

7. Social resilience in facing precarity: young people ‘rising to the occasion’

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1 INTRODUCTION

How some people successfully cope with and adapt to precarious employment experiences in their youth, and whether or not these efforts result in transformative outcomes, lies at the heart of discussions around social resilience (Keck and Sakdapolrak, 2013) and capabilities (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993). This chapter provides an empirical investigation of these concepts in Norway and the United Kingdom – two countries with distinctive youth transition regimes in terms of supporting institutions and cultural norms around young adulthood (Walther, 2006). Through qualitative interviews we identify similarities and differences in the support provided through formal institutions, such as education and public employment services (PES), and through social networks facilitated by family, friends and volunteering experiences. We argue that drawing on the two concepts of social resilience and capabilities provides a powerful lens for identifying how young people negotiate their pathways out of precarious employment in the short to long term. Situating this qualitative evidence in the context of two very different institutional contexts allows us to identify similarities and differences in the interactions between institutional structures and individual agency that enable functioning in the capabilities sense, and at the same time highlights different types of social resilience.

Our analysis is presented in three sections. First, we provide a short review of the literature on social resilience and the capability approach. We argue that linking the two perspectives provides analytical leverage for better understanding the dynamics underlying apparently positive outcomes. Second, we draw on data from life-course interviews conducted in the United Kingdom and Norway to examine the role of some key conversion factors. These include formal institutions

such as education and PES, alongside social networks facilitated by the voluntary sector and informal social networks with strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). Our conclusions revisit the questions as to what makes young people resilient in different contexts and how young people might use formal institutional resources and/or informal networks to initiate a process of transformation – the strongest form of social resilience.

2 SOCIAL RESILIENCE, CAPABILITY AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S EMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS

The concept of resilience has been applied to a number of fields: from psychology, anthropology and ecology to the analysis of human and physical responses to geographical disasters (Keck and Sakdapolrak, 2013). In recent years it has been used as an analytical lens through which to examine a spectrum of issues ranging from the financial crisis (Walker and Cooper, 2011) and regional economic development (Christopherson et al., 2010) to practitioner and cross-cultural comparisons of interventions for youth at risk (Ungar, 2008). However, the concept has also become more prevalent in research on young people in the labour market.

Narratives of resilience as a unique individual response to adversity may overemphasize personal characteristics and neglect the social context in which they emerge. Such literature indicates that while most young people find periods of unemployment difficult, their reactions to it differ. Bottrell (2007) suggests that for some the experience of unemployment might become a period of 'resistance' and 'reinvention' on the way to finding better jobs, while others find that the experience confirms their status as 'failures' and 'losers'.

Recent debates on the concept of resilience have moved beyond this individualistic perspective. Hart et al. (2016) identify four waves in the development of the concept in youth-focused research. The first wave focuses on the individual young person who manages to overcome difficulty, largely through personal qualities (Masten, 2007). The second wave moves from the micro to the meso level, including the role of families, schools and local communities as mediating pathways for young people towards more positive outcomes. The third wave emphasizes the importance of cultural meaning in how outcomes are defined and provides a more dynamic process analysis of intervention and innovation effects (Ungar, 2004). The fourth wave uses Bronfenbrenner's (1977) human ecology theory to provide a more dynamic, multi-levelled and contextualized interpretation of resilience.

This latter definition comes closer to the concept of ‘social resilience’ (Hall and Lamont, 2013), which contextualizes individual experiences and actions in relation to social institutions that mediate their options and behaviour. This view situates both the individual person and the adversity they face in relation to socioeconomic and cultural dimensions, examining how policy interventions can best be directed so as to reduce the effects of adversity (Cassen et al., 2009).

The capability approach provides a complementary perspective, focusing on individuals’ capabilities in a broader societal and institutional context and the extent to which they achieve a life that they value (Böhler et al., Chapter 3 this volume; Bussi and Dahmen, 2012). The capability approach builds on two core normative claims. First, giving individuals the possibility to achieve well-being should be of primary moral importance to societies. Second, the freedom to achieve well-being should be understood in terms of capabilities, that is, the set of possible ‘beings’ and ‘doings’ that the person values. A person is able to achieve one of the possible valued outcomes if they are empowered with the material and non-material resources necessary for that purpose (Robeyns, 2016).

Conversion factors play a central role in this approach: they equip individuals with tools to make use of the available resources. Conversion factors can be broadly grouped into micro-, meso- and macro-level factors (Dingeldey et al., 2015). The micro level refers to personal characteristics and knowledge; the meso level includes institutions (e.g., school, welfare agencies, voluntary organizations) and informal networks and resources (e.g., family, friends, acquaintances); and the macro level consists, for example, of macroeconomic conditions, and national and cultural norms.

