

Educational biographies in Germany: From secondary school general education to lifelong learning?

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This article addresses the change in the transitional process from secondary school general education to gainful employment within the framework of societal modernisation processes in Germany.

We analyse the relationship between the options for and restrictions upon individual educational mobility under the conditions imposed by the various socially institutionalised educational segments, which comprise a structure of opportunity.

The database for our study consists in the longitudinal findings of the “Hamburg Biography and Life Course Panel” (HBLP) from 1980 to 2007, which examined the processes of vocational education mobility for a sample of the Hamburg graduating class of 1979.

How do these people manage their educational strategies? What do they experience in terms of vocational education and continuing education within the institutional structure of opportunity? Do the career paths differ after gender?

Keywords: Vocational training, Educational Biography, Vocational training mobility, Continuing education, Vocational education policy, Germany.

Introduction: Educational institutions and individualisation of vocational training mobility

The German education system is currently undergoing a process of transformation in order to meet the challenges of a globalised market. Additional topics such as lifelong learning and demographic change are also being addressed. Transitions between school and the working world have become longer and more uncertain due to the structural changes of modern society. They can include multifaceted, open-ended search processes and carry multifarious opportunities and risks for those trying to navigate them. Through the 1980s, the classic “two threshold model”ⁱ was still considered the standard biographical pattern, i.e. graduation, vocational training, employment (cf. Dietrich et al. 2009). Increasingly, for a growing share of graduates, this is being replaced by a complicated and open-ended multi-threshold process.

The point of origin for this change is an educational “system” that is divided into three separate “closed shops” with exclusive entrance requirements:

- the dual vocational training segment (dominant for male teenagers);
- the (full-time) vocational school segment (dominant for female teenagers); and
- the university segment ⁱⁱ.

Starting in the early 1980s, the vocational education mobility of young adults in Germany began to increase. This trend towards a change in the use of vocational education was and continues to be publicly debated,

especially the combination of vocational traineeship with academic studies. In 1983, only 8 percent of apprentices in the dual system of vocational training were also qualified for university entry. By 1998, “this figure had grown to 17 percent” (Jacob 2004, p. 116). In 1983, 13 percent of first-year students had completed a vocational education program; by 1991, 29 percent had (cf. HIS 1998; also Lauterbach/Weil, p. 110; also Arbeitsgruppe 1994, p. 544). Vocational education mobility is no fringe phenomenon; from an educational policy perspective, it has become an increasingly important topic. In his study “Vocational Education in Upheaval”, Baethge wrote that “the central focus is on the category vocational mobility, which is vitally important for both one’s individual professional career as well as for the safeguarding of the human resources in a modern economy. Institutionally, vocational mobility means that the borders between educational fields must be permeable and flexible. Individually, it manifests itself in the way teenagers acquire the skills necessary to independently organise their educational biographies within the context of lifelong learning” (Baethge 2006, p. 7). Permeability and equivalence in the structurally conservative vocational education institutions are the central requirements necessary to achieve an increase in individual vocational education mobility.

Based on the longitudinal findings of our Hamburg Biography and Life Course Panel ⁱⁱⁱ (HBLP), we reconstruct the complex processes of vocational education mobility within a biographical context. The aim is to transform the singular “vocational education” into the plural “educational processes” as well as to bring the otherwise insular segments of vocational education closer together. The object of analysis is a sample of the Hamburg graduating class of 1979.

Within the framework of a multiple step sequence, we explore the educational and continuing education processes of the gainfully employed members of the sample. We begin in section 1 by describing our survey sample and the experiences of its members in the various vocational education segments. In section 2, we focus on the relationship between vocational education and continuing education. Section 3 deals with discontinuities and other risks during one’s vocational training and career periods. It’s important to note that our inquiry into vocational education mobility is directed toward the

relationship between the institution and decision-making (Hillmert 2007, p. 71): How are one's educational, occupational and continuing education biographies influenced by the institutional opportunity structure on the one hand (cf. Albert 2007) and individual decisions on the other? In section 4, we focus on the graduating class cohort's accounting of their educational participation and discrimination. Our conclusions in section 5 point to necessary educational policy reforms in Germany.

