Chapter 3
Students Anticipating the Future

Higher education is the most internationalised domain of educational experience, as student mobility increases and the interconnection of academic and research communities accelerates through global communications. Within Europe, the scope and potential for enhanced mobility and internationalisation of both teacher and student experience have been recognised by national governments. Education ministries have set in train the 'Bologna Process' to work towards harmonisation of credit recognition and qualifications across the universities of Europe (Bologna Declaration of June 1999).

In this chapter, the exploration of the subjectivities of actors moving in changing social landscapes continues, with a focus on the terrain of higher education. Student perspectives on higher education have to be interpreted now with an appreciation of the international context that influences their studies and future careers, as well as the local/national cultures in which their day-to-day experience is embedded.

Gellert (1993) refers to a number of 'essential areas of change' in higher education systems worldwide, linked to expansion. These include institutional differentiation (the establishment of new institutional forms), new approaches to teaching and learning, changes in government intervention and accountability and widening of access and participation. These changes are intertwined with the direct and indirect effects of European Union initiatives and longer term strategies.

The prognosis for Europe is that students' choices will increase and universities will have to attend to their expressed preferences and take student satisfaction indicators much more seriously than has been the case in the past. This state of affairs has already arrived in the United States and is already well advanced in the universities of the United Kingdom. A main driver for the Bologna process, other than the European long-term vision of integration, is, as Haug (2004) has observed, the international recognition that there are limits to the extent to which public funding will be available to support institutions much beyond the normal duration of the degree. Defining what can and should be considered 'normal' in terms of entitlement has been at the heart of the Bologna process and is experienced as particularly challenging for societies such as those in the Germanic tradition and other countries in the expanded Europe where relatively long duration of study has been the norm, for example in the Czech Republic.

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Yet there are very great differences in the ways in which different societies are aiming to make the Bologna process work for them. The initial complacency in the United Kingdom that UK models are simply being exported has given way to a better recognition of the challenges. The structural differentiation between countries is marked. Structures range from the Nordic models of integrated and unified higher education combined with equitable procedures for ensuring access irrespective of individual background (see Osborne et al. 2004) to those that reinforce binary divides (Germany) and increase institutional stratification and reinforcement of hierarchies combined, in some cases, with opening up of diverse higher education opportunities in a widely distributed system (United Kingdom). European models can generally be contrasted with those of the United States and Canada where community college courses mesh with universities in many cases, but not universally. In Canada, for example, there are some marked distinctions between provinces such as Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia in the policies and practices adopted, providing further warnings of the dangers of making undifferentiated assumptions about national systems that ignore systemic and other differences that occur within the social landscape. These often profoundly affect student experience 'on the ground'.

While the dominant features of national systems are relatively slow to change, multiple avenues for making first degrees more relevant to the labour market have been opening up. Marga (2002) has identified as a prime example the Romanian creation since 1998 of national network of university colleges offering 'short cycle' higher education. This is a stratified system working towards links between sectors to increase participation. Cerych (2002) also provides examples from the German Fachhochschule, the Dutch HBO (Hoger Bereops Onderwijs), and shows how the OECD concept of 'short cycle'–sector higher education has inspired Czech reforms.

The Bologna process stems less from the 'European vision' than from profound changes in the environment of higher education. As Haug (2004) has argued, educational agendas have become less and less autonomous, more and more driven by labour market and economic concerns. As this trend takes hold, the prospect grows that higher education will be drawn more and more fully into the scope of EU directives. As this coincides with a slow-down in growth, many universities in Europe and Northern America are now positioning themselves for intensified international competition in the recruitment of students.

Chapter 1 showed how long-term inequalities in access to higher education have become so much a part of the social fabric in the UK that portrayal in the popular media and literature of the social class and other barriers provides many commentaries to add to those that continue to flow from research and government. The United Kingdom has been among the first in Europe to raise tuition fees, to tackle the 'funding crisis' of supporting an expanded higher education system. The rationale for doing this in tandem with the policy of 'widening participation' appears contradictory to many international commentators. There are also apparent contradictions between the lifelong learning commitments espoused by government and the increasing alignment of the widening participation mission with earlier and earlier interventions in schooling and front loading of educational opportunity in the credentials race outlined in Chapter 1. To unravel some of these complexities,

there is a need to distinguish between increasing access for disadvantaged groups competing within the same peer age cohort and a life course approach based on an appreciation of the complexity and fluidity of individual lives and premised on latent potential in all sections of the population.

3.1 Barriers to Widening Participation: Student Experience in England

Unravelling factors which account for the apparently intractable problems in widening access to higher education among disadvantaged socio-economic groups in the United Kingdom has pre-occupied the national educational press in recent times. Many initial commentaries pointed to the deterrent effects of the changes in England in the funding support for students and the introduction of tuition fees, but more considered analyses have identified a host of interacting factors associated with low participation. Many of these have been set out in the National Audit Office (NAO) 2002 study, *Improving Student Achievement in Higher Education*. The NAO study showed that higher education institutions themselves have been inclined to blame low entry rates from non-traditional groups on the relatively poor examination performance at A level or equivalent among working-class pupils and have pointed to evidence that working-class students who do achieve two A levels are as likely to proceed to higher education as their middle-class counterparts.

The NAO report (2002) has shown that a significant proportion of universities in England discriminate against students from working class and disadvantaged backgrounds. According to the report, qualified working-class applicants were 30% less likely to be offered a place at some universities than their counterparts from higher socio-economic groups. Once in higher education, drop-out was associated with A-level scores. At this stage there was very little correlation with social class. Social class differences became apparent again at the end of higher education, in the form of disparities in the earning power of people with equivalent qualifications on entering the labour market. Graduates from social classes IV and V earned on average 7% less than graduates from social classes I, and these disparities have continued.

Young people from working-class families and disadvantaged backgrounds take a financial risk if they decide to go to university. It has been argued that these groups take more risk and are more debt averse than their middle-class counterparts and are less certain of the benefits of higher education. In addition, they do not have role models within their families and communities for successful participation in higher educations and careers. This chapter considers these factors further, using comparative evidence from 18–25-year-olds in England and Germany as a springboard for consideration of wider questions of the aims and purposes of higher education in the minds of students and the relationships between universities and educational agendas that espouse access and lifelong learning. As discussed previously, the comparisons allow the effects of socio-economic, labour market and cultural contexts to become more visible and help to shed light on some of the characteristics

of the respective systems as enacted through institutions and experienced by the participants.

In this chapter, the experiences of 18–25-year-olds in higher education are considered in relation to the changing context of higher education in the two countries and to the significance attached to wider participation and social support. Features of the student experience in the University of Derby, a 'new' English university, were selectively compared with the experiences of German students attending local universities at the cities of Hanover and Leipzig.

The data allow an exploration of four questions which are central to the widening participation debate:

- What are the subjective perceptions of 18–25-year-old higher education students in England and Germany about the effects of social characteristics in determining life chances?
- How does part-time work and financial support impact on their lives as learners in higher education?
- How do differences in dispositions to 'plan for future employment goals' relate to participation in higher education?
- How do choices, pathways, participation patterns and experiences reflect the wider socio-economic environment, particularly with reference to forms of regulation and the operation of markets?

German universities differ from those in the UK in a number of important ways. They tend to be more 'traditional' and conservative than their UK counterparts and less diverse, although there are newer and older institutions with slightly different missions. On the whole, young Germans attend their local university. Higher education tuition in state universities has been free until recent times, when controversial measures have started to introduce fees in many of the states. In universities approximately one half of the students are female, compared to approximately one-third in the Fachhochschulen, which are universities of 'applied science' similar in some ways to the former English polytechnics. In universities the primary route into higher education is through the gymnasium (grammar school). In the 'new Länder' or Eastern Germany and in the 'old Länder' or Western Germany, 54% and 74%, respectively, came through this route into university in 1998, seven years after the political changes. In Fachhochschulen the share of students with 'non-academic' backgrounds is higher. In 1998, 33% of students in the 'old Länder or Western Germany and 62% in Eastern Germany came from non-traditional backgrounds. Social background plays an important role in the orientation of young people when they first enrol in higher education, both in determining whether they can take a 'semester abroad' and in the financing of their studies and participating in additional part-time work.

Germany has a clear 'academic/vocational' divide, but the right of young people to attend their local university means that the system is non-selective once the threshold of the basic university entrance qualification has been gained. In 2002, the head of the Centre for Higher Education Studies (Frankfurt) blamed the 'outdated' allocation of study places by the Central Office for Allocating Admissions (ZVS)

for the lack of student mobility. Only 18% of places were allocated according to the grade of the Abitur, the academic school-leaving certificate and university entrance qualification. Critics say that this system 'compounds the mediocrity built into the German education system, and [it] reinforces the dropout rate of 33%' (THES 2002). Some want to abolish the central admission system and allow selection, pointing to the competitive nature of the growing number of private universities.