Here our analysis links conversion factors from the capabilities literature with the concepts of navigation and negotiation from the resilience approach. Ungar’s (2008: 225) conception of ‘social resilience’ as a process situating outcomes within a dynamic life-course approach is particularly relevant. We draw on the three defining aspects of social resilience proposed by Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013): *coping*, *adaptation* and *transformation*. Coping capacities refer to the ability of social actors to cope and overcome immediate adversities. Adaptive capacities point to the ability to learn from past challenges and to adjust to future challenges. Transformative capacities result in a substantial and sustainable change for both individuals’ and institutions’ robustness in the face of future crises.

Two aspects in Keck and Sakdapolrak’s discussion of social resilience are of particular relevance in expanding the concept and applying it to the context of youth resilience around labour market transitions. First, they recognize the relevance of temporality when relating social resilience not

only to present but also to future risks. The long-term perspective suggests that empirically we should be interested in the role of learning and adjustments based on past positive and negative experiences. Second, involving the role of institutions clarifies that social resilience and attaining valuable 'beings' and 'doings' is a political as well as a personal matter. Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013: 14) argue that 'social resilience, especially in the livelihoods of the poor and marginalized, is not only a technical, but a political issue'. This suggests that analysing the drivers of social resilience and the mechanisms of young people's integration into the labour market means taking into account processes of governance and policies and institutions designed to help youth transitions (see contributions to Volume 1). Analytically, this requires capturing how the complex power relations between the macro and micro levels of a society interact with the 'meso level of society' (Hertzman and Siddiqi, 2013).

In short, we adopt a conceptualization of social resilience that includes the normatively important aspiration in European societies that young people should have '*effective freedom to act and govern themselves*' (Johansson and Hvinden, 2007: 39–40). This ambition goes hand in hand with the idea that, empirically, resilient individuals are those who have the tools (or freedom) to act in such a way as to achieve outcomes they value. Moreover, our approach is in line with Keck and Sakdapolrak's (2013: 10) in incorporating an extended time horizon, rather than a single point in time. We consider the capacity to draw lessons from the past and from others as relevant for informing individual actions. Such processes of reflexivity and learning require a dynamic analytical framework to capture how young people's lives develop over time and the factors that influence their life courses. Against this background, social resilience and the capability approach are complementary insofar as social resilience can have a positive impact on future capabilities, promoting what Nussbaum (2011: 43) refers to as 'capability security', meaning that a given capability can be counted on for the future.

3 THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL RESILIENCE IN DIFFERENT YOUTH TRANSITION REGIMES: COMPARING NORWAY AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

Norway and the United Kingdom illustrate two very different kinds of youth transition regimes (Hora et al., Chapters 7 and 8 Volume 1; Walther, 2006: 136). The Norwegian regime is characterized by a universalistic and developmental approach to supporting youth, while the United Kingdom

is categorized as a liberal transition regime that is more punitive and individualistic (Wallace and Bendit, 2009).

Norway and the United Kingdom share a strong emphasis on education; however, while investment in education is similar, Norway has a higher degree of participation in lifelong learning and vocational training than is the case in the United Kingdom. Moreover, while higher education is mainly public and almost free of charge in Norway, higher education institutions in the United Kingdom are allowed to charge considerable tuition fees, which are generally funded through loans. In terms of employment protection, the Norwegian labour market tends to be more regulated than that of the United Kingdom, with the use of temporary contracts introduced in 2015 (Bussi and O'Reilly, 2016; Hora et al., 2016; Schoyen and Vedeler, 2016). Norway invests a high share of GDP in labour market activation policies that mostly support sheltered employment and training, with specific measures targeting young people. The United Kingdom adopts a 'work-first' activation approach with a strong emphasis on job search and benefits conditionality, while recent reforms introduced stronger sanctions and focused on promoting vocational training. In Norway unemployment benefits are tied to a previous record of paid employment, which means that young people are not eligible and are therefore reliant on basic social assistance. However, the duration of entitlement tends to be longer than in the United Kingdom, where replacement rates are lower than in Norway.

Our main hypothesis is that in Norway young individuals can count on the support of a broad set of public institutions to help them overcome the adversity of early job insecurity. These institutions represent important 'conversion factors' supporting adaptive or transformative capacities and forms of social resilience. These adaptive and transformative capacities imply an incremental and radical long-term change in people's lives, including an enhancement of present and future well-being. In contrast, institutions in the United Kingdom – which mostly advocate a quick entry into the labour market with limited and short-term financial support – are expected to foster short-term 'coping capacities'. Young people may receive help to resolve an immediate crisis but, in most cases, public support does not include the necessary tools to achieve a sustainable improvement.

However, we cannot exclude a priori that, in spite of differences in context and quality of resources in Norway and the United Kingdom, we might find – perhaps surprisingly – similarities in the way young people are able to develop strategies of coping, adapting and transforming adversity into opportunities.

