

School-to-Work Transition in East Germany: Challenges of a Market Society

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Abstract

This article explains factors of individualization, structure, post-industrialization, and unification related to school-to-work transitions of East German youth. We illuminate Beck's theory of risk and argue that in a market society young people are left to fend for themselves in career and technical education. Unemployment, particularly in the East, is a structural condition that impacts transitions among those looking for apprenticeships and better employment opportunities. We close with some of the research findings on work values in East Germany.

Introduction

School-to-work transition is a historically persistent topic of educational policymaking and reform that impacts national systems of vocational education and training (Bailey, 1995). The transition process refers to a period between completion of general education and the beginning of vocational education or the beginning of gainful employment as well as to training systems, institutions, and programs that prepare young people for careers (Rauner, 1999). The status passage of youth from school-to-work has changed structurally under late modernism, and young people are forced to adapt to changing demands of their environment especially when planning for entry into the labor market. While some young people have developed successful strategies to cope with these requirements, those undereducated and otherwise disadvantaged in society often face serious problems when trying to prepare for careers (DuBois-Reymond, 1998). Longer transitions lead to a greater vulnerability and to risky behaviors (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

Sennett (1998) suggested a shift away from a linear concept of time implying that people are unable to judiciously plan for the future. There is an emphasis on randomness whereby people seem to have lost control over events. A meaningful connection between the past, the present, and the future is missing.

Consequently, preparation for the life course is imploded by unpredictability as the future unfolds (Nilsen, 1999). Chisholm and Hurrelmann (1995) labeled discontinuities in the process of transition and structures serving as risk factors for young adults. Wyn and Dwyer (1999) wrote that young people in Western societies become increasingly proactive in the face of risk and uncertainty, and make pragmatic choices in order to maintain their occupational aspirations. According to Beck (1992) the individual is not so much an actor in one's biography as compelled by deinstitutionalizing structures to make choices. Youths in the top trajectories, who are typically high achievers with strong social support, tend to have agency while poor achievers with weak social networks tend to be more reactive in planning the life course (Evan, Behrens, & Kaluza, 2000).

The status passage is no longer a linear process but instead synchronous and reversible. The life course of young people today does not necessarily follow the traditional model of finishing school, completing professional training, getting a job, and building a family (DuBois-Reymond, 1998; Thomson, Bell, Holland, Henderson, McGrellis, & Sharpe, 2002; Wyn & Dwyer, 1999). Griffin (1986) distinguished between staged transitions (a traditional career development model) and so-called broken transitions with hosts of underemployed youths. The focus in youth research now is about exploration of the relationships between a range of transitional strands, such as education, employment, training, housing, family, income, consumption, and relationships (Thomson et al., 2002). The school-to-work-transition is often the crucial point in one's life course where decisions have to be made that involve risk or that are perceived as risky since they have long lasting effects on labor market entry, lifestyle, and upward mobility (Heinz, 1996).

In the last few years a political debate around deregulation, decentralization, and the erosion of the welfare state has caused concern among young people in Germany (Heinz, 2000). The traditional dual educational system, which offered a relatively tight link between initial vocational training, first jobs, and subsequent employment, is eroding and young people face tough challenges in a very difficult labor market (Evans, Behrens & Kaluza, 1999). In particular, students who stumble early in their transition from school to apprenticeship to work have fewer chances to obtain a job (Roberts & Foti, 2000). Although apprenticeships provide an entrance key to the labor market, increasingly employers are reluctant and unwilling to provide full-time positions to their charges. Mortimer and Krüger (2000) noted that one's life course is severely impacted by the perceptions of success in a first job, resulting in a series of failed career satisfactions later on. In this paper we analyze the conditions of risk in the school-to-work transition in East Germany through a multidisciplinary literature review, and discuss the range of socio-cultural problems associated with youth at this stage.