These systemic features, as well as institutional variations, are reflected in the populations of 18–25-year-olds in the Anglo-German comparative research undertaken in the chosen city regions. In the German cities, most of the students attending their local university had enrolled in higher education immediately after passing the Abitur examination. Only 15% had previously begun any vocational training. Many English students move straight from A levels into higher education. However, about 50% of the Derby sample reported having left full-time education at a younger age (16% at age 16 and 39% at up to age 18). This would be an unusual profile for the more traditional universities in the UK, but is not untypical for newer universities that have positioned themselves in the higher education 'market' as champions of wider access. This indicates that many probably had some experience of work or unemployment. For German students, studies may last for 7 or 8 years, although according to the national survey (BMBF 2002), more students than before are claiming that they are hoping to finish their studies as soon as possible, anticipating the beneficial effects of their move into the labour market. Students in their first semester in all subjects expect to stay about 5 years at university or 4 years at Fachhochschule.

Although students aspire to reduce their time at university, most of them stay longer than the period within which the course should have been completed both in the old and in the new Länder. In 2000, in the old Länder, the average age of a university student was approximately 25 years and more than 26 years for students at Fachhochschule. One-tenth of students were older than 30 years and 'still doing their first degree'. These are not 'mature students' as commentators in the UK would understand them. They have registered as conventional students but have then extended their studies over a long period, often undertaking part-time work in parallel with their studies. According to these students, there are two factors which slow down their progress through their studies: first, course regulations and second, part-time work.

In the higher education market of England, a wide range of higher education opportunities have opened up, distributed around a diverse multiplicity of institutions with different missions. While universities are broadly, and rather crudely, regarded as being in tiers ranging from the elite 'top 13' to the colleges of further and higher education that can provide a limited range of university-level courses, national review and assessment arrangements have enabled 'pockets of excellence' to be recognised as such, irrespective of their institutional location in all parts of the system; for example, single departments within former polytechnics have on occasions achieved national research ratings in excess of the equivalent department in their 'elite' neighbour .

3.2 Perceptions of Qualifications and Life Chances?

An important opening set of questions, in exploring the experiences and perceptions of students as actors in changing social landscapes, centres on how they see the significance of qualifications for them and for their young people generally. It should be noted that qualification, in the wider European sense, is about a set of abilities to do certain things rather than being synonymous with 'degrees' or 'diplomas', these partially testifying to the abilities of the holder to do certain things, so even the term is differently interpreted among English students in continental Europe, a point that had to be accounted for in the survey design and translation.

Chapter 1 introduced one of the most striking findings, that of the almost universal recognition by young people, irrespective of their position in the social landscape, of the importance of qualifications in influencing life chances and employment. Those in higher education have been able to pursue qualifications as personal goals. The means for achieving their goals have diversified in both countries, but more in England than in Germany. Respondents in the two German cities were more aware of the effects of the ascribed characteristics of gender, ethnicity and social class than their counterparts in the English city. The pattern of response in the higher education group is given in Table 3.1, showing that higher education participants rate the effects of higher education on their life chances most highly, and their perception of social class as a barrier is comparable with the perceptions of the

Table 3.1 Opinions on the importance of social characteristics in affecting life opportunities (numbers and percentages) delete if elsewhere

Percentages rating social characteristics as 'of considerable importance' in affecting life opportunities (n = 300 in each city)					
	Sex/gender	Race	Social class	Family background	Education Qualification
Derby					
1. Higher Ed	**20**	**24**	**32**	**28**	**87**
2. Employed	13	13	21	22	80
3. Unemployd	26	29	32	21	77
Total	59	66	85	71	244
%	19.7	22.0	28.3	23.7	81.3
Hanover					
1. Higher Ed	**26**	**45**	**46**	**31**	**97**
2. Employed	39	58	42	36	94
3. Unemployd	29	52	46	25	90
Total	94	155	134	92	281
%	31.3	51.7	44.7	30.7	93.7
Leipzig					
1. Higher Ed	**46**	**80**	**58**	**37**	**96**
2. Employed	37	71	53	25	95
3. Unemployd	35	67	57	28	81
Total	118	218	168	90	272
%	39.3	72.7	56.0	30.0	90.7

unemployed groups. They have slightly stronger perceptions of the impediments of social class than their counterparts who have already entered employment. Gender is seen as less of an impediment by those still in education (as one would expect) in England and the Western German city, before labour market realities have been fully experienced, but in the Eastern German city, gender is perceived as more of a barrier by those in higher education. An explanation could lie in these students' new encounters with different forms of gender discrimination and the observed downward mobility of women in the eastern states. This is likely to impact most strongly on the perceptions of life chances among those in higher education, with aspirations for professional careers.

Group interviews with higher education participants in the three cities explored the importance of social characteristics for life chances, as perceived by the successful entrants to the university system. In Derby, the group discussions contained many participants from non-traditional backgrounds, reflecting the policy of the University of Derby in relation to widening participation. For the most part, the significance of social class was discussed in relation to university life. One group focused on 'how you were seen by others', and a second group focused on access and financing of higher education courses. There was some tension between the views of participants in both groups. For some students, the 'area you come from' was important in shaping experiences in higher education. One research participant, for example, felt that no matter how well she did, people of a 'higher' social class did not look beyond the fact that she comes from one of the poorer council estates in the area and is a single mother. Another young woman in the group expressed the view that social class was not important within the university:

Young woman Derby(1):	I've never really experienced any divisions in social class really. Not like, especially not university, you don't really care. Nobody really cares how much your parents earn, whether they're employed or not. You know, it's you they're interested in not your background.
Young woman Derby(2):	Depends what area you come from though. Geographic. Say if you were on a border of like a posh area and you know like a council estate or something, if you went and had friends in the posher area they might sort of look down at you rather than look at you as someone else.
Young woman Derby (3):	It doesn't matter what you try to do here, they just won't let you cross that barrier. It's fair enough I might be doing a degree and I might be doing better than someone who lives in a really nice area but they never let me past the fact that I'm a single parent from a council estate. They just won't let me do it.

On the issue of the effects of policies on tuition fee, there were perceptions of 'unfairness' from several points of view. Some articulated the view that it is unfair that some must 'scrape' by on what they receive from the state whilst others 'blow their parents' money'; others observed that the recent move away from government grants towards loans is excluding the poorest from higher education and that it is those in the middle whose parents earn slightly more than the cut-off figure for

entitlement to a grant who suffer the most. There was also a degree of confusion about what the entitlements actually were:

Young woman Derby (4): So, I do think in a way the (influences of) class come in there, because if you're middle class then you tend to suffer, you know middle, middle class, you tend to suffer more than if you're top end of the scale or bottom end of the scale. I think that is a big effect money-wise . . . I do think that the classes still are affected, especially when it comes to coming to university because although people tend not to be oh you're middle class, you're high upper class, you're lower class, there always seems to be a band that, I mean if you've got no money at all you get a full grant, you get a full loan . . .

Young man Derby (5): I think, I think you're missing sort of, I feel the main point here is that, is that with the government stopping the grants it prevents the sort of lower classes of people going to university, so that you get those people who can go to university are going to be the people who can afford to pay the fees so you're going to eradicate the sort of people who couldn't normally afford to go. So I think that's, that's . . .

Young woman Derby (6): Going back to the pre-historical the rich get educated and the poor . . .

Young man Derby (5): Yeah, yeah I mean I thought that had been abolished sort of ages ago, but now it's sort of re-occurring.

Young woman Derby (4): But if you think about it, the, the poorer, as they say, those with less money are getting the full, are getting an extra loan on top of er . . .

Young woman Derby (6): But they don't.

Young woman Derby (4): That's what I got.

Young man Derby (5): If, if, if it's a loan then you've got to pay it back.

Young man Derby (4): Oh yeah you've still got to pay it back.

Many students are employed part time in casual jobs, often in addition to receiving parental support. This applied to 68% of respondents in Derby, 74% in Hanover and 75% in Leipzig. A survey of students in Germany (Bargel et al. 1999) revealed an extensive change over the last 15 years in relation to the employment behaviour of German students while still in higher education. In particular, paid employment during the semester has increased dramatically, alongside the interest-free loan and grant system. Today, about two-thirds of all students nationally work during term time. The survey found that 50% of those who worked did so in order to finance their studies. Others worked to earn additional money. Gaining practical experience and bettering post-graduation chances on the labour market were reasons given for working by one-third of students. This is paralleled by increases in part-time working among students in England. Tensions surrounding financial structures were most marked in the English sample studied.

