some had gone to university. Fathers, especially in France, were more highly educated than mothers. Some of them had experienced a short transition to adulthood, and others a longer, even unlinear transition. Indeed, some of them had worked, married and had children, and had simultaneously decided to pursue new studies in order to gain a promotion or change their career. However, in general they had left home and started working, and hence become fully independent, at an early age. The different educational backgrounds of the respondents' parents did not influence the respondents' perceptions of adulthood or transition. They

provided converging answers whether their parents had had a basic education or been highly educated. Indeed they were astute observers of their own situations.

R: So, do you feel that [your parents] were adults before, at an earlier age?
I: I think they were forced (…) to be adults. (…) When I think of my mum, physically being 20 or 21, I don't think she was an adult, but they were (…) forced to take responsibility much quicker than we are.
R: Forced by what, like …?
I: Forced by the fact, that … Well, in their case, having children. (…) She was 21.
Piia (24, Finland)

I don't know … Well, I think that inevitably they did, because in any case, they had responsibilities, they got married at 20. (…) To be responsible for a family at the age of 21, it's really young. So, (…) even if they were not necessarily … mature, (…) they had responsibilities that obliged them to be.
Alice (23, France)

According to Tuuli (25, Finland), when her parents were her age they had not been any more adult than she was now.

No! I think they were the same. (…) I've never thought about that so much, because for me, they've always been adults (laughs). But what I've heard and what I've seen, they had this youth life for a long time too, and careless lives and all that. (…) And my father was a student, so he was living a student life, so I think they weren't so adults, in a different way than I am now.
Tuuli (25, Finland)

Päivi (25, Finland) made an interesting remark. She explained that her parents had been adults earlier than her because they had settled down and started working younger than she had, but they had still been partly financially dependent on their own parents. By comparison, she had become financially autonomous at an earlier age. Suvi (25, Finland) highlighted that life situations and norms had made people appear to be adult earlier. For instance, they had had to leave the parental home early and work, which was typical for young people at the time, but that did not mean they were necessarily 'adults'. According to Tiia (26, Finland), expectations were different: it was assumed in those days that young people would quickly undertake the adult role. By contrast, nowadays it is socially accepted for young people to stay 'young' for longer. Audrey (26, France) said that her mother had started working early, which had qualified her as an adult, but she had kept her child spirit for a long time. Caroline (25, France) recognised that her parents had had responsibilities early, because of their life circumstances, but she also implicitly questioned their real mental maturity and psychological development.

> I think that they were confronted by the world of work; they took on responsibilities quite early. [But] once again, I don't know if that makes you an adult, because one might handle [responsibilities] so much. (…) They were young when they started: 18. But yeah, I think they certainly became responsible earlier.
> *Caroline (25, France)*

In their discourse, the respondents suggested that their parents might have been 'social' adults, but not necessarily 'mental' adults. In other words, abiding by expected social norms produced 'social' adults, but not necessarily 'mental' or 'psychological' adults. Thus according to the informants' interpretations, adulthood is based on individuals' mental and psychological development, and on a certain level of maturity, rather than on fulfilling a number of external criteria and

predetermined social roles. Becoming and being an adult increasingly seems to be related to handling responsibilities and managing one's independence and one's life in general. Being adult refers to psychological development, rather than to merely fulfilling social features.

The respondents' reflections pointed towards a clear distinction between being a 'social' adult and being a 'subjective' adult, and between playing quantifiable and predetermined roles and being truly able to fulfil them. They argued that being mature and 'feeling' adult were the essential attributes of becoming an adult. However, they did not reject the social markers. Having a job and a family were still considered important factors in the transition process, albeit mainly because they increased one's responsibilities and accelerated one's level of maturity and psychological development. The statuses that these roles endow do not make a young person an adult as such. They merely round out the status of adulthood, because of the obligations they bring. Highly educated young women distinguished between the visible and legitimate social status of adulthood and its psychological meaning. In their study, Holdsworth and Morgan's (2005) respondents also evaluated the concept of adulthood from a psychological standpoint, emphasising the capability for maturity over merely fulfilling social patterns. According to the current established notion of adulthood, one can be an adult while still lacking maturity. Similarly, an individual might act in a mature way and 'feel' adult, despite lacking the traditional qualifications for adulthood (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005: 114).

The *ESS Round 3 – 2006* data presented similar conclusions regarding the markers of adulthood. Finnish and French young people no longer regarded them as essential in their processes of transition. Nevertheless, the figures in Table 7.1 show both convergences and divergences between the two countries. Over half of Finnish youths considered having left the parental home to be an adult attribute, while the French were equally divided between stating that it was 'important' and 'not important'. In both countries most young peo-

ple agreed that having lived with one's partner was not an important criterion for being considered an adult. Similarly, most young Finns agreed that becoming a parent was not an important issue. By contrast, the French had equally divided opinions on that topic, stating it was both 'important' and 'not important'. Having a full-time job was mostly perceived as 'unimportant' or 'neither important nor unimportant' by the Finns, whereas most French youth considered it 'important'.

Table 7.1. 18–29-year-olds' opinions regarding markers of adulthood in Finland and France, 2006.

'To be considered adult, how important is it …?'		Finland	France
		Percentages	
To have left the parental home	*Not important*	24	41
	Neither important nor unimportant	21	14
	Important	55	45
	Total	100	100
To have a full-time job	*Not important*	41	25
	Neither important nor unimportant	33	10
	Important	27	65
	Total	100	100
To have lived with spouse/partner	*Not important*	66	52
	Neither important nor unimportant	26	19
	Important	8	29
	Total	100	100
To have become a mother/father	*Not important*	79	41
	Neither important nor unimportant	16	13
	Important	4	45
	Total	100	100

The data is calculated on the basis of the ESS Round 3 (2006). Information by gender was not available.

Fading social markers of adulthood

The research informants based their concept of adulthood on the ability to reach a certain level of maturity and individual development. They still viewed the post-war markers of adulthood, such as having a stable job and starting a family, as important, but mainly because of their capacity to enhance individuals' maturity and levels of responsibility.

Sanna (24, Finland), for example, considered as adults people who took responsibility for their own lives, but also those who were married and had a family and a stable job. Tiia (26, Finland), who had a baby, said that she had become more adult since becoming a mother, because of the increase in responsibilities for another person. Her role and status had changed too, from being a mere daughter to being a mother. What had made her become an adult was nonetheless not motherhood per se, but the responsible role it had bestowed upon her. Céline (23, France) also mentioned that having children made people become 'more adult'. For Caroline (25, France), having a stable job and children undeniably changed people's attitudes and increased their sense of responsibility. Valérie (23, France) added that having a fixed working schedule affected the transition to a more grown-up lifestyle.

When I asked who the young women considered to be more adult among their acquaintances, such as their fellow students or friends who were already on the labour market, many answered that those who had made the transition from university to a stable working life had grown up. The change in their lifestyle had increased their adultness.

R: And, which ones are more adults than the others?
I: Maybe those who have loans and permanent jobs and children, they are more adult than [us] who study (laughs).

R: Do you feel differences in the behaviour or sense of responsibility (…)?

I: I don't think we behave differently, or that students are (…) less responsible. But I think it's the life situation that makes it seem that they are more adult, although maybe in their thinking they are not, but it's just the concept of owning your flat and having a permanent job; (…) this is 'the adult life'.
Elina (26, Finland)

However, several young women stressed that having a job and a family did not necessarily make an individual more adult than a student or childless person. Having a family increases one's responsibilities and transforms one's social role, but it does not necessarily mean that one is an adult.

> [Having a job and being married] is not enough [to be considered an adult]. We can play mum and dad; we can play, there are roles that we can acquire.
> *Caroline (25, France)*

R: The people who work, do you think they're more adults than the ones that are studying?

I: Not always, no. I don't think work (…) makes you adult.

R: Ok. So do you … why? (…) What's their behaviour like, for example?

I: Mmm … I don't know. It's not just … [If] you have regular working times, it doesn't make you adult; it's yourself and how you behave [that does]. And also studying can [make you] grow up and educate you mentally very much. You can learn a lot of things from there too.
Suvi (25, Finland)

Tuuli (25, Finland) agreed that one's lifestyle could be based on personal decisions. She considered the decision whether to study or

enter the labour market to be an adult decision, or to show absence of maturity in some cases. She saw the choice of higher education as a mature adult decision. By contrast, young people who were perceived as adults because they had achieved the markers of adulthood, such as a stable job or a family, might in fact be immature in terms of life choices. She added that what differed between students and young working people was their lifestyle, rather than their levels of maturity. Both groups could be either mature or immature. Florence (22, France) made similar observations. She remarked that some of her student friends were much more responsible and thoughtful than some of her friends who were already working. Nadège (21, France) emphasised too that having a family did not transform a person into an adult. She referred to a friend who had been with a boyfriend for several years, and had stopped her studies because she wanted to have a baby. For Nadège, ending one's studies at a time when the socio-economic structure was so unstable and demanding was not a very wise decision at all. Emmi (25, Finland) made an interesting remark in this connection. She at first said that her friends who had children were more adult than the others, but after thinking about it more thoroughly, she pointed out that they could behave in the opposite way when they were free from their responsibilities. In that case they appeared more immature than her student friends.

R: And the ones who have children, for example?
I: Yeah, it's really different with them, (...) I think they're more adults. Or getting more adults, [being] all the time with their children.
R: So, you can feel a difference between these friends?
I: Yeah. But then, when you see those friends (…) without their children, it's a bit different than when they are with their children. (…) Then they seem more like you and more like young adults, or young people. (...) For example, my work mates, (…) many of them have children, [and] it's really funny 'cause sometimes I feel more adult than them when we go out, 'cause they get so 'crazy', (laughs) 'cause

they don't get out that often. (...) I'm a bit ashamed sometimes, how they act! (laughs) (...) So, maybe I wouldn't say that having children makes you an adult.
Emmi (25, Finland)

Parenthood partly leads to adulthood because it entails serious commitments, but mostly because it involves being responsible for another person. Parenthood per se does not turn a person into an adult; it is the responsibilities placed upon them by the role that do so (Westberg 2004: 51). Managing and coping with the new situation, rather than the change in social status as such, precedes the status of adulthood. Like my informants, Arnett's (2004: 216) respondents felt they were reaching adulthood gradually, at their own pace, rather than all at once. They too did not consider the status of parenthood a key marker; the responsibilities that came with it were the true causes of the growth in maturity.

Conclusion:
Adulthood – A combination of social and psychological attributes

The informants highlighted a new angle for considering adulthood. They pointed out that reaching majority and new legal rights does not transform a young person into an adult. They emphasised that fulfilling the social markers of adulthood does not necessarily mean that a person is an adult. They questioned the subjective aspect of adulthood, arguing that a person might be a social adult but not necessarily a mental adult. They highlighted the importance of psychological development and levels of individual maturity. They said that fulfilling their parents' criteria of adulthood might reinforce the subjective aspects of adulthood, because it confers additional responsibilities, but it does not make a person into an adult. Post-war markers thus only play a partial role in the status of adulthood.

Individuals' psychological development is equally important in the process of transition.

7.3 Emphasis on Responsibility and Maturity

As discussed in subchapter 7.2, in the informants' opinion, the criteria for adulthood were essentially based on individuals' characteristics, such as behaviour and mental development, rather than social qualifiers such as marriage, work, owning a house or becoming a parent. This subchapter further emphasises the less visible and more complex attributes of adulthood highlighted by the young women, such as having a sense of responsibility and maturity. The markers of transition still held an important place in their lives, but they were seen as enhancing adult status rather than producing it.

Are you an adult yet?

Specific markers have been used by scholars and researchers as a framework for youth analysis. In his work in the 1980s, Galland established a framework for the study of youth transition, defined by residential, professional and relationship transitions (Molgat 2007: 495). These events represented the stepping-stones in people's lives until the end of 'The 30 Glorious Years' of prosperity experienced by advanced societies after the end of the Second World War. However, since the end of the 1970s, structural factors such as socio-economic stagnation, fluctuation and global forces have drastically changed the course of those societies. In the wake of such changes, young people's transitions to adulthood have become more challenging, uncertain and elusive.

The attainment of adulthood is still measured with the markers mentioned above. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to determine the transition to adulthood according to social criteria, because a growing number of young people do not – or simply cannot – fulfil them any more. Many experts and policymakers' discourses acknowledge that these young people are extending their youth.

My informants were becoming adults within this particular framework. In light of the disruptions to the patterns of transition to adulthood, I asked how the young women perceived their own transitions, what they considered being adult to consist in, and whether they felt adult. The current wider perception of the criteria for adulthood is still based on the social markers of transition experienced by the previous generation. Did that mean that young women felt less adult than their parents at the same age, who had already fulfilled the criteria that qualified them as adults? The interviewees displayed different feelings towards their own adult status. Most answered that they felt they were partly adult or were young adults, or showed awareness that they were between two phases but were approaching the adult side. Some were very aware of being in the middle of the transition process.

> I'm losing my child spirit somehow, because inevitably I'm faced with problems I didn't have before, because when you're a child, (...) you're not aware of some things, some issues … (...) Now I feel I'm falling into the whirl, I realise, 'wow, I've got responsibilities.' (...) Now I handle everything, the car insurance, (...) my flat, leisure activities, (...) etc. …
> *Alice (23, France)*

Similarly, Anna (28, Finland) felt adult, but said that she would feel more adult when she had acquired a stable job, her own flat and maybe a family. Natalie (22, France) felt rather adult, even though her father paid for her rent and expenses, because she could manage her own

life and lived on her own. Thus the post-war markers of adulthood still had an impact on young women's feelings about adulthood.

I: I feel like a 'young adult'. (…) I'm independent, well, I live on my own, so I manage my everyday life, (...) I have student jobs, so I have some responsibilities, (...) but I know I'll feel much more adult quite soon when …
R: ... when you'll be working?
I: When I'll be, yes, fully independent.
      Natalie (22, France)

R: Do you feel adult then?
I: Mm … yeah! From time to time, yeah. (...)
R: But not all the time?
I: Not all the time, but I think it's only because when you are a child, (...) you think that adults don't worry or don't have any suspicions about anything, but the truth is that it's not easy to be an adult. And you can't (...) know answers to every question, even though you are an adult. So, yes, I feel myself as an adult. (laughs)
      Elina (26, Finland)

Some young women, in particular in France, clearly stated that they did not feel adult at all when I first asked the question. But after discussing it, they said that they were conscious of growing up and taking on new responsibilities, and hence of becoming adult. They were negotiating their own positions within the statuses of youth and adulthood during the interview. For instance, Caroline (25, France) and Céline (23, France) mentioned that they still felt the spirit of their inner child, but were aware of moving forward towards adulthood. Audrey (26, France) clearly stated that she did not feel adult yet.

Deep inside of me I really feel like a little girl! Well, I know I'm grow-ing up, I realise it because I'm living (…) on my own, well, I mean,

I don't live with my parents any more, and I'm trying to handle my life!
Céline (23, France)

Not at all! (laughs) Ah not at all! (...) I don't feel adult at all, I don't necessarily even feel ready to be a teacher to be frank, because when I see pupils in secondary school, sometimes I feel closer to them, although I'm 26! (...) Actually, I haven't changed so much since I turned 18. (...) Even physically, I don't see myself changing. (…) We take a lot of time to become adult; in fact, we are in-between, we are … big kids actually.
Audrey (26, France)

Some young women pointed out that being partly or fully financially dependent on their parents hindered a fully adult status. Adulthood was also associated with changing one's lifestyle and habits, such as calming down and having a more peaceful existence.

