



# Social networks and social integration panel A longitudinal survey. The processes of entering adult life, starting work and developing social networks

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## **Social networks and social integration panel<sup>1</sup>**

### **A longitudinal survey**

The processes of entering adult life, starting work and developing social networks

### ***Hypotheses, development of the survey and follow-up of the panel***

October 2006

This survey was designed in 1994-1995 at LASMAS-IdL, a CNRS research centre, by Claire Bidart (principal investigator), Alain Degenne, Daniel Lavenu and Lise Mounier.

Didier Le Gall (LASAR, University of Caen) assisted with the first two waves of the survey.

Four waves of the survey have been carried out in ten years and some changes have taken place in the team and the institutions.

Claire Bidart now works at LEST (CNRS, UMR 6123) and is continuing to work on the project.

Alain Degenne and Daniel Lavenu are still involved in the project but retirement is gradually limiting their commitment.

Lise Mounier is now working on other projects.

LASMAS-IdL, which used to be UPR 320, has become UMR 8097 and is now called the Maurice Halbwachs Centre.

Dominique Beynier and Clotilde Lemarchand (LASAR, University of Caen and now members of LASMAS-IdL) took part in one wave of the survey.

Anne Pellissier, then a member of LASAR, University of Caen, was an investigator in the original team. She is now a lecturer in education, a member of CERSE, University of Caen, an associate member of LASMAS-IdL and is continuing to work on the project as a researcher.

In addition to the people mentioned above, Bertrand Fribourg, Charlotte Letellier, Charlotte Lê Van and Madeleine Royet were involved in conducting the interviews. Paula Kervennic compiled biographical histories and interim reports.

An agreement has been concluded between the Maurice Halbwachs Centre, LEST and CERSE, associating the three research institutes in the continuation of the project.

This research project has been funded by the Interministerial Commission on the Integration of Young People – Ministry of Employment and Solidarity, the Lower Normandy Regional Department of Health and Social Affairs (DRASS), the Calvados Regional Department of Health and Social Affairs, the Lower Normandy Regional Department of Employment and Vocational Training, the Town Council of Caen, the Maison de Recherche en Sciences Humaines de Caen, the Interministerial Commission on the City, Ministry of Youth and Sport, Ministry of Culture, the Social Action Fund, the Urban Planning Commission, France Télécom R&D and the National Family Allowance Office.

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### **The hypotheses and research questions**

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note : the French title of this panel is *Sociabilité et insertion sociale*. Translation of the term 'sociabilité' into English is problematic, since the English word 'sociability' has only the restricted meaning of 'the quality of being sociable or of a friendly disposition'. It does not really have the extended meaning of the French term, which encompasses the development of personal social networks and, more generally, the art of

This panel-based longitudinal research project is concerned primarily with the investigation of processes of socialisation. Our approach is based on observation over time, comparing the successive stages in a cohort of young people's transition into adulthood. Lengthy interviews are conducted with the young people at regular intervals. We are seeking to explore in detail the link between changes in their networks of personal relations and the processes they bring into play as they enter adult life.

The use of a series of interviews to track the same young people at different stages in their life course is the first unique feature of this approach. The attention paid to relational networks as an intermediate level between individuals and society is a second unique feature. The third and final unique feature of our approach is that it takes account of the various spheres of life (school, family, work, relationships, place of residence, free time, etc.). Let us outline the hypotheses that provided the starting point for our approach.

### *Process and longitudinal method*

Most of the time, sociological investigations are based on *a posteriori*, retrospective reconstitutions of the important stages of individuals' social trajectories. This approach is particularly useful for objects of investigation restricted to the most 'objectified' stages and events of the working life, the life cycle and family creation, housing trajectories etc.

However, when it comes to more 'mobile' and more complex objects, which are more susceptible to subjectivity, reinterpretations and the sifting and sorting of memory, such as approaches to living in society, the construction of career plans, the choices made at key moments in the life course etc., the limits of these 'standard' methodologies are reached. The investigation of such processes gains considerably by being based on observations carried out over time. This makes it possible to compare stages, situations and discourses as they are lived and experienced and not after changes and reinterpretations that modify their meaning. Only by taking full account of the diachronic dimension is it possible to obtain the material required for precise investigation of the connections between the progression of the life course, change in the modes of *sociabilité* or living in society and processes of socialisation and social integration<sup>2</sup>.

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living in society.

<sup>2</sup> Bidart Claire, 1994, "Insertion sociale, sociabilité et cycle de vie", Université de Caen, *Cahiers de la MRS* n°3, p.91-107.

Longitudinal surveys, which follow a panel of individuals during a part of their lives by means of repeated interviews, make it possible to isolate the effect of age on these transformations and to identify the impact of important thresholds in the life cycle. The aim of researchers here is to equip themselves with the means to separate out the various factors at work in social maturation, to 'disaggregate' them by measuring their specific effects. If the members of a cohort age at the same rate biologically speaking, the same does not apply to all the aspects of their lives: at any given age, some will have children, others will not, while some will be in stable employment and others will not be. Efforts can then be made to identify more clearly the developments associated with each of the aspects of socialisation.

### *The choice of time: the entry into adult life*

The transition from adolescence into adulthood is a crucial period in an individual's life. It is also a particularly interesting period for sociologists. It is ultimately a very condensed period, but one in which events, choices and changes in life orientation and attitudes are concentrated which, although not definitive, are in any event very important. It is a time when the results of previous experience and decisions and the scope they leave for personal choices are subjected to close scrutiny. It is a time when the socialisation processes are completed, or rather put to use.

Young people experience a very clearly defined transition from environments that are relatively structured and homogeneous, particularly in terms of age group (secondary school), to much more heterogeneous and diversified worlds (the workplace). They experience a series of often simultaneous breaks (leaving school, the family home and sometimes their home town) that has no equivalent later in life. At the end of compulsory education, paths begin to take shape for the future, but they also become aware of the limits affecting all the important areas of life: work, place of residence, and their emotional and family lives are all at risk at this time, or at least called into question.

And yet these various areas of life are often approached separately in sociological studies, whereas there is every reason to suppose that they interact profoundly with each other, particularly since these choices are made in such rapid succession. Moreover, the sequencing can itself become a research question: the intervals between these various types of choice and changes have been the object of various sociological investigations.

Leaving the parental home, the choice of university or other educational programme, entering the labour market and taking up an occupation, affective experiences and the search

for a partner, moving in with a partner, setting up a house of one's own and deciding to start a family are stages that are concentrated into just a few years with an intensity that is seldom encountered in the subsequent phases of the life course<sup>3</sup>. It is, therefore, an absolutely privileged period for a longitudinal study of socialisation processes.

We could have adopted an 'objective' notion of age when selecting the survey population and decided to interview young people all aged 17, for example. However, our particular purposes were better served by focusing on a 'social' stage in the maturation process, defined by its location within the process of social integration. This is why it seemed appropriate to us to carry out the first wave of interviews at a time when the young people were on the threshold of an important phase that would to some extent determine the direction of their future lives: just before the *baccalauréat* (upper secondary school leaving certificate) for some and just before the end of a training placement for the less academically inclined. This first wave of interviews was conducted in 1995. The second wave of interviews was conducted three years later in 1998, the third wave three years after that in 2001 and the fourth in 2004. We have thus been able to compare these four stages in the young people's trajectories and examine very closely everything that happened in the intervening periods. This has enabled us to observe them going down certain paths, branching off in other directions, making choices, reacting to constraints and developing within an environment, in short gradually constructing an adult trajectory. We have also been able to compare three segments of these trajectories and thus see whether the 'ways of getting on' remain constant or evolve over time, whether the processes remain stable for the same individual or change from period to period. This is an important theoretical issue.

We will undoubtedly continue the investigation by interviewing at least part of the survey population again.