The German Educational System

The German vocational education and training system which facilitates the school-to-work transition for many young people is organized in a dual way (termed the dual system), and leads to over 350 state-regulated and recognized occupations. Approximately 80% of young people who learn an occupation go through this system of part-time work in a company and part-time schooling in a vocational school; they obtain either an occupational certificate or an undergraduate degree—a number which is significantly higher than in the United States, where only 50% reach the same standards (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). The remaining 20% go into full-time, school-based training. Apprentices are usually between 16 and 25 years old, and they learn their profession in 3 to 4 years, a period which can be shortened if one has graduated from high school (Miller Idriss, 2002). According to Evans and Furlong (1997), the German institutional system of preparation from school-to-work is based on participatory socialization in extended full-time education or apprenticeships. Young Germans must complete their qualifications and training programs successfully before they can practice most occupations (Roberts, 1997). Weyman (1999) said that the highly institutionalized training system ensures excellent qualification levels of skilled and craft workers in Germany, and simultaneously protects the individual worker against lay-offs or unemployment. Nevertheless the German vocational education system cannot serve all non-college-bound youth.

From 1993 onward there has been a growing shortage of training places in the East, which primarily has been a result of the steadily and substantially increasing number of young people looking for apprenticeships. Despite their high motivation, a significant group of young people are unable to obtain training for their occupation of choice; instead, they have to continue school or find a training contract in the West (Ertl, 2000). Hinz (1997) argued that “in the new *Länder* the supply of apprenticeships is far from meeting demand, and expectations of orderly careers” (p. 19). The vocational education and training system in unified Germany in general is moribund due to new labor market conditions. Under widespread technological change and the circumstances of globalization, some of the traditional occupations which were developed according to the guild model were becoming obsolete (Miller Idriss, 2002). This problem was magnified in the East where labor markets did not respond to upgraded technological methods and organizational changes in manufacturing and industrial production. While new occupations related to information technology are on the rise, the vocational system often cannot accommodate instruction because of the lack of trained teachers.

Career choice is very risky business as well. Young people have to be able to “predict accurately the state of the labor market opportunities in a future time period—the period after they have completed their educational preparation”

(Crouch, Finegold & Sako, 1999, p. 226). The risk of making a wrong decision can cost a lot of time and energy as well as money. The state of qualifications reached after graduation is weighted against potential job offers. Since the labor market changes so rapidly it is difficult to predict skill demands, particularly in the post-apprenticeship years. Therefore, some social scientists argue that a general education should be emphasized over vocational education due to the flexibility and transferability of student completers faced with jobs in the new economy (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002).

The dual system has the advantage in that it integrates real work experience and organizational settings with theoretical instruction in vocational schools. The German vocational education and training system has been successful because it contributes to a well-trained labor force and compared to other European countries has a relatively low unemployment rate (Blossfeld & Stockmann, 1999). The dual system functions as a safety net that provides work and training for three to four years and prepares young adults for the world of work (Shavit & Müller, 2000). Yet since German unification training sites are harder to find, particularly in the East (Ertl, 2000). The system also does not prepare everybody appropriately for the labor market (Miller Idriss, 2002). Some of the jobs young adults are trained for have already disappeared; others have changed their focus. For students who attended *Hauptschule* (extended elementary school) or *Realschule* (intermediate school to grade 10) it is also very difficult to enter apprenticeships in fields such as banking, insurance, or the travel industry because many students who have achieved the highest school degree from the *Gymnasium* (the *Abitur*) receive those apprenticeships.

The German Department of Labor (*Bundesanstalt für Arbeit*) keeps track of the number of youths who are currently enrolled in some kind of vocational education and training with a provision that apprenticeships have to exceed the actual demand at 12.5%. According to information from the Department, since 2003, there are approximately 1 million youth not involved in the primary labor market, unemployed, or on state assistance. Some 2,145,600 companies are official training sites, but only 637,700 actually offer apprenticeships, and more than 45% of those companies who have the permission to train are not getting involved. In 2003, 47.5% of unemployed youth had not completed an apprenticeship; 21.6% of those had not even graduated from the *Hauptschule* and are particularly at risk (*Bundesanstalt für Arbeit*, 2003).