R: Do you feel adult?
I: Absolutely not! (laughs) No, because first of all, my bank account fills up by itself every month, (...) there's someone who puts money into it every month, so of course, financially, I'm not [an adult].
Nicole (21, France)

No, I don't feel adult at all! I don't have a proper job, (...) I don't feel like settling down, I don't feel like building anything with my (…) boyfriend, I don't feel like it, I don't see any future in that … Well, no, I don't feel adult; I'm not independent, my parents pay my rent (...) [and] I still like to party.
Sabrina (23, France)

I'd say 60% of me is adult and 40% is still … Well, (...) I get money from my mum, which basically makes me a child still, but I do think

that I'm an adult in the sense that (...) I'm quite responsible. (...) A concrete example is that a few years ago, on the weekend we'd get out [with friends] (...) and get drunk and (…) party. (...) And now I think that a nice weekend can be renting a movie on a Friday night and going for a jog on Saturday morning. (...) I've gradually moved into adulthood when I've noticed that I like doing things that don't have anything to do with going out and partying … You know, just calming down a little bit …
Piia (24, Finland)

Feeling 'in-between' is a central part of being an emerging adult (Arnett 2004: 227). Young adults are in an unstable phase, located between adolescence and adulthood yet belonging to neither. Arnett stresses that his respondents felt 'in-between' and examined their own positions within that status. Arnett's respondents were from various backgrounds, not necessarily from the academic field. Their answers regarding feeling adult were often ambiguous, and oscillated between the affirmative and the negative, just like my informants' responses. Arnett's respondents also said that in some circumstances they felt adult – for instance, they were financially independent and could handle responsibilities – but in other situations they still felt insecure or childlike (Arnett 2004: 14, 217). Some of Holdsworth and Morgan's (2005: 110–111) informants also hesitated between a negative and a positive answer when asked whether they felt adult. Several implied that in fact they felt 'both'. They too spoke of still feeling like a child inside. They displayed a sense of moving back and forth between childhood and adulthood according to different situations. Many young people today do not reach adulthood by merely fulfilling predictable social milestones. Instead, they gradually and personally construct their paths to adulthood, based on their own perceptions of the concept. Molgat (2007: 496–497) agrees that adulthood is a psychological period founded on existential maturation and an increasing sense of personal responsibility and independence.

Reaching adulthood is thus a psychological process that takes several years to complete. The extension of the transition has been increased by contemporary socio-economic restructuring and uncertainty. The author argues that adult status today is a combination of personal qualities and social roles. Indeed, young adults' biographies are sensitive to external structural fluctuations, mainly in the labour market, policies and welfare systems. The new developments in the life course and the resulting prolongation of youth are both a product of the changing socio-economic structure and a reaction to those changes (Molgat 2007: 508, 511–513). The social markers of transition are therefore still important and partly relevant, but they can no longer be dissociated from young people's subjective and psychological experiences of transition. The contextual structure is unfixed, and so are the social concepts. Patterns of transition are therefore moveable, and need reconsideration in the light of contemporary structural fluctuations and developments.

Negative clichés

Some young women – in both countries, but mainly in France – contested the notion of adulthood during the interviews. They saw adulthood as something negative, and referred to old clichés, such as having a routinised, fixed and predictable lifestyle, and losing one's childlike spontaneity, innocence and ingenuousness. For Céline (23, France), being an adult meant having constant pressure, problems and worries. Becoming an adult also meant growing old, which troubled her. Elina (26, Finland) similarly stated that the most difficult thing about becoming adult was having constant worries about everything in general. Although they felt rather adult, Sabrina (23, France) and Florence (22, France) had unenthusiastic perceptions of adulthood. In fact, Florence openly challenged the concept of adulthood as such when I asked her whether she considered herself an adult.

I *don't* like the word 'adult'. (…) I don't like the word 'adolescent' either, actually, so maybe I simply don't like categorisations. (…) I don't consider myself to be a teenager, so … why not an adult actually? Maybe it's the word itself that is too serious actually! I know I attach negative connotations to the word. (…) I tend to think, 'adults don't have fun any more!' I used to think when I was little (…) 'oh, it's not fun to be an adult, we can't play any more, we can't laugh any more, we don't have fun any more!' And I think [this idea] remained in me unconsciously.
Florence (22, France)

To me, it's also synonymous with having a bit of a gloomy life, (…) commuting, going back home and being with your husband, your child, your dog. I see it a bit that way: becoming sensible, becoming a bit boring.
Sabrina (23, France)

I know people who say that if you're an adult, you're not allowed to play around or laugh or do something very childish, but I don't see it that way, 'cause I have sisters who are over 30, and we are always just playing.
Suvi (25, Finland)

A few French young women also associated adulthood with losing one's child spirit or soul.

I: I'd like to remain a child! (…) Sometimes kids are a bit burdensome, but they are so enthusiastic about everything! They are always so happy about everything you suggest they do, and I really want to remain like that!
R: You mean, to keep on being spontaneous?

I: Ah, yeah! [They are] so spontaneous, well, a bit naive too, but it doesn't matter! (...) As a result, for me, adult ... (...) The vision I have of adulthood, (...) it's a bit old school, (...) it means there are things that you can't do any more, otherwise you'll be considered childish. (...) Hence, to me, it's almost derogatory to be an adult. When you're an adult, (...) you can't laugh needlessly any more ... Well, it's not fun!

Valérie (23, France)

Some of Arnett's (2004: 218–219) respondents also conveyed a bleak vision of adulthood. They saw responsibilities as burdensome, and adult life as synonymous with constraint. In addition, they regarded entering adulthood as becoming boring, beginning a stagnant period of life, and ceasing fun and spontaneity. Emerging adults tend to idealise childhood and the inner child spirit, which they try to preserve. They might act like responsible grown-ups, but they do not want to let go of their inner child. Regarding changes in values and attitudes, Inglehart (1997: 41) argues that the function of some cultural patterns has weakened following socio-cultural transformations after the Second World War. For instance, divorce and reconstituted families have become more accepted. However, this does not mean that the traditional family form is no longer a norm. It simply means that that particular feature has gradually weakened, opening a space for other social phenomena (in this case, reconstituted families) to become a new model that coexists with the older one. The conventional concept of adulthood might be similarly weakening and eroding, at least in the eyes of highly educated young women. Several authors (Bauman 1998; Calcutt 1998; Furedi 2001) observe that the concepts of fun, entertainment and enjoying oneself have become major sources of pleasure in life. They talk about a movement of rejuvenation, with adults seeking to revert to rather childish and less mature behaviour. The culture of amusement is also strongly linked to the entertainment market, which promotes individual gratification, hedonism, perpetual youth and images of immaturity.

Changing perceptions of adulthood

Entry into adulthood is distinguished by specific markers. But what are young people's – in this case, highly educated young women's – subjective conceptions of the concept of adulthood and the attainment of adult status? Do they still consider the transitional milestones to be as crucial as society deems them? Do they still share the same definitions of adulthood? Finally, are those who do not follow their parents' patterns of transition less 'adult' than those who do?

When I asked my informants about the notion of adulthood and what 'being an adult' meant to them, the answers in both countries converged. Most answered straightforwardly that being an adult was related to taking responsibility, being mature, being both financially and emotionally independent, and being able to manage one's own life. They viewed adulthood as a mental and individual process, rather than a merely social process. The respondents showed awareness of the definition of adulthood in terms of the social markers discussed above, but they emphasised that being an adult encompassed much more than those. Piia (24, Finland) illustrated this point clearly.

R: According to you, what is being an adult?
I: Well, if I say having children and having a house and being married, it's a really boring answer and I'm not sure if I even think that, but I would say that every person that I know who has a mortgage or has children is an adult. But I know people who I'd call adults and they don't have children or mortgages, or they're not married. I think being an adult is owning up to your own actions and being responsible. (...) I think it's being responsible for yourself, (...) admitting your own mistakes and being responsible for your actions.
Piia (24, Finland)

She added that moving on to a new life phase, such as graduating and starting to work full-time, enhanced one's adult status, rather than

generating it. Florence (22, France) agreed: a change in life situation, such as moving in with one's partner, might lead to further mental development and 'feelings' of adulthood, but in itself it would not determine adult status. In Sabrina's opinion (23, France), some of the post-war markers of transition still had a strong impact on the process, alongside mental development and maturity.

> Actually, I really associate adulthood with the labour market. (...) Being adult, I think, means having a job, financially supporting oneself, being responsible. (...) Becoming sensible. (…) I really see it that way: being more autonomous.
> *Sabrina (23, France)*

For Tuuli (25, Finland), being an adult was related to 'making all the decision mostly by yourself, (...) trying to manage on your own, and taking responsibility for your actions.' She too suggested that being an adult was a mental process. Natalie (22, France) echoed these views. Several young women mentioned that being an adult implied being responsible not just for oneself, but also for other people, and considering other people more.

> [Being adult] is being aware of one's own responsibilities, (...) being able to manage one's own life, and also being aware of other people's lives.
> *Natalie (22, France)*

Päivi's (25, Finland) definition of adulthood encompassed 'being independent, taking care of oneself, (...) being self-sufficient.' However, she was aware of not fitting into the post-war concept of adulthood.

I: I guess there's this connotation to the word adult, that (...) also means (...) [that a] person (...) already knows what he or she is going to do two years from now … You know, (...) [a] very fixed lifestyle. (...) I

don't think I'm adult in that way. (...) I think at some point [in the past] it might have been, but I'm not sure if [being adult] is that any more. (...) I think the concept is changing a little bit as well.

R: So, you view yourself as an adult, but within a kind of different idea what an adult/

I: Yeah, within my idea!

R: You have your own definition?

I: Yeah, yeah!

Päivi (25, Finland)

Similarly, Tiia (26, Finland) simply stated that 'for different people adulthood means different things,' Anna (28, Finland) that 'the "adult" is more in your head,' and Johanna (26, Finland) that 'it's a "feeling" that you are an adult,' which leads to a change within 'the whole mental world'.

Annika Westberg (2004: 37) distinguishes between the social status of adulthood and the individual or subjective conception. Social adulthood is defined by achieving social milestones. However, reaching independence or starting a family is being postponed by a growing number of young people today. They thus appear to be extending their youth and attaining the status of adulthood later. However, this is rooted in the social institutionalisation of the meanings and perceptions of the concept of adulthood. Westberg argues that there is a lack of research and knowledge about subjective and existential conceptions of adulthood. Rather than interpreting the transition in terms of external milestones, young people tend to emphasise the notions of responsibility and maturity as the major criteria of adulthood. They highlight the mental dimensions of transition (Westberg 2004: 40–41). Psychological development, individual maturity and managing responsibilities are more important than social markers for achieving adult status. Increasingly, existing social definitions of adulthood do not comply with many young people's perceptions of adulthood and transition (Westberg 2004: 49–50). However, the

current social structure does not yet recognise the mental aspect of adulthood as a criterion for transition. Young people's status thus remains ambiguous. Socially, they are considered not as adults but as experiencing a prolonged youth. Nevertheless, they might feel adult on the subjective level, and act like mature adults. Many are indeed able to handle life challenges, live autonomously and, above all, take responsibilities and wise decisions. It is important to remember that transitions vary according to young people's social backgrounds, gender, ethnic origins and levels of education. As a result, the process of transition is multidimensional (see Miles 2000). Different young people might perceive adulthood differently, with some focusing on the social markers and others more on mental aspects.

To further the discussion, Harry Blatterer (2007b: 774–778; 2010: 46–48) argues that the present concept of adulthood is deeply rooted in advanced societies' collective imaginaries. The contemporary model of adulthood and the current markers of transition gained normative validity after the end of the Second World War. Post-war economic and social prosperity, the development of welfare systems and access to higher education offered new possibilities for young people. The majority of baby boomers thus managed to achieve the social markers of transition at a faster pace. The fact that a significant number of people experienced an accelerated transition established new standards of transition and markers of adulthood, and led to their institutionalisation. Today's expert discourses, policies and cultural values are still based on these standardised patterns of transition, which are taken for granted and considered to be fixed milestones. However, because of recent socio-structural transformations, a growing number of young people can no longer become an adult by merely achieving those milestones. Consequently, their status remains ambiguous: they are not socially validated as full adults, but they are no longer adolescents either. Mentally, they have attained adulthood, but the subjective individual dimension goes unrecognised, mainly because young people's transitions are observed from an increasingly irrelevant perspective.

7.4 'Feeling' Rather Than 'Being' Adult

The status of adulthood, at least for highly educated young women, is a matter of 'feeling' adult, rather than of merely fulfilling expected social roles such as getting married, starting a family, or having accommodation or a stable job. The informants suggested a new way to look at contemporary adulthood and examine the actual components of that status. They had conflicting thoughts about the meaning of adulthood. Most of them said that being an adult consisted in displaying responsible and mature behaviour, rather than in merely fulfilling social criteria. They still valued the social markers of adulthood and considered them important stages in their processes of social integration, but they emphasised that they were not sufficient to make an individual an adult. In other words, they pointed out that being adult encompassed psychological and subjective characteristics. However, individual mental development in the process of transition is scarcely taken into account. Young people's transitions and social progression are still measured by their ability to attain the markers of adult status, in other words, social criteria. Contemporary analysts of youth generally fail to recognise the moral and subjective markers of adulthood, because they continue to base their evaluations on a concept that was standardised in the 1960s. The concept of adulthood, and especially the accelerated patterns of transition experienced by the baby boomers in their youth, became a point of reference because a sufficiently large number of individuals had undergone such a transition (Blatterer 2007b: 775). Nevertheless, concepts, like the social structure itself, are not necessarily fixed for all time. The patterns of transition to adulthood experienced by the baby boomers were embedded in the social context of the time. The wider structure has undergone restructuring since then. Therefore the pathways to adulthood that applied to young people 50 or 60 years ago do not necessary match the patterns of integration of today's youth. The currently common belief that young people are delaying

their transition to adulthood might in fact be erroneous. Looking at the process from an objective angle, unbiased by the influence of the post-war markers of adulthood, might shed new light on the process of transition experienced by young people today.

8.

CONTEMPORARY TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

This study compares Finnish and French female students' paths from university to the labour market and an independent lifestyle, their plans for motherhood, and their subjective approaches to the concept of adulthood. There were both divergences and convergences in the patterns of becoming an adult in the two countries. For instance, young women's transitions from university to the labour market differed between Finland and France, while their perspectives on adulthood were similar across the case-countries. Differences and similarities also appeared within rather than between the two countries in relation to some issues. This implies that transitions to adulthood are far from similar across advanced societies, European Union member states, or even individual countries. Furthermore, this study only included young women who were university students. Given that even this group presented differences in their patterns of transition, it is even more likely that there will be divergent patterns

of transition between young men and women, and among youths from different social and ethnic backgrounds. The diversity occurs at different levels – internationally, nationally and within subgroups of individuals. Thus the experience of the transition to adulthood and the supposed prolongation of youth cannot be taken for granted, and must be understood as multiple, heterogeneous and complex processes.

Different structural factors provide a framework for young people's transitions, such as welfare regimes, social and cultural ideologies, the socio-economic apparatus, or policies directed at young people. In turn, different structural dynamics shape the possibilities for and paths of integration into the wider social sphere (see Walther et al. 2006: 124). Van de Velde's (2008) study of transition among young people from four different countries (Denmark, France, the United Kingdom and Spain) with different welfare regimes and socio-political ideologies also demonstrates the diversity of patterns of transition and integration. Dominique Anxo, Gerhard Bosch and Jill Rubery (2010: 6) point out that normative regulations structure life courses and transitions in each country. This in turn provides a mould within which young people's life trajectories and pathways to adulthood take shape. These important findings go against the idea that there is a homogeneous experience of transition across all European countries, let alone across all advanced societies. The Finnish welfare system applies social-democratic principles, with an emphasis on universalism and individual independence. The French system is conservative-corporatist, emphasising the family as the main source of support for its members and the selective distribution of assistance. My informants were undergoing transition within these different contexts; their experiences were therefore likely to diverge.

The post-war model of transition to adulthood (see Figure 8.1) involves synchronic progress from one life stage to the next, with entry to adulthood being linear and predictable. This is the transitional model that most young people experienced in the 1950s and

1960s in France, and also in most other advanced societies. Finnish post-war youth experienced a similar entry into adulthood, following rather straightforward and predictable patterns of transition. This model also shows a clear separation between the public and private spheres (Galland 2004: 137). In the public sphere, young people generally completed compulsory schooling, and then entered the labour market and simultaneously gained financial independence. This impacted on and activated their development in the private or domestic sphere. Young people could leave the parental home, settle down, marry and start a family. Young women usually moved out of the parental home into their own households when they married, since cohabitation was still a marginal practice.

Figure 8.1. Post-war transition model.
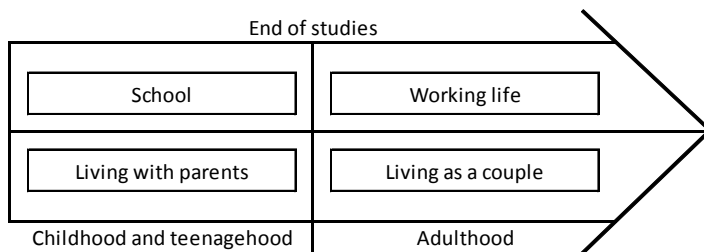
Source: Galland (2004: 137).