### *Social networks and social integration*

The complex system of relations that individuals maintain with other people, whether they be family members, work colleagues, neighbours, childhood friends, members of a volleyball team or of a social club, or even just friends whom they meet regularly for a drink,

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<sup>3</sup> Bidart Claire, 1997, *L'amitié, un lien social*, Paris, Ed. La Découverte ; Bidart Claire, 1999, "Les âges de l'amitié : cours de la vie et formes de socialisation", in G. Ravis-Giordani (ed.), *Amitiés, anthropologie et histoire*, Aix en Provence, Presses de l'Université de Provence, pp. 421-435.

constitutes their social network. Our hypothesis is that the form this network takes, the way in which it is structured, is indicative of an individual's mode of social integration.

Such social networks constitute, after all, an 'intermediate level' between the individual and society: it is by means of interpersonal relations that individuals gain access to groups, social organisations and even institutions. Thus individuals' social networks lie at the heart of their relationship with society<sup>4</sup> and can be said to reflect their position within it.

This system takes various forms. It may be highly concentrated in a particular milieu, for example in the case of an individual who associates mainly with work colleagues, who also know each other well. The network may also be focused on a certain period if, for example, a person's only friends are those made in adolescence. Conversely, it will be highly dispersed if an individual has moved around a lot and maintained links with very different people who do not know each other at all and who may not even like each other.

The degree of homogeneity, i.e. the fact that the acquaintances all resemble each other somewhat or, conversely, are very different people, is an important characteristic of a network. Similarly, the density of the network, i.e. the fact that the friends associate with each other as well or, conversely, that the individual in question meets them separately, is indicative of the 'concentration' of the network or its openness to diverse social environments between which there are few links and little overlap.

These two factors are decisive for social integration. If an individual's network is both very homogeneous and very dense, that individual will be very firmly rooted in a social environment, strongly integrated but relatively limited to that one environment; if he or she leaves it, the problem of a lack of resources may arise. Conversely, if the network is heterogeneous and dispersed and the various members do not know each other, the individual will be less well integrated into an environment but will also be less dependent and will be able to move more easily, adapt to different situations or even play with different facets of his or her identity. This is just one example of the issues at stake in the structuring of social networks, the effects of which go beyond the management of a stock of interpersonal links.

### *Movement within social circles, the development of social networks and socialisation*

A relationship between two people might be regarded as going beyond mere interaction, or the sharing of activities and words between those two individuals. After all,

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<sup>4</sup> Degenne A., Forsé M., 1994, *Les réseaux sociaux*, Paris, A. Colin.

behind each of the links or each of the friends there is a 'small world', a segment of society or a social circle to which that friend gives access. Each relationship offers an individual further relationships, acquaintances, knowledge, ideas and attitudes, which act as an additional window opening on to the social world<sup>5</sup>. The fact that these social circles may, once again, be concentrated and overlapping or, conversely, diversified, separate, fragmented and organised in one way or another determines the nature, the solidity and the variety of the 'small worlds' to which an individual has access and hence the mode of social integration.

Thus we have observed changes in the young people's social networks as their entry into adulthood progresses. We have sought to ascertain how these networks have evolved, both generally<sup>6</sup> and with regard to the characteristics of their constituent relationships<sup>7</sup>. How have their relationships with their own families, with their partners' families or with their childhood friends developed as the various stages in the transition to adulthood have been reached and left behind? How do a new couple organise their life in society? What knowledge is sought, to provide what kind of support and at what points in time? How do new relationships develop, in what circumstances, around which activities and within which environments? To what do these new relationships give access? Ultimately, how are the various modes of movement and rootedness in society constructed and how do they evolve as personal networks evolve?

Conversely, it may be argued that the relational environment and network composition affect the pace of socialisation and the choices made in the course of the socialisation process. If all their friends have children or are all in stable employment, then individuals will have different perceptions of their position in the age-related social structure depending on whether they are 'in synchrony' with their friends or not. The feeling that there is a gap or a time-lag between them and their network may influence personal choices and the timing thereof. A more diversified network will offer a wider range of possible reference points and influences, as well as greater opportunities for adaptation and change. Thus it is important to take account of networks in their entirety in order to assess their homogeneity in terms of life-cycle stages and rates of development and to locate the individuals in question within them.

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<sup>5</sup> Bidart Claire, 1999, "Se lier et s'orienter", *Agora*, n°17, p.7-18.

<sup>6</sup> Bidart Claire, Degenne Alain, 2005, "Introduction : the dynamics of personal networks", *Social Networks*, vol. 27, n°4, pp. 283-287.

<sup>7</sup> Bidart Claire, 2004, "Les formes de l'amitié", *Sciences Humaines*, n°150, June 2004, p.20-23. Article republished in Xavier Molénat (ed.), *L'individu contemporain, regards sociologiques*, Editions Sciences Humaines.

### *Networks as a resource*

We have also been able to investigate the links between network structure and the constitution of 'social capital', i.e. the extent of the resources provided by the network, and to examine the ways in which relationships develop and the uses to which they are put. Our aim here has been to investigate the ways in which the resources provided by networks are exploited, depending on the type of relationships that are put to work, the subject's initial assets and competences and the validity of those resources in the sphere in question at the relevant point in time. Our investigation has focused on the effects of the various forms of mobility on movements and changes within the network likely to be made use of.

After all, in the course of their lives or in particular circumstances, certain individuals make considerable use of their relationships in order to find accommodation, to borrow money or simply for moral support, whereas others make very few demands on them. Thus we have been interested in the use made of networks in order to find various types of resources (a job, for example), as well as in the way that a network might influence the choices made at important stages of the life course and the transitions into adulthood.

Finally, we have investigated the linkages between the young people's biographical trajectories, the dynamic of their networks and their communication technologies trajectories. With which network members do they communicate by telephone or e-mail, to say what, at what point in time and to what end with regard to face-to-face meetings? The aim here has been to gain a better understanding of the links between biographical trajectories and trajectories of communication technology usage.

### *The interactions between the various spheres of life*

Another novel feature of this research project lies in the systematic attention paid to the interactions between spheres generally investigated independently of each other. Work, family life, residence and emotional life are usually dealt with in isolation by researchers. At best, connections are established after the event. In our project, we began to construct the links between these spheres from the time of the interviews onwards.

Their relative weightings are themselves significant. The fact that, at such and such a point in time, a person is investing very heavily in establishing a relationship with their partner may help to explain why, at the same time, the search for a job is somewhat neglected,



although not in every case, The relationship to work, as well as the more or less normative representations attached to the 'imaginary schedules' that mark out the various stages of the life course, reveal a range of different priorities and links, according to the young people.

On the other hand, events located in one sphere may influence an adjustment taking place in another sphere, which we seek to clarify precisely during the interviews. Thus the young people talk to us about the possible mutual influences of a romantic involvement, a family situation and progression at work, and the principles they follow in seeking to combine these various elements<sup>8</sup>. At certain key moments, when they have to make choices, particularly at dividing points in their lives, various factors influencing their decision-making and choice of direction emerge, intersecting and cross infecting the various spheres of their lives. Love affairs can cause shifts of direction or even radical changes in work trajectories, and vice versa; changes at work or in the family may cause a person to leave the region they are living in<sup>9</sup>. Leisure activities, for example, can open doors and lead to the construction of competences that will prove decisive in an individual's career<sup>10</sup>.

Some events are life-changing, others are not, some have effects beyond their own sphere, others do not. Thus one might wonder what breaks with the past or changes of direction are caused by military service, settling down as a couple<sup>11</sup>, starting work or moving house. The priorities given to one or the other sphere, their relative weightings, the links connecting them, the synchronies and the time lags are all questions of fundamental importance to an understanding of the processes of socialisation and entry into adulthood. Thus the temporal aspects of this transition, whose propensity to become protracted and complex is well known, have been re-examined in the light of this panel, revealing both the intersections and moments of hesitation and indecision<sup>12</sup>.

Personal networks, which are cross-cutting by definition, support and construct these linkages and reflect any changes that are taking place. The cessation of contact with certain

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<sup>8</sup> Bidart Claire, Lavenue Daniel, "Enchaînements de décisions individuelles, bifurcations de trajectoires sociales", 6è journées d'études sur l'analyse longitudinale du marché du travail, Clermont-Ferrand, 27-28 mai 1999, Document Céreq n°142.