The vocational education and training system is also in decline because it does not prepare everybody appropriately for market conditions. Heinz (2000) argued that the training is too job specific and the range of skills and knowledge one can gain is dependent upon the size of the firm. Forty percent of those who complete an apprenticeship in the dual system cannot find a job in the occupation for which they were trained (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). Miller Idriss (2002) outlined that while there are thousands of apprentices trained for fields where

employment prospects are dismal still there is a lack of career preparation in the information technology sector. According to Heinz (2000), “because of its hierarchical and horizontal regulations and cooperative patterns the dual system is slow to adapt to changes in technologies and work organizations which require more cross-occupational competencies” (p. 167). Miller Idriss (2002) noted how “students complain that teachers are ill-informed about the field and that the theoretical instruction is not relevant enough to their future occupations” (p. 477). Lehmann (1995) argued that the training process should be shortened—an entrance qualification for lifelong education, not a terminal credential. The dual system is perceived as too slow in adjusting to market changes (Cockrill & Scott, 1997).

The German Welfare State

The welfare state is of particular importance for young people who traditionally receive health insurance, social insurance, long-term care, as well as free higher education, job security, healthy work environments, and paid holidays. The concept has been based on a solid response to risk that comes within a typical life course. The welfare state provides a broad social obligation as well as the creation of mutual security among its citizens (Edwards & Glover, 2001). Yet current economic and demographic developments (lower native birthrates; higher migration rates) point to the erosion of a social safety net. Edwards and Glover (2001) argued that the effect of globalization changes perceptions and experiences toward risk; interlinked with “a decline in citizen’s confidence in, and reliance on, those who administer and provide welfare service” (p. 4). The purpose of social security systems is to cover major life risks or to decrease the dependency of the individual on others. The individual should be able to make life plans based on the expectation of stabilized income and need provision—and enable one to flexibly change places and jobs.

According to Leisering and Schumann (2003) German society can be characterized by the normative principle of security, stability, and continuity. The welfare state protects the individual against social risks in regard to the regulation of the labor market. The welfare state represented by different formal and governmental institutions shapes the individual and protects one in transitional processes. For instance, state assistance is provided for work-related risks like accidents, disability, and unemployment, as well as family-related illness, parenthood, and divorce. Leisering and Schumann (2003) listed four regulative mechanisms and related provisions as follows:

1. Transfer payments during illness, child benefits, social assistance payments, etc.
2. Tax exemptions for married persons or earned income tax credits.

3. Personal social services, such as social assistance, health services or psychiatric care.
4. Protective rights and privileges like guarantees of jobs for women on maternity leave, job security for handicapped persons, etc. (p. 194)

Welfare provisions are meant to help a person bridge a situation of risk until self-support is possible again. That includes further education and training with the prospect of employment.

Young people in Germany have access to a number of social support options when they are unemployed. Unemployment is defined by the Social Legislation Code (Nipperdey, 1998) as a situation where young people only have short-term or minor part-time jobs (less than 15 hours); are looking for work and are willing to take reasonable work (including part-time employment); have registered at the employment office; and comply with their tri-monthly duty to register. In order to be eligible for social support young adults have to be available for employment and show that they are actively searching for work. For those who have worked as part of their apprenticeship in the dual system unemployment benefits are calculated at 50% of the expected income from their future job. After one year or under certain circumstances before that people might be eligible to get social assistance. This minimum income is provided when no other payments are available. The minimum subsistence level includes the costs for meals, accommodations, clothing, utilities, and personal needs for daily living. Larger household investments such as a washing machine or television can be financed by single payments which require a separate application (Kieselbach, Beelmann, Erdwien, Stitzel, & Traiser, 2000). According to Nipperdey (1998) young adults when unemployed are also eligible to participate in further qualification schemes. The European Social Fund offers young unemployed adults with financial support for becoming self-employed, language courses, or internships in other European countries (Kieselbach et al., 2000).