However, as demonstrated both in this study and in most analyses of youth transition, the socio-economic and cultural transformations that have taken place in advanced societies in the past few decades have disrupted the post-war model of transition presented above. As a consequence, the transition to the adult stage has started to extend, and integration into the next life phases has been delayed. Figure 8.2 offers an overview of the patterns of transition experienced by a growing number of young people in France and most other advanced

societies. The model partly applies to Finnish youth too. Young people study for longer, mainly by entering higher education. However, graduation does not necessarily lead to direct entry into the labour market. A large proportion of youth face unemployment or uncertain and fixed-term working contracts. This situation hinders them from reaching autonomous status, and forces them to be financially dependent for longer, on their parents or on state support. The compromises experienced in the public sphere simultaneously inhibit private or domestic transitions. The lack of stable jobs prevents young people from attaining residential independence and starting a family. Youth thus appears to be prolonged, and entry into adulthood delayed.

Figure 8.2. Extended transition model.
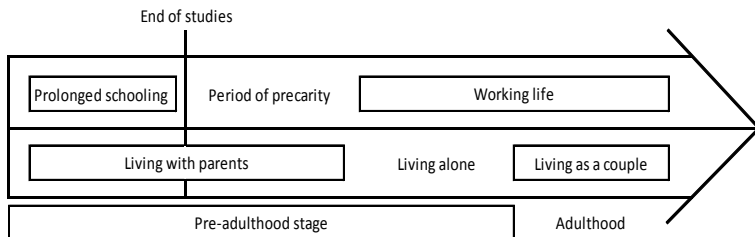
Source: Galland (2004: 151).

I have analysed my informants' patterns of transition through the post-war markers of adulthood, including integration into the labour market, becoming independent, leaving home and starting a family, as well as in terms of the subjective aspects of becoming an adult.

Prolonging education to adapt to labour market demands

A continuously growing number of young people are engaging in tertiary studies. It is increasingly common to pursue higher education. Yet policymakers regard this pattern negatively in some respects. In particular, young people are accused of delaying their entry into the labour market. However, there are concrete and justified reasons why young people are engaging in higher education. According to my respondents, studying at university or other higher-education institutions is a form of response to the labour market. Political and ideological incentives from the 1960s onwards have influenced young people to accumulate educational capital. Studying at university has become a logical step and a socio-cultural norm. Nonetheless, the large increase in young people with tertiary qualifications has led to the phenomenon of degree inflation. It is argued that the real number of places available on the labour market is lower than the number of graduates (see Chauvel 2002). Consequently, many qualifications have lost some of their former value, and young people are aiming for yet higher qualifications. Joining the world of work is increasingly difficult because of job competition, limited prospects, uncertainty, unemployment and precarity. A large number of occupations require specific skills provided by higher-education degrees. Diplomas simply provide eligibility for higher- and even lower-status professions, and only partly guarantee one's position on the market. Furthermore, some respondents stated that many young people used university as a safe haven from economic uncertainty and hazardous outcomes, and also as a means to gain time before entering working life for good. Many young people do not feel psychologically ready to enter the labour market on a full-time basis in their early 20s, and need more time to mature and consider their life prospects.

Finnish and French young women's experiences within the university system differed, as did their perspectives on that system. In Finland, they arrived at university already knowing the subject they

wanted to study, and with a rough idea of their future professional field. Most chose a course on the basis of a combination of personal interest and labour market prospects. Finnish students are selected through entrance exams, and this pushes them to decide in advance on the degree they want to study. Once at university, they can study minor subjects and modify their curriculum. Many take one or several gap years after finishing secondary school, in order to gain work and/or personal experience. My informants considered gap years essential, as they allowed them to gain maturity and work experience, and gave them time to think about their future job prospects and higher-education plans. Once they had entered university, their motivation for study was rather high, as they had a specific goal to aim for on basis of their own decisions.

Most secondary-school students in France go straight to university after graduation. Young people rarely take gap years, which are not a cultural norm in France as they are in Finland. Many students go to university because they do not know what else to do, in relation to either study paths or work plans. Several informants described French universities as a place for 'lost' young people. They claimed that many students go there without any predefined study objectives, choose a curriculum at random, and change their study path or educational institution, which entails starting all over again. The first university years are often a stage of experimentation, and indeed are experienced as disguised gap years.

The Finnish respondents showed reasonable satisfaction with the university system. They appreciated the system's flexibility, the homogeneity and parity between types of higher-educational institutions, and the efforts to offer equal chances to everyone. They also valued the ability to choose from a variety of courses and change curriculums. They saw the system as an adequate service for adults seeking further qualifications. Above all, they greatly appreciated the opportunity to combine study and work, and to arrange their timetables around these two parallel activities. The majority of students in Finland have

a part-time job, whether related to their studies or otherwise. Taking gap years and working during one's studies allows students to become familiar with and gain access to the labour market. In that sense the university system functions in tandem with the labour market, and operates as a bridge in the school-to-work transition.

By contrast, French young women displayed disappointment and frustration with the university system. They described it as weak and obsolete, and emphasised its inaptness to prepare students for professional life. They asserted that university offered exclusively theoretical knowledge and few possibilities to gain professional experience. French students rarely take gap years, and working during one's studies is difficult because of the rigidity of both the educational system and the labour market. Both the study schedule and employers are rather inflexible towards working students, which does not permit an easy combination of study and work. University is like a tower within which students acquire academic capital, but which functions as a separate entity from the labour market. Furthermore, the French higher-education system is segmented into several divisions and types of institution, which offer different educational qualifications. Different professional value is given to the degrees obtained, based on the type of institution. The system has remained hierarchical and selective, depending on whether students study at university, in vocational higher institutions, or in prestigious specialist schools (*Grandes Ecoles*) that are mainly elite institutions. The education system thus contributes to and perpetuates hierarchical social divisions and inequalities, and moulds young people's future paths of integration into the labour market and their socio-economic destinies (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

Inconsistent socio-economic integration

The informants from both countries agreed that they did not consider work per se the dominant feature in their lives. They undeniably wanted to work, but they wanted a job they would enjoy and that was related to their personal values and interests. This suggested a willingness to blend the characteristics of previously separated spheres, that is, of private and public life. For highly educated young women, work is not simply a means of subsistence that allows them to enjoy their private lives. It goes further. Work must have meaning, give sense to their lives, and be founded on personal ethics. They rejected the value of working for money, but not that of work per se. Work must still secure a living, but it equally represents a source of personal development and self-fulfilment. It should be an enriching experience that enhances individuals' lives, rather than a burden on one's private life.

Nevertheless, accessing one's dream job is often tremendously challenging. Socio-economic restructuring, uncertainty regarding job prospects, and precarious circumstances are well-known obstacles that significantly compromise young people's integration into the labour market. The job market is becoming increasingly demanding in terms of adaptability, flexibility, and educational and professional qualifications. The French young women in particular perceived the labour market as a paradoxical and hostile place for young people, and especially for young women. They expressed more anxiety and pessimistic feelings towards their prospects for integration than their Finnish counterparts. They pointed out university students' difficulties in entering working life, compared with students from vocational higher institutions and *Grandes Ecoles*, because of a lack of relevant professional experience. The saw entry into the world of work in terms of being left alone to face an unwelcoming labour market. In Finland the university system allows students to gain better acquaintance with the labour market before graduation. The Finnish young women

expected to have some difficulties before finding the job that would suit them best, but they felt rather confident, since they already had one foot in working life.

However, women in general remain marginalised on the labour market, in terms of unemployment, lower-status jobs, and more precarious employment. Moreover, women face more pressure than men to prove their value as competent, skilled and capable workers. Simultaneously, they experience social, political and cultural pressure to fulfil the domestic roles of wives and mothers taking care of the family. Nonetheless, many young women are implicitly discriminated against during the job-hunting process because of their childbearing capacity. The informants clearly discussed these issues. Several of them expressed worries about combining family life and a career. Some had chosen an occupation that would allow an easier combination, such as schoolteaching. Others clearly stated that they would lower their professional ambitions in order to raise their children. Many women adapt to the situation in similar ways. Young women's integration into working life is compromised by opposing sets of ideologies that create dilemmas in their personal and professional lives. They need to negotiate between labour market requirements, family values and their desire for motherhood, as well as personal values linked to full independence and self-fulfilment.

The informants clearly sought employability over employment, and were in favour of flexibility as long as it remained under their control. Most desired to engage in lifelong learning and a variety of professional experiences, rather than having to work all their lives in the same company or field. However, although there was a general acceptance of flexibility and constant change, the respondents called attention to the phenomenon of irrevocable destiny. They explained that once they had engaged in a particular field of study, they would have to work in that particular field, and would be unable to change it. The French informants insisted more on that particular aspect. Many French students fear making the wrong choice during their

studies, since it would determine their entire professional lives (see Van de Velde 2008). Those willing to change career must study all over again in order to obtain the required qualifications. The French young women felt trapped within the demands of both the education system and the labour market. Like most French people in general, they also had a rather pessimistic view of their socio-economic prospects, even if they already had work experience. They were frightened by the lack of predictability and potential hazardous outcomes.

The Finnish informants displayed a different, rather positive attitude. They asserted that they already knew how the labour market operated, through having worked prior to and/or in parallel with their studies. Most French university students are more at risk of precarity and unemployment after graduation, because they are new entrants, and because few of them have relevant practical experience (see Couppié and Mansuy 2003). Some Finns gain work in their own field before graduation. Obtaining their diploma helps to regularise and maintain their professional position. In France, graduation is a means to become eligible for work, and a proof of potential employability. French students complete their studies at a younger age than Finns, but their position as new entrants on the market and their lack of relevant professional experience greatly hinder their finding a stable job. Many undergo a rather long and tumultuous road to integration, with periods of precarity and unemployment (see Kivinen and Nurmi 2003; 2011). Ultimately they start stable working life at about the same age as Finnish students. The Finns may study for longer, but their route to integration seems smoother and more direct.

Rethinking the terms of independence and family ideologies

Attaining residential and financial independence is intrinsically correlated with the ability to obtain a stable position on the labour market. Finnish and French youth leave the parental home relatively early.

Those aiming to enter higher education move out after the completion of secondary school, if they are going to pursue their studies in a different city. However, while many students are residentially independent, they are not necessarily financially independent. This is especially the case for French students. Most receive regular financial support from their parents. Parental aid represents either their main source of income or supplementary funds. Finnish students do not depend so much on their parents. In general, they get occasional financial support when needed. There are several reasons for this difference. More young people can study and work in parallel in Finland than in France. Work is often the main source of income for Finnish students. In addition, all Finnish students are entitled to a study grant and housing support. This certainly helps to maintain their independent living arrangements. Many French students also receive study grants, although these are means-tested on the basis of their parents' income. Thus not all students are entitled to this type of assistance. Nevertheless, most of them can receive housing support, regardless of their parents' income. In that sense, similar policies concerning aid for residential independence operate in both countries. With regard to study grants, distribution in Finland is universal, in line with welfare principles that support individual independence. In France, the corporatist-conservative welfare ideologies still posit the family unit as the main source of care and support for its members. Nonetheless, housing support promotes residential independence. Leaving the parental home thus occurs within a hybrid system that creates contradictions and maintains young people in a state of of semi-independence (see Van de Velde 2008). Leaving home in Finland leads young people, including students, to reach full independent status. However, since their autonomy largely depends on state intervention through the distribution of study grants, student accommodation or housing allowances, we might question their status. Are Finnish students really fully independent and more autonomous than their French counterparts? What would be their

position if state support came to a halt? One could argue that many Finnish students are semi-independent too, simply relying on a different source of support – the state, rather than their parents.

Interesting patterns developed during the interview analysis with regard to plans to start a family. Young women's positions converged or diverged within and between the Finnish and French respondents. Finnish and French young academic women largely have equally contrasting attitudes towards marriage and childbearing. Being a married wife and mother were no longer the sole determiners of their identity. Some young women hoped to get married, some were against marriage, and most thought cohabitation was the wisest solution. Thoughts of motherhood provoked similar reactions, with some respondents wishing to have children, and others preferring to remain childless. In most cases they did not want to have children before they felt psychologically ready and had obtained enough life experience. Most wanted to complete their studies, find a stable job, or spend time on personal interests, such as working abroad, before starting a family. They considered the age of 30 a turning point at which to enter a new life phase. Those hoping to start a family would face the challenge of successfully combining two roles and two identities, in order to be an efficient professional and simultaneously a caring mother and wife. This choice required negotiations, such as lowering one's career ambitions, or choosing a job that would allow success in both areas. The Finnish and French welfare states provide equally generous assistance to families with children, yet the Finnish young women felt more confident than the French about managing that situation. Again, their fears were rooted in the socio-economic apparatus. Some informants explained that the university system and labour market would effectively dictate the timing of childbirth. They saw the labour market as demanding and discriminating against young women who wanted to have children. Moreover, student mothers are not legally recognised in France, and neither are their needs. Few young women in France have children during their studies, unlike

in Finland, where the phenomenon is fairly widespread. Student mothers' requirements are acknowledged, which encourages them to have children during their studies.

The transition to adulthood is often a blend of studying and working in Finland. Similarly, the mixture of statuses can extend to starting a family, which means that some young people are working students as well as parents. The transition to adulthood tends to develop in either a unlinear or a mixed pattern. In France the school-to-work transition occurs in rather linear and clear-cut terms. Patterns of starting a family follow the same model. Young people tend to graduate, find a job that will ensure financial stability and security, and then start a family. Although state interventions for families are equivalent in the two countries, the dominant structural ideologies continue to strongly influence young people's perspectives on starting a family and making the transition to adulthood.

Acknowledging new routes of integration and subjective adulthood

Throughout the centuries, specific social elements have marked individuals' transitions to adulthood. Some specific indicators gained influence and became standard points of reference during the 1950s and 1960s, when the majority of young people were suddenly able to complete their studies, find work, reach independence, move away from home, get married and start a family in a rather linear and brief interval of time. Since the 1980s, and even more so since the turn of the new century, policy discourses in advanced societies have focused on the extension of the transition from youth to adulthood. Young people now apparently postpone their entry into the adult sphere, and this is viewed negatively. But why consider this phenomenon a problem?

The informants, whose opinions converged across the two countries, provided explanations for the transformation in transitions to adulthood. Many of the scholars previously discussed have identified economic fluctuations and restructuring, as well as socio-cultural change, as the main triggers for the prolongation of youth. The Finnish and French young women distinguished similar features. They indicated the impossibility of planning their future, and thus of establishing long-term plans, because of the uncertainty of events to come. In that sense, the labour market holds the key to stable transitions, and to the timing of transition. Acquiring a mortgage and having a family necessitates not just financial but also geographical consistency. The labour market strongly requires young people to adapt to geographical flexibility. This seriously compromises their ability to enter a couple relationship and start a family. Unemployment and sudden hazardous situations are a constant possibility. For the respondents, living in the present was a strategic response to the impossibility of planning their life ahead. They stressed the necessity to be constantly alert and prepared for unexpected outcomes. Living in the here-and-now was therefore both a choice to adapt to, and forced upon them by, external circumstances.

At the same time, socio-cultural shifts that started in the 1960s have deeply transformed established conventional norms. The informants' parents had become adults in a context in which conservative mores and values still strongly shaped individuals' life directions. Today the context is more liberal, and people have more freedom to decide their own life trajectories. There is a large number of possibilities and opportunities. Yet the increase in choice has generated individual pressure and confusion regarding the 'right' options to choose, and how to reach the new goals. People's lives were more entangled with norms a few decades ago. The transition to adulthood followed a prescribed route, and was hence simpler and smoother. Today, individuals are apparently the masters of their own destinies, but life trajectories are increasingly unpredictable and complex, and

are still entwined with external structural factors. As a result, the process of transition has become very hazy and ambiguous. The prevailing discourse suggests that young people are prolonging their youth and deliberately refusing to integrate into the wider structure. In truth, the prolongation of youth did not emerge as a sudden state of mind; rather, it is a response to the unstable contemporary situation. Young people are simply attempting to find solutions in order to adapt to socio-economic fluctuations. For instance, they may try to gain extracurricular credentials and work experience, and deeply consider the timing of starting a family. Postponing parenthood is often the result of wise reflection, rather than of fear or a refusal to 'grow up'. Starting a family requires financial security and the ability to provide for one's children's well-being.