Sample of the Hamburg graduating class of 1979: Educational and vocational training mobility

We have followed our research sample for more than 25 years, posing questions regarding their education in the context of vocational qualifications, occupation and familial status. We define the sample theoretically, describing it as a "modernity sample" (cf. Friebel et al. 2000 and 2008) because the members' life courses and biographies have been heavily influenced by modern societal structural changes in complex ways. The members of the sample:

- were "children" of the German educational expansion in the 1970s, which means they had additional educational opportunities;
- were "poor cousins" of the labour market crisis in Germany at the beginning of 1980s and thus experienced more labour market restrictions;
- are representatives of a generation from the high birth rate era, having been born between 1959 and 1964 ("baby boom"), which means more intense competition.

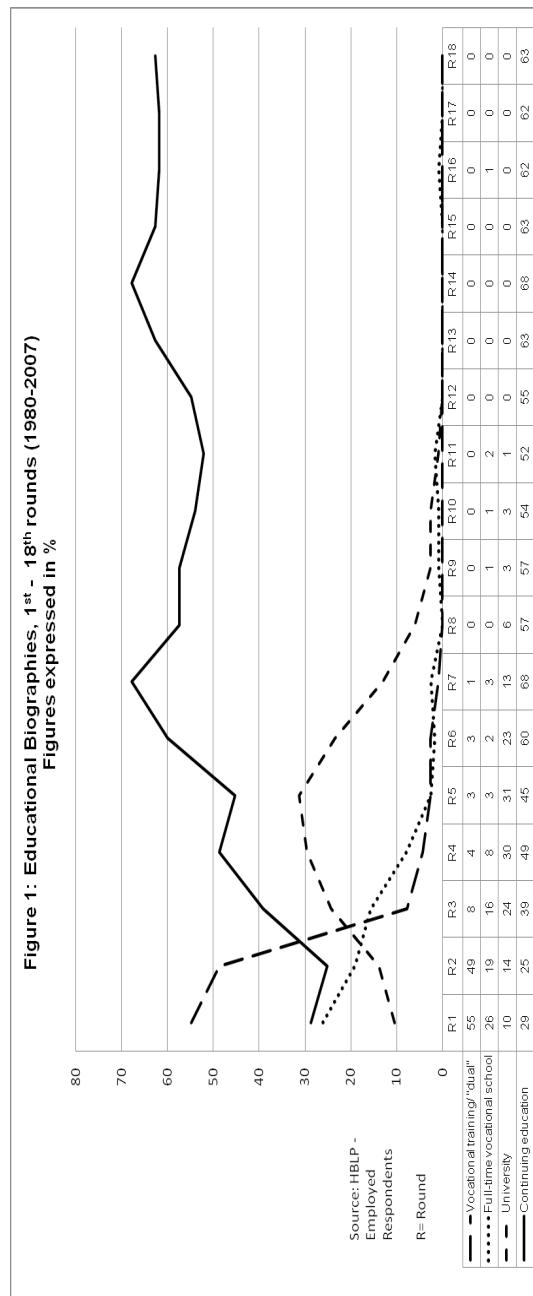
This interlinking of additional educational options and more labour market restrictions under conditions of increased competition and crowding-out has shaped the graduating class of 1979 as a so-called modernity sample. The survey sample is a randomly generated cluster selection. Three different types of schools were selected in each of three Hamburg neighbourhoods with varying social structures. Using randomly generated numbers, the sample was taken from lists of the graduating classes. The first survey round was conducted in 1980 with 252 people, and the 18th round took place in 2007 (the time between rounds was approximately one and a half years)^{iv}.

Within the constraints of socially institutionalised educational segments functioning as opportunity structures, we examine the relationship between the available options and the restrictions on individual educational participation. For our methodology, we rely on the approach used in the origin of life course theory, Elder's famous study "Children of the Great Depression" (cf. Elder 1974). In that study, Elder developed a theory with fundamental principles regarding the unity of individualisation and institutionalisation over an entire lifespan – simultaneously encompassing the logic of the subject (individuals shape their own lives on the basis of their decisions and actions within the realm of their possibilities) and the logic of the structure (an individual's life course is embedded within and affected by the historical period in which it is lived) of the life course.

The vocational training mobility^v of the sample is particularly impressive. We distinguish between three separate paths of vocational education mobility:

- Path A: Non-academic horizontal mobility, meaning additional vocational training in the dual or full-time vocational school segment followed an initial vocational training that was likewise non-academic, especially in another occupational field.
- Path B: Non-academic vertical mobility, meaning an initial non-academic vocational training was followed by additional training, primarily for mid-level positions such as technicians, master craftsmen and business administrators.
- Path C: Academic vertical mobility, meaning an initial vocational training in the dual or full-time vocational school segment was followed by university studies, primarily in the same occupational field as the vocational training.

