

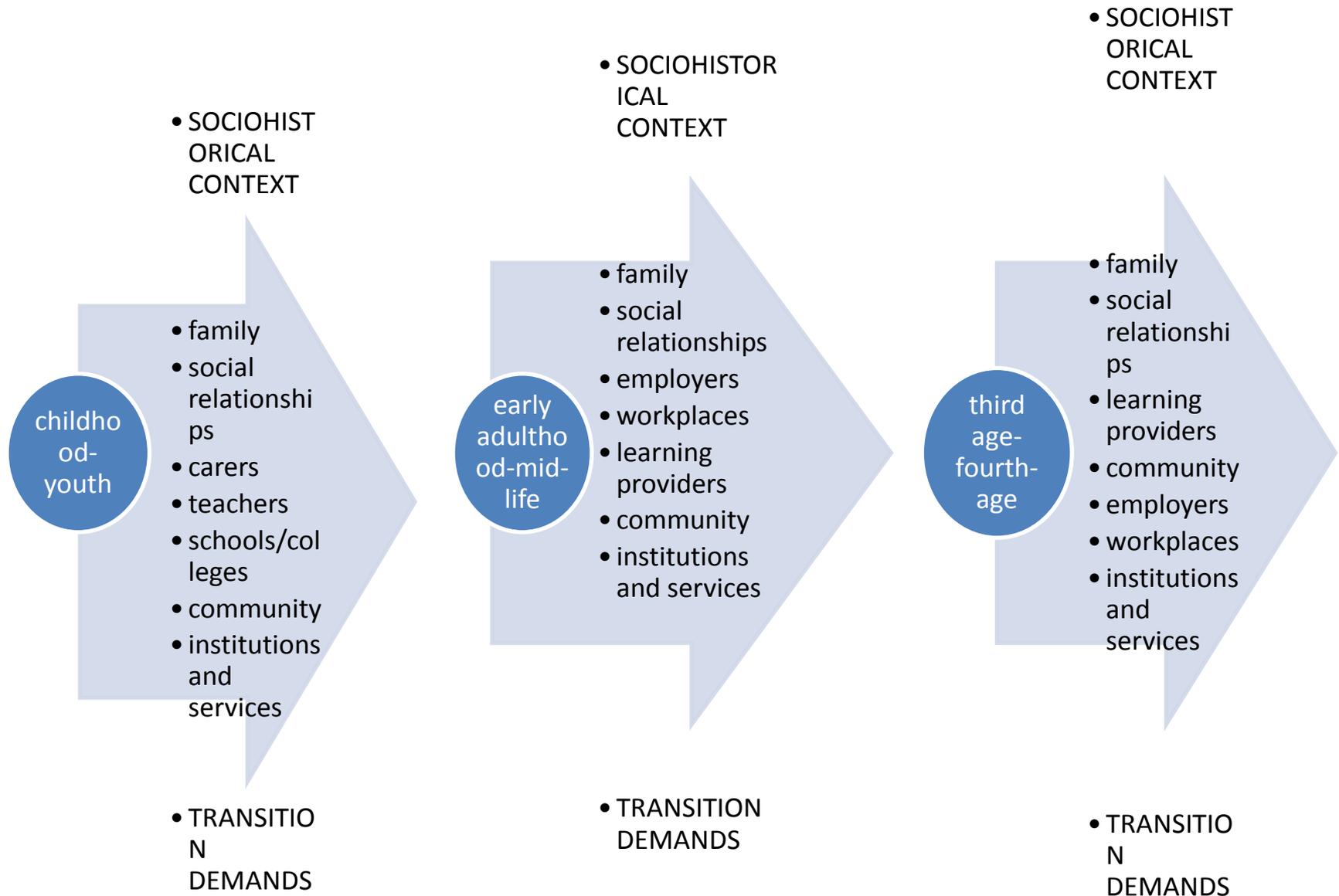
**From rational choice to biographical
negotiation:
challenging dominant policy paradigms
through interdisciplinary LLAKES research**

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Karen Evans

Institute of Education,
University of London

May 2012

Learning through the life course:



Interdisciplinary research happens in different ways (Lyall et al) e.g.-

- **developing conceptual links using a perspective in one discipline to modify a perspective in another**
- using research techniques developed in one discipline to elaborate a theoretical model in another
- **modifying and extending a theoretical framework from one domain to apply in another**
- developing a new theoretical framework that may re-conceptualise research in separate domains as it attempts to integrate them

- Developing an extended dialogue between ideas and evidence
- Combining discourse on variables with discourse on cases
- (see Charles Ragin, comparative sociologist)

Dow (2010) , economist, argues:

- ‘Socio-economic system is complex and evolves in non-deterministic way...no one formal model can either explain everything or be capable of precise prediction.’ ...
- Argues for pluralism ...
- ‘For pluralists, the most problematic assumption underpinning mainstream economic theory is that individuals are calculative – that they seek quantitative information on which to base their rational choices in order to maximise personal benefit relative to costs’

And concludes

- ‘It is important, in designing policy, to understand what underpins behaviour... including the social—institutional environment...’
- Needs a better sense of the limitations of any one approach (inevitably only explaining one facet of behaviour) and an openness to other disciplines
- ...one response to this is the development of ‘behavioural economics’ (see Ariely)



*Connecting ideas and evidence –
contributions to an extended dialogue :
can lifelong learning reshape life chances?*

- Multiple empirical encounters , from LLL researchers
- Protective effects of education through the life course (Schoon et al.)
- Economic benefits of lifelong learning – new analysis by Weale et al.
- Evans et al – socio-economic structures and ‘bounded agency’; learning in and through work

Developing a network of perspectives and concepts

Shared concepts:

- *Risk*
- *Incentives to learn*
- *Opportunity*
- *Responsibility*
- Opportunity structures & social structuring of the life course - *agency, life chances*
- Rational choice - *earnings, employment*
- Individual adaptation – *motivation, aspiration, preferences*

Destandardisation or diversification in life course?

- German Life History Study, Brückner and Mayer (2005) concluded that there is little evidence for de-standardisation in the transition from education to employment.
- study of changes in the timing and sequencing of major life transitions in Australia showed that the majority of Australians followed well-established conventional life-course pathways (Martin, 2007).

De-standardisation or diversification ctd.?

- Evidence of stability regarding the timing, prevalence, and spread of role acquisitions of young Mexicans in their transition to adulthood was also reported by Fussel (2005) using Mexican census data for 1970 and 2000.
- Evidence from the British birth cohort studies (Schoon, Ross and Martin, 2009) suggests mixed findings, indicating both stability and change in transition experiences. *Diversification with polarisation* patterns are suggested.

Dorsett, Lui and Weale (2010) find substantial benefits from lifelong learning.

- 25-year old men who gain qualifications without increasing their overall level of qualification from their initial NVQ level to a higher one increase their remaining life-time earning power by 5-6%.
- The benefits are lower for older people but for forty-year olds with initial NVQ levels of 0 are still at least 5% greater.



- The benefits of upgrading of qualification levels are higher, at just over 20% for someone who initially has no qualification falling to 12-13% for someone initially with equivalent NVQ level 3.
- These are similar at age 25 and age 40 and arise largely because an increased qualification level is found to have a substantial favourable impact on the probability of employment. Similar effects are found for women.

- The analysis allowed for the possibility, which was supported by the data, that while, in the majority of cases, people's earnings are closely related to those of previous periods, they are subject periodically to large disturbances.

Movers and stayers

- Dorsett et al have been able to identify the routes by which lifelong learning might affect wages, assessing not only whether lifelong learning affects wages *directly* but also whether it has a role in assigning individuals to be movers or stayers and thereby have their wages subject to differing sets of influences.

Qualitative case analysis over time shows dimensions of variation in lives of 'routine' workers : example (from Evans et al,2012)

- **Machine Tool Fitter (T1 ,T2) Trainer (3)**
- **Progressive trajectory**
- **'Stand-by Opportunism' (T1)**
- **Aspirational (T2 and 3)**
- Medium-High-High uses of literacy at work
- **ICT, Job-related reasons for learning**
- **Transformative**
- **'Attitudinal' effects beyond work**
- **'ICT at Home'**

