

## Subjective effects of entrepreneurship policies among Spanish young people

### Efectos subjetivos de las políticas de emprendimiento en la juventud española

Diego Carbajo Padilla<sup>1\*</sup>, Elsa Santamaría López<sup>2</sup>

1 Departamento de Sociología 2, Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, País Vasco, España

2 Psicología y Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, España

\*[diego.carbajo@ehu.eus](mailto:diego.carbajo@ehu.eus)

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#### ABSTRACT

In the last decade the European Union has implemented a wide range of policies aimed to foster entrepreneurship and self-employment among its young people in order to counteract the disturbing effects of the Global Financial Crisis on youth employment. Departing from the research question of what kind of individual are young people being urged to become through those policies, this article analyses the subjective effects of the entrepreneurship policies among Spanish young people. This analysis is grounded on a qualitative study composed of document review of European and Spanish policies about entrepreneurship and an exploratory fieldwork. It is composed of participant observations in institutional events, discussion groups and in-depth interviews to young people involved in entrepreneurial projects. Thus, the article identifies a core tension between the governmental discourse around entrepreneurship and the interviewees' experiences as well as gives evidences of the articulation between entrepreneurship and precarity. Aligned with critical research undertaken in this field, it concludes establishing that those policies entail a conception of work on oneself that leads the social actor to normalize and collaborate in his own precarisation.

**Keywords:** youth, entrepreneurship policies, precarisation, qualitative methods, subjectivation

#### RESUMEN

En la última década, la Unión Europea ha implementado políticas de fomento del emprendimiento y el autoempleo destinadas a contrarrestar los perturbadores efectos de la crisis financiera mundial en el empleo juvenil. Partiendo de la pregunta de investigación sobre qué tipo de individuo buscan producir estas políticas de emprendimiento, se analiza los efectos subjetivos de estas políticas en la juventud española. Este análisis se fundamenta en un estudio cualitativo compuesto por la revisión documental de las políticas y un trabajo de campo exploratorio, a partir de observaciones participantes en eventos institucionales, grupos de discusión y entrevistas en profundidad a jóvenes involucrados en proyectos emprendedores. Entre los resultados se identifica una tensión central entre el discurso gubernamental sobre el emprendimiento y las experiencias de las personas entrevistadas, que viene a mostrar la articulación entre el emprendimiento y la precarización. Alineado con investigaciones críticas recientes en este campo, se concluye estableciendo que estas políticas implican una concepción de trabajo sobre uno mismo que lleva al actor social a normalizar y colaborar en su propia precarización.

**Palabras clave:** juventud, políticas de emprendimiento, precarización, metodologías cualitativas, subjetivación

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The effects of the economic, political and cultural changes that have taken place since the 1970s and 1980s are the basis for the increased uncertainty that characterizes many areas of life, above all, those related to the world of work (Beck, 2000; Sennett, 1998; Standing, 2011). These characteristics, stronger and more visible as a result of the 2008 financial crisis, show little sign of reversing and represent a new type of normality (Lorey, 2015; Neilson, & Rossiter, 2008). Within the rhetoric of an urgent need to implement government programmes to mitigate or reverse this situation, the European institutions have introduced a wide range of laws to stimulate the creation of small business, foster self-employment and encourage entrepreneurship. The policies targeting young people that have been implemented in the last decade represent some of the key emergency measures adopted by the member states to counteract both high unemployment rates and employment precarity (European Commission, 2010b; 2013).

This article departs from the research question of what kind of individual are young people being urged to become through those policies and takes a closer look to how this discourse and its regulative practices (Rivera-Aguilera, 2018) are deployed in a context of extension and normalization of labour precarity such as the Spanish case. This way, it outlines and puts in relation some subjectivation processes that emerge in the complex junction between the policies aimed to reduce unemployment -structure- and young people -agency-. Overall, by illustrating the paradoxes and tensions between entrepreneurship policies and precarious work, it seeks to reflect the social effects of entrepreneurship policies as well as the practices and attitudes among young people 'interpellated' by that discourse.

In the first section, it sketches some of the key perspectives with regard to current labour precarity framing it on a long-standing process of employment crisis. The next two sections examine the role played by entrepreneurship in the European employment policies in the last decades by paying special attention to the employment access programmes for young people in Spain. This way it outlines how, pushed by different agents, a powerful discourse around entrepreneurship has come to the fore. Through it, young people have become an object of intervention as well as the ideal subject for social change (Serrano, & Martín, 2017) towards a 'new' type of worker and individual: the 'entrepreneurial-self' (Bröcking, 2016). In short, the deconstruction of this discourse gives support both to the notion of the 'self-as-enterprise' (Kelly, 2013) and to the thesis that it conforms a contingent engineering project of subjectivities (Crespo, & Serrano, 2013, p. 1117;

Rivera-Aguilera, 2018; Serrano, et al., 2012).