One of the most prominent themes to emerge from the interviews with students in Derby was difficulty in making choices between earning money, borrowing money from the state, accepting parental support and time spent studying. These decisions and their outcomes were a considerable source of stress for many students:

Young woman Derby (4): But in the back of your mind you're always thinking you know when I come out I'm going to have to pay off like £10,000 worth of debt and it's just a nightmare to think about it like that. But still.

Young woman Derby (7): And I mean my parents would contribute but I don't want to ask them to, you know what I mean, I'd rather pay my own way, because I'm independent even though I still live at home really. So I mean I do struggle with money a lot.

Young man Derby (5): Through term, I only work week-end at the moment, I used to, used to work, in the second year I used to work like three or four days a week or five days a week. I found that, looking back I found that that was too much and now I only work sort of Saturday and Sunday and I find that a lot better, because I've sort of made it so that I get paid the same amount of money on the week-end and I can still have time to do my work as well Monday to Friday.

Interviewer: And that makes a better balance between your study time and your work?

Young man Derby (5): Yeah, 'cause I feel that because I only get the grant and a student loan it doesn't sort of cover my expenses, so I feel that I have to work to support, because if I didn't work I would be in that much more debt so, so rather than get in that much more debt I'd rather work as well as study.

Young woman Derby (6): I, myself, have only got the money that I have here. I have no other savings or anything. I saved all my money up and had jobs while I was college and at school and saved all my money up and basically spent it getting stuff to get me here. Because my parents recently got divorced and so we didn't have anything to send me here with, so I had to buy all my pots and pans and bedding and everything which is unbelievably a large amount of stuff. So I have no money, so presently I have minus four hundred and something pounds. So next to nothing.

Interviewer: So money is a bit of a struggle?

Young woman Derby (6): A little bit. But I don't think I'd have time for a job really.

Young woman Derby (4): I mean I don't have a problem, I am a very strict budgeter I have to be, because of what I'm living on, I'm basically feeding myself on a thousand pounds a year, I get no help from my mum or my father and I just live on my loan and what I earned so. But I know it is a big problem for some of the other people that are in my house they don't budget. And therefore, they end up with no money at the end, spent it all at the beginning and that is stressful, but in a way that's mismanagement as well, so I mean I don't think there is anybody there to teach you either.

3.3 Independence, Responsibility and Achievement

Most of the English students in the sample stated that both of their parents had encouraged them to stay in education when they reached the end of compulsory schooling. The German students were more likely to report that their parents had left the decision up to them.

In all three towns, a large proportion of students is partly dependent on their parents (61% in Derby, 55% in Hanover and 51% in Leipzig). In Derby, 24% considered themselves to be financially independent of their parents, a striking comparison with Hanover and Leipzig where only 16% and 8%, respectively, feel independent.

Many of the young adults felt that they had come to be in higher education as a matter, of course, in line with their family background, and very often pursued the same subjects as their parents (e.g. dentistry). Although for many, parental pressure to continue studying was not strong.

Young woman Leipzig (1): It was very fair of them not to put any pressure on me to do as they have done. ... The admission to the period of practical training at a radio station arrived quite late but they said start to study and you might change your subject of study once. I used that offer. Coming directly from grammar school to the university, anyway, my parents do not really care what I am doing at university. Of course, they want to see results of examinations and tests etc., all that. I had thought of them as being really mean, if they would have forced me to study economics, followed by a ten-year working experience and the examination as a tax adviser and then I could take over the office because it might be a secure thing.

Occasionally, family expectation was experienced as pressurising, such as in the case of this female student from Derby.

Young woman Derby (1): Well, I'm here because my mum had the opportunity to be a teacher and turned it down to marry my dad and they split up so she wanted me to do well so I didn't really get much option, I kind of had to go.

Interviewer: So you, you felt her expectation of you.

Young woman Derby (1): Yeah. I was always sort of expected to do well in our family.

Interviewer: And well meant going to university?

Young woman Derby (1): Yeah.

Despite parental influences, the discussion of students in Hanover shows the need for more career guidance at the end of school. At the same time, the interview extracts give insight into the variety of motivations young people had for choosing certain subjects:

Young woman Hanover (1): The wish for self-realisation. It is really true! It sounds very cliché-like but you are always searching for the one thing that will make your life worth living. At least that is my personal attitude.

Young man Hanover (1): But you do not know for sure when leaving school . . .

Young woman Hanover (1): No. Regarding this aspect, you receive no preparation at all. With me it was the following: when leaving school with the A-levels then, well yes, somehow you start to think about your professional future.

Young man Hanover (2): ... I, more or less, knew what way to choose for me. And it did not take a very long time before I made it reality. Maybe it was not the sense of self-realisation that made me study

mechanical engineering but the pure consideration of the situation on the labour market.

Interviewer: **Are these, for you all, two very important aspects in what to do in your future professional lives, that is, to pursue what you really want to do and the consideration of the situation on the labour market?**

Young man Hanover (2): I never cared about the situation on the labour market. If I had cared, I better should not have started to study political science and history. ... However, I cannot claim to have let myself be influenced by the situation on the labour market up to the intermediate exam, that is, until the fourth semester. Right after the intermediate exam I went abroad. From then on my foremost goal was to do the thing I have started as well as I could and to find a job. I have always been very convinced of that. It simply would not be true, if I claimed I was guided by the wish of self-realisation when making the decision what to study. It played no part at all. Studying has always been to stressful and challenging to me as if I could constantly and intensively think about myself.

Young woman Hanover (1): I, in contrast, have very thoroughly thought about what I can do with that kind of education on the labour market. How good are the chances to get a job after having finished your study? I really cared about these questions. Most important, I think, is that I did feel some kind of urgency for self-realisation when I chose adult education as my future course of study. How can I explain it to you? To me self-realisation is very much connected with doing what you think is fun, that is, what you like to do. But at that time I did not dare to do what I would have really liked to. I had a very kind student advisor who told me: 'Well, yes, why do not you do what you like best? Do not give a damn about what your parents or anybody else says about the situation on the labour market and your future prospects. Simply do it'. So I thought, okay, why not?

Students see their various dependencies on their parents clearly, but at the same time this does not cause marked stress or strain. They are, on the whole, realistic about the need to come to terms with some degree of reliance on parents whilst studying. This is well illustrated by another student in Leipzig:

Young man Leipzig (3): Financially it is the same with me, absolutely dependent. Apart from that I can do whatever I want although I am living with my parents. I got used to the way of living there so that it appears to me quite independent. One should be at home at midnight, not forgetting to put one`s clothes at the right places – then you feel dependence but it is not stressful for me. I never had a flat of my own. When I will be standing on my own two feet, I will talk differently, for sure. Now I am carefree although I am dependent.

The financial dependence does not appear to undermine the status or the self-esteem of the students. Whether financial dependency on parents exists or not, the students

often have strong relationships with their parents. These Leipzig students reveal the links:

Young woman Leipzig (3): I was just thinking about the subject. Financially I am dependent on my parents, although I have got a flat of my own and although I am in Leipzig, I am very dependent on my parents – also in social terms. I need them in my special way and Sunday afternoon at four o` clock I know I must sit at the coffee table. I am dependent as well when I have a test. I always have to give them a ring and tell them how it was going. They have called me before, wished me luck and I tell them the next day whether I passed or not. That is a kind of a dependence to me.

Young woman Leipzig (4): It is very similar with me. I would even go that far that I am most dependent socially because if somebody calls to wish me luck before a test then it is not only my parents but also my grandmother, my aunt or my uncle. It may be a very unimportant test, they call. I really avoid telling them. The telephone bill is quite immense at times. Financially, I am not completely on my own two feet but I hope this is going to change very soon.

This student's opinion is that she would never want to feel socially independent, since she understands herself to be a member of the human community and that means living interdependently.

Most Derby students reported feeling that their parents were generally supportive and could be relied upon to help if help were needed. However, mostly they also said that they wished to do things for themselves before looking to their parents.

Young woman Derby (2): I think my family are totally behind me in anything I might want to do.

Young woman Derby (3): If anything they push you, not restrict you.

Young woman Derby (2): They're always there if I need them, not just for money or anything, but for anything.

Interviewer: So they're very supportive?

Young woman Derby (3): Yeah, very. They totally support what I am doing.

Young man Derby (1): They didn't really want me to leave home but they, they supported me in what I'm doing.

Young woman Derby (3): I'm not totally independent, but I mean, it's not an issue of having them to rely on, my parents, I know they will be there but I'm not relying on the fact, and I'm not expecting anything from them to get me going.

