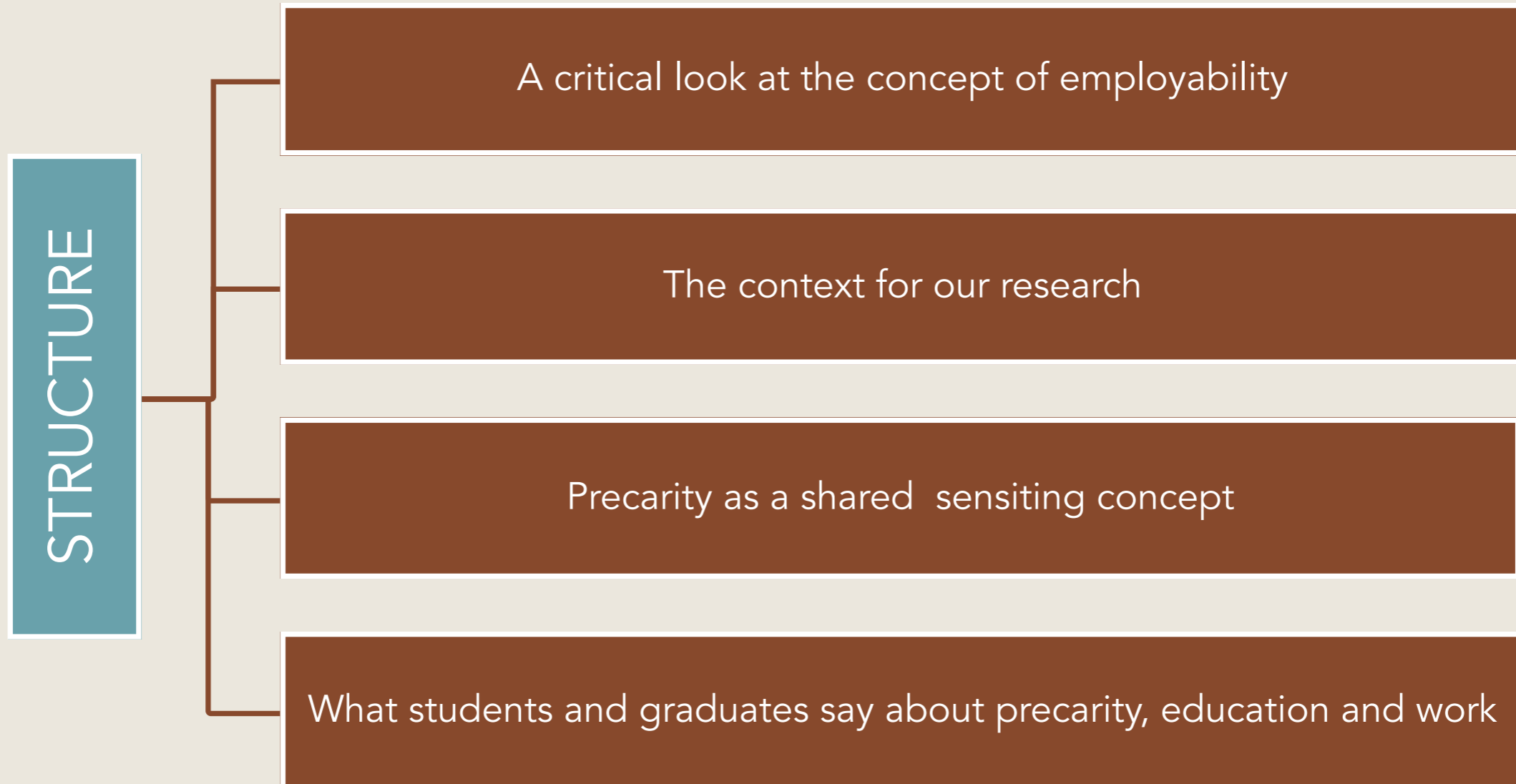


Reference: 2014-1-UK01-KA203-001842.
Erasmus Plus, KA2 Educación Superior, Strategic Partnerships.
430.870 €
November 2014 to October 2017 (36 months)