We discuss the vocational training processes and the mobility paths from two perspectives. Figure 1 documents the occupational qualification processes throughout the entire period of the research study. Afterwards, we discuss the structural correlations between the highest educational degree one achieves and one's mobility path.

Figure 1: Educational Biographies, 1st – 18th Rounds (1980 – 2007)

The process analysis in Figure 1 makes distinctions according to the three vocational training segments on the one hand and participation in continuing education^{vi} on the other. Here we briefly analyse the progression of vocational training participation from a biographical perspective:

- In the first interview round (1980), nine-tenths (91 percent) of the cohort had entered vocational training.^{vii} Dual vocational training programs dominated (55 percent), while 26 percent of the sample had begun vocational training in the full-time vocational school segment and 10 percent had begun studies at a university.
- In the third round (1983), the rate of participation in the three segments had undergone radical changes. Altogether, just under half of the cohort (48 percent) was still participating in vocational training. 24 percent were at a university, 16 percent were in the full-time vocational school segment, and the vocational trainee group had dropped to just 8 percent of the total.
- By the seventh round (1991), the percentage of those pursuing vocational training had decreased to 17 percent. At this point, the group consisted nearly exclusively of university students (both traditional students as well as those pursuing the so-called second and/or third educational route for adults).

Continuing education participation during the course of this research study can be divided into three phases. In the first, there is a nearly continuous rise in participation from the first (1980) through the seventh (1991) round, an indication of the transition from the phase of pursuing an initial vocational qualification to the phase of increasing continuing education activities. However, there is an inter-temporal reduction in continuing education levels between the eighth (1992) and thirteenth (2000) rounds. In the final phase, starting in the fourteenth round (2001), the level of participation rises again to approximately the level in the seventh round.

In the following section, we focus our attention on the connection between the highest level of vocational education achieved^{viii} and

vocational education mobility. Approximately two-fifths (42 percent) of the sample successfully completed only one vocational training program. The remaining 58 percent (!) successfully completed at least two vocational training programs.

- The most common cumulative progression was Path C (academic vertical mobility), which was the route taken by 25 percent. This path is a highlight of consecutive vocational training advancement in Germany: the practical experience-based expertise gained from an initial vocational training is then expanded upon via a corresponding theoretical specialisation (Kraus 2006, p. 151). Below ^{ix}, we have integrated cases for both the standard and the second educational routes – in universities and technical colleges – demonstrating academic vertical mobility:
 - Male (*Abitur*/high school diploma '79): 1st training = Shipping agent; 2nd training = Bachelor of Business Administration
 - Male (*Abitur*/high school diploma '79): 1st training = Administrative supervisor; 2nd training = Lawyer
 - Male (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Precision mechanic; 2nd training = Chartered engineer (2nd educational route via a technical university)
 - Male (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Assistant tax accountant; 2nd training = Bachelor of Business Administration (2nd educational route via a business secondary school)
 - Female (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Architectural draftswoman; 2nd training = Chartered engineer (2nd educational route via a technical college)
 - Female (*Abitur*/high school diploma '79): 1st training = Bank clerk; 2nd training = Bachelor of Business Administration

The pursuit of multiple related consecutive vocational qualification opportunities such as vocational training combined with university studies is a typically male path.

- The second most common route, at 20 percent, is the cumulative

progression of **Path B** (non-academic vertical mobility). This group is represented predominantly by skilled tradesmen and specialised professionals in positions of medium occupational status. After initial vocational training in the dual and/or full-time vocational segments, they pursued non-academic vocational titles such as technician and business administrator.

- Female (*Hauptschule*/secondary general school diploma '79): 1st training = Machinist; 2nd training = Mechanical engineering technician
- Female (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Medical assistant; 2nd training = Medical technician
- Female (*Abitur*/high school diploma '79): 1st training = Bank clerk; 2nd training = Business administrator
- Male (*Hauptschule*/secondary general school diploma '79): 1st training = Interior decorator; 2nd training = Technician
- Male (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Wholesale and export merchant; 2nd training = Business administrator
- Male (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Auto mechanic; 2nd training = Technician

This vertical non-academic mobility matches the classic consecutive careerism model of German vocational training (Drexel 1996, p. 68). It is the layering of qualifications on top of one another, based on the traditional occupational arc from apprentice to journeyman to master craftsman. However, it also has equivalents in other occupational fields and economic areas. Males and females are represented nearly equally in this path.