Young man Derby (2): I think I've, I've sort of made myself sort of totally independent now, 'cause I haven't actually been at home for a year, I've sort of spent the whole year in Derby so it's like, like Dionne, I haven't had any help from anyone at all so that sort of everything's off my own back, you know I live off my own back if you see what I mean.

Many students are employed part time in casual jobs, often in addition to receiving parental support. This applied to 68% of the young adults surveyed in Derby,

74% in Hanover and 75% in Leipzig. A survey of students in Germany (Bargel et al. 1999) revealed a substantial change over the last 15 years in relation to the employment behaviours of German students (while still in higher education). In particular, gainful employment during term time has increased dramatically. Today, about two-thirds of German students work during term time, and half of them do so in order to finance their studies. Others work to earn additional money. Gaining practical experience and bettering post-graduation chances on the labour market were reasons for working given by one-third of students.

Young man Hanover (1): I have always tried to be self-reliant and independent. That is probably why I have started to work very early. Due to the fact that I have got a cheap room of my own, I am able to feel independent. In order to be able to afford a little more, I invested some more time in working in semester breaks. At the beginning, my health insurance company interfered because I did not get BAFÖG (supporting payments of the state for students) or only a very small sum. Now I get nothing at all. I was always sort of proud to be so independent. It feels good to be so independent. I could not understand those who accepted money from their parents in order to survive financially or who take their clothes to their mother to have them washed. I have always been very happy not to be so dependent on my parents anymore.

One of the most prominent themes to emerge from the interviews with students in Derby was that of difficulties experienced in having to make choices between earning money, borrowing money in the form of student loans to finance their studies, accepting parental support and time spent studying. These decisions and their outcomes were a considerable source of stress for many of the students.

Young woman Derby (4): But in the back of your mind you're always thinking you know when I come out I'm going to have to pay off like £10,000 worth of debt and it's just a nightmare to think about it like that. But still . . ..

Young woman Derby (7): And I mean my parents would contribute but I don't want to ask them to, you know what I mean, I'd rather pay my own way, because I'm independent even though I still live at home really. So I mean I do struggle with money a lot.

Young man Derby (2): Through term, I only work week-end at the moment, I used to , used to work, in the second year I used to work like three or four days a week or five days a week. I found that, looking back I found that that was too much and now I only work sort of Saturday and Sunday and I find that a lot better, because I've sort of made it so that I get paid the same amount of money on the week-end and I can still have time to do my work as well Monday to Friday.

Interviewer: And that makes a better balance between your study time and your work?

Young man Derby (2): Yeah, 'cause I feel that because I only get the grant and a student loan it doesn't sort of cover my expenses, so I feel that I have to work to support, because if I didn't work I would be in

that much more debt so, so rather than get in that much more debt I'd rather work as well as study.

Young woman Derby (1): I, myself, have only got the money that I have here. I have no other savings or anything. I saved all my money up and had jobs while I was college and at school and saved all my money up and basically spent it getting stuff to get me here. Because my parents recently got divorced and so we didn't have anything to send me here with, so I had to buy all my pots and pans and bedding and everything which is unbelievably a large amount of stuff. So I have no money, so presently I have minus 400 and something pounds. So next to nothing.

Interviewer: So money is a bit of a struggle?

Young woman Derby (1): A little bit. But I don't think I'd have time for a job really.

Young woman Derby (4): I mean I don't have a problem, I am a very strict budgeter I have to be, because of what I'm living on, I'm basically feeding myself on a £1000 a year, I get no help from my mum or my father and I just live on my loan and what I earnt so. But I know it is a big problem for some of the other people that are in my house they don't budget. And therefore, they end up with no money at the end, spent it all at the beginning and that is stressful, but in a way that's mismanagement as well, so I mean I don't think there is anybody there to teach you either.

In Derby, it has already been noted that significant numbers were the first from their families to go to university – the university in question being one of those which emphasise their widening participation mission. In the case below, the person felt that he had 'taken control' of his life in departing from previous family norms:

Young man Derby (4): Because I'm going in a completely different path to both my parents, I'm sort of forging new links so to speak. I'm the first person out of the family that'll get a degree. So their advice is sort, is not really sort of valid. And they can only sort of say 'this is what I feel', 'cause they haven't had the experience of going to university and doing a degree, their sort of advice isn't really relevant to me. I feel that I'm going through life in what I think more than what my parents think.

This case underlines another important barrier to advancing in higher education that is experienced by many 'first generation' students. Role models, tacit knowledge and life experiences in a person's immediate networks are often taken for granted and their power underestimated in supporting or impeding transitions into higher education. But as Heinz (1999b) has pointed out, social networks provide very significant differential resources which people use and engage with daily as they move in their social landscapes. These lifeworld resources translate, eventually, into outcomes in the labour market.

Similar numbers of English and German students recorded positive experiences of working at their degree studies. Those experiences included 'Feel a sense of achievement', 'Have a chance to use my initiative', 'Make decision for yourself', 'Feel stretched and challenged', 'Set your own goals and targets' and 'Feel that you are being given responsibility'. Where satisfaction was low, inadequacy of

their qualifications or barriers put in their way were blamed. In their free time, however, English respondents reported fewer positive experiences compared with their German counterparts and tended to judge their social abilities and their self-confidence, their ability to make decisions at a level that was a little lower than the German respondents. Long-term career aims/considerations played a role in decision-making with most. This is true for more students surveyed in Hanover and even more in Derby. Comparable items asked in the students' survey (Studierendensurvey, University of Konstanz) showed motives for the choice of the subject are moving closer together in the old and new Länder. 'The special interest in the subject, connected with an analogous assessment of the own talent for the subject is a priority motive when choosing a subject'. Interest in particular careers tends to be stronger in science or medicine than in other subjects. The Leipzig students included a high number studying science and medicine, who had strong professional ideas and goals already at the beginning of their courses. Students in the arts and social sciences were more vague about their further career. Another possible interpretation of the strong emphasis on long-term career goals in Leipzig is that, in the eastern states, aspirations have traditionally been directed towards completion of higher education that equips for a profession. It is also interesting that a few more English and West German respondents were prepared to disagree with the statement that 'my work will be the most important thing in my life' compared with East German respondents. Overall, there was relatively little divergence in the reported experiences, but English research participants were more likely to report less positive use of their free time.

3.3.1 Control of One's Own Life

The less positive experience of use of 'free time' perceived by the students in Derby is significant for wider considerations of learning, since spaces afforded for leisure, social and creative activities open up new avenues for younger people to participate in different social environments as well as to broaden their learning for life in general.

As described above, there are considerable differences in the judgements made by higher education students about the structural and individual factors that are important for chances of success in life. Family background, region, sex, ethnicity and social class were of great importance for the East German respondents. Students in Derby reflected the patterns in the wider survey (Chapter 2), believing more strongly that chances are open to everybody and therefore gain control over their lives and ascribe less influence on chances to structural factors. On the other hand, Leipzig students appeared to benefit, regarding feelings of control over their own lives, from stronger alignments of their present lives with long-term aims, career plans and their own interests.

In all three cities, negative factors affecting the students' feelings of control over their own lives revolved around how they perceived their own weaknesses (including

not being able to hold a viewpoint against most others). Beliefs concerning how important individual disposition and talent are in the search for work differed between English and German students, with German students being the more pessimistic. The German students were clearly of the opinion that people who are successful do not necessarily deserve it. Taking the indicators together, the English students could be said to exhibit a stronger sense of control in expecting to be able to influence their own life chances through their own efforts.

3.3.2 Plans for the Future

Plans for the future showed few regional differences in these student populations. For a small number of students surveyed in Derby, Hanover and Leipzig, it was 'unlikely' or there was 'no chance' that they will move to another region, want to move to another country or will learn a foreign language. As would be expected, students expressed a markedly greater readiness for mobility and flexibility than their employed and unemployed peers.

More of the German students were unsure of whether they 'will find a job they really want' in comparison with their English counterparts. This depiction of future expectations is completed by the fact that more English respondents had definite plans for their future. The absolute majority of students in Hanover and Leipzig had ideas for the future in mind rather than being definite (in comparison Derby 52, Hanover 80, Leipzig 81). Overall, students had an optimistic (but far from euphoric) view of their future, reflected in the extent to which they were aware of the fact that they actively can take part in their own development after they have graduated, although young Germans, as reported previously, were more sceptical about the extent to which the successes people experience in working lives are earned and deserved. One of the few attitudinal and dispositional variables significantly associated with social class (defined on the basis of the English registrar general's scale) was the disposition towards long-term planning. While life chances may have become more strongly influenced by abilities to be proactive and to plan for the future, the findings confirm that dispositions towards planning found in our respondents have structural foundations in social class. When planning dispositions were examined in relation to social class, in the total sample of 900 young people, long-term planning dispositions and the alignment of decisions and choices with long-term goals were found to be strongly associated with the social class of the respondents (see Fig. 3.1). This presentation, however, masks differences between the three groups in the sample.