Furthermore, there are two sides to adulthood, the social and the subjective. The latter is generally neglected and lacks official recognition. Individuals are considered to be adults once they are able to meet the milestones of adulthood, that is, completing school, obtaining a stable job, becoming fully independent, settling down as a couple, and starting a family. However, these criteria define adulthood from legal, social and objective perspectives. They recognise neither the subjective aspects of adulthood nor the psychological aspects of transition (see Westberg 2004). The informants had a transparent perspective on the concept of adulthood. They stressed that their parents had become adults earlier than do most young people today; however, they had done so not out of choice, but because they were forced into it by social norms and life circumstances. They remarked that their parents had quickly achieved the legal and social aspects of adulthood, but they genuinely questioned their parents' mental and psychological maturity and their abilities to be adequate adults. The young women strongly emphasised being mature and responsible as the major criteria for being adult. In their opinion, an individual reaches adulthood in the mental sphere. They still perceived the social markers of adulthood as important, but this was because of their abil-

ity to increase one's sense of responsibility and maturity, rather than because they were the foundations of adult status in themselves. Some respondents even considered that fulfilling the post-war roles associated with adulthood could be immature and thoughtless in certain circumstances. For example, they pointed out the irresponsibility of starting a family instead of entering higher education to guarantee a minimum integration into the labour market. They viewed wise decision-making and thoughtful behaviour as the basis of adulthood, regardless the markers of adulthood.

The transition to adulthood experienced in the 1950s and 1960s is still considered the normative path to the status of adulthood. Consequently, today's young people are suspected of sabotaging the supposedly sole and authentic transitional route instituted by previous generations. Although it is increasingly difficult for young people to follow this path, because of socio-economic and cultural shifts, the new patterns of transition they are adopting are misunderstood and misinterpreted. Advanced societies have undergone profound and complex changes that have affected their deepest structures, and which have simultaneously impacted on social concepts such as adulthood and patterns of transition. History has proven that no social edifice is fixed. The current social context and social concepts are malleable and will undergo transformations. Social concepts are deeply rooted in the wider social structure that shapes them, and thus flow alongside it. This leads to the need to reconsider markers of transition and social concepts themselves. Young people's transitions to adulthood continue to be compared to those of the previous generation, and measured with the same taken-for-granted standards. However, these are increasingly irrelevant and outdated, thanks to recent restructuring (see Blatterer 2007b; 2010). Understanding contemporary transitions requires an objective view of young people's life trajectories, a reconsideration of the current markers of transition, a redefinition of the concept of adulthood itself, and an acknowledgement that patterns of transition are malleable rather than fixed. Letting go of established

concepts, habits and patterns of transition is difficult, partly because it represents one generation's deep involvement in the construction of the world as we know it. Passing the reins to that generation's successors implies the change, deconstruction and rebuilding of society in ways that the previous generation might dislike, as it might no longer meet their needs or expectations. This is part of the generational conflict between baby boomers and young people today that has led to misunderstandings regarding young people's choices of life trajectory (see Chauvel 2002).

Finnish and French female university students' models of transition

Finland and France are both European Union member states, and are believed to operate rather similarly. Yet on closer inspection, a fair number of differences appear in their internal structures. The divergence in welfare systems and socio-economic fluctuations offer a variety of responses and forms of support to citizens. As a result, young Finnish and French people experience fairly distinctive transitions to adulthood. This study focuses on female university students from the fields of the humanities and social sciences; the analysis might not apply to all students, let alone to the wider group of young people in general. As mentioned previously, if the group of informants had belonged to a different category, the results obtained would have varied in many respects. Nevertheless, it provides a clear picture of the model of transition that a growing number of young people currently follow.

The generalised model of extended transitional patterns illustrated in Figure 8.2 does not accurately correspond to the transitional model followed by my informants. Data analysis has revealed that university students experience different routes of integration. Social background, parental and state support, and the type of education

institution, particularly in France, affect their routes to and opportunities for integration into the wider sphere. In this particular model of transition, the public and private spheres tend to merge, especially in Finland. Finnish students move out of home early, and then might study at university, live as a couple (usually cohabiting), have children, and work at the same time (see Figure 8.3). They are entitled to state provision too, depending on their situation and needs. The transition in Finland thus appears to be desynchronised, with the different markers of adulthood experienced in a non-linear order or even a fusion, with no straightforward trajectory or clear-cut separation.

In France, university students tend to follow a more linear route of transition, especially regarding studying, graduating and entering the labour market (see Figure 8.3). Nonetheless, their patterns of moving away from home are similar to those of the Finns. Many students leave the parental home early to study, and thus attain residential independence. Some live as a couple and cohabit, but they rarely have children. However, they generally continue to rely on their parents for financial support, even after graduation during the period they spend job-hunting and/or in unemployment. Some students also return to the parental home after graduation if they cannot find a job. This situation occurs frequently.

Figure 8.3. Female university students' patterns of transition in Finland and France in the late 2000s.

Finland

End of studies

Higher education	Possible precarity	Working life
Study grant and/or work	Possible state support, Working life: own earnings	
Living alone or as a couple, possibly starting a family	Living alone or as a couple, starting a family	

Pre-adulthood stage

Adulthood

France

End of studies

Higher education	Expected precarity	Working life
Parents' support, and/or study grant, and/or work	Parents' support	Working life: own earnings
Living with parents, alone or as a couple	Living with parents, alone or as a couple	Living alone or as a couple, starting a family

Pre-adulthood stage

Adulthood

These models of transition to adulthood no longer resemble the paradigm of the 1950s and 1960s. The public sphere still determines some aspects of private life, but it does so in a more indirect and implicit manner. Young people, especially in Finland, do not wait

until after graduation to work and/or start a family. In addition, as examined earlier, university students rarely see work as a mere means of survival after graduation. Their profession must give meaning to their personal lives too. Starting a family requires sensible arrangements and planning, and being an adult is a subjective state of mind rather than a legal and social status. The dominant discourse suggests that young people are extending their youth. Some authors recognise that young people today are pioneering an additional stage of the life course, referred to as emerging adulthood (see Arnett 2004). Nevertheless, in most discourses and analyses, contemporary youth transitions continue to be examined through the lens of an outdated model, the 'classical' path generated in the 1950s. From an historical perspective, the 1950s model was in fact new, and was produced by post-war conditions. However, since the majority of young people adopted it, it became standardised and acknowledged as a point of reference. The current phenomenon of the 'prolongation' of youth might thus simply indicate that what is taking place is an alternative pattern of transition, rather than a disruption of the 'traditional' model. In that case, the process of youth 'extension' might not exist in reality; it could simply be a misinterpretation of current phenomena on the basis of structural conditioning and an outdated analytical apparatus. An objective and concrete viewpoint will offer up-to-date insights.

9.

EXPLORING THE NEW DIMENSIONS OF TRANSITION

This chapter provides new perspectives for looking at the current patterns of transition to adulthood, drawing on highly educated Finnish and French young women's views of their own pathways to adulthood. It asks primarily whether the prolongation of youth is truly taking place, or if an alternative model of transition, different from the post-war model, has started to replace it. However, this aspect remains to be discussed.

9.1 Alternative Models of Transition

Because things are the way they are, things will not
stay the way they are.
(B. Brecht in Good Reads 2011)

Young people are expected to follow the same model of transition to adulthood as the previous generation. Yet contemporary young people are increasingly pursuing a different path of integration into society, which seems to be delaying their entry into adulthood. They also have a different perception of the concept of adulthood. Their new patterns of transition are misinterpreted and misunderstood. Experts fail to recognise that an alternative model of transition, more appropriate to young people today, is emerging. Young people are however not attempting to disrupt the 'traditional' paths to transition, nor are they becoming adult at a different pace. They are simply becoming adult in a different way.

Is the prolongation of youth really taking place?

Social agents, including experts, the media, policymakers and even young people themselves, understand the concept of adulthood on the basis on the meaning currently attributed to it. Being an adult means being independent, having a stable job, settling down with a partner and starting a family. These 'classic' markers define the current notion of adulthood, and provide the context for moving on from adolescence to adult status. However, many contemporary young people, such as highly educated youth, are experiencing increasing difficulties in following this pattern. First, the current socio-economic situation prevents them from attaining stability and thus the full status of adulthood. Second, a large segment of the youth population simply no longer wants to fulfil these markers. For instance, the Finnish and French interviewees said that they wanted to lead flexible lifestyles, and to be able to change jobs and workplaces, as long as they remained in control of their own decisions, rather than being forced to do so. Many young adults no longer seek a fixed or predictable lifestyle, such as working for the same company all their lives. However, they also reject being forced into socio-economic or

geographical flexibility. They wish to be able to choose and control that aspect. A growing number of young people in fact hope to follow a flexible route, as long as it remains in accord with their life choices and values. Third, they have a different view of the concept of adulthood. They understand being an adult in distinctive terms, based on subjective maturity and mental development rather than social attributes.

Nonetheless, the standard patterns of transition still hold sway in perceptions of young people's social status, and assume that young people are merely defying the norms by delaying their entry into adulthood. Young people are suspected of experiencing a prolonged period of youth before attaining the 'natural' pattern of adulthood. However, they are striving for integration into a demanding economic apparatus that compels them to adopt innovative strategies. These coping strategies might postpone some developments in their life course, such as reaching financial autonomy and starting a family. Nevertheless, these tactics collide with the political and socio-cultural expectations that young people should move on to the next stages of their lives within a short interval. As a result, the general discourse tends to stigmatise young people, and regards them as responsible for their own precarity. Young people's lives are surrounded by contradictions. They are greatly encouraged to pursue tertiary education in order to achieve the qualifications that the labour market demands. At the same time, policy initiatives aim to reduce study time and accelerate the school-to-work transition. Young women feel the pressure to be good mothers and family carers, while at the same time the labour market implicitly discriminates against them for childbearing. The natural and biological feature of parenthood becomes a source of conflict for many young women. They feel forced to negotiate whether and when they should have children, depending on their career and personal desires for motherhood.

The post-war generation's exceptional destiny

Looking at transition from a wider and longer-term perspective offers much valuable evidence. The rapid, condensed and linear transition to adulthood experienced by young people in the 1950s and 1960s was in fact exceptional and specific to that particular generation. Societal transformations brought specific life conditions, possibilities and opportunities to the youth of that time. The considerable change in the process of transition in those decades was an outcome of the major structural transformations experienced by advanced societies after the Second World War. In earlier times, although the socio-economic and politico-cultural apparatuses were different, the pace of transition and the ages for fulfilling markers of adulthood did not necessarily diverge much from those experienced today.

Transition has always varied among different social groups, according to levels of education, socio-economic background and gender, and between rural and urban areas. Today, different subgroups of young people continue to experience diverse patterns of transition, depending for example on their educational qualifications, social origins or ethnic background. The young women in my study represent one subgroup of young people, mainly highly educated middle-class females. Analyses of other youth subcategories would certainly present different results and show diverse patterns of transition. Antoine Prost (1987: 35–39) distinguished two types of young people that coexisted in France between the First and Second World Wars. In the first group, young people from peasant backgrounds and the lower and middle classes had a shorter youth. They generally finished school at 13, after the end of compulsory schooling. They went to work, but continued to live in the parental home, gave their salary to their parents, and remained under parental control. Military service for men, and later marriage for both men and women, marked the transition to adulthood. The second group included youths from upper-middle and higher social classes, who

experienced a longer youth. They studied for longer, and some left home to pursue higher education or military duties. They generally married later. Few women went into tertiary education, but those who did delayed marriage as a consequence.

In 1911 in France, the average age of marriage for men was over 30 in the middle and upper classes, while it was around 25 in the lower classes. Women were generally younger: 24 in higher social classes, and the early 20s in lower social categories (Prost 1987: 40). In Finland, the average age of marriage in 1881–91 was 27 for men and 25 for women. This average remained fairly constant until the 1950s, when it started to decrease (Koskinen et al. 2007: 141). Jack Goody (2000: 107) adds that in some parts of Italy in the 18th century, men and women did not marry until the age of 29–30. In some other parts of the country, they married younger. The age of marriage varied greatly across Western European countries. The main reason for marrying later for men was the necessity to accumulate sufficient financial and economic resources, so that they could provide for their wife and family. In pre-industrial European agricultural societies, young men and women would also generally leave the parental home to go into service, or would work while still living with their parents, and save up for their future household before getting married (Goody 2000: 63–64). Young people could not marry without presenting a dowry in the case of women, or an inheritance in the case of men. Young people from lower social classes had to work to save funds so that they could marry. This process took time, and young people therefore married at a rather late age (Goody 2000: 106; Oinonen 2004: 287). From the 1950s, as the old apprentice and service systems disappeared, youth participation in education increased. The transition process was condensed, with young people leaving home in order to marry, and simultaneously becoming financially and residentially independent (Oinonen 2004: 289). Today's transitions resemble those of pre-industrial times. To some extent, some young people are in a similar situation: working, saving money, and still living with their

parents. The societal context and ways of life are not comparable, yet these aspects reveal that before the Second World War, and across history, transitional pathways did not necessarily follow the linear or synchronic lines of those experienced by the post-war generation.

The median age of women at childbirth has historically never been consistent or confined to a specific age range. Fabienne Daguet's (2002) report shows that in 1901 in France, women's average age at childbirth (including all births, not only the first birth) was 29. This is about the same age as today in Finland and France. However, it should be remembered that the socio-cultural context was different at that time. Women did not have access to effective contraception, and many gave birth after the age of 40. Infant mortality was also high. Nonetheless, until the 1950s, most women gave birth between the ages of 25 and 34. After 1950 the number of women giving birth before 24 increased, but it never overtook the number of births among the 25–34 age group. From 1975 onwards, trends returned to what they had been before the 1950s. Mores and family values have had an impact, as have women rights and access to contraception, yet empirical data shows that the figures in the 1950s and 1960s were a historical exception.

In Finland, trends were similar (Vattula 1983: 42–47). In the early 1800s, women aged 25–29 and 30–34 accounted in equal proportions for most births. Many women also gave birth at ages 35–39 – surprisingly, more than did women aged 20–24. In the early 1900s the patterns were the same. The trends started to change after the Second World War, as they did in France. Women aged 20–24 and 25–29 then accounted in equal proportions for most births. From the 1980s onwards, birth patterns returned to earlier historical tendencies, as in France, with most women giving birth at the ages of 25–29 and 30–34, and the number of those having babies at the age of 20–24 decreasing (Koskinen et al. 2007: 141; Laes 2005).

The concept of marriage underwent alterations too. Marriage based on love and intimacy is a fairly recent phenomenon. Tradition-

ally, marriage was an institution to secure one's socio-economic assets and social position. The Victorian era saw the emergence of unions based on romance (Coontz 2005). After the Second World War, the 'Golden Age' witnessed a general move towards a marriage model that reinforced the division of gender roles, with a male breadwinner, a female homemaker, and generally two children. The archetype for the nuclear family emerged. This model, which was adopted by the majority, gave a new meaning to marriage. Like adulthood today, it became taken for granted as a fixed model that would last into the future. Yet since the 1970s, the institution of marriage has been disrupted (Coontz 2005: 228). The division of roles between men and women collapsed with women's access to the labour market, and this disrupted the standard nuclear family, which was founded on fixed gender roles. Simultaneously, divorce rates have escalated, new family models have developed, such as lone parents and reconstituted families, and cohabitation rather than marriage has become a norm. In addition, same-sex couples can openly live together, and can even get married in some countries. Mores have greatly evolved towards acceptance regarding couple diversity and living arrangements in recent decades.

The age of majority in Finland and France, as in most advanced societies, is 18. This too tends to be taken for granted as unquestionable and definite. Young people legally become adults at 18, which endows them with new sets of legal rights, duties and opportunities. However, the legal transition to full citizenship has only recently been set at this age. The age of consent and the legal age of marriage have followed the same patterns (see Table 9.1). Throughout the centuries, they have fluctuated. In addition, surprisingly, while life expectancy has gradually increased, the age of majority has progressively decreased. About 100 years ago, young people had to wait until the age of 21 to be legally recognised as fully responsible citizens in Finland and France. Before the French Revolution, the age of majority in France was even higher, at 25. Finland was a part of the Kingdom

of Sweden from the Middle Ages until it became a Russian duchy in 1809, and Swedish law therefore applied in Finland. Before the end of the 19th century, Finnish women were not considered independent citizens, and were legally dependent first on their parents and then on their husband. The age of consent and legal marriage followed a parallel development in the two countries, rising throughout the centuries (Markkola 2003: 139–140).

The age of marriage with parents' consent presents an interesting historical difference between Finland and France. In Finland the Ecclesiastic Law of 1686, based on Lutheran Reformation laws and principles, stipulated that parents or guardians could neither force nor prevent marriage. Parents' consent was necessary, but it could not impede the marriage (Knuutila 1990: 185, 699). This law came into force in 1734, when it was recognised by the Kingdom of Sweden (Koskinen et al 2007: 139). However, Ilmar Talve (1997: 192) points out that in practice young people's choice of spouse was still restricted by the consent of their parents, who could withhold a dowry or inheritance. From 1864, people aged 21 could marry the person of their choice. Furthermore, although the legal age of marriage was fairly low, the age at which people were seen as sufficiently mature for marriage was 25–30 for men and 20–25 for women (Talve 1997: 191). By contrast, in France, as in most other Western European countries, young people were bound by their parents' decisions and approval for marriage. They could rarely choose their partner, as marriages were usually arranged (see Goody 2000). However, the age of marriage without consent followed a parallel development with the age of majority. Before the French Revolution, men and women had to wait until the ages of 30 and 25 respectively to be able to marry without their parents' consent (see Planiol 1950 [1899–1901]). The age decreased and then rose again throughout historical and political transformations.