<sup>9</sup> Lemarchant Clotilde, 2000, "Rester ou partir ? La mobilité géographique de jeunes Caennais", in Hérin R. (ed), *Caen, capitale régionale ?*, Presses Universitaires de Caen.

<sup>10</sup> Le Gall Didier, 1999, "Quand la passion déborde le loisir...", *Agora*, n°17, p.53-78 ; Le Gall Didier, 2002, "Le travail du temps libre" in Juan S., Le Gall D. (dir.), *Conditions et genres de vie. La société française autrement*, Presses Universitaires de Caen.

<sup>11</sup> Bidart Claire, 2001, "Faire couple", *Agora Débats Jeunesses*, n°23, p.11-18

<sup>12</sup> Pellissier Anne, 2002, "La première fois sera-t-elle aussi la dernière ? Trajectoires de décohabitation et cheminements vers l'âge adulte", *Agora / Débats Jeunesses*, n°28, "Rites et seuils, passages et continuités", p.80-92.

childhood friends may indicate that an individual is restructuring their whole approach to living in society and making new life choices entailing a shifting of relational investments and a change in the way personal ties are maintained<sup>13</sup>. Some biographical transitions, such as starting work or settling down as a couple<sup>14</sup>, may have very distinct effects on the size of personal networks. Do these developments in relational worlds open up new horizons, do they increase an individual's 'social space', or do they simply reinforce already well-established positions without diversifying resources? In our view, these questions are crucial to any attempt to observe the processes of entering adulthood and socialisation.

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<sup>13</sup> Bidart Claire, Pellissier Anne, 2002, "Copains d'école, copains de travail. Evolution des modes de sociabilité d'une cohorte de jeunes", *Réseaux*, vol.20, n°115.

<sup>14</sup> Bidart Claire, Lavenue Daniel, 2005, "Evolutions of personal networks and life events, *Social Networks*, vol.27, n°4, pp. 359-376;

## **Survey methodology**

### *The mode of questioning and conduct of the interviews*

The originality of this approach and the focus on the actors' representations, on the principles guiding their choices and on their own assessment of their relations and investments obliged us to rely solely on semi-structured interviews for the first wave of the survey. These interviews lasted 5 to 6 hours on average, with a minimum of 3 hours and maximum of 11 hours, requiring between 1 and 4 sessions distributed over several days.

After this first wave of interviews, we improved and stabilised the questions and also clarified certain response items.

For the second wave of the survey, therefore, we were able to organise our investigation in two complementary parts. The first part takes the form of a standardised questionnaire that is easy to code, thus providing us with more a systematic data collection tool that could be processed by computer. This questionnaire deals essentially with the path taken by the young person since the previous wave of the survey and the construction of his or her personal network. After all, we started with a sample of 87 individuals and their cumulative relationships number in the thousands, so it is important to be able to process them by computer. We fill out this questionnaire with the young person. The second part of the investigation comprises a recorded semi-structured interview, conduct of which is facilitated by the fact that no factual data needs to be gathered. There is greater freedom in this part to discuss the changes that have taken place over the previous three years. This procedure was repeated for the third and fourth waves of the survey.

Apart from this difference in form, most of the questions were, of course, similar in all four waves, in order to make them comparable. From wave 2 onwards, we added to the recorded part of the interview questions that asked the young people to evaluate and assess the changes that had taken place in their lives in the three years separating each wave of the survey. For the rest, the principle underlying the questioning remained constant, even though some questions were not included until the second or third waves, when they had become more relevant. After all, questions on changes of job, separation or divorce, childcare etc. were of little relevance at the time of the first wave of the survey.

## ***The "questionnaire" part***

### *Life contexts*

As we have seen, our investigation of personal networks is based on a 'strong' hypothesis linking them to socialisation processes. Consequently, the construction of the lists of relations and of the networks must match this particularity and give the most faithful picture possible of these young people's social circles and movements. To that end, those questions that aim to produce lists of people with whom our young people are in contact, the so-called 'name generator' questions, have to cover a very broad range of social spheres and circle likely to harbour potential relationships. The idea here is to get as close as possible to listing all the people they are in contact with in all spheres of their lives and social activities. We thus put in place a series of 'contextual' name generators that aimed to stimulate the young people's memories, to evoke the full diversity of activities and spaces the interviewees had been involved in and to rake over, as it were, all possible contexts.

In the first part of the interview, therefore, each young person is encouraged to talk about all the periods of their lives and all the places in which they have spent time. These contexts may be institutional environments, such as schools or families, They may also have a more informal dimension and include neighbours, friends, leisure activities etc. We also take into account contexts that have now disappeared, such as schools and districts where they used to live, all of which may, nevertheless, have generated ties that are still active today (childhood friends, for example).

Thus we systematically tackle the following contexts: education, leisure activities while in education, old school friends and acquaintances, work (including part-time jobs), links maintained with former colleagues, training courses, leisure, sporting and cultural activities, membership of organisations (clubs, trade unions, political parties, groups of various kinds), old involvements now abandoned, activities associated with practice of a religion, holidays, travels, groups of friends, groups of former friends, places of residence, parents' friends, other old acquaintances, military service, other places of association, romantic attachments and relationships arising as a result, previous romantic attachments and, of course, family. General questions are asked that enable us to locate the young person in these contexts and to assess the level of investment he or she has made in them.

### *Constructing the social relationship network*

In each of these contexts, the questions asked (the so-called ‘name generators’) reveal the existence of the interpersonal links associated with each one. They are of the following type : ‘In (such and such a context), are there any people whom you know a little better, with whom you talk a little more often ?’.

Thus the social relationship networks are constructed by systematically recording the first names of the people mentioned by *ego*<sup>15</sup>, context by context. For each person mentioned, we subsequently collect some basic sociographic data (sex, age, marital status, educational qualifications, occupation, place of residence etc.). Some of these relationships, the ‘strong ties’ (cf. below), are subsequently documented in greater detail (shared activities, length of relationship, sharing of confidences, forces motivating the tie, etc.). This enables us to go beyond individual characteristics in order to discover the ‘content’ or substance of the relationships. This helps us to compare, for example, the substance of the relationships that last with that of the relationships that fade away.

Finally, from wave 3 onwards, a series of questions has been asked with the aim of identifying the persons within the network with whom certain means of communication are used, namely landline phone, mobile phone, e-mail and regular mail.

Thus the network is constructed through a long series of name generators applied to all the contexts investigated. In this way, a total of almost 50 questions likely to generate names is reached in this survey. Of course not all of them are productive, but the important thing here, as we have said, is to facilitate the best possible reconstitution of all the social worlds that have provided these young people with relationships that remain active today. From the point of view of a study of socialisation, it is important for us not to guide the questioning towards or limit it to a single type of social tie, whether it be the closest ones or the most frequent contacts or those most likely to help the young people, since this would give us a much too ‘targeted’ picture of their circle.

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<sup>15</sup> This is the name given to the interviewees; *alter* denotes the relationships cited by *ego*.

### *Contacts and strong ties*

For each of the first names cited, we introduce a filter question procedure that enables us to separate strong ties from mere contacts or acquaintances. We start from the hypothesis that multiplex relationships<sup>16</sup> that cut across several different places, activities and worlds are, by virtue of that fact, less dependent on the initial context, less specialised, more flexible and more likely to impinge on individuals' personal lives. They are also, undoubtedly, the most lasting relationships. We equipped ourselves with the means to test this hypothesis by introducing, for the second wave of the survey, a second filter question concerning the subjective importance of this tie.

These questions, which in this example concern the work context, are arranged as follows:

*In your present job, have you met people whom you know a little better and with whom you speak a little more ?*

(the first names are noted on the list)

*Do you see any of them outside of work?*

*Are any of them important to you, whether you see them elsewhere or not?*

The first names that are mentioned again in response to each of these questions are noted. Those that are mentioned in response to one or other of these questions will be classed 'strong ties' and will be the subject of a more extensive sheet of questions on the content of the relationships. The others will be accounted for on the sociographic data sheet mentioned above.

The young people no longer have any contact with certain 'old' contexts, such as their primary schools, for example. The fact that this context is no longer active (the young people no longer attend primary school) but interpersonal ties with old friends are still maintained takes the place of multiplexity for us, and the relationship is straightaway classified as a strong tie. Nevertheless, we still ask whether the person in question is important for *ego*.