4 METHODOLOGY

The life-course interviews used in this chapter were conducted in Norway and the United Kingdom between May and November 2016. We targeted individuals from three cohorts (1950–55, 1970–75, 1990–95) who had experienced a prolonged period of unemployment or employment insecurity in their teens or 20s. The life-course interviews sought to uncover how young people negotiated their insecurity, that is, what resources they had access to and how they had used these to overcome adversity and try to accomplish what they valued in terms of employment and life satisfaction (for details of the method, see Hvinden et al., Chapter 1 this volume). We focus here on resilient respondents (Ayllón et al., Chapter 9 this volume, and Böhler et al., Chapter 3 this volume, present a number of cases where the outcomes were not as successful).

We were interested in understanding what tools and resources our interviewees had deployed to build and sustain social resilience. Based on our analysis of these interviews, we focus on four conversion factors: education, PES, volunteering and social networks. Further details of this methodology are outlined in the introductory chapter to this volume.

All of the anonymized interviewees from Norway and the United Kingdom that we identified as being resilient are listed in Table 7.1 (13 out of 30 persons in Norway and 18 out of 30 in the United Kingdom). Although they had not all secured stable employment, they felt they had overcome their initial difficulties in entering the world of work, and they were confident that they were (or were on the way to) achieving a degree of self-fulfilment and a life they valued.

In addition, we list the key conversion factors that supported their development of a degree of social resilience. This summary indicates some interesting patterns. In Norway older cohorts named the PES as the sole most important support factor; for younger cohorts, education has become increasingly more relevant. By contrast, in the United Kingdom only two respondents credited the PES as a major supportive factor. Education was more frequently cited, especially for older respondents, although in many cases this was because they had returned to studying when they were older. UK respondents were also more likely to cite the importance of voluntary work or social networks that had enabled them to overcome their experience of early job insecurity; the Norwegian interviewees did not mention these latter factors.

This preliminary summary analysis interestingly reinforces some of the characteristics of the Norwegian and UK youth transition regimes: where social institutions are stronger, as in Norway, these were more

Table 7.1 Resilient individuals in our sample

				Relevant conversion factors			
Interviewee	Gender	Cohort	Education	PES	Volunteering	Network	
Norwegian sample	Mai	f	1950	(x)	X		(x)
	Jarle	m	1950		X		
	Inga	f	1950	X			
	Elin	f	1950		X	(x)	
	Jan	m	1970		X		
	Gerhard	m	1970		X		
	Nidar	m	1970				X
	Thor	m	1970	X			(x)
	Johanna	f	1970	(x)	(x)		X
	Grete	f	1970	X			
	Kristina	f	1970	X	(x)		
	Anne Karin	f	1990	X	(x)		(x)
	Toril	f	1990	X			
				Education	PES	Volunteering	Network
UK sample	Joseph	m	1950	(x)		X	
	Mo	f	1950			X	
	Tina	f	1950	X			
	Angie	f	1970	X			(x)
	Danny	m	1970	X			
	Yvonne	f	1970	X			
	Nina	f	1970	X	(x)		(x)
	Terri	f	1970			X	
	Jimmy	m	1970				X
	Kay	f	1970				X
	Sadiq	m	1990	X		(x)	(x)
	Simon	m	1990	X			(x)
	Jesse	m	1990			X	(x)
	John	m	1990				X
	Kylie	f	1990	(x)	X		
Lulu	f	1990		(x)	X	(x)	
Samuel	m	1990		X		(x)	
Sienna	f	1990				X	

Notes: **X** = main conversion factor, i.e., the primary driver of social resilience; (x) = supporting conversion factors, i.e., secondary factors supporting social resilience.

evident in respondents' accounts of supporting factors; in the United Kingdom, where these institutions are comparatively weaker, informal and voluntary networks were more often cited. We now examine each of these four conversion factors, drawing on evidence from the individuals we interviewed.

5 CONVERSION FACTORS IN COPING, ADAPTIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE FORMS OF SOCIAL RESILIENCE

5.1 Education

Scholars of the capability approach have focused on education because of its central role in the enhancement of opportunities for individuals (Nussbaum, 2011) and on the potential social justice of higher education arrangements (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007). Sen (1997) argues that education and skill formation are at the heart of human capabilities in conducting a meaningful life. The impact of education and training goes beyond the wage premium or increased quality of production. Education is expected to be one of the main factors equipping young people for the world of work and potentially supporting transformative agency. We present two narratives illustrating how education contributes to different forms of social resilience.

Born in the early 1970s in a working-class family, **Angie** was interested in staying on at school to do A-levels (the British school-leaving qualification required for admission to university), but she left a comprehensive secondary school at age 16. The cultural norm for girls like her, from a working-class family, was to work for a few years, then marry and have children. When she suggested staying on at school, she recalls her father saying: ‘What would you want to stay on for? You’re a girl, you’ll get married and have children, there’s no reason for you to stay on at school.’