Table 9.1. Legal age of majority, marriage, and marriage without parents' consent in Finland and France.

Legal status	Finland	France
Age of majority	-Before 1700s: 15 for men only; women were the property of their parents, then of their husband (based on Swedish laws, as Finland belonged to Sweden at that time) -1721: 21 (for men only) -1864: 21 for men, 25 for women -1898: 21 for both men and women -1969: 20 for both -1976: 18 for both	-Before the French Revolution in 1789: 25 for both men and women (the age varied in different regions) -1792: 21 for both -1974: 18 for both
Legal age of marriage (minimum age by law)	-Before 1500s, based on Roman and canonical law: 14 (men), 12 (women) -1571 (ecclesiastic order) and 1686 (ecclesiastic law): 15 (men), 14 (women) -1721: 21 (men), 15 (women) (peasant men were allowed to marry younger, at 18) -1911: 21 (for all men), 17 (women) -1929: 18 (men), 17 (women) -1987: 18 for both men and women	-Before 1789, based on Roman and canonica law: 14 (men), 12 (women) -1792: 15 (men), 13 (women) -1804: 18 (men), 15 (women) -2005: 18 for both men and women
Legal age of marriage without parents' consent	-1686 (applicable from 1734): theoretically, parents or guardians could neither force nor prevent marriage under Lutheran law. In practice, parents' consent still strongly applied. -1864: 21 for both men and women -1987: 18 for both	-1579–1792: 30 (men), 25 (women) -1792–1804: 21 for both -1804-1907: 25 (men), 21 (women) -1907–1974: 21 for both -1974: 18 for both

The table is based on information from the following sources: Finlex (2011); Legifrance (2010); Koskinen et al. (2007); Knuutila (1990); Markkola (2003); Ministry of Justice, Finland (2001); Otavan Iso Tietosanakirja (1962–1965: 247); Planiol (1950 [1899–1901]); Talve (1997).

Considering the low ages of consent and marriage, and the shorter life expectancy in earlier times, one might expect that the age of full entitlement to citizenship rights would have followed the same trajectory. This partly reveals the historical perception of adulthood itself. Young people may have been working, getting married and starting a family, thus meeting all the qualifiers that would entitle them to social adulthood today, but from a legal perspective, on the basis of their age, they were not necessarily considered fully fledged adults, as they were not yet entitled to majority. Parents also wielded authority and control over their children for longer. Adulthood in those days was measured by different norms, and was different in nature. Similarly, adulthood has a different meaning today than in the 1950s–1960s. While social criteria were emphasised in those decades, young people nowadays increasingly emphasise the subjective aspects of adulthood. This shows that the various determinants of a given status are not fixed in time, but are liable to modifications in parallel with wider structural fluctuations.

In the 20th century, the age of majority became closely interrelated with the civil rights young people gained when reaching 18. Today, age is still considered the denominator of specific life stages, such as schooling or voting. In the past, dominating factors such as family, mores and traditions essentially determined people's life directions. However, age now seems to have lost its importance for the regulation of young people's patterns of transition. New sets of values and expectations are increasingly replacing age in shaping transitions, such as getting a job one enjoys and/or finding love and romance in partnership. Age still influences biological aspects like childbearing, but more and more young people wish to have children when they feel ready and mature enough. These are abstract qualities that cannot be solely determined by age, but must also take life circumstances into account. Yet age is still used as the main tool for measuring processes of transition.

Policies and youth transitions

The conventional ways of experiencing the school-to-work transition and the pathways to adulthood no longer work. In France, the university system and the labour market operate as separate entities (see Chapter 4). French young people therefore undergo a rather linear and predictable school-to-work transition, in which they must first obtain their diploma before being eligible for the corresponding job. However, the school-to-work transition is much more blurred in Finland, with young people working and studying at the same time, and even delaying their graduation because of commitments to their part- or full-time job. The recently restructured labour market is more demanding in terms of not only qualifications but also relevant professional capabilities. It seems that the rapid 'school-*then*-work' transition model leads to a failure of integration into the labour market. Given current socio-economic circumstances, a slightly longer and more mixed 'school-*and*-work' model seems more appropriate. In addition, because they enter the labour market during their studies, Finnish young people fulfil the adult criteria of working and being financially independent. In fact these young people do not seem to experience an extended period of youth, but simply a different type of transition.

However, current Finnish policy strategies aim to reduce the interval between studies and working life, and to return the school-to-work transitional path to that which was experienced by the previous generation, and which still exists in France. Finnish policies are also attempting to reduce and even eliminate gap years, to restructure the whole higher-education system into a more rigid school-like institution, and to condense study time in line with the requirements of the Bologna Process. The aim is to encourage young people to start working earlier, and simultaneously to regularise the timing of their school-to-work transition. But is this really the correct strategy? Gap years allow young people to pause and think about their lives and

futures, and to gain maturity. Most then enter higher education with lucid and coherent views. In any case, why should young people lose the freedom to benefit from enriching experiences of life and work? The current higher-education system allows them to integrate into the labour market before graduation in a smoother and more prepared way.

The French higher-education system, particularly university, resembles a large school-like institution, because of its organisation and its close incorporation with the wider school system. University is even considered a place for 'lost' young people who are unsure about their future work plans. In Finland, higher education has been regarded as a service for mature adults, but it seems that recent policy schemes are seeking to turn it into a large school-like institution with a business orientation. Flexibility, freedom and the provision of good services have been the main qualities associated with the Finnish higher-education system. Recent initatives will undermine the present system by weakening its good service provision and creating yet another rigid institution to monitor young people's life directions and destinies. These are precisely the features of which the French respondents strongly disapproved, and which are considered a failure in France.

The Bologna Process aims to create a European Higher-Education Area (EHEA) to facilitate staff's and students' international academic mobility and cooperation (Bologna Process 2007–2010). This entails the restructuring of the higher-education systems of the European societies involved in the EHEA into a standardised higher-education model. The qualifications framework has been changed into a threefold structure: the Bachelors, the Masters and the Doctorate. Both the Finnish and the French systems have already adapted to this structure. However, adapting to European directives is one thing, but restructuring the entire system into a more standardised model is another. The main goal of the Bologna Process is to encourage international cooperation. However, does a system that was working

efficiently, at least in the opinion of the Finnish students who have been using it, deserve to be eradicated? It might be sensible to ask the opinions of the current and future students concerned in these alterations. We might be led to wonder whether young people's voices really count in a decision-making process that involves those young people themselves.

We may further question whether the ultimate goal is genuinely to protect young people from precarity, or simply to ensure that their transition to adulthood fits established norms, even at the price of a more hazardous integration into the labour market. Is this an attempt to preserve a social system that started to disintegrate several decades ago? Today's socio-economic circumstances are contrary to those of the 1960s in terms of stability and predictability. Why should young people today follow a school-to-work transition model identical with that of the previous generation, if this model is increasingly inappropriate to them? It seems reasonable to ask whether the Finnish higher-education system that worked so well deserves to be torn down and transformed into a lower-standard and inadequate institution that would resemble the system that many consider obsolete in France. Towers are much higher and more visible than bridges; however, that is also their weakness (see Chapter 4). The wind of change strikes them first and beats them more fiercely. It then takes a great deal of effort to hold them up straight and strong.

Aiming for mature adulthood

On the question of starting a family, young people feel the pressure to follow socio-cultural norms and start a family according to the 'right' timing. Yet in many cases these norms do not match young people's real capabilities or desires. Gisèle Harrus-Révidi (2001) reveals the stories of baby boomers who went through traumatic experiences during their childhood because of their parents. The author suggests

that the institution of parenthood was emphasised by biological and conventional rules over a genuine desire to have children. Young people were implicitly forced by mores and structural norms to marry and start a family. As a result, parenting was in many cases a burden, and parents did not always provide emotional support and care for their children. Some people, especially women, were not necessarily ready or willing to start a family. From the late 1960s onwards, contraception gave women the ability to control their fertility, and having children became a matter of desire rather than risk (see Coontz 2005; Hakim 2000). This simultaneously changed the image of the child, legally, emotionally and socio-culturally.

Most young women in this study wished to have children, but only when they felt mature enough to care for a child. The informants expressed different opinions regarding having children. Some preferred to remain childless, but those who clearly desired children thoughtfully affirmed that they were not ready yet, and that they preferred to focus on other aspects of their life before entering motherhood. Many young people today share these views. Being able to take mature decisions is a crucial factor in adulthood. In addition, the sphere of the family has transformed. New family forms have become widespread and acceptable, such as cohabiting rather than getting married, living as a reconstituted family, and same-sex couples. Yet the general discourse disparages young women's choice to delay childbirth. It is often perceived as an attempt to deny their sociobiological responsibilities. One might wonder whether it is better to have children out of love and care when one feels ready for parenthood, or out of duty when emotional maturity and desire might be absent. Children are the future of society. The less emotional disturbance they suffer, the more likely they are to become healthy and balanced individuals. Is this not what society wants for its members?

Living in the present is a coping mechanism young people have adopted to tackle future contingencies, rather than being a mere self-indulgence. This strategy is generally misunderstood by the previous

generation, which grew up in a stable and predictable context. After graduation, some informants expected to enter an undetermined life period when their paths would be completely unpredictable and unknown. Whereas the previous generation knew where the road would lead after their studies, today even highly educated youths face a void period before obtaining a stable job. They must simply adapt to, react to and negotiate with what lies ahead. For instance, the media, general discourse and several experts (e.g. Bauman 1998) have discussed young people's choice to live a hedonistic lifestyle, and to focus exclusively on the here-and-now rather than planning their future. However, the informants who chose to live day by day claimed this was a strategic decision. In times of uncertainty, predicting future life outcomes is close to impossible. Young people are born within socio-economic instability and uncertainty, and have adapted to those circumstances. Today's socio-economic conditions indeed engender situationalism, in which people cannot plan ahead or engage in long-term commitments (Blatterer 2007a: 45). Young people still develop projects and try to stick to their aspirations, but they equally know that their plans are likely to change along the way. Marlis Buchmann (1989: 187) stressed that in times of transience and fluidity, it is more logical for individuals to orient themselves towards the present than the future.

Regarding the concept of adulthood, the research respondents raised an important issue: they contrasted social and subjective adulthood. They separated the post-war markers of adulthood (completing school, getting a stable job, reaching full independence, getting married and becoming a parent) from mental and psychological development. Fulfilling the classic markers of adulthood is one aspect of transition, but individual maturity and responsibility is another. The young women even questioned their parents' 'real' maturity when they were the same age. Almost all of them stated that their parents had been forced into adulthood by life circumstances, and thus had had heavy responsibilities at a younger age than themselves, but this

had not necessarily transformed them into psychologically mature adults. At that time social norms and expectations had greatly shaped the pace of people's objective or social development. Today, young people wish to focus equally on the subjective aspects of growth and reflexivity. In today's context, attaining social characteristics according to the supposedly 'right' timing might simply reveal an absence of responsibility and maturity. Some informants pointed out that nowadays, not pursuing higher education and entering the labour market straight after compulsory schooling is unwise and thoughtless. Although tertiary diplomas do not guarantee employment, they nonetheless protect individuals from remaining on the margins of society in an endless circle of precarious low-paid jobs. The French respondents in particular also argued that interrupting one's studies in order to have a baby 'on time' showed individual immaturity; nowadays, one should endeavour to increase one's chances of integration into the socio-economic sphere. Thus social maturity does not necessarily match subjective maturity. Under the current socio-economic conditions, subjective adulthood and an attentive consideration of one's commitments and conduct are more likely to contribute to effective integration into the wider social sphere than mere social adulthood.

9.2 No Prolongation of Youth, Only Changing Patterns of Transition

The model of transition that young people follow nowadays is perceived as a temporary blip that might be rectified in the future and changed back to the 'norm'. Efforts to encourage young people to complete their studies and enter the labour market sooner rather than later, or to get married and become a parent before they reach the age of 30, constitute strong attempts to perpetuate the previous

generation's pattern of transition. However, the baby boomers' destiny was the destiny of one particular generation, and does not necessarily apply to younger generations, who live within a completely different social apparatus (see Chauvel 2002: 220).

The young women interviewed for this study generated new perspectives for the analysis of pathways to adulthood. They highlighted that the post-war model of adulthood that was used to identify whether young people were adults is now eroding. The current model of adulthood took shape in advanced societies during the 'Golden Age' after the Second World War. It gave rise to a prevailing 'common-sense' and 'logical' model of adulthood that still prevails today (Blatterer 2007a: 6). The transition was shortened and homogenised, and this contributed to more rigid chronological ordering and a uniformity of pathways to adulthood (Kohli 1986: 279–280). Blatterer (2007b: 774–775) argues that a particular model of adulthood became institutionalised after the Second World War because a sufficient number of people at that time fit an identical model of transition. That particular model therefore became the standard reference. No other period in history had provided the necessary conditions for that model to be experienced by the majority. Coming of age became associated with attaining stable work, individual financial independence, marriage and parenthood within a brief period of time. These life stages became solidified markers of transition that then shaped the current definition of adulthood (Blatterer 2007b: 774–775). Social concepts are constructed on the basis of the socio-cultural and political developments of a given time. People's current perceptions of adulthood are founded on a succession of mental edifices constructed by the previous generation that implicitly determine current thinking (Blatterer 2007a: 23; Chauvel 2002). The social imagination further perpetuates the institutionalisation of specific concepts, such as the current model of adulthood, until it becomes a solid part of the wider societal apparatus and is thought of as a permanent feature.

The structure within which people live clearly influences their interpretations of the world and the way they act. Bourdieu (1980: 144) argues that the concepts of youth and old age are in fact socially materialised echoes of the struggle between younger and older generations. Youth is not a stable biological feature, but is a social feature. It is determined by society and historical contexts and events (Prost 1987: 35). Carol D. Ryff also argues that reality is socially constructed. In other words, people's interpretations of specific social phenomena are rooted in their subjective understandings of objective realities. The processes of institutionalisation and legitimation produce objective reality, and the internalisation of social parameters and socialisation gives rise to subjective reality. External and internal factors come into play with regard to the identification and comprehension of events and the construction of meaning. Ryff mentions that, for example, what seems real to a Tibetan monk is not real for an American businessman, and vice versa (Ryff 1986: 41–42).

In the same way, what matters for young adults and what seems real to them might not correspond at all to the older generation's preoccupations and perceptions of the world. Social concepts such as childhood, adulthood and the life course are products of a given society's collective imagination (Blatterer 2010: 45). Individuals internalise social roles and what is associated with those roles, as well as the development they are supposed to follow, on the basis of socially shared expectations and definitions. Understanding objective reality therefore involves the examination of the subjective realm from the individual's point of view (Ryff 1986: 46, 63). However, as the interview analysis in this study has highlighted, the social structure continues to allocate roles to young adults that no longer necessarily correspond to their needs. Indeed, socio-cultural expectations of adult development and the transition to adulthood are increasingly at odds with individuals' subjective perspectives.

Advanced societies' regulations and transitional stages, from childhood to retirement and beyond, rely heavily on age. This has

generated a normative system in which most social beings feel some pressure to conform to norms and rules based on age, even if only implicitly. Age is used to allocate status; however, this also entails some limitations. Such classifications deny the possible discrepancies between societal definitions and cognitive development (Ritchies and Koller 1964: 15). Moreover, deviation from age norms is generally perceived negatively (Sugarman 1986: 50–52). Young people today are stigmatised for not respecting the 'right' timing of transition. Léonie Sugarman (1986: 52) explains that categorising people by age may prevent them from reaching their full potential. A large number of young adults have a pessimistic perspective on future outcomes and integration into the labour market; they feel that they are failing by comparison with the previous generation, which managed to attain the benefits that had been guaranteed by their educational qualifications or had simply been offered as incentives for integration (see Chapter 5). The judgemental prevailing discourse on the extension of youth contributes to a state of uneasiness among young people. A large proportion of the youth population is caught between dominant institutionalised ideologies about the pathways of transition on the one hand, and the inability and unwillingness to adhere to the beliefs of another era on the other. The objective recognition of new patterns of transition based on flexibility, rapid adaptability and innovative strategies for socio-economic integration would help to decrease not only the current generational conflict, but also the negative view that many young people have of themselves. Young people do not intend to sabotage old patterns of transition; they are simply establishing new pathways that are more suitable to their own requirements. For instance, they are studying and working at the same time, or waiting to reach economic stability and individual maturity before starting a family. To some extent this involves a process of social and cultural deconditioning; in other words, departing from conventional pathways and blazing a new trail. In fact it involves a certain amount of bravery, which has been misrecognised as individual inconsistency.