In the next section, it describes the materials and methodologies of the qualitative fieldwork designed for exploring some specific experiences of Spanish young people to whom this discourse is aimed. Then, it takes a closer look to the subjectivation processes of those entrepreneurship programs by analyzing the embodied experiences of it. The conclusive section addresses the paradoxes and tensions between those policies and the experiences of young people, as well as it deals with its limitations and sketches future lines of research.

### **The employment crisis and the precarisation processes**

In the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis, concepts such as precariousness, precarity and precarisation have become useful tools for the sociological understanding of not only the current transformations of labour, but also the uncertain living conditions of the so called risk societies (Alberti, et al., 2018; Della Porta, et al., 2015; Papadopoulos, et al., 2008; Tejerina, et al., 2013).

Regarding labour, precarity has been proved to be useful to define the southern European models of employment and among them, the Spanish one (Alonso, 2007; Bilbao, 1998; Cano, 2007). The main precarity factors that characterize the Spanish labour market are: high rates of unemployment; a high rate of temporary employment; an increasing labour segmentation which manifests itself in problems regarding access to and retention of employment; unequal employment conditions for workers and; an overall loss of labour rights intertwined with an increase in the workloads.

In this line, Standing (2011) has suggested the emergence of a new social class 'in the making' on a worldwide level. Christened as 'precariat', this analytical category gathers a diffuse and heterogeneous collective -in which young people stand out-. It is characterized by having insecure and flexible employment conditions, irregular, intermittent and insufficient salaries, and/or receiving minimum welfare state benefits -which in the case of Spain have been significantly cut back-. Beyond the reasonable criticism that the concept has received as a political category (Della Porta, et al., 2015), from a sociological perspective the notion of 'precariat' is successful in stressing that these conditions expose outstanding numbers of individuals to unprotected conditions by excluding them from the rights that workers used to have in the fordist, waged, labour era.

Nevertheless, labour precarity is not a new phenomenon nor is it exclusive to the most recent employment situation in Spain (Santamaría, 2011). It is rather a long-standing historic process that is parallel to the

development of capitalist economies driven by neoliberal policies (Laval, & Dardot, 2009). Understanding labour precarity not as a circumstantial phenomenon but as a process, has allowed several authors to detect how it has acquired different forms and evolved gradually, albeit irregularly during the 20th century (Neilson, & Rossiter, 2008).

From this procedural approach, labour precarity would not always manifest itself obviously in the various areas that make up the world of work, but it would show up in all of them. It is in this sense that the visibility and invisibility of labour precarity in each of these areas and its interrelation with other dimensions of life has been identified in different ways by many different authors (Castel, 2003; Papadopoulos, et al., 2008; Tejerina, et al., 2013). The notion of precarisation stresses the fact that precarity is not limited to the world of work, but rather reaches into other areas of social interaction, underlining the multi-dimensional normalization of social precarity in our time. In this regard, it is worthy to note that the Spanish young people has been analysed as a paradigmatic case of a precarious generation (Benedicto, et al., 2017; Bessant, et al., 2017; Santamaría, 2018).

Going a step further in the development of the analytical framework, in the last decades there have been approaches that have tackled the issue of precarity not only as a lack of stability or as a limit regarding to work, but also as a condition of possibility for the emergence of renewed and ambivalent subjectifications (Precarias a la deriva, 2004) that, among other things, overflow categorizations such as the mentioned notion of class (Della Porta, et al., 2015). One of the most important authors of the last decade who has developed a complex understanding of precarity is Isabell Lorey (2006, 2015). Following her works there are three ways of addressing precarity. It can either be approached as a state ('precariousness') or, as mentioned, it can be understood as a process (as 'precarity and/or precarisation'). The state focus refers to an existential socio-ontological condition, while the latter stresses the crucial importance of political processes that (re)produce differential and asymmetrical distributions of precarity. Although these two first approaches are difficult to separate, there are increasing evidences that the 'procedural' approach has more heuristic potentiality to deal with the complexity of contemporary precarity (Alberti, et al., 2018; Carbajo, 2014; Della Porta, et al., 2015; Lorey, 2015; Tejerina, et al., 2013).

The core idea of the procedural approach is that precarity can be understood as an existential, ontological and constitutive condition related to life and bodies (Butler, 2004), but not as something given, natural or immutable,

but as "always relational and therefore shared" (Lorey, 2015, p. 19). As the condition of precarity is both socially and politically determined and distributed (Butler, 2010), following Foucault's approach, Lorey establishes a third understanding of precarity defining it as 'governmental precarisation' (Lorey, 2015). Addressing precarity as an instrument of government and self-government opens a powerful perspective to grasp how populations are governed, and continue to be governed, through precarity (Lorey, 2015). The concept of 'governmental precarisation' she develops "makes it possible to problematize the complex interactions between an instrument of governing, the conditions of economic exploitation and modes of subjectivation, in their ambivalence between subjugation and self-empowerment" (Lorey, 2015, p. 4).