When analysed separately, the findings for the higher education students showed that the higher education group with the strongest long-term planning disposition in the English city was from the 'skilled non-manual' class (3A). While the numbers were insufficiently large for strong conclusions to be drawn, the results intuitively made sense. For those from managerial and professional families, the process of going to higher education is often one of simply staying on the escalator (getting off the escalator would require the planning). Those non-traditional

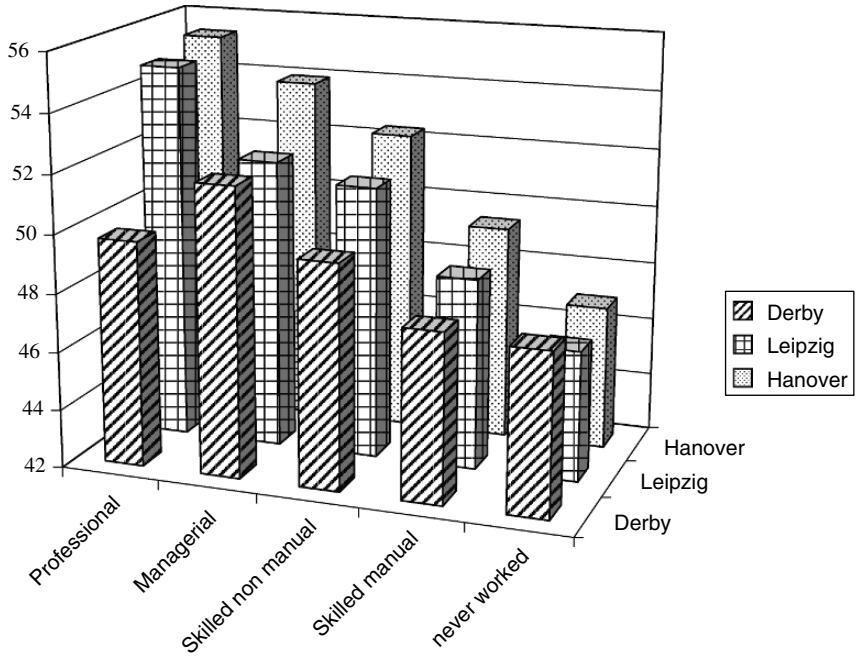

Fig. 3.1 Planning dispositions by social class (control indicator) (n = 900)

applicants who actually enter higher education appear to have done so via a process of planning which is untypical for the broader population of young people from working-class backgrounds. This again adds to the evidence that there are features of both middle-class and working-class experiences which keep young people in the socially reproductive 'line of least resistance'.

The students' own explanations help to put these high figures into context. Students talk of the way that their parents played a considerable role in their development: they have been socialised in such a way that alternatives were not seriously considered. Their life and professional 'planning' often followed the line of the parents, with no conscious awareness that this was the case. Possibly for some students, the naturalness of the 'taken way', the easiness of the decision, the lack of weighing up of possibilities and a lack of assessment of the alternatives led – retrospectively – to the opinion that their 'own plans' were more decisive for their current situation than was actually the case.

3.3.3 Assessment of Own Behaviour

Only a small minority of the students think it unlikely that they will move (region/country) or learn a foreign language. The awareness of the importance of active behaviour in these respects tended to correspond with active behaviour in

the past, namely the extent to which students use all options available when looking for training or workplace. More students in Derby made use of various ways when searching for training or a job. As mentioned before, the German respondents had fewer experiences with the labour market compared with the English respondents. Few had once held a full-time or part-time job (for comparison: Derby 54, Hanover 18 and Leipzig 7). The situation is similar regarding experiences with unemployment (for comparison: Derby 20, Hanover 2 and Leipzig 0). There were only minimal differences in how the students fit their own behaviour into a social context. Looking at what the students 'want most from work' in all three cities, only few students consider 'relationships with a wider circle of people' or 'to contribute to society through own or group effort' as important (compared with the importance given to 'good job security', 'good pay' or 'good career prospects'). Work preferences are primarily seen in the context of one's own needs and interests and appear to correspond with processes of individualisation in social system. It is, however, interesting to see that individualistic preferences *do not* emerge more clearly among students in England as might have been expected from previous, more generalised analyses.

3.4 Scope for Action in Contrasting Socio-Economic Environments

In German society, the regulated socio-economic environment requires young people to clear more hurdles than their UK counterparts in entering the labour market. Once in jobs, they have more stability than in the UK. English young people use more 'trial and error' approaches. Young Germans experience more 'hurdle jumping' and have to respond to more highly structured external demands to make their way. Standardised careers and more clearly defined options provide clearer maps. It was also the case that most of the young Germans had relatively little direct experience of employment compared to the English students. The higher education students in all three cities reported positive life experiences, including feeling a sense of achievement and high levels of personal responsibility. It was also important to ask how far 18–25-year-olds are active agents in their lives outside work and training, and how this compared with their 'institutionalized' lives and work values.

Students in the two German cities reported more fulfilling experiences in their personal lives, revealing a cultural norm and an expectation that one ought to make constructive use of personal time and that not to do so is wasteful. Individualised market-oriented behaviours are shown most strongly in the setting in which markets have been deregulated and individualised behaviours have been most strongly encouraged or enforced, that of the English labour market. While the German groups from both Hanover and Leipzig were less proactive in relation to the labour market, they showed higher levels of politically active group behaviours involving activities such as participation in political events and engagement in political discussions.

In their views of the future, all higher education respondents were optimistic. Among the Derby students, there was a sense that they had to remain optimistic if they were to succeed in achieving their goals.

Young man Derby (8): I'm hopeful. I'm quite confident.

Young man Derby (9): You've got to be fairly optimistic really else you'll never achieve anything.

Young woman Derby (10): If you thought at the end of it you weren't going to get a job then you'd just think, well, what's the point in studying for a degree. You know you've got to think at the end of it there's really going to be something that's made it all worthwhile. And you've got to think optimistically or you'd never do all this work and everything, I think you'd probably get a job now.

Young woman Derby (4): I don't know! I don't know at all. Erm, I guess I was at first, I mean I had a big set back this summer when everything was rosy and now it's gone, so I mean I had a big set back, but in certain ways yes, I'm optimistic that I'm going somewhere. But I'm not sure where.

Young man Derby (9): I just think that if you've got a positive attitude then you can do almost anything really. I mean if you can sort of get yourself to think yeah I can do that no problem, then you have that confidence and that confidence shows.

German higher education students also showed a high degree of optimism, with a sense of demands, risks and limits, as the extracts in Chapter 1 have already exemplified. The optimism in these cases was accompanied by statements of high self-confidence that were more hesitantly expressed in the English cases. The interview extracts in Chapter 1, referring to 'conquering' the challenges and the risks, striving in the face of demands and the 'breathtaking' possibilities that they perceived as being open to them, were from German students, from Hanover.

Evidence from the wider study (Evans 2001d) has shown that 'agency', as represented by young adults' beliefs in their ability to influence or change their life chances by their own efforts, operates in differentiated and complex ways in relation to the individual's subjectively perceived frames for action and decision. Thus, a person's frame of reference has boundaries and limits which can change over time, but which have structural foundations in ascribed characteristics such as gender and social/educational inheritance, in acquired characteristics of education and qualification and in the segments of the labour market into which these lead. In this and other respects, the hypothesis that a 'structured individualisation' process is apparent in the experience, values and behaviour of young people is supported.

While structured individualisation accounts for the variety of experiences in all social groups as well as for the class-based and gender-based linkages in planning dispositions and horizons, it shifts the attention back onto the operation of structures rather than understanding human agency as it relates to the underlying features of the social landscape. Goldthorpe's answer to the agency problem (1998) is that a calculation of costs and benefit is involved, while accepting that rationality operates within individuals' horizons and social norms and calling for more cross-cultural

studies to illuminate this. The Anglo-German cross-cultural researches did not set out to study the rationality, objective or subjective of our respondents' decision-making, but they revealed the apparent rationality of our respondents' perceptions and actions in relation to the features of the three labour markets involved and their positions in the 'social landscape'. However, these are as well explained by the individually perceived need to maximise their options and minimise social risk as they are by any calculation of 'cost and benefit'.