Young people are not prolonging their youth, but simply redefining the pathways to and concept of adulthood in response to contemporary socio-economic changes and demands.

Today, most experts assess young people's routes to adulthood within what they consider an established and permanent framework. The results of their analyses tend to demonstrate negative outcomes. However, it seems that they lack the necessary distance that would allow them to interpret today's transitions more accurately. Still, they cannot be blamed for misunderstanding the phenomenon of the so-called extension of youth. It is natural for humans to evaluate others on the basis of their own perceptions. Older generations assess younger generations' ability to integrate into the wider sphere from the perspective of their own subjective perceptions of the world, their socio-cultural values, their own experiences, and their beliefs about the 'right' way to undergo transition. Even social scientists have adopted the common view that young people are delaying adulthood (Blatterer 2007a: 20–24).

The taken-for-granted models of youth transition and adulthood continue to set the timing for coming of age. Young people's apparent failure to reach the 'classic' markers of adulthood within the 'right' interval of time gives rise to the idea that they are prolonging their youth and rejecting adulthood. 'Real' adulthood is perceived as a fixed norm that a large segment of 'deviant' youths are unable to reach. However, members of the previous generation are failing to recognise the growing gap between the standard model of adulthood and the current reality. Rapid socio-economic changes have provoked a rupture between old standards and pathways and contemporary societal circumstances. In other words, following the 'classic' model of adulthood is rarely possible today (Blatterer 2007a: 63–64). Young adults grew up in a socio-economic context that radically differs from the world in which their parents came of age. Their visions and experiences of adulthood therefore diverge. Yet young people's experiences are still evaluated from within the framework of the

previous generation, regardless of the current state of the world. The interpretation itself is thus biased, since it is based on an outdated model that represents the transition of another generation in another historical period (Blatterer 2007a: 112). This suggests that not only does the evaluative framework for patterns of transition need redefinition, but the present model of adulthood itself requires reconceptualisation.

The social structure is malleable and permeable by wider external fluctuations. History has continuously proved that no socioeconomic model is fixed and unchangeable. Social concepts are not immune to restructuring, and they are therefore exposed to transformation. Whether young people are experiencing a delayed transition to adulthood seems to be the wrong question. Instead of concentrating exclusively on their difficulties in following the routes to adulthood established by the previous generation, a more accurate focus would be to ask: What are the appropriate paths of transition *today*? And what are young people's *contemporary* requirements for integrating into the larger social structure? As every generation tends to do, today's young people are exceeding the established parameters of the system and reshaping the structure into a more appropriate edifice for their own age group. The powerful baby boomer generation instituted an unprecedented social system that they thought would be lasting, yet it has proven to be as liable to alteration as all previous social apparatuses. It is certainly a challenge for the elders to recognise that the new generation cannot maintain that system, and to accept that young people have already started to lay the bricks of tomorrow's social edifice.

> *'It is demonstrable,' said he, 'that things cannot be otherwise than as they are; for as all things have been created for some end, they must necessarily be created for the best end.'*
> *(Voltaire 2006 [1759]: 4)*

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Appendix 1 – Cities and their Universities

Table A1.1. Brief description of Lyon and Tampere.

	Lyon (France)	Tampere (Finland)
Date founded	1st century BCE	1500 (village) 1779 (city)
Population (rounded up)	488 000[1]	213 000[2]
Distance from capital city	470 km	175 km
Ranking (size) in country	Second	Third
Main economic sectors	-Hi-tech industry -Medical research and technology -Services -Entrepreneurship -Tourism	-Industry, manufacturing -Information technology -Services -Research and development -Entrepreneurship

[1] Data from 2009.
[2] Data from 2011.

The table is based on information from the following sources: INSEE (2011); Site Officiel de la Ville de Lyon (2012); Tampereen kaupunki (2012).

Table A1.2. Universities in Lyon and Tampere.

	Lyon 1: University Claude Bernard	Lyon 2: University Lumière	Lyon 3: University Jean Moulin	University of Tampere	Tampere University of Technology
Date founded	1971[1]	1971[1]	1973[2]	1966[3]	1972[4]
Number of students (rounded up)	36 000	28 000	23 000	15 000	10 000
Main teaching sectors	-Sciences -Health and medicine -Teacher-training (IUFM)	-Humanities -Law and political sciences -Social sciences -Economy	-Humanities -Law and political sciences -Economy -Includes IUT and IAE Lyon[5]	-Health and medicine -Information science -Humanities -Social sciences -Education -Management and economy	-Scientific research in technology -Architecture
Research informants' (number) university of origin	3	3[6]	2	11	

[1] The University of Lyon was created in 1896, bringing together all the faculties that previously functioned independently. In 1971, the University of Lyon was divided into two universities: Lyon 1 and Lyon 2.

[2] In 1973, a split occurred within Lyon 2, creating Lyon 3.

[3] The University of Tampere was first created as the Civic College in Helsinki in 1925, which moved to Tampere in 1960. The name 'University of Tampere' came in 1966.

[4] The Tampere University of Technology was first established as a subsidiary of Helsinki University of Technology in Tampere in 1965. The university started operating as a foundation in 2010.

[5] IUT stands for *Institut Universitaire de Technologie* (Technological University Institute) and IAE Lyon (*Ecole Universitaire de Management*) is a specialist management school.

[6] One interviewee had been in Lyon 2, but was studying for her Bachelors using distance learning at the time of interview. Another had studied in Lyon 2 as well, but was taking a gap year when I interviewed her. One informant did not study in Lyon but at the IUP Management (*Institut Universitaire Professionnalisé* – Professional University Institute) in Saint Etienne (a city near Lyon) and was doing her internship for her Masters 2 in sustainable development in Lyon.

The table is based on information from the following sources: Tampere University of Technology (2012); Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1 (2012); Université Lumière Lyon 2 (2012); Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 (2012); University of Tampere (2012). There are also specialist schools and/or higher vocational institutions in Lyon and Tampere, but only universities are listed here.

Appendix 2 – Information on the Interview Process Provided to the Informants

Information provided to the Finnish interviewees before starting the interview:

Information on the interview process and data protection

This interview is conducted for the purpose of my PhD research, which is being carried out in the department of sociology at the University of Tampere. I am doing a comparative analysis of young adults' socio-economic situations in Finland and France. The research concentrates on young people in their 20s who are about to finish their university degrees and enter working life. The study also focuses on the social and economic changes that have occurred in the past 10–20 years, and how these influence young adults' living arrangements.

Since this study concerns young people, I think it is important to allow them to express their opinions on the current socio-economic situation. Statistics offer a lot of information on young people's living conditions, but they do not explain the reasons and issues behind them. The main goal of my research is to explain the situation of youth from young people's own points of view. This is why this interview is taking place.

The data provided during the interview will be used for scientific purposes only. Quotes will be included in my PhD thesis, in papers and articles written for conferences and to scientific journals, and also in a co-authored book on youth transition to adulthood that we plan to write with some colleagues from the department of sociology.

The same material will be used again later when the PhD thesis will be rewritten in publishable form. Research participants' real names or very personal information will not be revealed. Instead, fictitious names will be used to preserve anonymity. Also, all the information given will be kept confidentially and no one other than me and my research assistant will be able to access it.

If you wish to know more about my research or about the eventual results, don't hesitate to contact me!

Aurélie Mary
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Finland

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Information provided to the French interviewees before starting the interview:

Informations sur le processus de l'entretien et la protection des données transmises

Je mène des interviews dans le cadre de mes études de Doctorat en sociologie. Je fais une étude comparative entre la France et la Finlande sur la situation économique et sociale des jeunes adultes qui ont la vingtaine, et en particulier des jeunes qui terminent leur études universitaires et vont bientôt entrer dans la vie professionnelle. L'analyse porte également sur les changements sociaux et économiques qui se sont produits ces 10–20 dernières années, par rapport aux conditions des années 60–70, et comment ils influencent le mode de vie des jeunes.

Comme cette étude concerne les jeunes, il me semblait important de leur donner l'occasion d'exprimer leurs opinions sur la situation socio-économique actuelle. Les statistiques offrent beaucoup d'informations sur les conditions de vie des jeunes, mais ils n'expliquent pas pourquoi ou comment certaines choses se produisent. Le but de ma recherche est de parler de la situation des jeunes du point de vue des jeunes eux-mêmes. C'est pour cette raison que cet entretien a lieu.

Les informations données au cours de cet entretien ne seront utilisées qu'à but scientifique. Des citations seront incluses dans des articles écrits pour des conférences et des revues sociologiques, dans ma thèse de doctorat et aussi dans un livre sur la transition des jeunes à l'âge adulte que je suis en train de préparer avec des collègues à l'université de Tampere en Finlande. Certaines citations seront réutilisées lorsque ma thèse sera réécrite pour être publiée sous forme d'ouvrage scientifique. Le nom d'aucun participant ne sera

cité, ni les informations vraiment personnelles : des pseudonymes seront employés pour que l'anonymat soit préservé. Aussi, toutes les informations transmises sont confidentielles et aucun autre chercheur que moi n'y aura accès.

Pour plus d'informations sur ma recherche ou sur les résultats à venir, n'hésitez pas à me contacter !

Voici mes coordonnées :

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Appendix 3 – Interview Questions

(The lists do not include probes and other indications, only the main questions.)

ENGLISH VERSION

I – Present and Future: Personal Situation

a) Education

To start with, can I ask you what you are studying?
Are you now writing your Masters thesis?
Why did you choose to study this subject?
Are you satisfied with your choice?
And why did you choose to go to university?
Is there anyone in your family who studied at university?
By the way, how old are you?
Did you go to university straight after secondary school?
What do you think about the Finnish university system in general?
Do you think you'll find a job related to your level of study? And related to the subject you studied?

b) The labour market

Do you have ideas about the job you'd like to do?
Do you have some working experience already? Could you talk about that a bit?
How do you view the world of work?
How do you view the beginning of your working life?
Are you in a hurry to finish your studies and enter working life?

Do you feel pressure to develop and lead a successful professional career?

c) Living arrangements

Can I ask you where you live at the moment?
How do you finance your rent and other living expenses?
Later on, would you like to buy your own flat or house?

d) Family

What is your priority, finding a job or starting a family?
Would you like to get married later? Or just live with your partner?
And would you like to have children?
Do you think you'll be able to develop a professional career and have a family and/or children at the same time?

e) Hobbies and personal interests

Do you have any personal interest or hobbies that are important to you? Or are you involved in any associations?
Do you dedicate a lot of time to these?
And how do you think you'll manage to combine your personal activities with your future working life and family life?

f) Transition

In your opinion, what is 'being an adult'?
And do you feel 'adult'?
What do you think will be the most difficult in your transition from university to working life?
And in general, are you satisfied with your life at the moment?

II – The Youths' Current Situation

a) Education

According to statistics, the number of students has significantly increased in the last 20 years. In your opinion, what makes young people go to university?
Do you know any young people who went straight into work?
Did they find a job quickly after finishing school?
How is it going for them now?

b) The labour market

How do you view your peers' integration into the labour market?
Do you think that they feel pressured to have a successful professional career?

c) Living arrangements

Where do most of the young people that you know live at the moment?
How do they finance their rent and other living expenses?

d) Family

What is the relationship status of the young people that you know?
Do you have many friends that are living together with a partner (married or cohabiting)?
And do they have children, or will they have some soon?
Does that have an effect on you?
Does it put pressure on you to start a family?

e) Hobbies and personal interests

Do your peers or friends have any personal interests or hobbies that are important to them? Or are they involved in associations?
How do they organise their time between studies, work, private life and personal activities?

f) Transition

Do you consider your friends 'adults'?
What do you consider the most difficult issue when university students enter working life?
Do you think that those who went to vocational school encounter the same difficulties, or are better off?
And what is the hardest thing for the young people that you know who entered working life recently?
Are the young people that you know, or your friends, satisfied with their life in general?

III – Past

a) Education

To start with, can I ask you how old your parents are?
Did your parents study?
What did they study?

b) The labour market

Did your parents managed to follow or develop a professional career?

How do you think it was for your parents to find work once they finished their studies?

Do you think that they had more opportunities and chances to succeed than you have?

Do you think it was better 30 years ago?

Have you talked about all that with your parents?

c) Living arrangements

Were your parents independent at an early age? How old were they when they left home?

What did they do when they finished school?

Do you know if they started working early but would have rather continue studying, or doing something else?

d) Family

Are your parents married? At what age did they get married or move in together?

Before getting married, did they spend some time living on their own or with friends, or did they cohabit?

How old were they when they had their first child? And how many children do they have?

Do you think that there was more pressure to leave the parental home, find a job and get married at that time?

e) Hobbies and personal interests

Did your parents have a lot of hobbies or leisure activities when they were young? Or were they involved in associations?

In your opinion, do young people nowadays have more personal interests and leisure activities than young people had before?

Do you think that young people now dedicate a bigger part of their lives to leisure activities, in comparison to their parents when they were young?

f) Transition

Do you think that your parents became 'adults' at an earlier age than young people today?
Do they put pressure on you sometimes to find a job (and finish studying) or to lead a successful career? Or to start a family?
Do you get lots of support and understanding from your parents?
In general, do you think that life for young people was easier or more difficult when your parents were young?
Have you talked about that with them?
Do you think that young people were happier 30 years ago?

Conclusion

For the last part of this interview, I'd like to ask you if you have an idea of what you'll be doing or how your life will be in five or 10 years?
Also, do you feel that being a woman can facilitate or complicate your entry into working life or life in general?
Do you consider your generation to be unique or stand apart?

FINNISH VERSION

I – Nykyhetki ja tulevaisuus: henkilökohtainen elämäntilanne

a) Koulutus

Aluksi, voisinko kysyä, mitä opiskelet?
Eli, kirjoitatko tällä hetkellä gradututkielmaasi?
Miksi päätit opiskella juuri tätä alaa?
Oletko tyytyväinen valintaasi?
Entä miksi päätit mennä yliopistoon opiskelemaan?
Onko perheessäsi joku, joka on opiskellut yliopistossa?
Entäpä, minkä ikäinen olet?
Mitä ajattelet suomalaisesta yliopistojärjestelmästä yleisesti?
Uskotko löytäväsi koulutustasoasi ja opintoalaasi vastaavan työn?

b) Työmarkkinat

Onko sinulla ajatus siitä, millaista työtä haluaisit tehdä? Miksi juuri tämä työ?
Onko sinulla jo jotakin työkokemusta? Voisitko kertoa siitä hieman?
Millaiseksi miellät 'työn maailman'?
Millaisena näet oman alkutaipaleesi työelämässä?
Onko sinulla kiire saada opintosi päätökseen yliopistolla ja siirtyä työelämään?
Koetko, että sinuun kohdistuu paineita pyrkiä saavuttamaan hyvä ura?

c) Asumisjärjestelyt

Voinko kysyä, missä asut tällä hetkellä?
Kuinka rahoitat asumis- ja elinkustannuksesi?

Haluaisitko jossakin vaiheessa ostaa oman asunnon tai talon?

d) Perhe

Kumpi on prioriteettisi, työn löytäminen vai perheen perustaminen?
Haluaisitko naimisiin myöhemmin? Vai asua avoliitossa kumppanin kanssa?
Haluaisitko saada lapsia?
Uskotko, että sinun on mahdollista kehittää uraasi ja olla perheenäiti samanaikaisesti? Kuinka?

e) Harrastukset ja henkilökohtaiset kiinnostuksen kohteet

Onko sinulla kiinnostuksen kohteita tai harrastuksia, jotka ovat sinulle tärkeitä? Tai oletko mukana yhdistystoiminnassa tms.?
Omistatko näille paljon aikaa?
Kuinka uskot onnistuvasi yhdistämään aktiviteetit tulevan työ- ja perhe-elämäsi kanssa?

f) Siirtymä

Mitä mielestäsi on 'olla aikuinen'?
Tunnetko itsesi 'aikuiseksi'?
Minkä uskot olevan kaikkein vaikeinta siirtymässäsi yliopistomaailmasta työelämään?
Oletko yleisesti ottaen tyytyväinen elämääsi tällä hetkellä?