- The cumulative series of **Path A** (non-academic horizontal mobility) is relatively rare (10 percent). This category of mobility is usually typified by a progression from an initial non-academic vocational training to a second non-academic one that is not occupationally connected to the first. In its typical form, it can be seen as qualification through “invalidation”: the originally acquired qualification is never actually professionally utilised, and the new

vocational training basically replaces and invalidates the first.

- Female (*Hauptschule*/secondary general school diploma '79): 1st training = Early childhood educator; 2nd training = Retail saleswoman
- Female (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Dental assistant; 2nd training = Real estate saleswoman
- Female (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Display designer; 2nd training = Clerk
- Female (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Dental technician; 2nd training = Administrative assistant
- Male (*Hauptschule*/secondary general school diploma '79): 1st training = Upholsterer; 2nd training = Nurse
- Male (*Realschule*/secondary intermediate school diploma '79): 1st training = Concreter; 2nd training = Executive judicial officer

Path A is more likely to be taken by females. The path is a symptom of the crisis-ridden development of vocational training since the 1980s.

All three paths signal that the working world is currently undergoing a rapid modernisation process.

Attempts to pursue skills that we refer to as “bridge qualifications” make up another important component of vocational training mobility. These are explicit or implicit measures for the acquisition of secondary school diplomas (the second educational route), thereby expanding the availability of career choice options in the context of general education or vocational and vocationally-oriented organised learning processes. These belatedly acquired school diplomas function as bridges “to other banks” of vocational training mobility.

Approximately half of those who left school in 1979 without an *Abitur* (high school diploma) were able to eventually acquire one or more graduation certificates. These findings can be viewed as evidence of the significant vocational mobility potential for those who – thanks to the social closure of the civic school, civic institutions and the civic “middle”

– were considered condemned to continue struggling to complete their vocational training even into their fourth decade of life “due to the extremely long vocational training periods” (Friedeburg 1992, p. 475).

Continuing education in the educational biography context

Turning again to Figure 1, we see the continuity of the rising rate of participation in continuing education through the 7th round (1991). What follows, from the 8th (1992) to the 13th (2000) rounds, is an upward trend for women who became mothers (cf. Friebel 2014).

As part of the problem-centred interviews we conducted parallel to the standardised questionnaire surveys, mothers and fathers provided typical complementary reflections of their personal environment during the family formation phase of their lives:

- Mother: “*When the first child came, I had to put all continuing education activities on hold...for the family.*”
- Father: “*When the first child came, I had to take part in as much continuing education as possible...for the family.*”

Women who become mothers take part in significantly fewer continuing education opportunities than men who become fathers. Mothers participate less frequently in professional continuing education and training events in the workplace, and in general they plan to attend continuing education events less frequently. Effectively, the exclusionary process is both external and individual!

In order to clearly discuss these gender-specific findings as well as our additional continuing education analyses, we converted the complex variables of continuing education participation, as illustrated in Figure 1, into a simple index that illustrates the rate of continuing education participation. This index classifies respondents into one of two broad categories of continuing education participation, based on the 18 rounds of data points obtained over the course of the study:

- Participation rate “rather low” – Participation in 9 or fewer rounds = 36 percent
- Participation rate “rather high” – Participation in at least 10 rounds = 64 percent

In Figure 2, we document the extent to which one's everyday environment affects the frequency of one's participation in continuing education. While just 42 percent of women who became mothers during the observation period are represented in the category with a "rather high" rate of participation, 68 percent of the men who became fathers are. However, continuing education is indeed "feminine" for women who did not become mothers; 95 percent of them are represented in the category "rather high".