Furthermore, the findings support the arguments that social divisions can become obscured by a universalised belief that 'competence' and good 'performance' will be rewarded in the labour market. This was most advanced in the market-oriented environments of the English labour market of Derby. Group interview transcripts demonstrated how social differences are perceived and collectively experienced but how, in discussion, questions of 'competence, will and moral resolve' permeated and often dominated the discourse. This was particularly marked in extended discussions of gender differences (see Chapter 6).

English higher education students in the 'first generation' to attend university also appear to be converting social and cultural inheritance into action in new but socially differentiated and bounded ways. The apparent differences in orientations to 'life project planning' may be explained in part by interactions between the generations and the extent to which parents are able to secure the prospect of 'better lives and opportunities' for their children. The changing but bounded aspirations and expressions of agency may also be explained by socio-cultural influences experienced in their peer groups and institutional settings, as well as by the contingencies inherent in life transitions. There are some important indicators of 'collectivities' in shared perceptions of the social landscape and common experiences which are well articulated (and may therefore be surmised to be well internalised). Socially bounded agency means that roles and social relations will be reshaped over time as they strive to 'take control of their lives', and this reshaping will have collective and cultural, as well as individual, features.

3.5 Systemic Implications

Social responsibility at the meso- and macro-levels is often viewed in terms of society's stakeholders (whether in government or the social partners) systematically and equitably providing the institutionalised support and resources as well as the incentives young people need to make their way in acquiring the responsibilities of adult life. The interdependencies in this relational process are often overlooked. The evidence from the full set of empirical encounters supports the view that the most insecure and flexible system (represented by the English labour market of Derby) necessitates greater proactivity and the maintenance of a positive approach to 'opportunities'. This arises out of individual attributions of success and failure, which are themselves linked with beliefs that 'opportunities are open to all'. For young adults in Eastern Germany, our previous findings showed that market signals were picked up quickly, and in case studies conducted seven years after the political

changes (in 1996–1998), behaviours in the eastern city of young people on the threshold of employment were aligning, to some degree, with those of their English counterparts as unregulated ways into the labour market opened up. Those entering the higher education escalator were generally following the family line and were not usually tempted by such possibilities, although those coming to the end of their higher education were, in some cases, looking for entrepreneurial possibilities that would not have been dreamed of, not remotely possible, in the previous generation. Within a further five years, many young people were showing renewed hopes of ways back to standardised careers through government intervention in their region. Among those in higher education in the East German city, this was associated with a longer term planning orientation towards envisaged professional futures, a different kind of proactivity from the short-term reactive responses of young people differently positioned in relation to labour market opportunities.

The effects of measures taken at the meso- and macro-levels in the forms of governmental and non-governmental interventions in the eastern states of Germany operated unevenly according to the social actors who engaged with them – people and families whose actions and responses were in turn reflexively shaped by their own histories and purposes. For example, the temporary nature of government interventions was not understood by the families of the young people who interpreted the moves to create quasi-apprenticeships as re-creation of a state-controlled labour market and participated on the basis that this would be a long-term feature of the system, thus creating the political necessity for longer term survival of the schemes than might otherwise have been the case.

Despite the apparent belief in meritocracy, young people entering ‘mass’ higher education in the UK are certainly not blind to class-based inequalities and discriminatory behaviour. Policy needs to address more directly the muddle and disincentives in the financing of higher education studies and the stress of juggling competing demands in the short-duration UK full-time degree. It also needs to recognise more generously that it takes considerable self-belief and courage for people from disadvantaged social backgrounds to make their way even in the most open of UK higher education institutions under present labour market and policy conditions.

3.6 Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning

These patterns and ‘social regularities’ in the experiences of people moving in contrasting social landscapes lead into deeper questions of how wider participation in higher education is connected with individual and social responsibility in the social worlds of learning and work. In the United Kingdom, such discourses are constructed around the idea of mutual benefits accruing from investments in the future by the different stakeholders – the individual young person invests (through a loan system) in the expectation of a future career that will increase their expected earning potential substantially, while government invests in human capital in the national

interests of the economy and the wider society. This is a version of the 'stakeholder' approach that assigns meanings to the notions of capital and investment that are far distant from the traditions that underpin the German system or indeed those that underpin the public service and radical aspects of missions of universities as they have evolved historically within the United Kingdom.

There are manifest difficulties in making generalisations across international boundaries in this field. As this book argues throughout, such matters are emdedded in the interdependencies that operate in different social landscapes. As Osborne et al. (2004) have shown, the assertion that there has been rather limited success in widening participation is best made in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia where sophisticated quantitative data exist. The National Center for Post-Secondary Improvement (NCPI) in the USA stated in 2002 that despite 'notable progress on the frontiers of reform since the 1960s and 1970s, higher education's core practices remain largely unchanged' and 'achievement gaps in higher education persist between students of lower and higher socio-economic status, and across ethnic and racial groups' (NCPI 2002 p. 3). Comparable evidence for Australia was provided by the Australian VCC, while evidence from Southern European countries such as Spain also shows that versions of the 'short-cycle reforms' designed to achieve counter-inequality of opportunity for those from the lower socio-economic strata have had only limited impact (see San Segundo and Valiente 2002; Albert 2000; Petrongola and San Segundo 2002). Both practices and achievement gaps in education are heavily entrenched in social advantages of the users of the system. The middle classes strive to turn resources into higher educational credentials everywhere, in ways that transcend cultural and systemic differences.

Within the UK and other parts of the world heavily influenced by Anglo-Saxon approaches, both intended and intended consequences have stemmed from the combination of English 'stakeholder' approaches (in which those who stand to benefit are expected to contribute to the cost) with expansion of the system through various forms of innovative 'entry' and degree programmes. The stakeholder approach tends to lead into increasingly instrumental behaviours and attitudes to 'getting in, getting through and getting on' through higher education among an increasing number of users of the system. This is an intended consequence and is fuelled through fees and loans as well as the public discourses that legitimise them. The unintended consequence is that the expanded entry continues to come predominantly from middle-class constituencies, while the long-term under-representation of young people from working-class backgrounds comes to be viewed as an intractable problem that can only be significantly impacted on by setting up special entry measures that allow the less qualified (in terms of certification) to enter the system. This contrasts with longer term measures introduced elsewhere, notably in the United States, that set out to identify and nurture the talents of the socio-economically disadvantaged from an early age, an approach paralleled in the UK in the setting up of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY) in the UK amidst controversy that this will become as yet another vehicle which the vocal and articulate middle classes will manipulate to gain further advantages for their children. Special entry

programmes used to widen participation beyond its usual constituencies in the UK, researched by Haggis and Pouget (2002), also have unintended consequences: (1) sense of injustice and alienation deriving from their learning experiences, (2) lack of effective learning strategies for coping with formal learning and (3) performance depending greatly on the strengths of relationships and support mechanisms.

Attempts to widen participation of new, non-middle-class constituencies within the peer age group have foundered in various ways. Wider social forces have interlocked to undermine intended reforms in ways that benefit the already relatively advantaged more than the intended beneficiaries. Throughout these processes, the potential for widening participation to be realised through universities' complex and sometimes contradictory relationships with the ideas and practices of lifelong learning has been under-explored.

Universities' engagement with lifelong learning remains difficult to characterise, not least because of the ambiguity of what lifelong learning actually means in terms of institutional long-range goals, purposes and guiding principles, otherwise known as 'missions'. There is also often a gap between goals as espoused and the practices that are enacted lower down the organisation. Lifelong learning is best understood when viewed through the lens of the learning individual rather than institutional structures and missions, and it is therefore as difficult to encapsulate what it means in terms of institutional missions, whether for schools, non-advanced colleges or universities, beyond rather vague statements of intent to 'develop lifelong learners – people with a motivation to go on learning through out their lives'.

A central mission of all universities is critical independence in knowledge creation and communication. An advocate of the higher education market would say that this is the core business of universities. Their stock-in-trade at international level resides in their critical independence in knowledge creation and communication. This uniquely defines universities, and, in market terms, the status of this critically independent knowledge creation drives the global demand for its 'products'. Hence, we see the global market in university degrees from publicly funded, autonomous institutions barely dented by those private providers whose critical independence is often considered diluted or rendered suspect by the profit motive. The market in higher education is sustained by the esteem and status of these autonomous, public institutions in the eyes of its worldwide constituencies (including individuals (the public), governments and business organisations). It is hardly surprising then that institutions benchmark themselves in terms of international research excellence and international post-graduate indicators rather than their contributions to their local communities, however worthwhile these are.