Thus, on the one hand, this development helps to sketch how the notion of entrepreneurship, as a governmental discourse, overlaps and folds with the mentioned governmental precarisation. On the other hand, because it troubles the pre-conception of an isolated, abstract, rational and free choice making subject, that ambivalence helps the analysis not to get stuck in debates around psycho-social profiles -such as entrepreneurs 'of necessity' and 'opportunity'- derived from mainstream psychological approaches. In other words, the approach explained above allows understanding how government apparatuses and dispositifs (Foucault, 1980), structural socio-economic conditions, and subjectification modes regarding to entrepreneurship and precarity, emerge in the very grey zone between something imposed and something "chosen for oneself".

In any case, following the notion of power developed by Foucault, precarisation is not only a process being "shaped by the non-linear dynamics of capitalism, but also by the actions, activities, and resistance of people living in precarious situations themselves (...) because precarization always leaves some freedom for positive action for its subjects" (Della Porta, et al., 2015, p. 3). In this vein, the approach developed here tries to highlight the complexity of contemporary precarisation processes stressing the transversality and multidimensionality of that long-term transformation known as neoliberalism. Overall, it allows detecting how social actors develop different margins of action (agency) in a social and institutional structure that pushes populations to perform entrepreneurially in all dimensions of their lives (Bröckling, 2016). Or in regard to education and training and getting closer to the study object of this work, to understand through which means kids, teenagers and young people are being urged to become entrepreneurs (Mononen-Batista, & Brunila, 2016; Oinonen, 2018; Serrano, & Martín 2017). The following looks more closely

at this last question starting with a brief analysis of the governance of employment in the present days.

### **European employment policies and the discourse of entrepreneurship**

The European employment policy has been the framework for the measures taken in Spain in this regard since the mid-90's. The 1997 Amsterdam Treaty was the starting point for the EU employment policy that was further developed at successive European summits (e.g. European Commission, 2010a, 2010b), resulting in the European Employment Strategy (EES). Although there are differences in each country, these European directives have become the foundations for the employment policies implemented by member states. The EES and more specifically, the 'Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (European Commission, 2010b) and the 'Entrepreneurship 2020 action plan. Reigniting the entrepreneurial spirit in Europe' (European Commission, 2013), established the direction that each member state should take and they were oriented by concepts such as 'flexicurity', employability, activation and, more recently, entrepreneurship (Serrano, & Martín, 2017). Overall, current laws have assimilated these notions, especially the ones aimed to young people, whom after the Global Financial Crisis was defined as a priority group requiring urgent intervention measures (Rodríguez-Soler, & Verd, 2015).

The instructions to "become entrepreneurial" sent from public institutions in order to overcome situations of unemployment depart from a psychological and modern representation of the autonomous, rational, choice making, and risk aware individual (Kelly, & Pike, 2017, p. 13). Taking the economic system and the labour market conditions as almost natural processes -if not ungovernable (Rose, 1999)-, these instructions are mainly centred on developing personal abilities aimed to forge one's own subjective skills to find or to create a job (Serrano, & Martín, 2017). Putting emphasis on personal responsibility for training and being employed, fostering "making oneself employable" (Santamaría, & Serrano, 2016), they put aside structural determinations and stress the notion of investment on one-self. As well as specific knowledge and the desire to work, this rationale implies that the young person has to develop the motivation and skills required to look for employment, the ability to acquire the necessary information, the will to work hard in order to improve one's profile as a worker and to have a positive attitude, courage and self-discipline (Carbajo, & Santamaría, 2015).

All these instructions overlap with the discourse of lifelong learning as a constant updating of resources and individual intellectual skills or 'human capital' (Muñoz, &

Santos, 2017, p. 75). Moreover, all of them emerge together with a general call for the development of communication, emotional and social skills, which are ever more important in post-fordist economies and the so-called 'semiocapitalism' (Berardi, 2007). This range of practices, orientated towards the search for greater employability -professional recycling, skills improvement, choice making, risk taking and the mobilization of resources-, operate as a personal imperative and as a moral. In other words, as a subjectivation process. Overall, given the impossibility of creating employment by themselves, the welfare policies seek to ensure the adaptation of individuals to new labour market requirements (Ginesta, 2013; Serrano, et al., 2012).

### **Elements of the youth entrepreneurship dispositif**

The promotion of entrepreneurship among young people is presented in Spain as a prioritized political strategy designed to foster the employability of this social group. Not clearly distinguished from self-employment, the interest in entrepreneurship expressed by the governmental institutions is evident in the '2013/2016 Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment Strategy Operative Programme' (currently set to be renewed for the 2017-2020 period), and the 'Youth Guarantee National Plan' (Spanish Ministry for Employment and Social Security, 2014). As said, these programmes are a continuation of those established by the 2000 Lisbon European Council, which proposed active incentive mechanisms for entrepreneurship -including private economic initiatives- as drivers of European economic long-term growth.

The 'Green Paper on Entrepreneurship in Europe' (2003) highlights the need to develop comprehensive programmes to promote entrepreneurship on an individual, business and society level (Ginesta, 2013). The results and measures taken after this initiative can be seen in 'Action Plan: The European Agenda for Entrepreneurship' (European Commission, 2004). So, it can be said that the core ideas of the current entrepreneurship policies in Europe and Spain were already established when the Global Financial Crisis took place.