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<sup>16</sup> The term 'multiplex' is used to denote a relationship that is active in more than one context, for example when two people see each other at work and also engage in a leisure activity together

### *Social circles*

Another important aspect of this research is its focus on social groups or circles as another form of living in society. After all, one particularity of the way young people live in society is that they tend to form groups<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, one of the hypotheses underlying our research is the connection between the construction of personal networks and the access thus obtained to new social worlds. It was important, therefore, to investigate the social circles opened up by each personal tie<sup>18</sup> in order to observe integration processes, considered here in particular as ways of moving and putting down roots in the social world.

As soon as activities involving more than two people are identified, we introduce a series of questions on the extent, nature, functioning and common motivation of the group. In this way, we have been able to observe a link between the type of common motivation that 'unites' the individuals in these circles and the extent to which these circles remain stable over time<sup>19</sup>. We are also able to consider membership or non-membership of a circle as a characteristic of the relationship, which may be embedded within a group or, conversely, autonomised, uncoupled from the group and functioning as a two-way relationship between ego and alter.

### *The overall structure of the network*

Subsequent questions are intended to take us beyond the sum of relationships and groups in order to outline the overall structure of the network. In particular, this structure tells us whether the network is concentrated in one sphere or dispersed across the social world. As we have already said, this differentiation is of fundamental importance for social integration: some networks that are confined to a particular area, period in time or occupational or cultural sphere offer a firm but limited point of reference; others, dispersed among unconnected and contrasting groups, offer more alternatives for moving within society.

Moreover, the overall distribution of the network among different spheres and the relative weighting of the personal ties can be seen as an indicator of the distribution of the

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17 Bidart Claire, Le Gall Didier, 1996, "Les jeunes et leurs petits mondes, relations, cercles sociaux, nébuleuses", in Mobilités et insertions sociales, spatiales et temporelles, Caen, *Cahiers de la MRS*, n°5, p.57-76.

18 Lavenu Daniel, "Activités du temps libre et sociabilité de jeunes à la sortie de l'adolescence", *Culture and Lifestyles – Society and Leisure*, 24-1, Spring 2001.

spheres in which individuals have invested: if one third of the networks falls within the scope of the occupational sphere, one third within the scope of ties maintained with school or university friends and one third within the scope of the family, then the configuration is different from a model in which three quarters of the network are family members and one quarter neighbours. This indicator, taken in conjunction with individuals' statements about their choices and priorities, gives us an indication of the structure of their investments.

Whether or not *ego*'s relationships are part of the same world and strongly linked to each other indicates whether the network is open or closed. In order to measure the network's density, we write in a circle the first names of the strong ties that the interviewee has just mentioned and ask him or her to plot the interrelationships between them<sup>20</sup>. We then analyse the characteristics of these people and of the ties that join them.

In addition, at the end of this first part of the interview, we make a drawing of the network on which all the personal ties and groups are joined together by circles and arrows; this drawing is produced with the interviewee, who comments on it.

Once this questionnaire is finished, the first interview is ended. The investigator goes home and prepares the second part.

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19 Lavenu D., 1999, "Formes de la sociabilité", *Agora Débats / Jeunesse*, n°17, L'Harmattan, p.29-45.

<sup>20</sup> It is certainly possible to include contacts in this mapping of density, but in the case of extensive networks the drawing quickly becomes illegible and the construction of a matrix takes longer and is more difficult to do as part of the interview.



### *The 'interview' part*

The preparation for the interview that takes place between the two meetings involves identifying changes in the young person's situation and pinpointing the changes that have taken place in his or her network. The aim here is to do the groundwork for comparing the previous wave of the survey with the present one. It is this comparison that will form the basis of part of the interview. In particular, the investigator will be noting the first names of those individuals mentioned in the previous wave but not in the present one and will also compare the lists of people described straightaway as important. In addition, the investigator selects a number of particularly interesting relationships on which more detailed information is to be sought. These changes are noted on preparation sheets and will be discussed in the recorded interview that is to follow. This interview will also be transcribed in its entirety.

### *Biographical and relational processes*

As readers will have realised, each of these parts, whether it be the biographical stages or changes in the personal network, takes on a particular interest when compared with the answers given during each wave of the survey. Thus interviewees will be asked why they changed jobs, moved to another town or changed partners, what the 'high points' of the past three years were, why they no longer cite their father as one of the important people in their lives or how they mixed their work colleagues and their friends from the basketball team, and so on.

As far as their trajectories since the previous wave are concerned, interviewees' accounts of their experiences with education or training, employment, leisure activities, romantic involvements and their relations with friends and family reveal the principles animating their choices, some of the forces driving their behaviour, such as their relationship to work, and the principles underlying their progression. We can then identify the developments that have taken shape over time in accordance with these principles and driving forces<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Bidart Claire, "Bifurcations biographiques, ingrédients de l'action, dispositions : qu'est-ce qui persiste ? qu'est-ce qui change ?", Colloque international "Bifurcations et événements : pertinences et enjeux pour les sciences sociales", organisé par l'atelier de recherche "L'analyse des bifurcations et des événements (sociologie, histoire, économie)" soutenu et financé par l'ACI « terrains, théories, techniques » du Ministère de la recherche, Paris, 8 et 9 juin 2006.

Examination of the changes that have taken place in networks and of new relationships, as well as of those that have been maintained or abandoned, provides us with information not only on the processes of change that are at work but also on changes in the ways of establishing relationships, on the processes involved in abandoning them and on changes in the ways of living in society in general at these ages. Changes in a number of relationships that are either important or occupy a particular place in the network are discussed during the interviews. It would, after all, take far too much time to deal with them all, and for each wave we selected a few that we considered to be particularly significant. All the relationships that have been abandoned in the previous three years are also mentioned (on the basis of the information gathered during the previous waves) and we ask them why, in their view, they are no longer in contact with the persons in question.

Changes in social circles, whether they relate to density or to the overall shape of personal networks, provide information not only on changes in relational systems and the 'little worlds' to which they give access but also on changes in investment priorities. They also reveal the role of time and of biographical events on the size and composition of networks<sup>22</sup>.

The relationship that is constructed between these two orders of factors tells us a great deal about the development of the control that young people have over their own lives. In a complex system of constraints, how do they assess their room for manoeuvre and how do they attribute to themselves a role as actors? Who might influence their decisions, that is become involved in their trajectories to the point where they can change the direction they take<sup>23</sup>? Such questions help us to respond to our starting hypothesis concerning the interactions between social networks and socialisation.

We are primarily interested in more specific themes, and certain parts of this large volume of material have been given priority over the others.

### *Attitudes to work and modes of access to employment*

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<sup>22</sup> Degenne Alain, Lebeaux Marie-Odile, 2005, "The dynamics of personal networks at the time of entry into adult life ", *Social Networks*, vol.27, n°4, pp. 337-358

<sup>23</sup> Bidart Claire, "Parcours, décisions, influences: le rôle de l'entourage relationnel dans les processus d'entrée dans la vie adulte", 2è Congrès de l'Association Française de Sociologie, "Dire le monde social", RT 22 "Parcours de vie et dynamiques sociales", Bordeaux, 5-8 septembre 2006; Bidart Claire, "Relations, influences et orientations", 2è Congrès de l'Association Française de Sociologie, "Dire le monde social", Groupe ad hoc "Réseaux sociaux", Relations et réseaux comme ressources sociales, Bordeaux, 5-8 septembre 2006.

Over and above individual accounts of school careers, periods of training, first casual jobs and, possibly, entry into the labour market proper, a number of more forward-looking questions seek to explore the way in which the young people in our sample construct their own ‘worlds of possibilities’ regarding access to employment<sup>24</sup>. Various types of trajectories emerge, based on different notions of what work is, in and of itself.<sup>25</sup> Experiences come one after the other, motivations change and plans evolve<sup>26</sup>. From the third wave of the survey onwards, it is possible to discern the development of ‘ways of moving towards’ work<sup>27</sup>. The relationship to work itself evolves, as do its various components; more particularly, we have examined changes in assessments of job stability and mobility<sup>28</sup>.