Figure 2: Rate of Continuing Education Participation in the Context of Living Environment

18th Round, Figures expressed in percent

Living Environment	Rate of Continuing Education Participation	
	rather low	rather high
Women without children	5	95
Mothers	58	42
Men without children	44	56
Fathers	32	68
Total	36	64

Source: HBLP - Subsample of employed respondents

The growing importance of continuing education is reflected in the data assembled by the Continuing Education Reporting System, a representative survey of participation in continuing education in Germany. In 2012 the rate of participation in continuing education (49 percent) was more than twice as high as it was in 1979 (23 percent), the year our sample graduated. This triumph of continuing education participation rates must be tempered by the realisation that selection and segmentation are the providers of structure when it comes to participation in continuing education. Here are just two examples that point to the uniformity of our sample results and representative studies (cf. Bundesministerium 2012):

- Selection: There is a positive linear relationship between the type of graduation certificate attained in 1979 and the rate of participation in continuing education. 74 percent of those with an *Abitur*/high school diploma are represented in the "rather high" category, along with 65 percent of *Realschule*/secondary intermediate school

graduates. This compares to a participation rate of just 50 percent among those without a certificate qualifying them for further education.

- Segmentation: An even more significant positive relationship exists between company size and the rate of participation in continuing education. 73 percent of those who work in companies with more than 100 employees fall in the “rather high” category, as opposed to just 53 percent of those in firms with up to 100 employees.

During the problem-centred interview portion of our study, sample members expressed messages of individualisation that were diametrically opposed to the institutionalisation (selection/segmentation) of continuing education as presented above. We posed the question “*Why does one take part in continuing education?*”, and we received two typical responses from the subjects:

- “*Because I love to learn! ...I want to get to the bottom of the matter.*” (Motivational aspect)
- “*In principle it comes from me; I have to make that decision ...definitely.*” (Decision aspect)

Indeed, the concept of the subject as “the planning office” of one’s own biography is precisely the modernity metaphor of individualisation (cf. Beck 1986). Governing norms seem to fade in this perspective, and institutions seem to lose their influence as a shaper of behaviour.

Figure 3: Rate of Continuing Education Participation by Occupational Qualification

18th Round, Figures expressed in percent

Rate of continuing education participation	Highest occupational qualification*			Vocational training mobility				Control variable: Occupational continuing education support = Company supported			Total
	Dual vocational training	Additional Qualification	University degree	No further training	Path A	Path B	Path C	No, never	Yes, sometimes	Yes, regularly	
Rather "low"	58	25	20	53	50	25	16	91	55	6	36
Rather "high"	42	75	80	47	50	75	84	9	45	94	64

* Excerpt

Path A: horizontal mobility

Path B: non-academic vertical mobility

Path C: academic vertical mobility

Source: HBLP - Subsample of employed respondents

Our preliminary reflections on the relationship between the individualisation and institutionalisation of participation in continuing education point to the complexity of the question regarding the relationship between vocational training mobility and participation in continuing education. In Figure 3, we have documented the essence of this issue – expanded with regard to professional support for continuing education participation. The chart presents us with three positive linear relationships:

- Highest level of professional qualification: The higher the level of professional qualification, the higher the proportion that falls in the “rather high” category of continuing education participation.
- Vocational education mobility: The higher the status of one’s vocational education mobility path, the higher the proportion that falls in the “rather high” category of continuing education participation. Those with no vocational education mobility represent the group with the highest proportion in the category

“rather low”.

- The company as advocate for continuing education participation^x: The higher the level of support for continuing education by one’s employer, the higher the proportion that falls in the category “rather high”.

Although these relationships seemingly represent total confirmation of the institutionalisation thesis, the subject remains the active agent in this context!

Discontinuities: Unemployment and university and/or vocational training dropouts

We also analyse our sample’s unemployment experiences from the 10th (1995) through the 18th (2007) interview rounds. We do not take previous periods of unemployment into account here, because unemployment experiences during the transitional phase from school to work do not provide us with any insights. We have constructed a three-level index of unemployment experience during the survey period:

- No unemployment experience = 74 percent
- One to two periods of unemployment = 18 percent
- Three or more periods of unemployment = 8 percent

We have also reconstructed the vocational and/or university study discontinuities of our sample throughout the entire study period:

- No discontinuities = 87 percent
- At least one discontinuity = 13 percent

Our analysis of the relationship between unemployment experience and discontinuities in university studies or vocational training showed no significant correlation. However, based on selected socio-demographic variables, we can note that:

- Women, especially mothers, were more likely to have experienced unemployment. Distributions by type of graduation certificate are not available.
- Men, especially fathers, were more likely to have experienced vocational training and university study discontinuities.

The key findings on the relationship between vocational education mobility and discontinuities in educational and occupational

biographies are illustrated in Figure 4. Although the deviations of each of the highest professional qualifications and qualification paths from the average values are rather small, some differences are still quite noticeable. Overall, most of those who are represented in mobility Path B have been spared from discontinuities.