In line with their predecessors, current programmes promoting entrepreneurship, in which public and private intermediary agents take part on a municipal, provincial, regional and national scale, consist mainly of economic measures as well as other non-economic steps relating to entrepreneurship training. Specific measures here include the 'Freelance Flat Rate' social security contribution; the compatibility of unemployment allowances with the launch of a new business activity; the option to take unemployment allowances as capital

payments; 'second chance' protective measures for freelancers, activities that promote 'entrepreneurship culture' and; the creation of Public Employment Offices specialized in consultancy and mentoring for the new entrepreneurs (Rodríguez & Ramos, 2016). After the controverted Spanish labour reform of 2012 and the emergence of the political rhetoric around entrepreneurship in that context (Ortiz García, 2018), a whole range of agents started working and stabilized this discourse and its regulative practices.

In this 'dispositif', (Foucault, 1980) the academic research field stands out first. The Spanish government scientific policy defines entrepreneurship as a priority area for research in its R+D National Plan, as well as the Research Horizon 2020 programme, with multiple on-going calls. One way or another, these scientific policies mean that entrepreneurship and youth, at least in Social Science, have become a renewed "research niche" and an "artefact of expertise" (Kelly, 2018, p. 10). Thus, significant academic and intellectual resources have been invested both by the Spanish government and international agencies such as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2018). Secondly, and directly related to the directives of the European Union, entrepreneurship programs can also be found implemented in the current school curriculums. As in many European Countries, through them children and adolescents are being taught entrepreneurial skills (Bori & Petanović, 2016; Mononen-Batista & Brunila, 2016).

Thirdly, among the agents who are helping to expand the entrepreneurship discourse public-private networks, companies and para-institutions have to be mentioned, as in recent years they have made entrepreneurship training their main activity and their own niche in the education and skills markets. Banks, who provide incentives to entrepreneurship through a series of consultancy or mentoring programmes and different financial products, stand out most among them all. Fourthly, for some years now and in line with the objectives of the quoted European action plans and funding programs, the media have given national coverage to a whole range of entrepreneurs' biographies through a variety of "entertainment products" and turning this topic omnipresent (Santos, 2014).

Briefly, it can be said that the semantic discourse spread by most of these agents (radio, television, print media and the Internet) steadily promote a particular archetype of entrepreneur based on success stories that are replete with positive clichés regarding the importance of hard work, talent, creativity, innovation and the vitality associated to youth. In essence, all of these policies and practices landing in Spain especially after the Global

Financial Crisis, reflect a powerful dispositif that features entrepreneurship as a feasible (if not the only) way out for young people experiencing the addressed precarisation processes. As Serrano and Martin have noted: "The entrepreneur means the hyperbolic representation of youth as value (synecdoche). In this way, the fight against unemployment is transformed into the fight against aversion to risk." (Serrano & Martin, 2017, p. 806).

## Method

To frame and delimitate the field where entrepreneurship has emerged as a governmental practice, the most relevant and influential documents according to this study's scope were selected and analyzed. The main selection criteria were the type and significance (laws, regulations, plans and programs) and the scale or institutional level (European, state and regional level). The most important ones can be found both quoted along the text (especially in the review presented in section 2 and 3) and marked with an asterisk (after authorship) in the bibliography.

Together with this document review, five participant observations were carried out in several entrepreneurship related events organized by public and private agents such as universities, public administrations, and third sector organisations. The type of events was: conferences (1), seminars (2) and workshops on entrepreneurship (2) that took place between 2012-2017. In them, active participation was performed while systematically registering the developed activities in field notebooks according to analytical categories such as frameworks, objectives, contents, examples, discourses, etc. Through this work, how the political guidelines were materialized and transferred was observed. And together with that, what kind of argumentative axis and institutional narratives were mobilized and articulated was identified. But above all, by registering the attitudes and capacities that this type of event tries to foster among their participants, these observations were useful to outline the type of young people that this dispositif tries to interpellate and produce.

Thus, in order to go in depth in our research question -not only that of what kind of individual are young people being urged to become through those policies but what kind of subjective outcomes do they produce- the research design of this study included an exploratory qualitative, fieldwork carried out in the context of a broader research project about contemporary precarisation processes in Europe in which the authors of

this article participated in<sup>1</sup>.

With the aim of knowing about the collective discourses and representations of entrepreneurship, their consensus and disagreements, etc., two discussion groups were conducted. And for knowing about the individual approaches and attempts into the broad field of entrepreneurship, as well as for tackling the subjective experiences that it activates, fifteen individual semi-structured in depth interviews were carried out. In both the discussion groups and the interviews young people between the ages of 20 and 35 that were involved in diverse degree and types of entrepreneurial projects took part.