II – Nuorten nykyinen tilanne

a) Koulutus

Tilastojen mukaan opiskelijoiden määrä on kasvanut suuresti viimeisten kahdenkymmenen vuoden aikana. Mikä sinun mielestäsi saa nuoret hakeutumaan yliopistoon? Tai nuoret, jotka tunnet, kuten ystäväsi? Onko sinulla samanikäisiä ystäviä, jotka eivät ole opiskelleet yliopistossa? Ovatko he töissä?

Löysivätkö he työpaikan pian päätettyään koulun/opintonsa?

Mikä heidän tilanteensa on tällä hetkellä?

b) Työmarkkinat

Millaisena näet tovereidesi integroitumisen työmarkkinoille?

Uskotko heidän kokevan paineita saavuttaa menestyksekäs ura?

c) Asumisjärjestelyt

Miten suurin osa ikätovereistasi asuu tällä hetkellä?

Kuinka he rahoittavat vuokransa sekä muut elinkustannuksensa?

d) Perhe

Mikä on ikätovereidesi siviilisääty?

Onko sinulla monta ystävää, jotka asuvat yhdessä kumppanin kanssa (naimisissa tai avoliitossa)? Onko heillä, tai aikovatko he lähiaikoina hankkia, lapsia?

Onko tällä sinuun vaikutusta?

Koetko itse paineita perheen perustamiseen?

e) Harrastukset ja henkilökohtaiset kiinnostuksen kohteet

Onko ikätovereillasi heille tärkeitä kiinnostuksen kohteita tai harrastuksia? Tai ovatko he mukana yhdistystoiminnassa tms.?

Kuinka he organisoivat aikansa opintojen, työn, yksityiselämän ja aktiviteettien välillä?

f) Siirtymä

Pidätkö suurinta osaa ikätovereistasi 'aikuisina'?
Mikä on mielestäsi vaikeinta nuorille yliopisto-opiskelijoille heidän siirtyessään työelämään?
Uskotko, että ne, jotka valitsivat ammatillisen koulutuksen kohtaavat samat vaikeudet, vai ovatko asiat heille tässä suhteessa helpompia?
Entä mikä on mielestäsi tällä hetkellä vaikeinta niille ikätovereillesi, jotka ovat siirtyneet työelämään äskettäin?
Ovatko ikätoverisi tai ystäväsi yleisesti tyytyväisiä elämäänsä?

III – Mennyt

a) Koulutus

Aluksi, minkä ikäisiä vanhempasi ovat?
Ovatko vanhempasi opiskelleet, ja opiskelivatko he yliopistossa?
Mitä he opiskelivat?

b) Työmarkkinat

Onnistuivatko vanhempasi kehittämään uraansa menestyksekkäästi?
Millaista uskot työnsaannin olleen vanhemmillesi kun he saivat opintonsa päätökseen?
Ajatteletko, että heillä oli enemmän mahdollisuuksia ja tilaisuuksia menestyä kuin sinulla?
Uskotko, että tilanne oli yleisesti parempi kolmekymmentä vuotta sitten?
Oletko puhunut tästä kaikesta vanhempiesi kanssa?

c) Asumisjärjestelyt

Itsenäistyivätkö vanhempasi varhain? Minkä ikäisiä he tuolloin olivat?

Mitä he tekivät saatuaan opintonsa päätökseen?

Tiedätkö aloittivatko he työnteon varhain, mutta olisivat sen sijaan mieluummin jatkaneet opiskelua?

d) Perhe

Ovatko vanhempasi naimisissa? Minkä ikäisinä he menivät naimisiin, tai muuttivat yhteen?

Ennen avioitumistaan, asuivatko he jonkin aikaa itsekseen tai ystävien kanssa, tai asuivatko he yhdessä?

Minkä ikäisiä he olivat saadessaan ensimmäisen lapsensa? Ja kuinka monta lasta heillä on?

Uskotko siihen aikaan olleen enemmän painetta lähteä lapsuudenkodista, löytää työ ja avioitua?

e) Harrastukset ja henkilökohtaiset kiinnostuksen kohteet

Oliko vanhemmillasi paljon harrastuksia tai vapaa-ajan aktiviteetteja, tai olivatko he mukana yhdistystoiminnassa tms. kun he olivat nuoria?

Onko tämän päivän nuorilla mielestäsi enemmän vapaa-ajan aktiviteetteja ja henkilökohtaisia kiinnostuksen kohteita kuin nuorilla aiemmin?

Uskotko tämän päivän nuorten omistavan suuremman osan elämästään vapaa-ajan aktiviteetteihin verrattuna heidän vanhempiinsa, kun nämä olivat nuoria?

f) Siirtymä

Uskotko, että vanhempasi aikuistuivat varhemmin kuin nuoret tänä päivänä?
Painostavatko vanhempasi sinua löytämään työn ja lopettamaan opinnot, tai saavuttamaan menestyksekkään uran? Tai perustamaan perheen?
Saatko heiltä paljon tukea ja ymmärtämystä?
Yleisesti, uskotko, että nuorten elämä oli vaikeampaa tai helpompaa vanhempiesi ollessa nuoria?
Oletko puhunut siitä heidän kanssaan?
Uskotko nuorten olleen onnellisempia kolmekymmentä vuotta sitten?

Yhteenveto

Lopuksi kysyisin, onko sinulla ajatusta siitä, mitä teet ja millaista elämäsi mahdollisesti tulee olemaan viiden tai kymmenen vuoden kuluttua?
Entä koetko, että naisena oleminen voi helpottaa tai hankaloittaa aikuis-/työelämään siirtymistäsi?
Pidätkö sukupolveasi erityisenä tai ainutkertaisena?

FRENCH VERSION

I – Présent et Futur : Situation Personnelle

a) Education

Est-ce que je peux te demander ce que tu étudies ?
Et tu es à quel niveau d'étude ?
Pour quelles raisons tu as choisi cette branche ?
Est-ce que tu es satisfaite de la voie que tu as choisie ?
Pour quelles raisons tu as décidé d'étudier à l'université ?
Est-ce qu'il y a quelqu'un autour de toi, ou dans ta famille, qui a fait des études universitaires ? Qui ?
Au fait, tu as quel âge ?
Qu'est-ce que tu penses du système universitaire Français ?
Est-ce que tu penses trouver un travail à la hauteur de tes études ? Et dans ta branche ?

b) Le marché du travail

As-tu des idées sur le travail que tu souhaites trouver ?
Est-ce que tu pourrais me parler de tes expériences dans le monde du travail ?
Quelle est ta vision du monde du travail ?
Comment tu envisages tes débuts dans la vie professionnelle ?
Est-ce que tu as hâte de finir tes études et d'entrer dans la vie active ?
Est-ce que tu ressens de la pression autour de toi pour mener un bonne carrière professionnelle ?

c) Modes de vie

Est-ce que je peux te demander où est-ce que tu vis en ce moment ?

Comment est-ce que tu finances ton loyer et tes dépenses quotidiennes ?

Tu as l'intention de louer pendant de longues années ou tu voudrais éventuellement acheter un appart ou une maison plus tard ?

d) Famille

Et qu'est-ce qui est prioritaire pour toi : de trouver un travail ou de fonder une famille ?

Est-ce que tu voudrais te marier plus tard ? Ou juste vivre avec un partenaire en concubinage ? Ou bien être pacsée ?

Est-ce que tu voudrais avoir des enfants ?

Est-ce que tu penses que tu pourras mener à la fois ta carrière professionnelle et être mère de famille ?

e) Passe-temps et activités personnelles

Est-ce que tu as des passe-temps, ou des activités qui te sont chers ? Ou fais-tu partie d'associations ?

Est-ce que tu dédies une grande partie de ton temps libre à ces activités ?

Est-ce que tu penses que tu devras abandonner certaines activités personnelles quand tu vas commencer ta vie active, ou changer de style de vie ? Et lorsque tu auras une famille ?

f) Transition

D'après toi, c'est quoi 'être adulte' ?

Et est-ce que tu te sens 'adulte' ?

Qu'est-ce qui est le plus difficile pour toi, quand tu considères ton passage de la vie d'étudiante à la vie active ?

Est-ce que tu es satisfaite de ta vie en général, en ce moment ?

II – La Situation des Jeunes Actuelle

a) Education

D'après les statistiques, le nombre d'étudiants a largement augmenté ces 20 dernières années. Selon toi, qu'est-ce qui pousse les jeunes à aller à la fac ?
Est-ce que tu connais des jeunes qui n'ont pas fait d'études et qui ont travaillé directement après l'école ?
Est-ce qu'ils ont trouvé du travail rapidement après l'école ?
Et comment ils s'en sortent maintenant ?

b) Le marché du travail

Comment tu perçois l'insertion des jeunes que tu connais sur le marché du travail ?
Tu penses qu'ils ressentent de la pression autour d'eux pour mener une bonne carrière professionnelle ?

c) Modes de vie

Où est-ce que la plupart des jeunes que tu connais vivent en ce moment ?
Comment est-ce qu'ils financent leurs dépenses quotidiennes ?

d) Famille

Quelle est la situation familiale de la plupart des jeunes autour de toi ?
Est-ce que beaucoup de jeunes que tu connais vivent en couple (mariés ou en concubinage) ?
Et est-ce que beaucoup ont des enfants, ou vont bientôt en avoir ?
Quel effet cela a sur toi ?
Est-ce que tu ressens de la pression pour aussi fonder une famille ?

e) Passe-temps et activités personnelles

Est-ce que les jeunes que tu connais dédient une partie importante de leur temps libre, ou de leur vie, à des passe-temps, ou des associations ?
Comment est-ce qu'ils organisent leur temps, entre les études, le travail, la vie privée et les activités personnelles ?

f) Transition

Tu penses que la plupart des jeunes que tu connais sont 'adultes' ?
Selon toi, qu'est-ce qui est le plus difficile pour les étudiants en cycle universitaire, lorsqu'ils finissent les cours à la fac et entrent dans la vie active ?
Est-ce que tu penses que ceux qui ont suivi une filière professionnelle connaissent les mêmes difficultés, ou s'en sortent mieux ?
Et pour ceux que tu connais et qui sont entrés dans la vie active assez récemment, qu'est-ce qui est le plus difficile maintenant ?
Est-ce que tu trouves que les jeunes dans ton entourage sont satisfaits de leur vie en général ?

III – Passé

a) Education

Tout d'abord, est-ce que je peux te demander l'âge de tes parents ?
Est-ce que tes parents ont fait des études ?
Qu'est-ce qu'ils ont étudié ?

b) Le marché du travail

Est-ce qu'ils ont réussi à poursuivre ou développer une carrière professionnelle ?
Comment tu penses que c'était pour tes parents de trouver du travail une fois leurs études terminées ?
Est-ce que tu trouves qu'ils avaient plus de possibilités et de chances de réussite que toi ?
Tu penses que c'était mieux il y a trente ans ?
Tu en as déjà parlé avec tes parents ?

c) Modes de vie

Est-ce que tes parents ont été indépendant jeunes ? Quel âge ils avaient quand ils sont partis de chez eux ?
Qu'est-ce qu'ils ont fait après avoir terminé l'école ?
Tu sais s'ils ont commencé à travailler jeunes mais auraient en fait préférer continuer leurs études, ou faire autre chose ?

d) Famille

Vers quel âge tes parents se sont rencontrés ? Et à quel âge ils se sont mariés ?
Avant de se marier, est-ce qu'ils ont vécu quelques temps seuls, en collocation avec des amis, ou bien en concubinage ?
Quel âge ils avaient quand leur premier enfant est né ? Et combien d'enfants ils ont eu ?
Est-ce que tu penses qu'il y avait plus de pression pour quitter le foyer familial, trouver vite un travail et se marier à l'époque ?

e) Passe-temps et activités personnelles

Est-ce que tes parents avaient beaucoup de passe-temps ou d'activités particulières ? Ou est-ce qu'ils faisaient partis d'associations ?
Selon toi, est-ce que les jeunes d'aujourd'hui ont plus d'activités personnelles qu'avant ?
Est-ce que tu penses que les jeunes en général consacrent une plus grande partie de leur vie aux loisirs par rapport à leurs parents quand ceux-ci étaient jeunes ?

f) Transition

Est-ce que tu penses que tes parents sont devenus 'adultes' à un âge plus avancé que les jeunes d'aujourd'hui ?
Est-ce qu'ils te mettent la pression parfois pour que tu trouves vite un travail, ou pour que tu développes une bonne carrière professionnelle ? Ou alors pour fonder une famille ?
Reçois-tu beaucoup de soutient et de compréhension de leur part ?
En général, tu trouves que la vie des jeunes était plus facile ou plus difficile lorsque tes parents étaient jeunes ?
Tu en as déjà parlé avec eux ?
Est-ce que tu penses que les jeunes étaient plus heureux il y a une trentaine d'années ?

Conclusion

Pour la phase finale de cet entretien, j'aimerai te demander : quel genre de vie tu espères mener dans quelques années, disons dans cinq ou dix ans environ ?
Et d'après toi, est-ce que le fait d'être une femme facilite ou rend plus difficile ton entrée dans la vie active ?
Est-ce que tu considères que la génération à laquelle tu appartiens est unique ? Ou que c'est une génération à part ?

Appendix 4 – The Finnish and French education systems

Education systems overview

The Finnish education system is divided into three phases: basic education, upper-secondary education and tertiary education. Basic education or comprehensive schooling was established in the 1970s. It lasts for nine years, and pupils' attendance is compulsory between the ages of seven and 16 or until completion (see Figure A4.1). Since 1998, six-year-olds have been able to enter a one-year preschool class, created to smooth the transition from day care or home to school and develop children's learning skills. Participation is voluntary. However, nearly all six-year-old children participate in the programme (Opetus-ministeriö 2008–2009). Comprehensive school is divided into two stages: the lower stage and the upper stage. The lower stage lasts for six years, and pupils are aged seven to 12. Instruction is provided by a class teacher. The upper stage lasts for three years, and pupils' ages range from 13 to 16. The instruction is given in the form of subject teaching by different teachers. Primary and secondary education is funded by municipalities, which receive support from the state. There is a limited number of private schools in Finland, which are state funded and supervised by school authorities. They have to follow the core curriculum established by the Ministry of Education, and cannot impose tuition fees. Most of these schools are faith-based or established on the basis of different approaches and ideologies, such as Steiner schools (Opetushallitus 2009).

When the nine-year comprehensive education syllabus is completed, Finnish pupils receive a certificate; however, this does not constitute a valid qualification. Students wishing to raise their study skills and knowledge can have an additional year of voluntary basic education before continuing to upper-secondary level (Opetusminis-

teriö 2008–2009). The upper-secondary education stage lasts for three years and is divided into two parts: general upper-secondary schools that offer broad and general academic knowledge (*Lukio*), and vocational schools (*Ammattikoulu*) that offer vocational training and skills (see Figure A4.1). The general upper-secondary education curriculum does not qualify students for any occupation; it offers the necessary syllabus and eligibility to pursue study in higher-education institutions, mainly at university. At the end of the three-year programme, students pass the national Matriculation examination. In contrast with general upper-secondary schools, vocational upper-secondary education provides students with knowledge and training in specific occupations and entitles them to vocational qualifications. Students graduating from vocational upper-secondary schools are eligible to study further, either in universities of applied sciences or at university (Opetusministeriö 2008–2009). In 1994, two competence-based qualification programmes, 'Specialist vocational qualifications' and 'Further vocational qualifications' (see Figure A4.1), were designed to maintain lifelong learning and enhance the vocational skills and knowledge of the adult population. The 'Specialist vocational qualifications' scheme is especially set up to develop abilities and mastery in a particular field (Opetushallitus 2009).

The French education system is divided in three main stages; primary, secondary and higher education. These are split into five sub-stages: nursery school, primary school, lower-secondary school, upper-secondary school and higher education (see Figure A4.2). Nursery school (*Ecole maternelle*) is intended for children aged from two-and a half or three years to six years. It is optional, but virtually all children attend it, either part-time or in most cases full-time (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères 2007). They are state-funded, and operate similarly to day care in terms of activities organised for children. School is mandatory in France for all children aged six to 16. Primary school (*Ecole élémentaire*) lasts for five years, from the ages of six to 11. Instruction is provided by class teachers. Second-

ary education lasts for seven years and is divided into two cycles: lower- and upper-secondary school, which last respectively for four and three years. Children enter the lower stage (*Collège*) at the age of 11. The instruction is provided in the form of subject teaching by different teachers. Lower-secondary education is concluded by a national diploma, the *Brevet*, established in 1987. However, it does not provide any qualification or entitle students to a specific occupation, nor does it determine entry into the upper-level of secondary education.