Figure 4: Discontinuity Experience by Occupational Qualification

18th Round, Figures expressed in percent

Discontinuity Experience	Highest occupational qualification *			Vocational training mobility				Total
	Dual vocational training	Additional Qualification	University degree	No further training	Path A	Path B	Path C	
<u>Unemployment</u>								
No, never	66	85	74	78	58	85	66	72
Yes, up to twice	17	15	17	10	33	15	22	18
Yes, more than twice	17	0	9	12	8	0	12	10
<u>Dropping out of university studies and /or traineeship</u>								
No	83	91	80	80	75	91	84	83
Yes	17	9	20	20	25	9	16	17

* Excerpt

Source: HBLP - Subsample of employed respondents

This non-academic vertical advancement pattern is typical of the “German model” of intra-generational advancement, especially the progress from positions like skilled workers and clerks that require qualifications that can be obtained in the dual system to more advanced positions such as engineers, master craftsmen, specialists, etc. Structure is provided by a variety of “highly institutionalised, demanding continuing education courses which are shaped to reinforce employees’ vertical mobility processes, especially those leading to positions as engineers and master craftsmen” (Drexel 1996, p. 68). As we emphasised in the discussion on continuing education practices in the previous section, the biography of this advancement pattern and the vocational education mobility pattern of Path B is especially receptive to continuing education.^{xi} In addition, we note that sample members in Path B have above average tenures with their companies and quite often work for companies with more than 100 employees. It is likely that this is an employment type that is particularly well integrated in the labour

market in general and within the respective companies in particular. We have classified this group as a segment of the “core workforce” – the ideal of the so-called normal labour relationship (Mückenberger 1989, p.158).

People whose highest vocational qualification is a “dual” diploma present a counterpoint to those with additional qualifications (Path B). And the qualification through “invalidation” represented by mobility Path A implies a greater likelihood of unemployment experiences. Ultimately, those for whom dual vocational training represents their highest professional qualification are also particularly vulnerable to multiple periods of unemployment. The mobility Path A group also has a disproportionately large number of educational and training discontinuities.

The middle ground of experiences between the opportunity-rich Path B on the one hand and the risk-laden Path A – including those with dual vocational training – on the other is generally where representatives of vertical mobility Path C can be found. This is particularly true for those with general academic studies and those without a second vocational training.

Assessment and educational biography perspectivity

The HBLP subsample of employed subjects assesses its educational and work biographies overwhelmingly positively. There are generally only minor variances with regard to one’s highest professional degree obtained and one’s mobility path. Using the following three variables:

- satisfaction with one’s professional future;
- utility of the qualifications obtained in one’s (most recent) vocational training; and
- satisfaction with one’s income,

We have constructed an assessment of the factors that are influential for professional “success” on the basis of the findings of the 18th survey round (2007).

Figure 5: Balancing of Vocational Training and Occupational Biography

18th Round, Figures expressed in percent

	Occupational future satisfaction		Usability of the acquired qualification			Income satisfaction	
	Generally satisfied	Generally unsatisfied	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much	Satisfied	Unsatisfied
All employed respondents	73	27	17	45	34	59	41
Vocational training mobility							
• No further training	71	29	17	54	28	59	41
• Path A	67	33	17	58	25	73	27
• Path B	80	20	24	19	57	52	48
• Path C	74	26	16	52	32	63	37
Highest occupational qualification *							
• Dual vocational training	71	29	20	54	26	61	39
• Additional qualification	80	20	24	19	57	52	48
• University degree	78	22	11	55	34	64	36

*Excerpt

Source: HBLP - Subsample of employed respondents

We have documented this assessment of “success” in Figure 5:

- Approximately three-quarters (73 percent) of the sample members consider themselves “generally satisfied” regarding their professional futures.
- The most positive responses came from representatives of mobility Path B and those with academic training, regardless of whether this came via mobility Path C or if one’s sole professional qualification is a college degree.
- The least satisfied with their professional futures are those who followed mobility Path A.
- Approximately a third (34 percent) of the sample members can apply “very many” of the skills they learned in their (most recent) vocational training to their current occupation. Those who followed Path B were far and away the most likely to indicate that they still used “very many” of the skills they had acquired.
- More than half (59 percent) of all respondents indicate that they are “satisfied” with their current income situation. Surprisingly,

the representatives of Path B were least likely to fall under this category. And in another surprise, representatives of Path A expressed the highest rate of satisfaction with their incomes.