Angie worked in a variety of office jobs that she describes as boring. In her early 20s, in 1983 and 1984, she had two spells of unemployment, which she found distressful and difficult to overcome. She describes signing on at the employment office as a ‘terrible thing to do’. None of her family had ever been out of work. She felt devastated and lost her self-confidence. She soon realized that she needed to gain some qualifications if she was going to be able to get a decent job. Angie had always had ambitions to become a teacher, but when she was younger she had no idea how to achieve this. As her self-confidence had been undermined, she found it difficult to imagine how she could realize this dream, until in her early 20s she received the support of her future husband.

After giving birth to her first child, she returned to education to gain her GCSE (a secondary-school qualification below A-level) in mathematics:

I said to myself, ‘I am at home with the children and I am not working. This is the time to try and do something about my education to give us a better quality of life. . . I felt then that if I had a degree, if I had gone on and got the teaching qualification, that I would have security and I would always be able to get a job.’

Following the birth of her second child, Angie enrolled in an Access Course at the local college. This was part of a government programme during the 1980s to improve the educational attainment up to degree level of those who had left school at 16 with no qualifications. Fees were negligible at this time and Angie went on to complete a degree at the local university, where she received a grant that covered the cost of day care for her second child. On completion of her degree, Angie had her third child whilst working at a local college teaching adult students. She completed two Master's degrees and found a job that gave her great satisfaction: teaching parents and children together to improve their maths skills. She encouraged all her own children to go to university and felt that her own education had helped her secure a better future for herself and her family that was supported throughout by her husband who had worked flexible shifts as a postman.

Angie's trajectory illustrates the most long-term and powerful form of social resilience – the transformative kind (Keck and Sakdapolrak, 2013: 10) – and the role of participative capacities. It illustrates how institutional structures impact on choices and opportunities. Angie was aware of the risks of long-term unemployment and precariousness while she lacked any qualifications. Her ability to go back to education was made possible from the late 1980s onwards by government policy supporting 'mature' students, that is, helping those who had left school with few or no qualifications to return to education. Part of this policy also recognized that mature students required supportive childcare to be able to gain these qualifications. Alongside these factors, the significant support from her husband, who was willing to share in domestic work and childcare, made it possible for Angie to sustain this transformative path. Her vision of successfully completing higher education, at a time when less than 20 per cent of the population were graduates, and becoming a qualified teacher challenged societal stereotypes about the paths open to working-class women like herself. As a teacher, Angie was also able to participate in the shaping of an institution that made a positive and long-lasting contribution to the lives of others.

The importance of educational support can also be seen in the case of **Anne Karin**, born in the early 1990s to a working-class family in a small Norwegian town. Like Angie, Anne Karin also encountered traditional prejudices about appropriate jobs for young women like her. Initially, she had wanted to pursue the vocational track, focusing on mechanical work, but her father refused: 'You can't go to mechanical school. That's not women's work.' The school counsellor provided similar advice, so Anne Karin ended up following a programme on health and social work.

She dropped out of vocational upper-secondary education after two years, and her mother took her to the public employment agency. They found her work in shops and nurseries, before she decided to move to one of the biggest cities in Norway to live with her boyfriend and his parents. She managed economically with some help from her mother, but she struggled with mental health issues and experienced periods of social isolation. At the age of 19, she received a mental health diagnosis and started long-term psychological therapy.

After a few months in the big city, and with the support of her boyfriend, Anne Karin was able to convince the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) – the one-stop institution that manages the national social insurance system as well as the PES – to grant her the minimum social benefit. The active labour market policies in place in Norway from the late 1990s onwards required her to participate in a labour market measure to receive this benefit, and she found a place supporting sports in primary schools. The local NAV office encouraged her to intensify her job search by going in person into shops and asking for a job. Eventually she found a very small part-time job for the summer. The job was important because it provided an income, but also a supportive and friendly social environment. Her supervisor was caring and understood her mental health condition; if she was unwell he would always ask if she wanted to come into work only for a few hours whenever she felt able. This supportive attitude instilled self-confidence in Anne Karin: ‘You become really very happy when you show up at work.’

After a couple of years, Anne Karin was ready to go to a special upper-secondary school for pupils with mental health issues. Class sizes were small, and the staff was trained to help with professional and private issues. At the time of the interview, Anne Karin was about to complete a school-leaving qualification that would qualify her to pursue one of her long-standing aspirations – higher education in digital design and computer programming.

Anne Karin’s story illustrates how both her family and the local school were unsupportive of her aspiration to pursue what they considered to be men’s work. The emotional and material support from her boyfriend (and his family) and the basic public social benefit played a significant role in improving her coping capacities and helped her turn her situation around. Motivated by public labour market programmes, an important conversion factor, Anne Karin got a job with a supervisor who was very accommodating. Acknowledging her mental health problems, he adopted a highly inclusive working-life approach. The focus was on encouraging her presence at work rather than counting the hours and days that she was absent. The job and the psychological treatment improved her mental health.