French pupils aged 15 to 18 attend upper-secondary school (*Lycée*). Upper-secondary school is divided in two distinct streams: general and technological education, and vocational education (see Figure A4.2). The general and technological branches lead to the general and technological Baccalaureate diplomas. Admission is based on students' academic performance during lower-secondary education. The first year provides a common curriculum, then pupils choose a stream in which they will continue. The general stream is divided into three series: humanities, social and economic sciences, and scientific studies. It prepares students to pursue longer study in higher education, at university or in specialised schools (*Grandes Ecoles*). The technological stream is divided into several series that all relate to industrial science and technology. It used to aim at direct entry into the labour market, but increasingly prepares students for short higher-education courses, in vocational and technological institutions.

The vocational branch offers vocational qualifications. It used to be divided into three streams until the 2009 reform, which condensed it into two. The CAP (*Certifical d'Aptitude Professionnelle* – Vocational Training Certificate) is a two-year apprenticeship programme that provides precise practical skills and training in a specific field, with little academic knowledge, and leads to direct integration into working life. Vocational upper-secondary education lasts for three years and provides a vocational Baccalaureate diploma. Students are given both
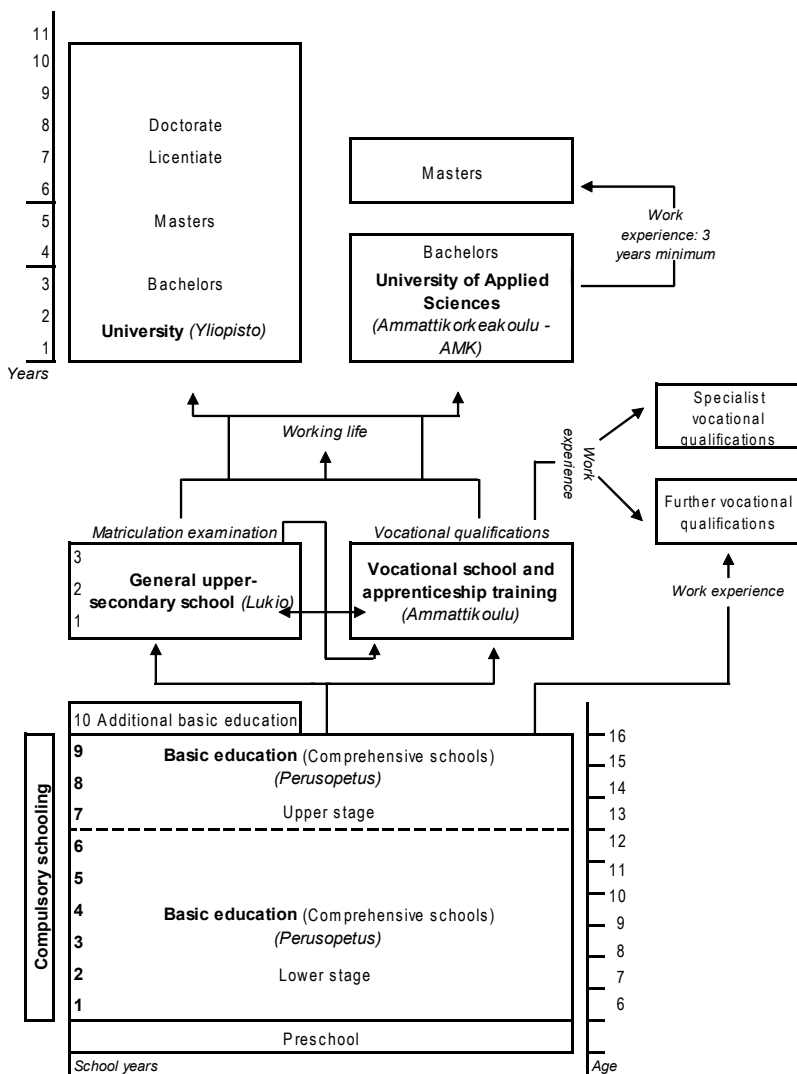
theoretical knowledge and practical training in a particular field. It is possible for first-year students to change stream and pursue a CAP. Simultaneously, CAP students can change branch and enter vocational upper-secondary education. The BEP (*Brevet d'Etudes Professionnelles* – Vocational Qualification Diploma) was an alternative stream until 2009. It now provides an intermediate qualification for those not willing to study for the vocational Baccalaureate and preferring to enter working life without further education. After achieving the vocational Baccalaureate, students can enter the labour market or carry on to short higher-education programmes related to their occupation (Kaiser 2007; Ministère de l'Education Nationale 2009).

A dual school system operates in France, with the coexistence of public and private schools. 13% of primary schools and 40% of secondary schools belong to the private sector. 21% of students are enrolled in private schools (Ministère de l'Education Nationale 2009). Most private institutions are related to the Catholic church. They are relatively autonomous, but remain supervised by the state and the National Education Ministry regarding the curriculum and pedagogy. Teachers are paid by the state and hired by the schools. These institutions are financed publicly by local municipalities and the state, depending on the agreement established with the state. Pupils' parents are required to pay tuition fees. The amount varies greatly from rather low to very high, depending on the contract the school signed (or did not sign) with the state.

Year repetition is a peculiarity of the French education system. Students are required to repeat one or several academic years during their schooling if they cannot reach the level of learning and understanding necessary for promotion to the next level. According to the OECD *Economic Surveys: France 2007* (2007a), on average, about 17% of primary school children repeat a year. This proportion rises to 36% when they reach upper-secondary school. Those who fail the Baccalaureate exam can repeat it too (OECD 2007a). In theory, year repetition aims to help students catch up with knowledge. However,

in reality, several studies have demonstrated that pupils who repeat tend to perform less well in future years. They tend to underestimate their own abilities and feel discouraged. In addition, they become undervalued by teachers and stigmatised by the system, considered lower achievers than their fellow students (Cousin 1998; OECD 2007a). The inefficiency of the method has been acknowledged by the national education policy, and year repetition has declined since the 1990s, when over 50% of pupils finished lower-secondary school after having repeated at least one year (OECD 2007a). In Finland, repetition of a class remains rare; no more than 2% of pupils are affected. Rather than being stigmatised, the weaker students are provided with support and encouragement, so as not to denigrate them or damage their self-worth. Special education is usually available part-time for students in need of specific support in some subjects. Special needs education, pupils' welfare and educational guidance are part of the national core curriculum. Different degrees of special education are provided, depending on the pupils' needs and difficulties (Opetushallitus 2009).

Figure A4.1. The Finnish education system.

Years		
11		
10		
9		
8	Doctorate	
7	Licentiate	
6		Masters
5	Masters	
4		Bachelors
3	Bachelors	**University of Applied Sciences** *(Ammattikorkeakoulu - AMK)*
2		
1	**University** *(Yliopisto)*	

Work experience: 3 years minimum

Working life

Specialist vocational qualifications

Work experience

Further vocational qualifications

Matriculation examination

3	**General upper-secondary school** *(Lukio)*
2	
1	

Vocational qualifications

Vocational school and apprenticeship training *(Ammattikoulu)*

Work experience

Compulsory schooling

10 Additional basic education

School years		Age
9	**Basic education** (Comprehensive schools) *(Perusopetus)*	16
8		15
7	Upper stage	14
		13
6		12
5		11
4	**Basic education** (Comprehensive schools) *(Perusopetus)*	10
3		9
2	Lower stage	8
1		7
		6
Preschool		

The figure is based on information from the following sources: Opetushallitus (2009); Opetusministeriö (2009).

Figure A4.2: The French education system.

Higher education (Years)

- **Grandes Ecoles** (specialist institutions) (3 Years)
- **Preparatory classes** (2 years)
- **Vocational higher education** (2-3 years)
- Doctorate
- Masters
- Bachelors
- **University** (General and professional IUP streams)

Working life

Working life

Secondary II

- *General upper-secondary school diploma* — **General upper-secondary** (Lycée d'enseignement général)
- *Technological upper-secondary school diploma* — **Technological upper-secondary** (Lycée technologique)
- *Working life*
- *Vocational upper-secondary school diploma* — **Vocational upper-secondary** (Lycée professionnel)
- **CAP** (2 years)
- *Possibility to change stream*
- *Inter-mediary diploma:* BEP

General and technological upper secondary

Secondary I — **Lower secondary school** (Collège)

Primary — **Primary school** (Ecole élémentaire)

Pre-primary — **Nursery school** (Ecole maternelle)

Age

The figure is based on information from the following sources: Ambassade de France en Irlande (2007); La France en Suisse (2009); Ministère de l'Education Nationale (2009); Site de Ressources et de Formation des Directeurs d'Ecole de la Marne (2008).

BEP: Brevet d'Etudes Professionnelles (Vocational Qualification Diploma)
CAP: Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle (Vocational Training Certificate)
IUP: Institut Universitaire Professionnalisé (Professional University Institute)

Historical overview

A brief historical analysis of the development of the education systems in Finland and France will help us to understand their present constitution. In Finland, the church wielded control over education until 1869, when the state and the church separated. Simultaneously, the management of educational matters was transferred to the Board of Education, founded in the same year. In 1966, the National Board of Vocational Education was created alongside the existing National Board of General Education. In 1991, the two boards were combined into the Finnish National Board of Education, which regulates both general and vocational education. Higher education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. In the 1980s, the management of educational matters underwent decentralisation, and it is today administrated by ministries, state provincial offices and local authorities alongside the central board. The decentralisation of education administration has led to an increase in educational institutions' autonomy and decision-making, and in teachers' accountability. More emphasis and trust is given to the schools, which are responsible for adequate transmission of knowledge, while the state provides for the schools, allowing the teaching body to fulfil its duty (Opetushallitus 2009). Concerning the development of schooling in Finland, in 1898, a decree was issued stipulating the obligation on local authorities to provide all school-aged children with an opportunity for schooling. The 1921 Education Law prescribed free, compulsory basic education to all children. Basic education was provided by folk schools for six years. After four years of folk school, pupils could study in secondary schools, divided into the five-year lower-secondary school and the three-year upper-secondary school. In the 1970s, the nine-year comprehensive school system was established, unifying the folk school and the lower-secondary school (Opetushallitus 2009).

French schooling started to develop under the new educational reforms implemented by Charlemagne in the eighth century. The

Catholic church played a central role in providing instruction until the Jules Ferry laws constituted the modern Republican School in the 1880s. These laws required free, compulsory and *'laïque'* (secular) schooling for all children aged six to 13, both boys and girls, the latter having previously had limited access to education due to the inferiority conferred on their gender. The secularisation of the education system engendered the separation of educational and religious instruction. The principle of *'laïcité'* (secularisation) implies the secularisation of the teaching staff and the prohibition of the promotion of religion in public schools. In 1959 compulsory schooling was extended to the age of 16. The French education system was based on five main principles: mandatory education; free and universal transmission of knowledge; neutrality through secularisation; success through meritocracy rather than social origins; and educational freedom, with the coexistence of public and private institutions (Cousin 1998; Langan 2008; Ministère de l'Education Nationale 2009). However, the founding principles of the French education system applied predominantly to primary education, and did not take into account pupils' diversity regarding learning abilities or social background. The expansion of secondary schooling in the 1960s and 1970s greatly challenged the principle of equality of opportunity. The new reforms that attempted to deal with this issue led to the selection of students on the basis of learning abilities. School has implicitly become a place for selection based on intellectual and economic capital, but also a provider of higher social positions and a weapon against unemployment (Cousin 1998).

Specialist schools (*Grandes Ecoles*) were created after the French revolution to replace universities, because of the latter's monarchist foundations. Faculties and universities were restructured in the 19th century, as were upper-secondary schools (*Lycées*), which were created by Napoléon in the early 1800s. The state had a monopoly over educational matters. To this day the education system has remained centralised, with all educational programmes being regulated by the Ministry of National Education. Schoolteachers and higher-educa-

tion professors and researchers are civil servants employed by the state (Rinne and Koivula 2008; Pugin 2008).

Different principles and ideologies shape the structure of the education system in different European countries. Different models operate in Finland and France. Rinne and Koivula (2008) distinguish three initial types of system that generated the present higher-education systems in advanced societies: the Napoleonic model in France, the Humboldtian system in Germany, and the Anglo-Saxon model in Britain. While the Anglo-Saxon model was adopted in the United States, the Humboldtian and Napoleonic models merged and generated the Western or Continental European model. In this typology, the Nordic model diverges. The Central and Eastern European model is another model altogether. The Anglo-Saxon model can be described as market-driven, hierarchical, and based on competition between higher-education institutions. The Continental model's most important principle is the academic freedom of researchers, with little competition between universities. The Central and Eastern European model is going through a process of transition, simultaneously with those countries' restructuring. Until the late 1980s, higher-education institutions were heavily under state control, and the system was founded on centralised and ideological principles imposed by the state. In the Nordic model, the principles of equal opportunities and homogeneity predominate. Higher education is therefore free. The institutions are regulated by the state and publicly funded, but remain largely autonomous. There is no educational market or competition between the institutions either (Rinne and Koivula 2008).

Appendix 5 – Family support in Finland and France, 2010.

Type of support	Finland	France
Maternity support	- Maternity leave (30–50 days before birth, 105 days after birth) - Maternity grant or maternity package - Maternity allowance (earnings-related, €22.04 minimum per day, paid by Kela)	- Maternity leave (42–56 days before birth, 112–182 days after birth; longer leave if multiple births) - Birth allowance - Maternity allowance (earnings-related, from €8.72 to €77.24 per day, paid by Social Security; for higher salaries, the employer pays the difference)
Paternity leave	- 18 days; 13–36 days from 2010 onwards - Paternity allowance (earnings-related, €22.04 minimum per day)	- 11–18 days - Paternity allowance (earnings-related, similar to maternity allowance)
Parental leave (Finland) **Educational parental leave (France)**	- Either parent can take it, or it can be split - Can be partial (possibilities to work part-time) - Length: 158 weekdays + 60 weekdays if multiple births - Parental allowance: earnings-related (€22.04 minimum per day, paid by Kela)	- Can be taken only if parent has worked for a minimum of one year in his/her current workplace - Can be up to three years, if taken when the child is younger than three years old - One year long, if taken when the child is aged three to 16 - Can be partial (possibilities to work part-time) - Either parent can take it - Employment security guaranteed when employee returns to work - Unpaid for the first child - Earnings-related allowance paid by CAF (Family Allowances Fund) only after the second child, and if parent has worked two years minimum prior the birth
Childcare leave	- Can be taken until the child reaches three years old - Unpaid, but families are entitled to child home-care allowance during that period - Employment security guaranteed when employee returns to work	

Early childhood benefits		- Basic allowance paid for children aged zero to three (earnings-related) - Supplementary allowance for free choice of working time (non means-tested) (payable from the first child, for six months for the first child and up to the third birthday of additional children)
Child allowances	- Benefits for each child, from the first child; the amount varies, and gradually increases with the number of children - Support offered until the child reaches 17 years old	- The benefits only start after the birth of the second child; the amount varies, and gradually increases with the number of children - Support offered until the child reaches 20 years old
Child maintenance allowance	For children who cannot receive sufficient maintenance from their parents; aims to provide economic security to children	
Housing support	Housing allowance; different measures for families with children	Family housing allowance
Additional allowances		- Flat-rate allowance (paid for one year to families with at least three children when the family allowance is reduced when the children reach the age of 20) - Family income supplement (means-tested benefit for families with at least three children aged three to 21)
Day care	- Three types of publicly subsidised day care: municipal, private and home day care - Unconditional right to municipal day care for every child - Means-tested fees based on family size and income - Child home-care allowance: for children not in day care - Private day-care allowance: for children in private childcare centres, family childcare providers or private hired caregivers	- Several types of public and private day care - Nurseries (*Crèches*): public or private, means-tested fees - Qualified nannies (*assistantes maternelles*): care for children in their home - Private day care (private nanny) - Nursery school (*Ecole Maternelle*): free for children aged two to five, part of the school system. Works like day care and school, with the teaching of a state-mandated curriculum - Supplement for free choice of childcare (if using the services of a childminder, and based on parents' income)
Start of school year allowance		Means-tested allowance payable to any child of school age (six–18) and attending school (for those older than 16)
School meals	Free school meals to pupils from comprehensive schools, upper-secondary schools and vocational education institutions	

The table is based on information from the following sources: Caisses d'Allocations Familiales, CAF (2010b); Centre des Liaisons Européennes et Internationales de Sécurité Sociale, CLEISS (2010); Kela (2009–2011); Ministère de la Solidarité et de la Cohésion Sociale (2010a; 2010b; 2010c); Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2006). Families can receive different types of support and allowances for disabled children, and if they are single parents. In addition, in France, families with children receive tax deductions. This applies until the children turn 21, or 25 if they study (Administration Fiscale: Impôts 2011).