NARRATIVES OF INSECURITY AND PREARIOUSNESS AMONGST NON- TRADITIONAL STUDENTS AND GRADUATES IN IRELAND AND PORTUGAL

Experiencing Higher Education, Transitions and the Graduate Labour Market:
The Non-Traditional Student Perspective
Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación
University of Seville
C/ Pirotecnia s/n
7 – 8 September, 2017

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Putting the research in context

- **A critical view of employability:** the new ‘planetspeak’ which encourages a new way of thinking about society and education
Commonplace but elusive – “a way of reasoning that seems to have no structural roots, no social locations and no origin” (Fejes, 2010, p. 91).
- Employability from a different perspective? Our participants and the rationale for the research.
- **The Irish context:** dramatic economic transformations, enduring social inequalities and high educational expectations
- **The Portuguese context:** the crisis/bailout (2011-14) – deepening inequalities and bringing new ones.
- Portugal and Ireland within Europe in a period of crisis and austerity (Finn, 2017; Lapavitsas, 2014; Regan, 2014; Streeck, 2016)

PRECARITY

- Precarity as a sensitising concept in exploring a range of interconnected themes.
- Precarity: increased vulnerability and insecurity in working life and beyond. Linked to neoliberal globalisation (Berardi, 2016; Bourdieu, 2004; EuroMayday, 2004; Standing, 2009).
- Precariousness has intensified in a period of crisis
- Our focus is on lived experience and the making of biographies in precarious times
- Our experience of precarity.



Through biographical case studies we want to explore the following things:

1. Experiences and perceptions of precarity
2. The layered and contradictory meanings of HE in precarious times.
3. Managing transitions between education and work: long and risky trajectories and issues of enduring inequality



EMPLOY

NON TRADITIONAL STUDENTS AND GRADUATES BIOGRAPHIES

A case study

Jim's case

- A non-traditional student with a non-linear educational trajectory. His non-traditional background, which forced him to have diverse and different jobs, was actually an advantage, because it gave him a professional experience, which was an asset and clearly improved his employability.
- Objectively, Jim endured huge periods of precarious jobs, with temporary contracts.
- His capacity of not being afraid of doing quite different tasks allowed him to avoid unemployed.
- As much as he used HE as a transitional space and “won” the first round, he is now facing a new battle: trying to find some professional stability.
- A life struggling?

“My parents have only primary school and they are around 60 years old. For them, sons were “arms to work” and education did not matter at all. My parents, because they have a low educational background, never had any interest in school, they did not even know my situation, how was school going on, etc. If I passed the year, it was not more than my obligation. When I finished secondary school, it was not possible at all to go to the university. So, I started working, first in construction, but then I realised that it was not the world I aspired to, I knew I had more capacities than that”.

“After concluding my Master degree, I sent my CV to the local administration that was looking for a Landscape Architect. I got the job for 6 months and was responsible to restore the cemetery. Then, the president proposed me 4 months extra in a kind of a special regime. After that, I was unemployed, but not for long. I sent my CV everywhere, even for jobs outside my area; as I had to pay my bills I really needed money. For some time I did some minor jobs informally. Then the City Hall called me again and I became responsible not only for the cemetery, but also for all the municipal markets (cloth, fish and fruits) and for the green spaces in the city – really in my area of expertise. I have work until the end of 2017. After that, I really do not know”.

Global results

- Risk, insecurity, anxiety in a majority of the biographical accounts.
- Precarity as an objective social problem
- Becoming normalised - “a way of life” - commonly can last for some years and affects how people act and imagine their futures.
- HE as a meaningful transitional space but followed by risky transitions into labour market. HE is also space of occupational precarity.
- HE – possibilities for intervention, resistance and alternatives?



Acknowledgements

To all the people that have collaborated in the project, specially those that were interviewed.

Erasmus + (No. 2014-1-UK01-KA203-001842-TP)