In capability terms, we identify the special upper-secondary school as the main conversion factor leading to a positive change in Anne Karin's trajectory. Interacting with the support she received from the public welfare administration and from her boyfriend and his family, education promoted Anne Karin's adaptive capacities. Since she was still in education at the time of the interview, it was too early to say whether she would eventually develop transformative capacities – the most encompassing form of social resilience. These two cases illustrate the importance of education and support mechanisms from significant others in enabling transformative social resilience in both countries.

5.2 Employment Services

Activation policies have been widely investigated from a capability perspective (Bonvin and Orton, 2009; Bonvin et al., 2013; Bussi, 2016; Bussi and Dahmen, 2012). Most of these contributions assess the role of material resources and the framework used by caseworkers to assess young recipients. The information used to judge a young person's needs, as well as the margin of manoeuvre of caseworkers, are crucial for determining the type of help provided. Bonvin and Orton (2009) claim that recent developments in public policies strongly based on quantitative performance leave aside complex issues of social justice and overlook individuals' well-being and freedom. However, our two examples show how PES in the United Kingdom and Norway were able to provide young people with adequate conversion factors that empowered interviewees.

Kylie was born in the UK in the early 1990s. She attended a comprehensive school and left school at 18 with four A-levels. The school was very keen for Kylie to go to university, but several members of her family had successful careers without higher education, and the costs of going to university were unappealing. She was frustrated that there was no help for those who wanted to work at 18 rather than go on to university. Kylie came onto the UK labour market just as the financial crisis was starting. Because she lived at home, her entitlement to benefits was minimal. After being unemployed for six months, she was offered a paid workplace experience under a government 'New Deal' for young people scheme. The job involved administration work at a charity for 25 hours a week at minimum wage. This work experience helped Kylie focus and gave her practical skills that helped her find a job in an area of work that interested her. After six months, the charity was unable to extend Kylie's contract, however they did help her compile a new CV and she managed to secure a job with a financial spread-betting firm trading in derivatives:

Not having a degree and trying to find entry-level jobs was quite hard without having experience, but having the Futures role [a PES educational training scheme] had given me stuff to put on my CV, which then in turn helped getting my next job.

Kylie has been able to successfully move up in the financial spread-betting company, securing 'graduate entry' jobs, although she realizes that it might not be easy for her to move to a different company without a degree. Nevertheless, at the time of the interview she was 26, had recently bought a flat with her partner and was earning over 30 000 sterling per annum, which is just above the annual mean income in the United Kingdom.

Kylie's story represents a good example of how PES could contribute to providing material and immaterial conversion factors. Her work experience from the scheme did not change her life radically, but it gave her experience and laid the foundations for a professional career, even without formal, higher-level qualifications.

In Keck and Sakdapolrak's terms, one could say that the opportunity of working at the charity helped Kylie mobilize her 'coping capacities' by not getting trapped into long-term inactivity. This first 'reaction' to unemployment can be seen as acting in the short term and overcoming the immediate threat of inactivity. In this case what was initially a 'coping strategy' developed into 'adaptive capacities'. The time dimension is crucial here. From a capability perspective, a resource – such as skills – can become a conversion factor when the skills are used, enabling incremental change and securing an individual's well-being in the face of future risks.

The impact of the Norwegian PES can also be seen in the case of **Elin**, who was born in the 1950s to a middle-class Norwegian family. Her father died when she was 12 years old and her mother died when she was 20. She finished upper-secondary school but did not have any concrete plans for what she wanted to do next. With her inheritance she bought a flat and did not have to worry about housing. She chose to have short-term jobs, working for a few months in a store, travelling abroad and hanging out with musicians and artists.

In her mid-20s Elin married and had a daughter after finishing a Bachelor of Arts degree. She sold her flat and the family moved to Southern Europe, which she said was the worst decision she ever made. Her husband became an alcoholic living off a disability benefit as a result of an accident; any inheritance money Elin had left dwindled away. She remained abroad and in this abusive relationship for many years. Eventually returning to Norway, Elin had no economic security and very few friends or social networks.

As a single mother, Elin received housing and social benefits from NAV. After undergoing psychological treatment, she was ready to start rebuilding her life. Because of her mental health condition, she was granted further support from NAV through a work assessment allowance and participation in a labour market programme. The programme helped her get a partly subsidized job, with the employer receiving a 60 per cent wage subsidy to employ Elin. She held this job for two years until the company had to downsize. Then she was unemployed for another four years before getting her current job. This was a temporary and again partly subsidized contract. Both her first and her current job are in the field of welfare; she uses her qualifications and personal experiences to improve the life situation of fellow citizens. Volunteer work was an important source of social interaction in the period in between her two jobs.