On the one hand, the discussion groups (extract code: DG1 and DG2) served to sketch the commonplaces of - and some few critiques of- the mainstream discourse around entrepreneurship. On the other hand, the semi-structured individual interviews (extract code: I. followed by the number of the interviewee) helped to identify more precisely the subjective declinations, hesitations and resistances to the discourse of entrepreneurship. More precisely, the discussion groups were useful to reveal the general representations of work, the changes occurred in employment, the working careers and how the perceptions about the present and future work were mediated by the crisis.

Beyond the consensuses and disagreements on employment policies, the economic crisis and the possible social and institutional responses to the crisis, both groups served to define more accurately some analytical dimensions. They also were helpful to detect some of the tensions and paradoxes produced in the processes of subjectivation and in which the individual interviews delved more deeply.

This way, the scripts used for the in-depth interviews sought the interviewees to relate the development of their working trajectories and their material and symbolic conditions. In other words, to grasp the subjective senses and meanings around their working itineraries, but also to narrate their personal experiences and expectations as well as to express their dispositions, reflections and thoughts about entrepreneurship and self-employment.

<sup>1</sup> Research funded by the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness under the title: Social Responses to the Crisis and the Precarization of Living Conditions in Contemporary Society: Belgium, Spain, France, Italy and Portugal (CSO 2011-23252). Lead Researcher: Professor Benjamín Tejerina.

## Participants

Mainly selected by snowball sampling<sup>2</sup> a total of 25 young people from urban contexts (Bilbao, Madrid and Valencia) took part both in the discussion groups and the interviews, exactly 9 women and 15 men<sup>3</sup>. It should be made clear that the profiles of the participants were not restricted to particular categories of entrepreneurship. That is, including individuals clearly defined as entrepreneurs, there were contacted other individuals that, located in the field of the institutionally mediated possibilities (plausibility structures) of becoming entrepreneurs, they were still “on the way” to it. Thus, the fieldwork was composed of young entrepreneurs, young people who had been developing business projects for a very short period of time and those in transition to forms of entrepreneurship and/or self-employment. Variables such as age, gender and type/field of entrepreneurial project were also taken into account in the selection of the profiles.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that this fieldwork was developed in a decisive period of the crisis in Spain, between January and December 2014. This recession factor was consciously adopted when designing both the discussion group and the semi-structured interview scripts, which allowed to reflect more accurately the tensions between their expectations, attitudes, practices and reasons for setting up in their own business and the precarious and unstable labour market conditions.

## Ethical considerations

Both the discussion groups and the semi-structured interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted by accredited members of the research team, who guaranteed the proper conditions for the correct performance these methodologies and the faithful compliance of the internationally established ethics standards. In this vein, before completing them, informed consents and authorizations to record all participants’ speeches and experiences were obtained.

In order to respect confidentiality and anonymity all the transcriptions were codified in the standardized way done in sociology and through which any personal, second or third party’s information becomes undetectable. Lastly, all the codified transcriptions were processed with a commercial qualitative data analysis software.

<sup>2</sup> For the selection of participants, we also had the support of Indaga, a social research cooperative based in Madrid.

<sup>3</sup> Even though a balanced participation between men and women was sought, it could not be achieved, which attests to the current gender imbalance also present in entrepreneurship in Spain, in which men predominate (GEM, 2018).

## Results

### The subject of the entrepreneurship narratives

Among the most invoked figures of the entrepreneurship governmental discourse -clearly reproduced by the media (Santos, 2014) and present in most of the events analysed through the participant observations- there are international celebrities as well as a host of local examples of businesspersons and economically and socially “successful” young entrepreneurs. The basic structure of this mainstream narrative is ‘the test’ or ‘the trial’ (Martuccelli, 2007) in which the main actor is ambivalently characterized between the modern businessperson and the contemporary “cool” entrepreneur. Synthetically, it underlines a subjective starting point -often as an epiphany- told in terms of personal uncertainties, dreams, aims and ambitions.

This mainstream narrative describes the precariousness of the moment when the protagonist embarks on his first self-employment and/or start-up project until he arrives at a turning point in which, failures, problems, and sufferings experienced along the way are stressed. After going through this traumatic juncture where the personal drive, the commitment, and the faith in her or himself are tested -in such a way that his “essence” is revealed-, the story culminates in passing this ‘trial’ by arriving at a personal milestone that ensures his economic and social recognition. This basic rite of passage, where only “the successful” trajectories can ex-post-facto be represented, conforms to the well-known cliché of the ‘self-made-man’ for whom the driving force is the psychological self.

Moreover, the different variants of this generic narrative constantly make reference to a western representation of youth (Serrano & Martín, 2017), a socially and culturally constructed notion that is ideologically produced and arbitrated (Martín Criado, 1998). This representation is associated to ideas such as vitality, creativity, independence, the seeking of self-fulfilment, boldness and a spirit of adventure. It also includes moderate doses of eccentricity as well as values such as perseverance, voluntariness, a commitment to oneself and an unbreakable will. In this regard, some interviewees reproduce quite literally the individualizing and moral component of such discourse.