In addition, there are questions concerning the relationship between these potentialities and the resources available within personal networks:

*"Let us imagine: you're leaving today, your education/training is finished. You have to start looking for your first job. What do you do? How do you go about it? Do you think that someone might be able to help you find a job in this sector? Who? Why?"*

The same question was then asked with regard to casual jobs as opposed to ‘proper jobs’. The differences in the ways the young people approach the two different types of jobs shed light on the various facets of the relationship to work and of the constitution and assessment of occupational ‘worlds’, as well as of the relational resources that are available in this regard<sup>29</sup>. Various types of procedures are revealed in this way: use of job search institutions, direct approaches to firms, targeted applications in the immediate environment (local shopkeeper), mobilisation of networks of close relatives, long-standing or more recent friends and of

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<sup>24</sup> Bidart Claire, "Projets, réseaux relationnels et trajectoires d'accès au monde du travail. Une enquête longitudinale", 7<sup>èmes</sup> Journées d'études Céreq – Lasmas-IdL – GREE-ADEPS, Nancy, 25 et 26 mai 2000, Document Céreq n°148.

<sup>25</sup> Bidart Claire, "La construction de l'insertion socio-professionnelle des jeunes, une enquête longitudinale", rapport de recherche pour la Délégation Interministérielle à l'Insertion des Jeunes, Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité, février 2000, 133 p.

<sup>26</sup> Bidart Claire, Lavenu Daniel, 2001, "Projets et trajets, contraintes et contingences : qu'est-ce qui fait bifurquer des parcours ?", 8<sup>è</sup> journées de Sociologie du travail, Marchés du travail et différenciations sociales, approches comparatives, LEST-CNRS, Aix-en-Provence, 21-23 Juin 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Bidart Claire, en collaboration avec Mounier Lise et Pellissier Anne, "La construction de l'insertion socio-professionnelle des jeunes à l'épreuve du temps. Une enquête longitudinale", Rapport de recherche pour la Délégation Interministérielle à l'Insertion des Jeunes, Ministère des Affaires sociales, du travail et de la Solidarité, Juillet 2002, 137 p.

<sup>28</sup> Bidart Claire, Correia Mario, Lavenu Daniel, "Evolution des rapports à l'instabilité professionnelle : une enquête qualitative longitudinale auprès de jeunes", 13<sup>èmes</sup> Journées d'étude sur Les données longitudinales dans l'analyse du marché du travail, Transitions professionnelles et risques, LEST, Aix en Provence, 1<sup>er</sup> et 2 Juin 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Lemarchant Clotilde, Oct. 2000, "Les trajectoires de raccrochage de jeunes Caennais. Rôles des réseaux et

people with various forms of expertise concerning the job in question. The potential for using relational resources and the modes of access to employment vary over time. The fact that a young person might have called on his or her father to help find a job in wave 1, then on the local task force for employment and training or on a former employer in wave 2 and then on a professional journal in wave 3 reveals something of the development of notions about the world of work, 'objective' changes in potential resources and the learning processes that young person has been through.

We can then ponder on the fact that such and such a category of young people makes use of such and such a procedure<sup>30</sup> and on the evolution of this type of approach to the world of work as they grow older and really begin to get to grips with it

### *Life as a couple*

These young people's emotional lives and couple formation have been the object of the same investigations as the rest of their networks in terms of the characteristics of their partners and relationships. Specific questions have been added on the history of these couples, their attitude towards the commitments life as a couple engenders<sup>31</sup>, their future and their relationships with their families and the effects of couple formation on social networks. We take into account both long-term relationships and shorter 'flings' regarded as temporary<sup>32</sup>. Some questions concern the changes brought about by these relationships, changes in personal situation, in attitudes, in career plans and in relations with family and friends. Here too, it is important for us to identify as many as possible of the 'bridges' between the various spheres of individuals' lives.

Other questions concern married life for those who live together and, of course, from wave 2 onwards, the birth of children and the changes this brings about in their lives, their work, their activities and their lives in society. Types of childcare, the division of labour and the effects of the arrival of children on relationships with both partners' families are also

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sociabilités", *Ville, Ecole, Intégration. Enjeux*, n°122, Paris, CNDP.

<sup>30</sup> Mounier Lise, 1999, "A quoi peuvent servir les relations sociales des jeunes ?", *Agora*, n°17, p.47-62.

<sup>31</sup> Le Gall Didier, 1996, "L'empreinte d'une émotion", in Education sentimentale et sexuelle, *Informations sociales*, n°55, Paris, CNAF, p.50-56 ; Le Gall Didier, Pellissier Anne, 2001, "Que manque-t-il à l'amour pour faire couple?", *Agora Débats Jeunesses*, n°23, p.19-23.

<sup>32</sup> Le Gall Didier, 1999, "Les amours adolescentes. Entre révélation et blessure intime", in "Amour et sexualité à l'adolescence", Paris, *Dialogue*, Ed. Erès, 4è trimestre, p.15-24.

mentioned. Changes in couples' relationships and in family ties reflect maturation processes but are also responses to external events<sup>33</sup>.

### *Relations with family*

During the first wave of the survey, we compiled a systematic list of each young person's extended family, including grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, as well as of their reconstituted family where appropriate. We collected sociographic data on all these people, even if the young person had no contact with them or no longer had contact with them. It is in this respect that the treatment of the family differs from that of the rest of the network: while the procedure for constructing the network includes the family in order to identify existing relationships, for the family itself even non-active relationships are included in this initial list. Moreover, more detailed questions are asked during each wave of the survey about relations with people in the parental household and with family members who appeared to be important at various points in the interview. In addition, we have tried to capture the functioning of family groups with a specific set of questions on family cohesion, tensions, conflicts<sup>34</sup> and organisation, particularly during ritual meetings, such as at Christmas or various family events.

### *Young people's relational careers and dynamics during the transition to adulthood: identifying social trajectories of ICT use*

From the third wave of the survey onwards, we added a specific module relating to uses of information and communications technologies and the changes therein. We repeated this module in wave 4, which allowed us to measure the changes that had taken place in these uses. Bertrand Fribourg is doing a PhD in sociology on this subject as part of a CIFRE agreement with France Télécom R&D. The aim of this thesis is to gain an understanding of the links between young people's biographical trajectories, the dynamics of their networks

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<sup>33</sup> Bidart Claire, Lavenue Daniel, Pellissier Anne, "Des jeunes, leurs amis, leurs parents : quelles relations, quelles évolutions ?", Rapport de recherche pour la Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales, Mai 2005, 174 p.

<sup>34</sup> Le Gall Didier, "Family conflicts in France as viewed by Youth", Communication au symposium "European perspectives on family conflict and domestic violence", 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Personal Relationships (ISSPR), Banff, Alberta, Canada, 4-8 août 1996 ; Le Gall Didier, 1998, "Family conflicts in France through the eyes of teenagers", in *Multidisciplinary perspectives on family violence in Europe*, sous la direction de Renate Klein, Routledge, London, England.

and lives in society and the social trajectories of communication technology use underlying those networks<sup>35</sup>.

These trajectories of ITC use are linked to the actors' sociodemographic characteristics (sex, social background, educational qualifications) as well as to their position in the life cycle and their life course<sup>36</sup>. Thus the processes of career building, settling down to life as a couple and starting a family have a considerable influence on technology use.

Focusing attention on the evolution of relational networks<sup>37</sup>, we also test the hypothesis that there is a transition from networks dominated by 'clanishness' or 'cliqueyness' to elective networks, in which relations are more individualised. The idea here is to gather information on the place of communications technology and data transfer formats in the process of network change<sup>38</sup>. In doing so, we are seeking to ascertain the influence of social relations on these developments.

Finally, we refocus attention on the 'workings of social relations', at the micro-sociological level of the dynamic of a relation or clique (sub-network). The aim here is to deconstruct in greater detail the changes at work in affinities and to show how a relational system is reconfigured in accordance with changes in the 'right distance' to be maintained in order to get on together<sup>39</sup>. We are also seeking to gain a greater insight into the use of ICTs as a medium for the construction of the 'right time frame' for contact.