The market analysis would not have been used earlier in history, when most university foundations had an immediate and essential ingredient of service to the community in their agreed mission and purpose. There were great movements in Europe and in the USA in universities in the 19th and 20th centuries that had their roots in missions to their communities. In Britain, for example, the civic universities and polytechnics had strong local ties and commitments to public service in those communities. Extra-mural education, sponsorship of town-gown cultural links and university 'settlements' were championed by many elite universities and came

to be the foci for radical educators and lobby groups committed to social justice. These were able to benefit from harnessing the status and intellectual standing of the wider university to their cause, while the universities themselves kept these functions at the periphery, allowing enclaves to develop that could demonstrate an institutional social conscience while operating at a distance from the core business of the day.

Commitments to the community have also taken on other shapes and forms in Britain. Regional agendas combined with the anticipated growth in people progressing from school or college to their local university as an alternative to the three-year residential experience of the mid-20th century have led to 'compacts' being developed between higher, further and secondary organisations to serve communities in geographical areas. More recently, foundation degrees involving a high degree of participation of business, public service and community organisations have provided a basis for progression to higher education for many employees and young people who would not previously have been among the traditional entrants to university education. The courses have to be capable of being 'topped up' to a full honours degree, to ensure their participants do not end up in dead ends or cul-de-sacs. The history of land grants and people's universities of the USA similarly also provided a backcloth to the introduction of associate degrees that articulate with degree structures in the universities. As Lay (2004) and Watson (2005) have argued, these types of organisational response to social as well as economic priorities can point to numerous ways in which higher education can connect with the wider society. In so doing, they offer channels for re-establishing the relationships between education and real life, throughout life.

Wider international movements beyond the Bologna process have had a significant part to play in encouraging universities' engagement with lifelong learning, but in a way that confuses the issues somewhat with references to credits being 'obtainable in non-HE contexts such as life-long learning' (HEPI 2004). The international organisations identified in Chapter 1, together with key reports such as Faure and Delors, have played their part in developing frameworks which, although contested, have brought some political leverage to those wishing to move varying versions and values of lifelong learning forward. Following the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's 1973 moves to tie the higher education sectors into cycles of recurrent education, the European Union has used the umbrella concept of lifelong learning and its funding programmes to encourage higher education (originally outside its competence) to participate in a range of programmes and activities. Many of these were recently consolidated in the action programme set out for Lifelong Learning 2006–2013. Another indicator of the increasing significance of lifelong learning as a discourse and as a 'big idea' for the times was the designation of 1996 as the European Year of Lifelong Learning, while UNESCO has continued to build on its early espousal of lifelong learning principles in its international programmes. Yet the ways in which lifelong learning ideas play out on the ground depend very largely on the socio-political landscapes in the regions and localities as well as the different cultural contexts of the diverse member states, with the weight of traditions and the inertia of systems and vested interests slowing

the pace of responses to putative globalised changes that are presented as urgent, inevitable and irreversible.

Efforts to achieve this will be suboptimal in their effects unless and until the higher education community strives for ways of widening participation that are in line with broader visions of their role in society, centred on independent and critical knowledge creation and communication.

There are two distinct approaches to widening participation.

The first involves changing the dynamics of access in the younger age cohort/peer group, to draw in all those deemed willing and able to benefit. Ability to benefit is itself open to wider interpretations than those in play when the expression 'willing and able' was first used in the 1960s, in the context of expansion of entry to UK higher education. This approach to widening participation dominated in most societies at the start of the 21st century since economic returns to learning feature strongly in the calculations. Within this approach, different strategies are found. Universities may be encouraged to compete for the most able from disadvantaged backgrounds and minorities (the approach used in the USA and beginning to be used in the UK through NAGTY) or to encourage special measures to support entry of people from a wider band of 'prior attainment' within the age group by recognising different indicators of merit and potential in what people can achieve.

The second approach to widening participation prioritises the widening of participation in the adult population, focusing on the learning individual engaging with higher learning as and when needed or desired. This has profound implications for the organisation and practices of the university. Flexibility and responsiveness to needs include credit accumulation and transfer, accreditation of prior learning, time tabling and expanded forms of student support, all of which require a fundamental rethinking of the resources and environments needed for learning and how these can be made more readily available to students whose patterns of attendance are dispersed and flexible. These features have to become 'mainstream' – what used to be irregular hours and places of study now have to be brought into the definitions of the norms if newer constituencies of students are to feel part of the university community. Less frequently cited but at least as important is the intergenerational effects and social benefits of widening participation – the more educated the parents, the greater the aspirations of the children. The widening of participation has important wash-back effects on the school curriculum. It also affects the profiles and capabilities of the body of graduates whose impact on the labour market and in businesses has yet to be fully realised.

All of these potential and actual effects of widening participation connect institutional mission to the social as well as economic priorities of the wider society and have considerable implications for lifelong learning. In practice, greater diversity is being achieved, but significantly changing the social class mix has to be recognised as a long and slow process, which will falter unless very actively fuelled and sustained.

The approach to widening participation that focuses on the adult population rather than, or alongside, the younger age cohort is very actively pursued by some universities. For example, Warwick, an elite tier university in the UK, has introduced

the 'Learning Grid' as a complementary library facility, designed for 'inclusivity' and responsiveness to student diversity within a 'commitment to lifelong learning'. (Edwards 2007[i] Higher Education Academy). Many other examples can be found in British universities. Yet however enthusiastically initiatives and innovations are advanced, the social dynamics of the system are always pulling day-to-day practices back towards the previous norms, in ways that continue to privilege the full-time undergraduates and place the full-time undergraduate experience at the centre of the teaching system. 'Non-traditional' students are too often marginalising, enclaves are created and innovative practices are undermined by, instead of incorporated into, the mainstream. It is also the case that systems that appear 'on paper' to offer flexibility such as credit recognition between institutions rarely materialise as intended. In the UK there is evidence that many students who would qualify for credit transfer on the basis of previous studies had received none (HEPI 2004; paragraph 7).

There is a danger of exaggerating individual self-direction and empowerment when we research individual actors situated in specific settings. This can be seen, for example, in some intervention studies into aspects of workplace learning (see e.g. West and Choueke 2003) that often highlight how major changes in perspective and work attitudes can be achieved with certain kinds of workplace intervention, but seldom consider these in the context of the prior learning and characteristics of the actors. Even fewer consider the structural conditions that fundamentally affect the longer term sustainability or transferability of these 'interventions' into other contexts exaggerated ('participants became empowered and prepared to generate impressive solutions' [West and Choueke 2003: 224]). In Chapter 1, it was argued that social institutions, the institutions that so fundamentally influence our experiences in education and the labour market, continue to interlock in ways that shape life courses, yet these may be rendered invisible. Research into the dynamics of higher education participation and labour market entry is increasingly uncovering the social processes at work, as Whitty et al. have shown in *Destined for Success?*.

Universities are not in themselves providers of lifelong learning, but they sit in a context of lifelong learning both in policy terms and historically, as Watson (2008) has shown. The question is how far they are sensitive and responsive to the needs of the learning individual, while pursuing their core mission of independent knowledge creation and dissemination.

Actual and potential students of higher education, moving as actors in these social landscapes, often experience something different from that intended in institutional accounts of achievements and statements of intent, and these gaps multiply the further the student is from the well-trodden pathways (or indeed escalators) of the middle-class 'standard' routes into higher education, as the Anglo-German evidence shows. A focus on the learning individual in the social landscape of higher education reveals

- unintended consequences;
- opportunities partially realised; and
- in-built inertia and resistances impeding changes to traditional norms and practices.