In any case, while the role model associated with entrepreneurship is that of a young and reflexive person who makes free decisions, the exacerbation of labour precarisation that has been described makes it very difficult to see oneself as an entrepreneur in the terms established by the governmental discourse. In other words, the clichés associated with this role model by the institutional discourse as a solution to the mismatches of

the labour market contrasts with many of the experiences of the interviewees. Most of the freelancers experienced the so-called “shift to entrepreneurship” and the precarisation processes as going hand-in-hand:

*‘From the start they told me I had to be freelance. The tendency was to hire freelance workers because companies could save themselves a lot of problems, right? Above all, if you have to fire someone or give them severance pay, you could save yourself a lot of red tape... Even avoid paying for someone’s lunch, because there, normally meals and other things come included. And of course, they saved on paying my Social Security, all that stuff.’ (I-8 Freelance Webmaster, 32, F)*

However, underlining the ambivalence between ‘something imposed’ or ‘something chosen by oneself’ that characterizes the notion of precarisation developed previously, there are also more ambiguous and complex subjective responses to these processes. As exemplified in the case of a freelance video game translator (DG2.4 freelance video game translator, 28, M) for whom the obligation of setting himself up was the only realistic “choice”, it proved to be the “best option”. Somehow, by accommodating the necessity of the situation, the conscious assumption of precarisation enabled him to continue working within the field of his hobby.

From this standpoint, the entrepreneurship discourse gives some first evidences of legitimizing the normalisation and exacerbation of processes of precarisation and individualisation, but the latter is not assumed as a constriction by all the interviewees in similar situations. This leads to ask what constitutes those logics of action and the subjectivations [with their pleasures joys and productive moments (Kelly, 2013)] that are produced within the precarisation processes and the discourse of entrepreneurship.

### Analysing the experience of entrepreneurship

As stated, labour policies implemented over the past decades place the responsibility for finding a job and keeping it upon the worker, reinforcing the idea that everybody is a kind of (self-)entrepreneur in terms of their own career (Bröckling, 2016; Gorz, 2001; Kelly, 2013). This is an idealised view in which each person is able to find what he is looking for in terms of work simply by desiring it (Zimmermann, 2014). As pointed in some interviews, in many cases this issue is subjectively framed as “going for it” and “overcoming fear” which produces a crucial sense of individuality not exempt of self-fulfilment or satisfaction.

The transfer of responsibilities and logics of action of business and market to young people that implies the ethos of this discourse forces many of them to assume a

incorporation of an economic rationality in their lives. These modifications have been studied by a large number of authors using Foucault's analytical concept of 'entrepreneur of the self' (Bröckling, 2016; Kelly, 2013; Laval & Dardot, 2009; Rose, 1999). Within this frame, getting indebted for acquiring all sorts of training or educational degrees and accepting poor employment conditions are subjectively re-signified as investments in the present for the development -or the promise- of a stable work/life project or self-fulfilment in the future:

*'Above all I see that in some way -and this has its costs, sometimes significant- I am investing my time now to create my own professional project, the project of my life...' (I-7, Unemployed developing cultural projects, 34, F)*

Therefore, it could be said that in certain cases, both self-precarisation and the discourse of entrepreneurship generates individuality, self-awareness, hope and/or pleasures. In this vein it is worthy to note that more than ten years ago, at the mercy of the generalized precarisation process, young German cultural producers had begun to experience what Beck defined as the 'proletariat of the self-fulfilment' (Proletariat der Selbstverwirklicher; Beck & Bonstein, 2007). Although Beck did not develop the concept in a systematic or operative way, the notion suggests one of the contradictions inherent to the contemporary discourse of entrepreneurship this article is dealing with. That of individuals mobilised by self-management and accountable for their work transition through certain representations of personal independence, free decision making and self-fulfilment in a socio-structural context which paradoxically makes them increasingly vulnerable and dependent on others.

Not without irony, 'proletariat of self-realisation' gives some clues to understand how, apart from managing their work skills and resources as businesspeople, in the fieldwork abound young persons that 'consciously seem to subordinate' their working conditions to the promise of self-fulfilment. This succinctly allows understanding how the 'inner' desire for individual self-realisation through work puts significant amounts of young people in precarious situations. More importantly, it also gives evidence of the powerfulness and success of an individualization and responsabilization process that makes precarity to be reframed and felt as something "chosen" by oneself.

At this point, it is relevant to tackle more thoroughly how entrepreneurship and precarisation processes overlap. As

said, precarisation is not so much an exceptional phenomenon that is only characteristic of certain groups, but a process of standardisation which results in reflexive self-regulation through a "self-chosen precarisation" (Lorey, 2006, p. 7). Based on a case study about cultural producers in Germany, she underpins the idea that those who in the last decades of the 20th century chose for themselves precarious lifestyles or precarious working conditions -based on anti- or counter-institutional philosophies- by associating them to freedom, autonomy and self-fulfilment, have today become role models (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2000; Lorey, 2006)<sup>4</sup>.