### *The relationship to time and diaries of events*

By organising their lives in a particular way and making their relational choices and other commitments, young people are constructing their priorities in a more or less distinct way. They are, as it were, ordering their activities and engagements in accordance with these

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<sup>35</sup> Fribourg B., "Usages relationnels des TIC : des révélateurs du lien entre structuration des réseaux sociaux et parcours de vie", communication au congrès de l'Association française de sociologie, Bordeaux, septembre 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Fribourg Bertrand, Licoppe Christian, Denis Jérôme, 2006, « Carrières des relations interpersonnelles. Eléments de réflexion sur les bifurcations et leur équipement », colloque international *Bifurcations et événements : pertinences et enjeux pour les sciences sociales*, organisé par l'atelier de recherche *L'analyse des bifurcations et des événements (sociologie, histoire, économie)* soutenu et financé par l'ACI « terrains, théories, techniques » du ministère de la recherche, Paris, 8-9 juin.

<sup>37</sup> Fribourg B., 2005, « Dynamique des réseaux relationnels et usages des TIC : apports d'une visualisation de graphes dans le cadre d'une enquête longitudinale », journée *La représentation graphique des réseaux et ses usages*", INED, Paris, 8 décembre.

<sup>38</sup> Fribourg Bertrand, 2003, "Faire et défaire des liens au fil du temps : Evolutions des contextes et des modes de sociabilité des jeunes entrant dans l'âge adulte", Premières rencontres Jeunes et Sociétés en Europe et autour de la Méditerranée, Marseille, 22-24 octobre 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Bidart Claire, Fribourg Bertrand, " Qui sont mes proches ? Proximités spatiales, proximités sociales dans les évolutions des réseaux relationnels de jeunes entrant dans l'âge adulte ", Quatrièmes journées " Proximités, réseaux et coordination ", IDEP-GREQAM-LEST, Marseille, 17-18 Juin 2004.

various levels of urgency, most of the time implicitly. In the interviews, we try to encourage them to make these priorities clear. This information is supplemented by their more general ideas about the organisation of their plans and of their future prospects. For example, is it essential for them to find a job before leaving the parental home to set up home with a partner, or is the converse true? One can look for sociographic variables likely to reveal differences in this question of the organisation of timetables.

In addition, from the second wave of the survey onwards, we have constructed with the young interviewees a more 'objectifying' and systematic diary, month by month, of all the biographical changes and various events that had taken place in each three-year interval between two survey waves. This tool enables us to go back over all the changes and to plot all the connections between them, as well as dating them precisely, which is not always easy if they are isolated from each other. Incidentally, this re-examination of events in the course of the actual interviews can help the interviewees themselves to get their bearing: they remember more clearly the date on which they did a training course if we help them to locate it relative to the date they moved house or their grandfather died. This precise timetable can then be set alongside their more general life choices and may give rise to discussions in the timing of their choices and the overall tendencies underlying the phases they are going through. We are trying to work on these questions of timing and to put forward some conceptualisations of the notion of biographical process<sup>40</sup>.

### *Dividing points in the trajectories: powerful moments, crossroads and decision taking*

Sociologists have not yet succeeded in shedding much light on the precise times at which divisions occur, trajectories change direction and decisions are taken. Trajectories are analysed, but the trade-offs of which they are the result are neglected. What possibilities existed at the time the choice was made? What alternatives presented themselves? What paths were abandoned in favour of the direction that was finally taken? How are the decision-making processes constructed? A series of question enables us to examine these 'powerful moments' very closely, including from the point of view of the part played by network members in shaping the choices actually made.

The accounts produced in response to our questioning enable us to plot the unfolding over time of events whose sequence makes sense, whereas more general surveys cannot

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<sup>40</sup> Bidart Claire, "Devenir adulte: un processus", Colloque de l'Association Internationale des Sociologues de Langue Française, "L'état social à l'épreuve des parcours de vie", Liège, 25-26 Septembre 2006.

achieve this level of precision and thus do not always perceive very accurately the sequences of causalities. After all, in diaries describing several years in an individual's life, it is impossible to separate out events that in some cases took place just several days apart, whereas this diachrony can prove to be crucial in the decision-making process.

By shedding light on these aspects, we are attempting to gain greater insight into the construction of the processes and on the sequencing of the decisions leading to dividing points in personal trajectories<sup>41</sup>.

### *Becoming an adult?*

We have also asked ourselves what the term 'adult' might mean for these young people and whether they recognise it as applying to themselves. By putting the question to them directly, we have been able to shed some light on their ideas on the subject<sup>42</sup>. These ideas reveal the strength of class divisions within society: young people are not a homogeneous group, and the notion of the 'individualisation of trajectories' comes up against its limits in the very pronounced differences between the arguments advanced depending on the young person's social background<sup>43</sup>. Putting the question again after an interval of three years enables us to ascertain whether or not biographical events are likely to interact with these representations of oneself as an adult<sup>44</sup>. Similarly, the 'ways of advancing' towards the world of work reveal the changes and discontinuities in the young people's lives; here too, the longitudinal aspect of this survey enables us to investigate the links between biographical trajectories and social representations, between experiences and ideas.

Thus in accordance with our starting hypotheses, the material gathered in this way provides us with an enormous range of information about and different ways of looking at the processes of socialisation and social integration at the time of entry into adult life. Of course there is no question of processing these data in a single block or of dealing with all our

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<sup>41</sup> Bidart Claire, 2006, "Crises, décisions et temporalités : autour des bifurcations biographiques", *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, n° 120, pp. 29-57.

<sup>42</sup> Bidart Claire, "Se dire adulte", in Juan S., Le Gall D. (dir.), 2001, *Conditions et genres de vie. La société française autrement*, Presses Universitaires de Caen.

<sup>43</sup> Bidart Claire, Daniel Lavenue, 2006, "Transitions vers la vie adulte et origines sociales. Une enquête longitudinale en France", in Bidart C. (ss. dir.), *Devenir adulte aujourd'hui : perspectives internationales*, INJEP, Collection "Débats-Jeunesse", L'Harmattan, pp.163-180.



disparate findings in a single analytical exercise. The task must be approached gradually and is very much a work in progress, with much still to be done.

It remains for us to provide further details of the source of our data, that is the population survey, and of the method used to select it.

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<sup>44</sup> Bidart Claire, 2005, "Les temps de la vie et les cheminements vers l'âge adulte", *Lien Social et Politiques*, n°54, pp.51-63.

## **The survey population**

### ***Constituting the panel***

From our research perspective, it was important to assemble a panel of individuals positioned on the edge of a stage of their entry into adulthood and one that was truly diverse in terms of social position and gender. Nevertheless, there could be no question, in a qualitative survey based on a relatively small sample, of attempting to make the survey population representative in any way or of ensuring that it was evenly divided in terms of social class, for example. We decided, therefore, to select the survey population on the basis of two criteria: gender and the educational or training programme being followed, which would be likely to take the young people in question along a number of different paths on their way towards social integration.

Thus we decided to assemble a panel of 90 young people living in the Caen travel-to-work area and taking part in three different educational or training programmes. The three groups were as follows:

1. Final-year high school students doing the economic and social sciences baccalaureate (ES bac.), who tend to leave the education system at an earlier stage and to a wider range of destinations than students from the other academic programmes.
2. Final-year vocational high school students (doing the vocational baccalaureate), the majority of whom either seek employment after the baccalaureate or complete their education with a short vocational training course (*brevet de technicien supérieur* (BTS), for example, a vocational training certificate taken after the age of 18).
3. Young people of the same age who had left education at an earlier stage and were already struggling with the problems of entering the labour market. They were participating in various integration programmes and were doing a variety of different courses, ranging from remedial literacy and numeracy courses to courses leading to vocational qualifications, usually as part of so-called ‘mobilisation for employment’ programmes. We will call them the ‘trainees’.

We sought to place equal number of girls and boys in each of these three groups of 30 young people.