In Elin's story the NAV emerges as a provider of both benefits and services she needs when in her thirties she returns to Norway with little economic security, a poor social network and low employability because of lack of work experience. The NAV enhanced Elin's coping capacity in the short term by providing housing and social assistance. Moreover, with a wage subsidy and a proper job the NAV also facilitated adaptation, as Elin was able to acquire on-the-job experience, increasing her employability. But it was also owing to her own active agency that she could secure her second job contract. Elin told her caseworker about using a wage-subsidy scheme to convince the employer to offer her the job. In Elin's story the NAV appears as the main conversion factor – in active collaboration with her own agency – that enabled her to overcome almost two decades of job insecurity. At the time of the interview, Elin was on the way to becoming what she valued, but she was anxious about managing to hold on to her temporary job.

5.3 Volunteering Pathways

Unsuccessful transitions in the labour market can be a source of frustration and can lower self-esteem. Volunteering has been recognized as having positive effects on young people who are at a loss, lack self-confidence and struggle to find their place in society. In the overall sample, several respondents reported that volunteering experiences in not-for-profit organizations had provided a 'safe place' where young people could nourish their aspirations, acquire soft skills and rebuild their self-confidence in a less competitive and punitive environment. In capability terms, volunteering nourishes a feeling of self-worth and empowers young people with a feeling of belonging. Nussbaum would define it as capability of affiliation, one of the central human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2007).

Joseph, born in the 1950s in the United Kingdom, considered himself working class. He left grammar school at age 16 to take up an apprenticeship in engineering, because that was what his father wanted for him; in reality, Joseph had hoped to go to university. He dropped out of the apprenticeship at age 19, met a girl whom he married, and they had a child straight away. They lived with his father-in-law for 18 months before eventually getting a council flat in the early 1970s.

From age 19 until 27, Joseph had many periods of unemployment and precarious work. He often had two jobs, including driving a taxi, to support his family. In his mid-20s he and a friend ran a football club, and he started to volunteer at the youth centre, where he encountered many young men with addictions.

Voluntary work supporting young people led to a new career direction that for the first time gave Joseph a ‘buzz’ from his work. Six years later, alongside this volunteering, he started to work through an agency as a residential social worker with young people in care. The agency he worked for helped him apply for a job as a social worker when he was 38. This was the first job he really enjoyed doing. Along the way, he gained qualifications that enabled him to manage sports teams.

Joseph reckoned that, in a way, precarious working had a positive effect because he realized that you can change, but he still has feelings of insecurity: working for the voluntary sector brought its own insecurity because of dependence on annual funding. He believes that when he was young he did not have enough experience of the world of work to know what kind of job he would like, and he felt that the time spent going from job to job, and more importantly doing volunteer work, enabled him to discover his strengths and interests.

Joseph made the transition from being a youth to being a parent, being married, and moving to and supporting his own household all without secure employment; something that he feels many young people struggle to do now. Volunteering, although it does not provide any income security, turned out to be a major conversion factor for Joseph. Volunteering fostered what Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013) call ‘adaptive capacities’. From a longitudinal perspective, one could say that being a volunteer brought about substantial change in Joseph’s life and even put him on the path to making a positive contribution to the welfare of others as a volunteer and as a social worker. This turn in Joseph’s life points to transformative capacities, as defined by Keck and Sakdapolrak (2013). Change in Joseph’s life course was incremental: he recounted that every step he made in the labour market helped him define and take specific steps towards what he wanted to be and do in his life. This had long-term consequences insofar as he was able to get what he valued. In his words: ‘I

feel lucky. I spent 25 years doing a job I quite enjoyed, which most people can't say.'

None of the Norwegian interviewees mentioned volunteering as a pathway to employment. Nonetheless, in some of the interviewees' stories, volunteer work seemed to enhance individual capabilities. For instance, Elin emphasized how she had used volunteering as a means to practice her social skills and reaffirm her value to other people while being unemployed:

I would recommend that to everyone who does not have job. Because. . . it is the social part and not least the feeling you get of contributing to something. . . The feeling you get from doing something useful, something for your community.

5.4 Informal Networks

Studying the role of networks provides a fruitful macro–micro bridge between political and personal forces (Granovetter, 1973: 1360). Interviewees reported the importance of interpersonal connections as a coping mechanism and sometimes as a source of work. Family was the strongest tie that featured in our interviewees' stories, providing financial support, housing, emotional support and temporary employment.

John was born in the early 1990s. He moved from a mainstream comprehensive school to a vocational college when he was aged 14, as part of a policy to help children potentially at risk of dropping out of school early. At age 16 he left the training organization with some entry-level vocational qualifications in vehicle fitting, although he really wanted to become a fireman: 'People put a downer on this, saying it was hard to get into.'