Similarly, our fieldwork shows how the concepts of employability and entrepreneurship that converged in the political and legislative dimensions in the last decade have "landed" overlapped in society (Serrano & Martin, 2017). From the sketched position, the choice of self-precarisation in pursuit of self-fulfilment and self-realisation can be defined as a more or less reflexive assumption of the individualisation of risk, uncertainty and insecurity. This 'reflexive precarisation' (Panagiotidis, & Tsianos 2004, p. 19, as cited in Lorey 2006, p. 8) is derived from the erosion of the modern conception of waged labour, its 'historical subject', and the relatively new normalization of the desire of self-fulfilment through work among wide sectors of the population -especially young people.

Evidently, this is inextricably linked to the desires of independence and freedom that emanates from to the representation of the modern, independent and sovereign individual (Lorey, 2015). The profound ambivalence between subjugation and the promise of freedom that entrepreneurship and precarisation articulate is significantly represented by an unemployed female when she reframes her strategy of reinvesting her subsides as a means to develop a cultural project she is involved in:

*'I prefer this type of life, although sometimes it tires me out and gives me headaches, always having to be looking out for yourself... (...) But it still gives me a greater degree of freedom, far greater, no doubt.'* (I-7, Unemployed developing cultural projects, 34, F)

It is precisely this kind of productive and ambivalent moments between self-entrepreneurship and self-precarisation that helps to understand how the discourse of entrepreneurship can be subjectively 'adjusted' or activated in a precarisation context. In this vein, the quoted figures of '(self-)entrepreneur', 'proletariat of self-realisation', 'self-chosen precarisation', 'reflexive

reproduces parts of the autonomous non-aligned discourse of 1968 social movements and the DIY punk philosophy.

<sup>4</sup> In that vein, it is increasingly evident that the current discourse of the entrepreneurship seems to have absorbed and

precarisation' and the recently coined 'guerrilla selfhood' (Howie & Campbell, 2016) represent a set of concepts which highlight the changes in the contradictory but compatible rationales developed by many young people today.

Going a step forward, it is worthy to note how these discourses, as practices, erode the notion of individual as the last unit of the sociological analysis. Most of the new entrepreneurial projects are generally extended and collectivised among a network of friends, colleagues and family members in such a way that the conventional representation of individual entrepreneur becomes blurred. The next excerpt, based on the ideological argument that entrepreneurship generates more jobs, invites to pose individuals more as a node or a fold than independent and centred subjects:

*'Then I saw a route which in the end might work out well if I take the first step, right? You know, overcome your fear and become self-employed. It also gives the people from my circle the chance to find work too.'* (DG1, 3, Self-employed in collective projects, 32, M)

Although some declensions of the discourse include forms of solidarity -more evident in some of the interviews concerning cooperatives, collective projects and social enterprises-, the transfer of responsibilities and logics of action of the market to young people forces them to assume a specific re-adaptation and incorporation of a utilitarian and economic rationality (Kelly & Pike, 2017).

These reflections become clearer by introducing into the analysis the logics of action produced by the debt (Lazzarato, 2013; Moruno, 2015). To the extent that one of the recurrent problems that interviewees say they face is credit and funding, the banks operate as crucial apparatus in the evaluation, selection, recruitment and production of entrepreneurs. As for many other interviews, for one girl the lack of financing put the brakes on starting up a publishing company:

*'When I finished my Master's degree, I took two months to find this and we tried to start up a publishing company. However, the investment that was needed was too high, we didn't have enough. No bank liked our project enough to give us a loan, and the idea ended up dying on its feet.'* (I-1, Freelance journalist, 25. F)

In an explicit sense, indebtedness adds one of the biggest productive tensions to the entrepreneurial project, not dissimilar to the ones at the origins of capitalism (Sloterdijk 2013,). The asymmetrical relationship between creditor and debtor (Lazzarato, 2013) becomes a central driving force of the entrepreneurial project.

Furthermore, more latently, there is a second logic of the debt that is contracted through the social framework (family, friends, associates, suppliers, etc.) and that sustains both the entrepreneurial project and the entrepreneur as individual. The explicit objections and resistances to the entrepreneurship discourse among the interviewees are often situated on those two declensions of the debt. Apart from the hesitations around a long term indebtedness, that second aspect of it also highlights the impossibility of conceptualising the entrepreneur as the ultimate unit of analysis. Basically, because their social and economic productivity is grounded precisely on constantly cancelling their definition as an isolated and/or centred individual by working their character, mind and souls (Kelly, 2013) and their social ontology through *active networking* (Coulson, 2012):

*'It is what it is. I'm gaining experience in this field, I've been managing myself for two years now, with quite a lot of responsibility. Right now I'm even thinking about bringing other people in, above all that circle of people closest to me that I mentioned before, we're doing more cultural activities and making it profitable too.'* (I-8 Freelance Webmaster, 32, F)

As it has been already hinted, most of the times the practice of entrepreneurship requires the constant mobilisation of a whole network of relationships and bonds. From this perspective, and depending on the entrepreneurial work-life-project, the partner, the family members, friends, acquaintances and colleagues are susceptible not only to become stakeholders or employees of the enterprise, but also "forced" clients of the project, long-term guarantors and occasional salespersons of it. As it dismantles the modern notion of work, entrepreneurship implies ways of relating to others that go beyond the dimension of labour and redefines the representation of the working individual. Additionally, while the discourse of entrepreneurship is mainly focused on the intrinsic capacity of an abstract individual to establish new and original combinations that are innovative and creative, the capacity of the entrepreneur to generate value is a result, above all, of associating with and depending on others.