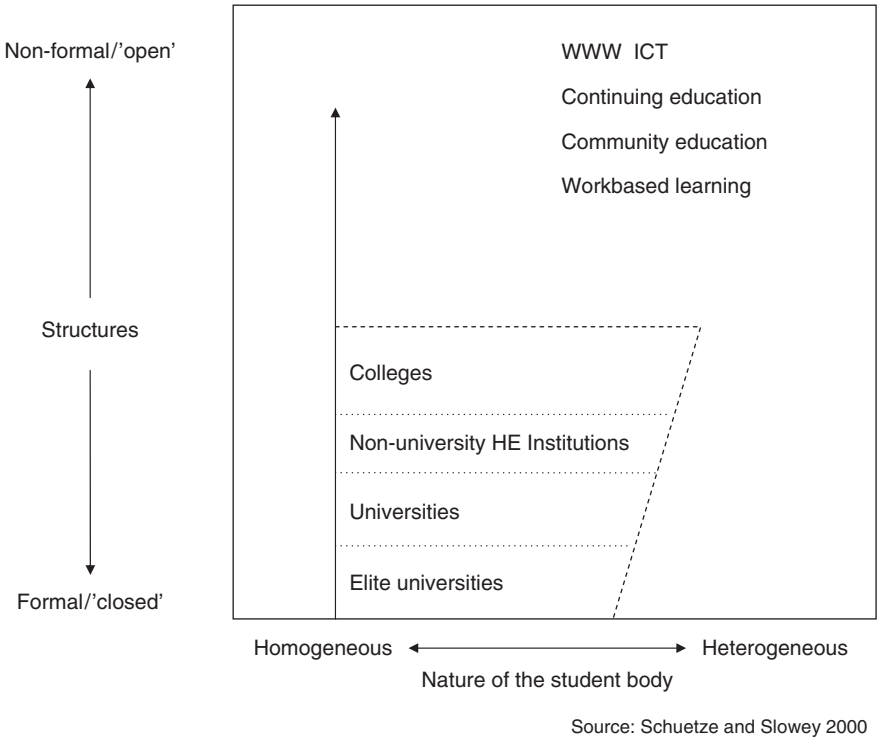

Fig. 3.2 Higher education and lifelong learning: a framework of change

Institutions are differentiated in the extent to which flexibility and openness of access feature in their missions. Schuetze and Slowey have demonstrated that the resulting reinforcement of institutional hierarchies around traditional patterns of provision is almost universal, as they set out in Fig. 3.2 below. Formal, or 'closed', structures are associated with high status and traditional provision. The more open and flexible the institutional structure, with the features that are 'more likely to make lifelong learning in higher education actually happen', the lower the status and public esteem.

In the UK, the growth in numbers taking part-time or other flexible modes of study, together with the continuing rise in the average age of participants, might suggest a growing culture of acceptance and indeed promotion of the principles and practices of lifelong learning in UK universities. Yet as Slowey and Watson (2003: 3–19) have shown, even in the UK context the students and potential students encounter barrier after barrier in their day-to-day experiences as the rules of the game and the associated practices continue to be set by traditional norms. This continues to happen despite the fact that the practices work well with decreasing proportions of the constituencies they are meant to serve.

Some commentators look to the 'liberating effects of mass' as offering most promise for emancipation through higher education and the pursuit of social justice

(e.g. Watson 2008). It is undeniable that the potential contribution to social justice is significantly enhanced by expansion of higher education systems all round the world, although that potential is largely unrealised because of the forces and factors outlined in Chapter 1, stemming often from middle-class dominance and the reluctance of politicians, thinking of the ballot box, to challenge this status quo boldly enough.

The challenge lies in converting this potential to actuality. This means creating conditions which open up alternatives to the meritocratic zero-sum race, outlined in Chapter 1, in which the most privileged participants are nearly always the winners over their less well resourced peers and the disadvantaged who cannot participate at all in higher education are left further behind. This includes tackling poverty in families and communities and huge disparities in the quality of initial education, within as well as between particular geographical areas. So whether we take the perspective of the learning individual or the perspective of the institution trying to widen participation, another lens needs to direct our gaze to the connections between institutions of higher education and the specific social landscapes in which they have their influences. While some of these are international and already well served in the drive for world-class status, others are distinctly local/regional. A focus on learning regions has considerable promise here – the idea (Osborne 2007) that multiple players, including universities, 'have a role in promoting and facilitating learning that develops the economic and social well-being of their locality' (p. 36). For universities, Osborne advocates, this role extends far beyond the economic into the exchange or transfer of knowledge that is not directly amenable to commercialisation: 'From cooperation with museums to educating citizens on topical and controversial issues ... they contribute not only to knowledge transfer and to public understanding of science and technology, but also to knowledge being valued in the community' (p. 37). Seeing 'the public', with its diversity of interests, as a fourth and crucial party in the alliances of universities, businesses and government is in line with the history and traditions of social responsibility, both for universities and for the communities in which they are set, including providing renewed and reshaped access for the 'million willing adult learners' who, according to Tuckett (2007 p. 17), are being pushed out by 'rising investment in younger students and a shift in priorities that privileges the interests of learning in the workplace'.

The 'reflexive' argument put forward by Watson focuses on connections of a reflexive kind between universities and life beyond their walls that will 'engender, over time, responsiveness to the ways in which the diversity of those who engage with the university want to shape their experience of it'. Within the configuration of UK institutions, this can be achieved in ways that consolidate and safeguard the critical independence that give universities their unique position in the market for education as well as in building on the best traditions of public service and social responsibility. The vision will only be achieved, however, with much fairer systems of support for the diversity of learners. These are essential conditions if social responsibility is be restored to its historically central position.

3.7 Bringing Social Responsibility Back into the Equation

A vision of learning that embodies social responsibility alongside dimensions of worth and value was encapsulated in one of the first announcements of the newly elected Labour Government in UK in 1997:

> As well as securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps us fulfill our potential and opens doors to a love of music, art and literature. That is why we value learning for its own sake, as well as for the equality of opportunity it brings. (DfEE 1998: foreword)

Although this vision that appears to have been overtaken with pre-occupations with a far narrower skills agenda at national level, how far can the 'Learning Region' approach offer prospects for bringing social responsibility back onto the agenda in modern ways, which avoid the patronising of the past? Can improved reflexive connections between organisations, including universities with their unique role and status of critical independence, reduce barriers to participation in higher education for people viewed as actors in changing social landscapes? Can they go beyond the world of work and its demands for 'skills' and human capital, the relentless march of 'credentialism' and the contemporary pre-occupation with employment-related skills?[ii]

Social responsibility operates at the level of the universities themselves and the level of those who engage with them. Social responsibility is crucially dependent at the macro, societal level on just and equitable material support that allows

- universities themselves to reassert their historically significant roles – which extend beyond relationships with businesses and the economy to the unique responsibilities for critical engagement with multiple communities and
- actors in changing social landscapes to assert their social as well as individual responsibilities to engage in their communities, as learners as well as active citizens.

3.8 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has explored perspectives on learning work and social responsibility that are important in the terrain of higher education. Profound relationships exist between higher education, work and life chances. Higher education continues to carry a high proportion of its participants into primary segments of the labour market (jobs marked by careers and high degrees of stability and remuneration) almost as predictably as truncated educational trajectories lead into secondary labour markets even though the process of getting a foothold in primary segment jobs now takes longer and the monetary returns have decreased.

To unravel some of these complexities, there is a need to distinguish between increasing access for disadvantaged groups competing within the same peer age cohort and a life-course approach that acknowledges the complexity and fluidity of adult lives and the latent, often undervalued, potential in all sections of the population.

English higher education students share an almost universalised belief that 'competence' and good 'performance' will be rewarded in the labour market. German students are more sceptical and clearly of the opinion that people who are successful in work do not necessarily deserve their success. English higher education students in the 'first generation' to attend university often show more initiative or 'proactivity' in their decision-making than those who are carried along on the middle-class escalator of parental expectations. The personal accounts of all students show how family relationships and expectations are deeply embedded in the higher education experience. Actual and potential students of higher education, moving as actors in these social landscapes, also often experience something different from that intended in institutional accounts of achievements and statements of intent about widening participation, and these gaps multiply the further the student is from the well-trodden pathways (or indeed escalators) of the middle-class 'standard' routes into higher education.

Despite the apparent belief in meritocracy, young people entering 'mass' higher education in the UK are certainly not blind to class-based inequalities and discriminatory behaviour. It takes considerable self-belief and courage for people from disadvantaged social backgrounds to make their way even in the most open of UK higher education institutions under present labour market and policy conditions.

It is undeniable that the expansion of participation in higher education is a key element in the pursuit of social justice, where it brings advanced learning and powerful knowledge within the reach of many more ordinary people than previously. This applies around the globe. Its potential is far from being fully realised.

Universities are not in themselves providers of lifelong learning, but they sit in a context of lifelong learning. They juggle the competing demands of demonstrating sensitivity and responsiveness to the diverse needs of learning individuals, while pursuing their core missions of independent knowledge creation and dissemination and preserving these when the needs of the economy start to dominate the political agenda. Expansion of the idea of 'learning regions' in ways that involve the wider population can potentially bring together the historic missions of universities with the newer visions of how they need to operate in the new economy. Both from the perspective of the learning individual and the perspective of the institution trying to widen participation, the vision will only be achieved, however, with much fairer systems of support for the diversity of learners and inter-institutional collaborations that genuinely reduce barriers and sustain wider participation in their social landscapes. Both of these require social responsibility to be brought more centrally into the equation.

Notes

i. See Edwards R. (2007), Inside and Outside the Walls. Academy Exchange, The Higher Education Academy, pp. 38–39.

ii. The latest UK intervention along these lines is the Leitch Report, which would like to see the proportion of the workforce with graduate-level qualifications rise from its current level of 29% to 40% by 2020 (Leitch, 2006: 137).