John spent seven years in precarious work or unemployment. His first job after school was in a garage, but he was dissatisfied with the job and the pay. He preferred to work on building sites as a labourer, where he could earn more money and the hours of work were more acceptable. At age 19 he became a father, which was unplanned and an initial shock. He carried on working intermittently on building sites for the next four years: sometimes he would have work for a few days, sometimes for longer. During this period it was hard for him to afford even basic needs. He did intermittently claim benefits, but these claims took time to process and in between he occasionally picked up a few days' work.

Initially, he lived with his partner and their child at her mother's house, and then at his mother's home. Now John is living at his parents' house and his partner and children live with her parents. Both his and her partner's parents have supported John, his partner and their children financially and emotionally throughout. He would borrow money from his parents and then try and pay them back when he was working, but this

was difficult as he was never in work long enough to pay off his debts and become self-sufficient. This economic instability affected his relationship. They were constantly arguing about John's inability to provide for his family without his parents' support.

All his work has come through friends and acquaintances. A family friend helped him start a bricklaying course at college, but when he was offered his current job he stopped going to college. He is now 'trained' by the men at the sites and occasionally goes to the college for practical exams. He feels more settled and really enjoys the job. Yet, despite working and earning more than the national average, he is still unable to move in with his girlfriend and children. This is in part due to high rents and housing costs in the southeast of England. John's story is in stark contrast to Joseph's, who shared some of these experiences, except that in 1970 Joseph could afford to make the transition to independent adulthood and establish his own household.

In sum, early parenthood and the lack of a stable and decent job exacerbated John's early period of insecurity. His social networks through his friends and family have been the main factor helping him cope with adverse circumstances. They have helped him restore his previous level of well-being and have played a major role in allowing him find work he enjoys, but he still cannot afford to live with his children and girlfriend and he has not fulfilled his dream of becoming a fireman. John's social resilience is about 'coping' capacities based on support from his social networks, but he does not yet seem to have gone beyond that.

Johanna was born in the early 1970s to a working-class family in Norway. Her father had a strong work ethic, expecting that you should turn up to work unless you were 'running a temperature of 40 degrees Celsius'. But Johanna was fed up with school by the time she completed her vocational upper-secondary education. She had no motivation to carry on studying and she did not know what she wanted to do. She spent almost a year unemployed, 'hanging around' at home with minimal responsibilities and receiving some financial support from public social assistance. She spent a lot of time sleeping and relaxing, and at the weekends partying with her friends and boyfriend (all of whom were studying or working).

As far as Johanna could recall, the public system did not require her to show that she had been applying for jobs or attending job application courses in return for the monetary help she was given. All she needed to do was fill in a short form every two weeks, stating that she was still without a job.

In the end it was her mother who pushed her into the labour market. She persuaded Johanna to apply for a job in a kindergarten in her neighbour-

hood. The position was as a 'junior assistant' – a special trainee position for young employees. Johanna enjoyed working with children. The position paid very little, but it provided useful job experience.

Johanna ended up staying there for seven years (eventually in a better-paid position), until she decided to quit her full-time job and go on to higher education to do a Bachelor's degree in child welfare. Her boyfriend at the time and a friend supported her, but she did not discuss this with her parents because she knew her father would not have approved. Higher education was not something he valued compared to having a permanent, full-time job. However, by the time Johanna started her education, she was divorced, a mother of two and she owned her own flat. Her transition to education was facilitated by a governmental benefit for single parents who participate in work-related activity such as pursuing post-secondary education. Johanna is the first in her family to have gone to university.

In her story, Johanna emphasized the significance of her mother in her first transition from unemployment to employment. Back then she experienced her mother as nagging her to start working:

But it was my mother who pushed me into employment. She had seen the [junior assistant] job listed. . . If I recall correctly, she had also called the kindergarten and then told me, 'This is something for you. . . Send in an application now. You must send in that application now.'

Johanna's story shows how different social actors and institutions supported and facilitated her transitions into employment. Her mother was the triggering conversion factor in Johanna's first transition to work. This first transition represents a coping dimension of social resilience. Johanna demonstrates adaptive capacities and strategic agency in moving into higher education. In this second transition, her informal network of friends and the transitional governmental benefit are supporting conversion factors. From a societal perspective, one may argue that the second transition also included the use of transformative capacities because Johanna as a child welfare counsellor took part in shaping institutions – the child welfare agency – that aimed to 'foster social robustness' (Keck and Sakdapolrak, 2013: 11) for disadvantaged social groups such as children in care. Moreover, Johanna's story about the second transition renders evident how a combination of social networks provided by her boyfriend and friends along with education and governmental benefits on a meso level acted as supporting conversion factors in her process of becoming what she values – a child welfare counsellor.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter set out to examine the concept of social resilience through the lens of the capabilities approach and an empirical examination of narratives from those who have experienced early job insecurity. We distinguished between coping, adaptive and transformative types of social resilience and explored various types of conversion factors associated with these transitions. While we could identify some cross-national differences between Norway and the United Kingdom in the importance of particular formal or informal conversion factors, we could also see where there were some comparable experiences in the two countries.