## Discussion and conclusions

In line with an emergent critical line of research in Spain, this study has explored the displacement from policies that seek to facilitate the production of employment by young people for themselves, to the transformation of these policies into mechanisms of normalization of precarity (Amigot, & Martínez, 2016; Briales, 2017;

Ginesta, 2013; Moruno, 2015; Muñoz, & Santos 2017; Pfeilstetter, 2011; Serrano, & Martín, 2017). Through the entrepreneurship discourse and its regulative practices several agents such as state educational and training institutions, occupational and social inclusion agencies, financial institutions or the media, are intensively cooperating in the reproduction of 'entrepreneurial mind-sets' that fit with the contemporary assumption of a market driven world. Although this process is not absolutely linear or coherent, this research, underpins that there are spaces for objections, resistances or unexpected outcomes. And it also points out that within a context of individualisation, the discourse of entrepreneurship becomes extremely seductive as a 'personal choice'.

Whether through personal time and effort investments and/or through conventional economic indebtedness, this shows how institutionally encouraging a psychological representation of the self that only can be managed through business models, fosters in young people a notion of self-realization that makes them to appear like collaborating in their own precarisation. When, as argued, both entrepreneurialism and precarisation are political and social governmental processes in which the 'individual choice' is far from evident. In this regard some analytical concepts such as (self-)entrepreneur, proletariat of self-realisation, self-chosen precarisation, and reflexive precarisation have been gathered in order to tackle those ambivalent subjectivation processes that are taking place between the entrepreneurship discourse and the current precarisation processes.

In any event, the central paradox largely lays in the fact that while the institutional discourses promoting entrepreneurship appeals to a modern notion of the independent, self-sustained, choice making and sovereign individual, structural processes of precarisation bring into increasingly sharp focus the elements that young people are dependent on. That is, what is left of the welfare-state, the regulations over the labour market, the financial system, the family, the partner, friends, etc. Which leads to the next dilemma: how can one be a self-made individual when the continuous help and support of others is needed?

The analysis also has point to a theoretical conclusion to be explored in further works in which the entrepreneur is understood as a productive unit that generates economic performance by constantly suspending his social definition as an isolated and independent individual. Mainly because, as the fieldwork has shown, in order to perform the conventional definition of the entrepreneur,

the young entrepreneur has to put his complete social existence, his social ontology, to work.

While the weight of their charisma, personification and individuality are constant features of the entrepreneur's official story and it can be like that in some cases, in analytical terms, the individual is far from being a figure that can be understood as a production unit separated from the social, structural, institutional and discursive milieu that sustains it. If the question of what is happening when entrepreneurship and precarity overlap has to be answer, renewed theoretical tools are needed to overcome the limiting notion of the individual that is being used in youth studies.

To finish with, three main limitations that are trying to be overcome in new lines of research have to be acknowledge. First, the exploratory nature of this study makes the findings to be taken with caution because, even it contributes to and clarifies some trends that are corroborated with the quoted publications in the last sections, it might not completely reflect all the 'lines of force' that shape the subjective experiences of the young entrepreneurs in Spain. Variations in gender, educational and cultural backgrounds of the participants may lead to more diverse representations and experiences of entrepreneurship. Future cross-cultural research with a larger samples incorporating ethnic, cultural and educational backgrounds and/or exploring the divergences by gender and age would, with no doubt, enrich the lines of thought expressed here.

The lack of diversity in the experiences of entrepreneurship gives shape to another limitation. Future studies should target more young people in more diverse activity areas, economic sectors, regions and states. This absence is already being compensated with an international research project about the 'Global Grammars of Enterprise' that, among other things, compares diverse policies and subjective effects by taking into account different cultural backgrounds, employment models and modes of governance (Carbajo, & Kelly 2019).

Finally, since the socio-structural context in which the research was carried out was strongly determined by a deep financial and economic crisis with implications that young people is still suffering, it would be helpful to study the evolution and projection of these processes to the present day.

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**Sobre las/los autores/as:**

**Diego Carbajo Padilla**, es Doctor en Sociología, por la Universidad del País Vasco. Actualmente es investigador postdoctoral en el Departamento de Sociología 2 de la Universidad del País Vasco (UPV-EHU) en el Programa de Perfeccionamiento de Personal Investigador Doctor del Gobierno Vasco 2017-2020.

**Elsa Santamaría López**, es Doctora en Sociología por la Universidad del País Vasco y Postgraduada en Juventud y Sociedad por la UNED. Actualmente es profesora en los Estudios de Psicología y Ciencias de la Educación de la Universidad Oberta de Catalunya (UOC).