Towards a life course approach

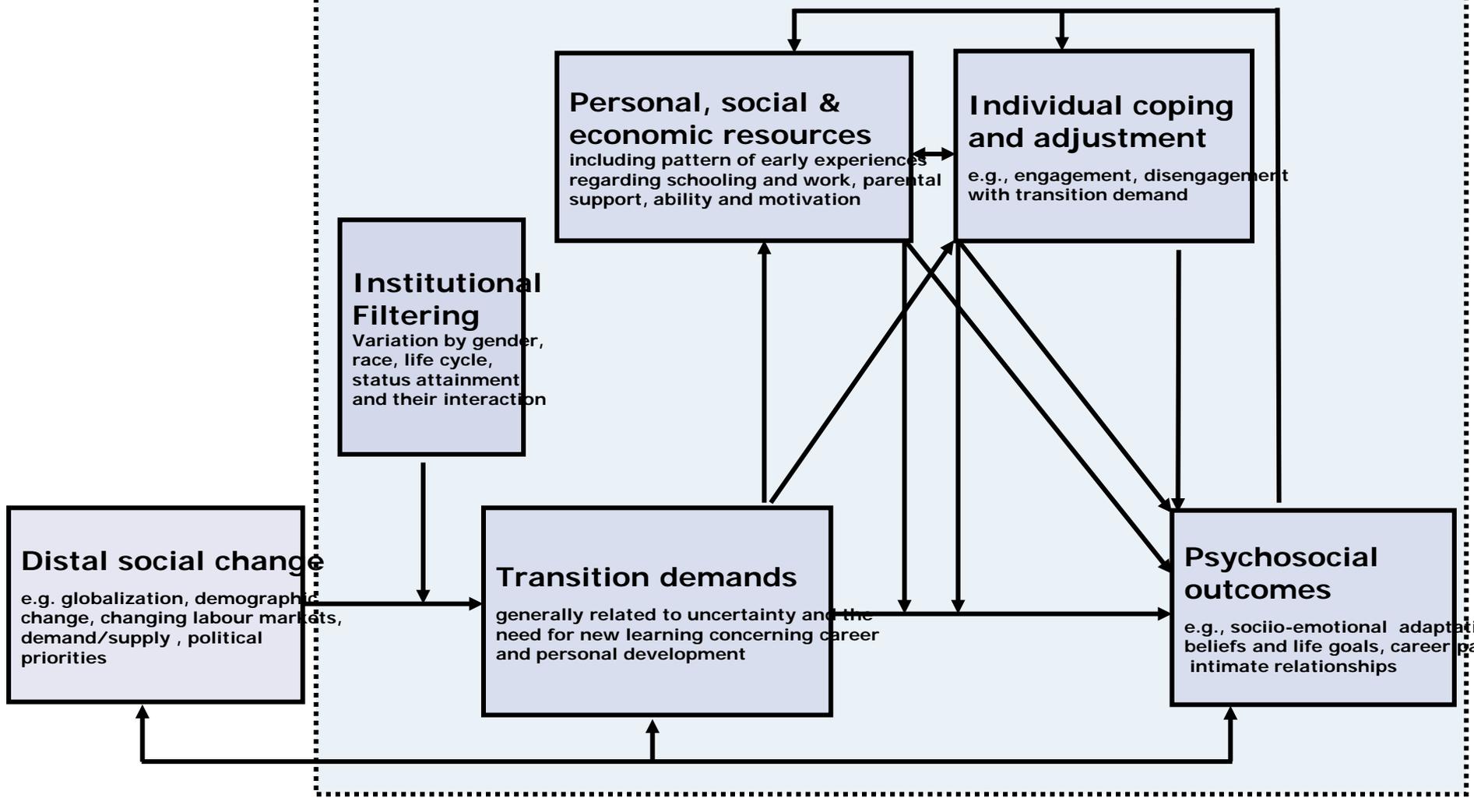
- human development is profoundly affected by macro-economic conditions, institutional structures, social background, gender and ethnicity as well as acquired attributes and individual resources such as ability, motivation, aspirations
- (see Heinz et al).

Life course research paradigm- different set of assumptions:

- Analysis of social processes..
- Based on the assumption of an interrelationship between individuals and society.....
- That evolves as a time dependent, dynamic linkage
- Between social structure, institutions and individual action (see Heinz et al 2009)

- A **life course perspective** emphasizes, for example, ***biographical negotiation*** rather than the discrete calculative events of ***rational choice***
- it enables trajectories to be studied in ways that recognise their ‘complex intertwining’ with social institutions and social roles as experienced at different stages of the life-course

H i g h e r - o r d e r e c o l o g i c a l s y s t e m s
(such as macroeconomic conditions, cultural belief systems, welfare regimes, social institutions and their interactions)



Early socialization

Transition phase

Adulthood

From rational choice to biographical negotiation: core assumptions of a pluralistic framework?

- **First**, that development takes time and that it reflects cumulative experiences (e.g. the accumulation of individual resources such as educational credentials or progressive development of capabilities).
- **Second**, the social contexts within which human development is embedded range from interactions with significant others to macro-social circumstances.

Biographical negotiation core assumptions /ctd.

- **Third**, life course transitions, such as from school to work, job change or work to retirement, are not only shaped by institutional and labour market structures *but also* involve developmental tasks that challenge the individual actors as well as institutional regulations and practices.
- **Fourth**, individual decision making is bounded by social institutions and the wider macro-social conditions.

- While disciplinary approaches are fundamentally different and cannot therefore be ‘integrated’ there is common ground between the disciplinary perspectives in this domain
- Longer term benefits in exploring this common ground in order to understand both the processes and consequences of participation in different forms of learning and experience,
- and thereby impact on policy in different ways.