Traditionally, the welfare state in Germany responded to unforeseen hazards such as unemployment, sickness or the need for another qualification. However, in the past few years successive governments increasingly have curtailed the level of and eligibility for many forms of state provisions. Financial support as described above is provided as social insurance and social assistance. Yet today's young adults are expected to make provision for retirement or disability insurance. At the same time young people receive less state backing particularly when they attend full-time vocational schools. Now they have to be at least 18 years old to be eligible for social assistance, but in terms of welfare benefits they are not normally recognized as independent until the age of 27 (Biggart, Cuconat, Furlong, Lenzi, Stauber, Tagliaventi, & Walther, 2002).

The Risk Society

Americans are considered to be risk takers because there are only a few restrictions through institutions that influence their planning of a life course (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). They tend to be more short-term planners; living in the present—keeping the future at bay (Brannen & Nilsen, 2002). On the other hand, Germans are risk avoiders because of the regulated life course that is planned through institutions such as schools, the Federal Labor Exchange Office, or the Chamber of Industry and Commerce. A highly structured school-to-work transition and a labor market that rarely provides jobs for unskilled workers, German youth are forced to plan their lives at an early age within a system that offers less flexibility for further education and fewer transitions to jobs outside of one's training. Young Germans strive for long-term security (Heinz, 1992), are highly oriented towards a normal biography, and usually try to avoid claiming any social assistance.

Risk taking is a conscious process that is influenced by parents, peers, uncertainty related to job-market opportunities, and socio-political policy. Risk perceptions are embedded within cultural meanings and exhibit a wide variability. Culture functions as a template that structures the individual psyche; it filters perceptions among members (Douglas & Wildawsky, 1982). Ulrich Beck (1992), a German sociologist who developed the theory of the risk society explained

In contrast to all earlier epochs (including industrial society), the risk society is characterized essentially by a *lack*: the impossibility of an *external* attribution of hazards. In other words, risks depend on *decisions*; they are industrially produced and in this sense *politically reflexive*. (p. 183)

Decoupled from traditional social structures, people became agents of their own making; planning and organizing for one's livelihood meant engaging in personal decisions about schooling, transportation, career ambitions, fashion and dress, etc. Yet individuals functioned in a state of dependence upon institutional structures operating within a market economy. Beck (1992) argued that institutions acted in legally determined categories of standard biographies; in that the life course was rationalized and predicated upon attaining age-specific stages.

For traditional career and technical educators (CTE), the notion of standard biography usually meant that after finishing secondary-level schooling, non-college-bound young people would start an apprenticeship, get a job afterwards, and maybe start a family. An interruption for civil service, the army, or a year of traveling around the world would not be considered important in acquisition of qualifications for a regular job and upward mobility. A linear pathway was expected, but those interruptions were seen as important to build social skills and obtain intercultural experience. Still, a changing reality in the Germany market

meant that fewer permanent positions were available for those who completed their apprenticeships. For instance, in the ten-year period between 1989 (the year of unification) and 1999, the unemployment rate in East Germany rose from zero to 20%—twice the rate as in West Germany; and the overall employment rate in the East declined 9% in the early 90s (Solga & Diewald, 2001). In the year 2004, young people under age 25 comprised 15.6% of the unemployed in the East (Seifert, 2004). The collective fate of mass unemployment and deskilling as well as welfare state cuts in long-term unemployment benefits drove thousands of people out into the streets of Leipzig and elsewhere to demonstrate on Mondays in August to October of that year.