## *Some characteristics of the population in the first wave of the survey*

### *Ages*

The high-school students doing the ES baccalaureate were aged between 17 and 20. Those doing the vocational baccalaureate were on average two years older (18 to 23), which is due to them having repeated certain years of school. In addition, many of them had already completed a *brevet d'études professionnelles* (BEP – a technical school certificate), which enabled them to prepare for the baccalaureate.

The trainees, very few of whom had a formal qualification (some of them had a BEPC, the lower secondary school leaving certificate, or a CAP-BEP, a technical school or vocational training certificate), were of comparable age on average, but the range was from 18 to 24. Very few of them were under 20 years of age and even fewer of them volunteered for the survey.

### *Geographical origin*

We decided to limit our recruitment to the Caen travel-to-work area. The high-school students doing the ES baccalaureate lived in the catchment areas for the schools in the city of Caen, as did most of the vocational high-school students, although the fact that the vocational high schools recruit on a regional basis meant that we had to cast our net somewhat wider in their case. We had to do the same with the trainees.

### *The high schools and the youth programmes*

The high-school student doing the ES baccalaureate were enrolled at three general *lycées* in Caen (Charles de Gaulle and Augustin Fresnel) and Hérouville-Saint-Clair (Salvador Allende), which is a town adjoining Caen.

The high-school students doing the vocational baccalaureate came from four vocational *lycées* in Caen (Camille Claudel, Dumont D'Urville and Victor Lépine) and Mondeville (Jules Verne).

The trainees were all recruited in Caen from programmes organised by six organisations and voluntary associations that we contacted<sup>45</sup>, in some case through the local task force for employment and training or the School for Parents and Educators (EPE), which provides support for parents, young people and professionals working with young people.

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<sup>45</sup> These organisations were : the CEMEA (Centres d'entraînement aux méthodes d'éducation active), the Greta (Groupement d'établissements de Caen/Bayeux), Hérouville jeunes, l'IRFA (Institut régional de formation continue Normandie-Maine), Visa Formation and Vis à Vis Formation.

### *Family backgrounds*

As the table below shows, most of the ES students came from middle-class backgrounds, while the vocational high-school students and, more especially, the trainees were from working-class or, in some cases, middle-class backgrounds. There were many more economically inactive mothers among the trainees and vocational high-school students than among the ES students.

Parents' socio-occupational category and educational/training programme

Education/training programme	ES		Vocational		Training programme	
	father	mother	father	mother	father	mother
Managerial and similar	10	8	3	1	1	
White-collar/clerical and similar	16	19	11	8	8	7
Manual worker and similar	8	5	12	11	14	7
Economically inactive		2		8		10
Unknown, no information			2		2	1
Total	34	34	28	28	25	25

As we have already noted, socio-occupational background was not one of our selection criteria. Nevertheless, the choice of education or training programme does reflect social class to some degree.

### *From plan to reality.*

So this was the population we were preparing to interview from the outset: 30 young people, 15 boys and 15 girls from each of the three education or training programmes. However, the discrepancies between their initial undertakings and their actual presence at the first interview changed this distribution somewhat. As a precaution, we had contacted more ES students than had been planned, 34 in all and all of them actually attended for the first interview. Of the vocational high school students and trainees whom we contacted, only 29 of the former and 27 of the latter actually turned up. We stopped at that point because of the difficulty of recruiting replacements in a reasonable time. Thus the initial population did

indeed total 90, even though the distribution by education or training programme was not exactly equal.

Nevertheless, three individuals (one male vocational baccalaureate student and two male trainees) had finally to be deducted from this population, since there was too much missing information for them to be comparable with the others or with the interviews in subsequent waves of the survey. They were withdrawn from the survey population, which for the first wave amounted finally to 87: 34 high-school students doing the ES baccalaureate (of whom 16 were girls), 28 vocational high school students (of whom 15 were girls) and 25 trainees (of whom 15 were girls).

The vocational high school students were distributed among the following specialisations:

Section	Girls	Boys
Office automation, secretarial work	8	4
Commerce and services	5	2
Sales and sales representation	1	1
Art and fashion	1	
Metallic structures		2
Maintenance of computerised systems		3
Wood working trades		1

The trainees were distributed among the following types of programmes:

Programme	Girls	Boys
Mobilisation	5	4
Job search	3	
Pre-qualification	2	1
Qualification	3	3
Orientation	2	
Others		2

While it would obviously have been better if the distribution had been the same as originally planned, the divergences are not crucial in a qualitative survey that seeks to understand the processes leading to the choices made rather than their statistical distribution.

### *The vicissitudes of voluntary participation*

This survey, comprehensive in scope and involving very long interviews repeated at intervals, demanded a considerable and sustained commitment on the part of the interviewees and could be based only on genuine voluntary participation. There was a considerable risk of ‘losing’ them on the way. Qualitative research of this kind precludes replacing any participants who fall by the wayside with others between two waves of the survey and we preferred them to refuse straightaway rather than taking part in the first wave and then dropping out. For this reason, we were very careful to leave them considerable scope for manoeuvre to take part voluntarily.

### *The recruitment procedure*

With this in mind, we decided to make the first contact with them in a group, thereby avoiding face-to-face meetings and the pressures inherent in such encounters: confronted with an unknown adult, the young people may well have not dared to refuse to take part.

We decided, therefore, to go to the schools and training centres, with the agreement of teachers and trainers, who offered us an hour of their teaching time in order to give their students a presentation about our profession, the survey and its objectives, as well as the demands we would be making of them. We were careful to emphasise that they would be making a long-term commitment. We then distributed the forms on which they could write their contact details before sending them to us. They were thus under no obligation to reply publicly<sup>46</sup> and on the spur of the moment but were able to reflect on it and then return their forms.

We then contacted the volunteers by telephone and made appointments for the initial interviews, which were to take place preferably at the young people’s home<sup>47</sup> or, if not, then in our offices at the Maison de la Recherche en Sciences Humaines de Caen, which is located on the university campus.

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46 The perverse effects of taking a stand in a group are well known, particularly at that age: young people are either persuaded by their mates to take part in a fit of enthusiasm, even if it means having to extricate themselves at some later stage, or are afraid of being regarded as ‘crawlers’ if they sign up for a project managed by people close to authority and introduced by their teachers.

47 For some participants, this option posed certain problems: flat too small, no room in which we could be alone for several hours (a point on which we insisted, being very aware of how inhibiting the presence of a third party can be during in-depth interviews). Some of the young people even gave us to understand, either implicitly or explicitly, that they were ashamed to let us see their family home.

### *From recruitment to carrying out the interviews*

The relatively modest size of the survey population we were looking for had led us to believe that it would be easy to find volunteers. In fact our recruitment procedure met with variable success, which it seems to us important to outline. After all, those who agreed or refused to participate can be divided up to some extent by gender and social/educational background.

The female ES students were two and a half times more likely than their male classmates to volunteer, and we had to visit the schools on several occasions in order to recruit boys from this group. There was more or less the same gender imbalance among the trainees. On the other hand, the sample we recruited from the vocational high schools was more evenly balanced. These differences reveal in particular the greater readiness of girls to volunteer, which is not very surprising, especially at that age. It is no secret that they are more mature and more at ease in the school environment than boys.

Overall, the final-year ES students, who had already embarked on their sociology course, understood the value of the project and showed a desire to 'tell their own stories'. On the other hand, many of the trainees remained reticent and it was more difficult to get them genuinely involved. For this group, more than for the others, the sociologist asking for their cooperation was a strange and unfamiliar being indeed, and this strangeness could not be totally overcome at the brief first meeting, even though we adapted our language and provided concrete examples. We were then faced with the young people's reactions of rejection or withdrawal. We also perhaps came up against the feeling of futility that research inspires in those who have experienced hard times and persistent unemployment. Thus a high proportion of the trainees who volunteered, again particularly the boys, failed to turn up for the first interview.

We were also confronted with the difficulty that so-called excluded populations experience in operating in different time frames and localities. These difficulties probably explain why so many appointments were missed, some of them several times, very specifically by the male trainees. We had great difficulty in tracking some of them down: they had dropped out of their courses, were living at temporary addresses (in hostels or with friends), had disappeared from home, gone missing, had their telephones cut off, and so on. Others never turned up for appointments that they themselves had chosen. When we eventually made contact with them again, they were evasive, made promises and then failed

to turn up for the other appointments. We gave them a hard time but we simply lost contact with some of them, while others finally refused to cooperate at all.