Based on our findings, we observe that the so-called individual benefits of the various educational strategies, for which we took three variables into account, do not significantly differ overall.

Final Considerations

Compared internationally, Germany has a low rate of university attendance and a dual vocational training system that remains dominant (cf. OECD 2012). In the face of internationalisation, this education system needs upgrading. In place of the traditional “vocations”, core qualifications and knowledge-based work skills (cf. Schneeberger/Nowak 2000) are necessary. New job profiles should be flexibly designed so that they can take future developments into account. The dual vocational training in Germany certainly offers a number of advantages, but it is neither sufficiently prepared for an institutional modernisation process nor does it offer the affected individuals sustainable mobility opportunities.

In 2009 a legal basis was established in Germany for young, professionally certified adults to study at a university without the traditional university authorisation (*Abitur/high school diploma*). Since then, “non-traditional students” (cf. Nickel/Duong 2012) have had the opportunity to achieve more educational justice via the so-called third educational path. Whether this also leads to greater parity between professional and general education in Germany remains to be seen.

Two significant short remarks to conclude:

- Although young women increasingly graduate with better school marks than young men in Germany, their risks in the education and job markets remain higher nonetheless. In particular, women's assumption of the traditional role upon starting a family leads to a considerable decline in their lifelong learning. Conversely, men who become fathers increase their participation in the continuing education.
- The transition from school to vocational training and work has

become both more complex and more opaque, and lifelong learning has become both more common and more essential in a knowledge-based society. Furthermore, the interviewees' cohort has a higher affinity for continuing education than generations before did. However, continuing education also has to fit in – between the biographically determined demand over one's life-course (logic of the subject) and the supply of continuing education offered up by society (logic of the structure).

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Dr. Harry Friebel is Professor for Sociology of Education at the University of Hamburg, Germany since 1996. He is leader of the research group “Continuing education in the life-course”, University of Hamburg. His main focuses in research and teaching are Educational and biography research, methods of empirical social research, gender and boys research. He is speaker of the expert committee “Boys” in the National Forum on Men in Germany.

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Endnotes:

ⁱThe first threshold is from school to vocational training, and the second threshold is from vocational training to employment.

ⁱⁱWe include advanced technical colleges in this category.

ⁱⁱⁱIn the 1980s, the research project was introduced as the “Hamburg Youth Study” (cf. Friebel 1983). Now that the project has been ongoing for more than a quarter century and the members of the sample are no longer quite so young, it has been renamed the Hamburg Biography and Life Course Panel (HBLP).

^{iv} 138 students who finished one of three school forms (secondary general school/*Hauptschule*, secondary intermediate school/*Realschule* and high school leading to the university entrance qualification/*Gymnasium-Abitur*) in Hamburg in 1979 have taken part in all 18 interview rounds. In this article, we report exclusively on the 115 employed members of this sample, as we need current employment data in order to balance the educational biographical data in section 4. The research was carried out analytically on multiple levels, i.e. via both (quantitative) questionnaires and (qualitative) intensive interviews.

^vWe define vocational training in multiple fields as the successful completion of additional vocational training after acquisition of an initial degree which qualifies one for an occupation.

^{vi} The graph for continuing education participation represents both vocational and non-vocational continuing education activities.

^{vii} The ranks of those not pursuing vocational training in the first round consisted primarily of male *Gymnasium* graduates who were fulfilling their military or civil service requirements and of those who were either pursuing a transition to a vocational preparation year (“transitional system”) or who had entered the workforce immediately after leaving school without any vocational training.

^{viii} In view of the small number of cases in the sample, we must limit our attention to selected vocational education degrees; thus, those that did not pursue any vocational training (3 percent) and those without a degree higher than a full-time vocational school training (4 percent) are explicitly excluded from this specific discussion.

^{ix} Here we illustrate each of the mobility paths with six real-life examples from the sample – quantitatively analogous to the real gender-specific distribution.

^x We included the variable “company sponsor” in the figure as a control variable to demonstrate the extent to which this provider of structure (i.e. opportunity structure) intervenes in the relationship between biography and vocational education mobility.

^{xi} This assumption is further supported by the finding that this group has received the highest level of company support for its continuing education activities; all of the members of this group listed their companies as a sponsor of their continuing education activities.