Reitzle and Silbereisen (2000a) argued that “German unification offers a unique opportunity to study the influence of social and economic change on the individualization of the school-to-work transition” (p. 240). Until unification the sequential patterns of steps into adulthood were constant: “Ten years of schooling at the *Polytechnikum*—vocational training (alternatively, extending to a high school degree and studying)—order a car—starting a job—forming a family (at age 23 on average). . .” (Bertram, 1994, p. 280). Student options to move around between tracks were limited, and the transition process into work was clearly formulated, so a person could become fully employed and financially independent at age 18 or 19. Employer-sponsored apprenticeships consisted of a dual system of study in the *Hauptschule* or *Realschule* around ages 16 or 17. Students trained on-the-job for several days per week and then returned to the *Berufsschule* for formal study leading to a certificate or diploma of skills acquisition (Evans, Behrens & Kaluza, 1999). However, this picture of stability has changed within the five years after unification, showing more age variability upon entering a first job, and a much later transformation into financial independence (Reitzle & Silbereisen, 1998; Hullen, 2001).

What happened in East Germany after unification is a matter of discussion among scholars who previously thought the Western market system of job preparedness would translate to the East. According to Nagel and Wallace (1997),

Whereas in the social planning model there were long term future perspectives, protection for the citizen from cradle to grave, and social support through different life stages (at least as a sustaining ideology), in the market model there is only short term planning. Markets are inherently unstable and introduce increased risk. In the market society, young people are left to fend for themselves, to worry about procuring their own training, improving their own human capital and even securing their own pension on an individual basis. (p. 52)

But citizens of the East, according to Wiesenthal (1996), still valued a socialistic heritage in terms of job orientation, meaning that they expected smooth transitions from training into the labor market leading to lifetime employment.

“Communist ideology was omnipresent in schools and youth organizations,” wrote Pinquart, Silbereisen and Juang (2004); but after unification “adolescents had to re-evaluate their value system and were expected to adopt Western democratic values” (p. 79).

After unification, the German state in partnership with companies and labor unions had not provided enough apprenticeships in the East. Instead youth were channeled into full-time vocational schools which provided fewer opportunities for field-based placements. Seifert (2004) outlined that more than 100,000 non-related internships accounted for 27% of all training sites in the East, while in West Germany only 4% were non-related placements in 2003. (Approximately 38% of the company-based training places are at least partly subsidized by public funding.) Students who cannot find an apprenticeship in the dual system were termed market disadvantaged—the training market in Germany does not operate on the principle of choice because on average 2 to 3 young people compete for a workplace and those who do not succeed are channeled into compensatory, basic education. Seifert (2004) wrote that only 40% of all trainees work in the professions for which they received vocational instruction, and considering instructional expenses of approximately €8,300 there appears to be a serious mismatch between the goals of the investment and the actual employment situation.

Individualization

To find out more about how the lives of young East Germans in the transformation process are shaped today, we explain the relationship between structural and individual factors in the risk society. Because of the shortage of apprenticeships, studies have found that job insecurity about the occupational direction one should take occurs more often in the East than in the West (Vondracek, Reitzle, & Silbereisen, 1999). According to Boehnke and Butz (2000), there is a higher level of xenophobia among East Germans but tensions exist in their future planning. For instance, some youth have moved into the West to get a good apprenticeship or a job, yet there are others who stay in the East—in their region where friends and family reside. Finding an apprenticeship in a traditional occupation such as becoming a nurse or a secretary or going into the army offers relative lifetime security. As a result of the rapid market transformation in East Germany, young people also have limited access to appropriate role models that could show them how to adapt successfully to economic and social change. Therefore, successful school-to-work transitions rely even more on individual factors such as formal education, skills, planning competencies, coping strategies, and flexibility (Bynner, 1999).