Comparable experiences related to gender stereotyping, class-inhibiting aspirations and the effects of and on mental well-being. While Norway is a country at the forefront of gender equality, experiences of occupational gender stereotyping were recounted both here and in the United Kingdom, especially by the older cohorts. Those coming from working-class backgrounds spoke of their aspirational achievements being dampened in both countries. Family expectations were either lower or inhibiting. For those who dreamed of unconventional pathways, their families were unsupportive of going to university or of aiming for occupations their families thought would be too difficult for them to attain. In both countries difficult transitions to the labour market were the reason for, or strongly contributed to, a decline in mental health that had detrimental effects on these interviewees' relationships and social inclusion.

We also identified similarities and differences in how conversion factors affect individuals' social resilience in light of the institutional context in which they are embedded. We expected the Norwegian youth transition regime to provide stronger institutional conversion factors to foster adaptive and transformative capacities. In the United Kingdom, where these forms of institutional support have been weaker, we expected to find more coping capacities rather than adaptation or transformative forms of social resilience.

While we found evidence in both countries of short-term coping strategies leading to adaptive resilience (Kylie, Joseph and Anne Karin) and in some cases transformational resilience (Johanna, Elin and Angie), there were also some notable differences in the conversion factors and mechanisms that resulted in these outcomes. Table 7.2 provides a summary of the key formal and informal conversion factors identified in the six narratives, alongside the type of social resilience each case illustrates.

In both countries, but especially in the United Kingdom, education played an important role. This confirms the relevance of gaining skills in both labour markets. However, a diverse range of educational provisions

Table 7.2 *Resilient individuals, main and secondary conversion factors, and type of social resilience capacities*

	Interviewee	Education	Public Employment Service (PES)	Volunteering	Network	Type of social resilience capacities
NO	Anne Karin	X	(x)		(x)	Adaptive
	Johanna	(x)	(x)		X	Transformative
	Elin		X	(x)		Transformative
UK	Angie	X			(x)	Coping/ transformative
	Kylie	(x)	X			Coping/adaptive
	Joseph	(x)		X		Coping/adaptive
	John				X	Coping

Notes: X = main conversion factor, i.e., the primary driver of social resilience; (x) = supporting conversion factors, i.e., secondary factors supporting social resilience.

in Norway was more often coupled with institutional support from PES. The PES was identified in Norway as a more prominent conversion factor than in the United Kingdom, although support from the PES was a significant factor for Kylie in the United Kingdom. The importance of PES as a conversion factor in Norway supports the characteristics of their youth transition regime, where activation programmes via PES are intended to empower young people through individually tailored measures promoting further education or job training. Johanna's story shows how these transition policies 'interpret youth as a potential resource for the future of society' and represent an approach centred on 'individual choice as being of central importance in order to allow for a maximization of individual motivation' (Walther, 2006: 127).

The UK interviewees were more likely to point to informal social networks, volunteering experiences and education as helpful routes to a more satisfactory employment situation. Informal networks acted as conversion factors that mainly provided coping capacities: the cases of John and Johanna illustrate the importance of their families in providing financial and emotional support and guidance. Several interviewees in the United Kingdom explained how stringent conditionality and job-search requirements, as well as administrative slowness, made signing on for benefits cumbersome or useless in the context of precarious and instable trajectories. According to interviewees from the United Kingdom, informal networks and the family fill in the gap when these systems fail to provide a safety net.

A complex interaction of factors facilitates or hinders individual thriving. For instance, Angie was able to become a teacher because of

affordable and flexible learning institutions, but also because she received great support from her husband. Similarly, for Johanna, the support of her mother was crucial in getting a job that she found valuable and eventually led to her going back to education, even if her father would not have supported her. A flexible and individualized approach to education as is practised in Norway acted as a secondary, yet important, conversion factor. Support for mature students returning to education has been significant in the United Kingdom, too.

In sum, the evidence presented in this chapter illustrates the richness provided by integrating the differentiated concept of social resilience with that of identifying conversion factors from the capabilities approach. It allowed us to identify some surprising similarities and differences between Norway and the United Kingdom in the factors that were identified as having more pertinence in facilitating long-term transformative social resilience where respondents were eventually capable of sustaining a life they valued. Educational attainment was important in both countries. Social networks had relatively more prominence in the United Kingdom, and the PES clearly had a more important role in Norway. The value of advice and guidance provided by formal and personal social networks that emerges from the narrative presented here could also be translated into policy, as discussed in the chapter by Lewis and Tolgensbakk (Chapter 10 this volume).

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