### *Changes in the survey population*

Thus it will have become clear that one of the main difficulties is to locate the interviewees every three years and to keep them motivated to remain involved in the survey. We put in place various procedures to stop them leaving the panel. Thus we made lists of friends' addresses that could be used in an 'emergency' if they moved and we kept in regular touch by post in order to remind them of our existence (we sent them new year's greetings, copies of a survey diary keeping them up to date with the project's development and press articles and academic publications based on the survey). Despite all this, we did of course 'lose' some of the original sample.

#### *The 'missing' members of the survey population*

Under the circumstances outlined above, it will come as no surprise that the majority of those who 'went missing' were from the original group of trainees, which was actually reduced in size from the outset. In the second wave, we 'lost' 12 young people, one boy from the ES group, one boy and three girls from the vocational baccalaureate groups and three girls and five boys from the trainee group. In wave 3, we lost another 9 people, three girls from the ES group, one girl from the vocational baccalaureate group and three girls and two boys from the trainee group. These figures show that, while the girls were keener to volunteer at the outset, they were not much better than the boys at staying the course. However, we did manage to 'recover' two girls, one from the vocational baccalaureate group and one trainee, who had refused to take part in wave 2 but who agreed to be interviewed again in wave 3 after we contacted them again despite their earlier refusal. In wave 4, finally, we 'lost' another 7 young people, three boys from the ES group and four girls from the vocational baccalaureate group. We 'recovered' one girl from the ES group who had refused to take part in wave 3 but returned for the fourth wave.

We lost contact with these young people for a variety of reasons. One of the male trainees committed suicide. At least that is what we were told by neighbours; his family proved impossible to contact. Other trainees ran away from home or avoided responding to us, with the parents sometimes blocking our approaches until we gave up or met with an outright refusal. When we were able to speak to the young people, the reasons they put



forward for their refusal to cooperate were usually connected with important dividing points in their lives. Having changed worlds and adjusted their priorities accordingly, they were breaking commitments they had given in their ‘former lives’. This was the case, for example, with a young man who had joined the army and was stationed at Pau, two girls who had had babies or even several individuals who said they were overwhelmed by a new job or a house move. In some cases, in the course of a particularly sharp downward trajectory (very marked downgrading of job relative to qualification, increasingly ‘nightmarish’ living circumstances, addiction to drugs or alcohol etc.), it was difficult for these young people to accept the ‘mirror’ we were holding out to them and to compare their current situation with their situation three years previously.

Clearly, these justifications are not sufficient to explain their withdrawal from the project: other young people managed to remain involved in the survey despite very demanding jobs, the arrival of one or even two children or moving to more or less distant locations. Since we are prepared to travel to meet them wherever they might be (even as far as Valencia, Oslo or Boston!) and to interview them in the evening or at weekends, no impediment of this kind should be an obstacle, at least from our point of view.

Although we were of course disappointed to ‘lose’ some of our interviews, and while it is most certainly problematic that most of those who dropped out are from the most disadvantaged segment of our survey population (which is already the product of a sociological reality), this is still a far from dishonourable result. In the light of other panel surveys and given the considerable time commitment we were demanding of these young people, the drop-out rate can be regarded as minimal.

### ***What became of them?***

#### *Geographical mobility*

Of the 74 young people we managed to contact for the second wave of the survey, 14 had moved out of the Calvados department where they had been living at the time of the first interview. Two of them had moved abroad, one to Boston and one to Norway. Ten of them were living in another region in France (Var, Hérault, Rhône-Alpes, Yonne, Paris and Paris region). Finally, two of them had moved the adjoining department of Upper Normandy.

The commonest reason for moving (7 cases) was to undertake a course of education or training; after all, it is not possible to prepare for certain competitive examinations or to undertake certain vocational courses in Caen. The second commonest reason was more

private in nature: in 4 cases, love was the initial reason for moving, even though in some cases the young people in question did find jobs in their new locations. Moving for work reasons was only in third position, with 2 cases. One move, finally, was for family reasons, with one girl having preferred to go with her parents to the USA.

In wave 3, a third young person went to live abroad, in Spain. We also discovered that 14 people were living in other regions of France, 8 of them in Paris or the Paris region. Finally, 8 individuals had moved to other departments in Normandy and 42 had remained in Caen or in Calvados.

In wave 4, the young man who had been living in Spain was now in Italy, while the other 2 emigrants were still in Oslo and Boston respectively. Thirteen of our initial survey population were now living in other regions of France, including 7 in Paris or the Ile de France. Of the rest, five were living in other parts of Normandy, while 39 were still in Caen or Calvados.

#### *Main activities during the survey*

The main trends are hardly surprising. Most of the girls and boys who completed the ES baccalaureate went on to higher education, while most of those who took the vocational baccalaureate have been in employment from wave 2 of the survey onwards. Most of the economically inactive members of the survey population are girls who were initially in the trainee group and are now at home caring for children.

In wave 2, 17 young people were in higher education, 7 boys and 9 girls from the ES baccalaureate group and one girl from the vocational baccalaureate group. Thirty-four were working, 18 from the vocational baccalaureate group, 7 trainees and 9 from the ES baccalaureate group.

In wave 3, about half of the ES group were in employment: 16 out of 30 were working, while the others were still in higher education (9, including 1 on a sandwich course), looking for jobs (3) or economically inactive (2 girls). All those who completed the vocational baccalaureate were working, 23 in full-time jobs and 1 who was employed in a number of casual jobs. The situation among the former trainees was more varied: of the 13 still involved by the third wave, 5 were in regular employment, 1 was doing casual jobs, 3 were looking for work and 4 were economically inactive.

By wave 4, 9 young people were still in higher education (4 of them from ES baccalaureate group, 2 from the vocational baccalaureate group and one trainee. Some of this group had been dawdling, others were doing a doctorate and yet others had changed direction

and gone back into education after having worked for a few years. Most of the survey population are now in employment, 41 in total. Five are seeking work (2 from the ES group, 1 from the vocational baccalaureate group and 2 trainees) and 5 have declared themselves to be economically inactive (1 from the ES group, 1 from the vocational baccalaureate group and 3 trainees).

### *Love and family*

As early as the first wave, 41 of the young people were in romantic relationships, and two had a child, including one single mother.

By wave 2, 46 were in romantic relationships (of whom only 20 couples had survived from the first wave) and 12 had at least one child.

By wave 3, 14 of them had children (including one young woman living alone with her child), 49 were in relationships, 19 were living with a partner without children (including one homosexual couple), 11 were living alone, 12 were still living with their parents and 12 were in other situations (living in shared apartments or hostels etc.).

By the fourth wave, finally, 49 of the remaining 60 young people had a partner, including two homosexual couples. Twenty-two had at least one child and 5 were caring for their partners' children. Of the 11 people not in romantic relationships in wave 4, 7 had never had a partner throughout the 4 waves of the survey.

### *To be continued...*

Even though these four waves of the survey have enabled us to 'see' increasing numbers of these young people gradually acquire some of the attributes that normally define adult life (jobs, leaving the parental home, independent family life etc.), it is still necessary, in our view, to go on with the project and to carry out a fifth wave, even if only a partial one. In its 'full' version, it might look only at those young people whose situations have changed significantly since the fourth wave, particularly those who have had their first child or who have experienced a significant change of direction in their lives.

After all, we think it is necessary to wait a little longer for some of the milestones of adult life that statistical surveys tell us are reached at very different times depending on social class and gender to be more fully achieved. It is important for those who have prolonged their studies to embark on their working lives in order that we can observe how the most 'gifted' as well as the most 'laggardly' of the young people integrate socially. We should also wait until a higher share of the young people have settled down with partners. Finally, even though there

is no question of continuing the survey until they all have children (which may never happen), it seems to us important to acquire a broader understanding of what happens at the time of the ‘generational leap’ when the life cycle comes full circle. Thus a fifth wave of the survey, at least a partial one, is planned. And then after that...

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