Reitzle and Silbereisen (2000b) found that young East Germans reacted quickly to the new requirements of the highly competitive labor market and

anticipated an accumulation of different qualifications over their lifetimes. This also resulted in the commitment to create occupational portfolios—a compilation of personal information, academic and technical skills, personnel skills, teamwork skills and project and volunteer work. Still, the highly regulated educational system in Germany makes it difficult to react more flexibly to changing requirements in the labor market. Hamilton (1994) argued that the German vocational education and training system offered a great deal of transparency but lacked permeability, which is very important in a society where everyone is shaping his or her own individualized biography. Hamilton (1994) outlined the following example,

A 3rd year auto mechanic in Munich explained to me that he had decided to switch to auto body repair because it was a more creative occupation. He added that this would entail a second 3-year apprenticeship, including 3 additional years of part-time schooling. [He further describes that] German adults who wish to change occupations, or whose occupations have been made redundant by new technology or economic change, are best advised to seek training in fields that do not have apprenticeship programs. If they are unable to retrain, they face serious downward mobility because the social and economic gap between skilled and unskilled jobs is vast. (p. 269)

The path from education to employment is marked by extensive credentialing and rigidity. Everybody knows the capabilities of a student who has studied auto mechanics, but the apprenticeship process is unforgiving and requires conformity to its training regimen.

Unemployment

Youth unemployment is a major problem in East Germany, and leads to an increasing migration of young people to West Germany (*Bundesanstalt für Arbeit*, 2003). The unemployment rate before getting a paying job that requires a qualification increased from 3.6% in 1991 to 12.1% in 1996 (Reitzle & Silbereisen, 2000a). In 1998, 42% of West German apprentices and 54% of East German apprentices were let go by firms after completing apprenticeships. About 20% of those youth find a position in another firm or begin studies at colleges and universities. In order to avoid unemployment or underemployment, young people remain longer in school. Vondracek, Reitzle and Silbereisen (1999) suggested the success of dealing with career transitions depends upon personality factors, such as values, attitudes, coping styles, and degrees of planning as well as family background—all variables that create inter-individual differences in the timing and patterning of adulthood transitions. Aside from personality factors there are also structural factors like the economic situation of a country or a region, unemployment rates, or the variety of options provided by the educational system

(Reitzle & Vondracek, 2000). Heinz (2000) argued that human capital theory—which assumed that the higher the level of education and the longer the period of training the better access to a job—did not hold firm in the new economy.

East Germans who acquired occupational credentials in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) now find a devaluation of their education, and as a consequence downward mobility in the labor market (Solga & Diewald, 2001). Seifert (2004) commented,

Faced with bleak economic prospects, torn between “having to leave” and “wanting to stay,” young people face ambivalent decisions. Women, high school graduates and those with strong family support tend to move to the cities where they are likely to find a wider supply of apprenticeships and better employment chances. Every year about 14,000 young people leave East Germany to the West in order to start a vocational training. Only few of them ever return. (p. 5)

Others fear leaving their region and tend to take any job that is available; of course, highly qualified people unwilling to relocate have problems finding an appropriate job. Since young people might need to change careers more often they must acquire new skills at different stages in their life. According to Hinz (1997) individuals make their decisions about schooling based on rational calculations: future income, career opportunities, social security, size of the company, and job security. Hinz (1997) argued that German youth would often not follow their personal interest or even try out different careers in order to find potential career aptitudes. Because of unstable employment opportunities, the timing of important life-course decisions, such as leaving the education system, starting a career, and forming a family has changed from former times when one-time-careers and lifelong company tenure were the rule.

Values

How can East Germans accept the risk society? Trommsdorff (1994) claimed that the preference for values such as high discipline and orderliness may allow East Germans to cope successfully with new developmental tasks. For instance, high performance workplaces expect employee adaptability, reliability and teamwork, values ranked very high and important in the market economy. Beyer (1996) found that East Germans had developed a positive attitude towards the market economy. Berg and Möller (1996) said many young East Germans became more self-confident and convinced that they could achieve their goals after unification. Since the transition to a job is seen as a major success in life, youth who manage this step successfully are more optimistic about their future; still others are disillusioned and pushed to the margins of society. Ironically, former socialistic values and the rise of a capitalist market economy are not necessarily contradictions to young East Germans. Parents are often aware of the

opportunities the risk society offers and they encourage their children to explore careers. Reitzle and Silbereisen (2000b) found that adolescents and young adults in the East put a greater emphasis on collectivist values such as family, politeness, and respect for tradition. Schwarzer and Leppin (1990) outlined that the social support a person gets from his peers, family and teachers in the form of emotional, instrumental and informational aid is an important factor when dealing with change. Scheller (2002) pointed out that group solidarity, a trustful working relationship, and a high responsibility among all group members are important values.

Vondracek, Reitzle and Silbereisen (1998) argued that a successful transformation depends on the vocational maturity of young people. Baltes (1987, 1990) claimed that career development is seen by youth as consisting of gains and losses. The meaning of life was strongly defined in the former GDR over the work one was doing. Because of the insecurity in the risk society East Germans are anxious regarding personal futures. Berg and Möller (1996) reported that young people whose parents were unemployed had the desire to get a secure job and a regular salary after their apprenticeship. If they could not find an apprenticeship, some respondents noted, they would try to get into the Armed Forces. Almost half of the young people who were interviewed stated they were willing to move to West Germany in order to start an apprenticeship there. Christmas-Best and Schmitt-Rodermund (2001) mentioned how East German youth exposed to Western lifestyles now attempted to fulfill their dream jobs or find glamorous work in the travel and fashion industries, among others.

Conclusion

The school-to-work transition is changing as a consequence of an unpredictable labor market. With the decline of the welfare state in Germany there is a need for the employees to have multiple talents. At the same time youth must be prepared for successful transitions from apprenticeship to work. Qualifications lead to successful job placements and enable people to take ownership over their careers—individuals must take control of their learning and master general concepts in the context of real world problems (Crouch, Finegold & Sako, 1999). Hinz (1997) argued for reforms in vocational training that moved from single apprenticeships to occupational clusters. Evans, Behrens and Kaluza (1999) contended that “critical for any country’s vocational education and training system is a unified qualifications framework through which young people can be guaranteed further progression into higher education or to more specialized vocational study or full adult status in the labor market” (p. 149).

According to Culpepper and Finegold (1999) some East German companies have already responded to the inflexibility of the dual system. Since the large manufacturers in Germany historically have provided only 10% of the

total apprenticeships, smaller firms now receive governmental assistance to train workers. The state of Saxon-Verbund designed a vocational policy that channeled money to the medium-sized companies in order to provide more apprenticeships in the metal professions. The companies were not only able to upgrade their technical equipment, but were organized into alliances with training departments in related companies. Of concern is what happens to job training when the state allowance is no longer available (Culpepper & Finegold, 1999).

Beck (1992) argued that education “is connected with selection and therefore requires the individual’s expectation of upward mobility; these expectations remain effective even in cases where upward mobility through education is an illusion, since education is little more than a protection against downward mobility” (p. 94). Two Canadian sociologists confirmed that subjective values about work attitudes and meritocratic occupational aspirations had not really changed that much (Krahn & Lowe, 1999; Lowe & Krahn, 2000). In both recession-laden decades of the 1980s and 1990s young people were aware of the risks of employability but still believed in job entitlement, such that “if someone has worked hard in school, they are entitled to a good job,” or “everyone has the right to the kind of job that their education and training has prepared them for” (Krahn & Lowe, 1999, p. 283). Additionally, the respondents viewed full-time work after leaving school through the lens of job accomplishment, promotional opportunities, interesting work, and the like as basic or foundational to their career goals. Behrens and Evans (2002) confirmed that unemployed young Germans in spite of everything “believed in a meritocracy” (p. 33) when it came to obtaining vocational qualifications in the new market society.

Interestingly, unification meant East German youth would have to be proactive in securing advice and decision-making around careers. Christmas-Best and Schmitt-Rodermund (2001) described the new perspective,

Adolescents in the East had to cope with changing from a context where it was unwise to ask questions to one where it was essential, and from a low-risk to a high-risk society, where the individual may have greater freedom of choice but also must bear more of the consequences of the choices made. (p. 1881)

Career education is an individual’s responsibility, and further training for the unemployed has been reduced in Germany. Aside from the Federal Labor Exchange Office, there are voluntary and private agencies which offer career development and employment service. But the federal authority is the largest provider and also responsible for unemployment insurance, as well as financial support for retraining. The Office has over 700 branch offices nationwide. In the branch offices professional information centers provide vocational information and are often the best and only way to obtain career information. Even today—some 15 years after unification—there are no particular measures or programs in order to assist youth with career transformations in the market economy. It is

generally assumed that young people would automatically become adjusted to the risk society.

Evans, Behrens and Kaluza (1999) confirmed that after the political changes in the country, German young people were “quick to pick up the ‘signals’ from the system and market.... Active transition behaviours and ‘going for it’ are perceived as the best ways to maximise opportunity and reduce risk” (p. 147). One of the major fears for young people in Germany, however, is to choose the wrong apprenticeship and end up being unemployed and socially excluded. The anxiety of not getting a job in a training company is high, and the positions offered today do not necessarily lead to permanent placements. There is a highly competitive climate for apprenticeships impacting future income and social status (Engel & Hurrelmann, 1989; Olk & Strikker, 1990). This causes enormous psychological pressure among vocational youth (Allerbeck & Hoag, 1985). Even if the youth unemployment rate in Germany is low compared with other European countries (Crouch, Finegold, & Sako, 1999), those with few qualifications are particularly at risk. Below and Goedicke (2001) concluded that parental confidence in the vocational education and training system in the East had declined since unification. The difficult economic situation there after unification has led to high skepticism towards training for traditional manufacturing firms, but caused a more favorable attitude toward jobs in the construction and service industries (Lutz & Grünert, 1999). Soon people discovered that even those sectors did not offer job security as in former times and, after 1996, the building boom ended (Below & Goedicke, 2001). Unemployment itself was a relatively new event for those in the former GDR who had predetermined pathways and were used to the social protections provided by the state. Young East Germans just were not prepared psychologically for dealing with the dangers of joblessness (Hormuth, 1999).

We have shown that the German dual system is subject to a number of vicissitudes since unification leading to patterns of young adult out-migration and unemployment, along with a general decline of apprenticeships in the East. Although CTE policymakers in the United States had studied the German dual system with frenzy in the 1980s—early in the next decade this led to enactment of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act—few at the time anticipated the concept of risk society would have such far reaching consequences upon school-to-work transitions. Individual preparations for career choice and selection of training opportunities increasingly were impacted by perceptions of uncertainty and instability. Young people viewed with trepidation heightened limitations upon obtaining salient qualifications, specialized knowledge from trained teachers, and job placements leading to permanent employment with lifelong security. Globalization factors such as corporate downsizing impacted the firms’ commitment to human capital development costs for job training. Green (1999) noted how “employers prefer to poach rather than to invest in training, especially,

as in the UK, where there is no strong training culture and where employer associations lack the power to enforce a common code of practice” (p. 27). Still, the German dual system is moored upon high levels of trust among all players—school-employers/labor unions-and the state (Rosenbaum, 2001). A similar strong social partnership is necessary in order for work-based learning and school-based enterprise to function effectively in the United States (Bailey, Hughes & Moore, 2004). Even with the changing political economy of markets, wearing away of welfare state benefits, and the rise of competitive educational spaces, the German dual system appears to be “resilient and adaptable,” wrote Green (2001). But he cautioned “whether it will survive in its current form in the longer term is another matter” (p. 81).

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