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Chapter 5

Analyzing Second-Generation Trajectories from a Life Course Approach: What Mixed Methods Can Offer

Ingrid Tucci

5.1 Introduction

Many studies on descendants of immigrants in Europe have primarily focused on educational and occupational outcomes. Up to now, there have been few cross-national studies looking at their trajectories in those domains and adopting a life course approach (Wingens et al. 2011: 1). The transition to adulthood is a crucial phase in the life course, marked by numerous major life events compressed into a relatively short span of time. It is also a period in which life courses become much more differentiated and diversified (Konietzka 2010). On the one hand institutions such as the school system and the labor market play a decisive role in the process of life course construction. On the other hand, familial and personal orientations as well as decision-making processes also become salient at this threshold in socio-economic development (Mortimer et al. 2005: 133). Accordingly, understanding the diversity in the trajectories of immigrants' descendants requires the use of an analytical framework that allows researchers to unveil typical pathways as well as the underlying institutional, social, individual and familial mechanisms leading to them. Understanding how typical pathways emerge can obviously contribute to the analysis of the production and reproduction of ethnic and social inequalities. The life course approach provides such an analytical framework because it allows to consider both the impact of social structures and institutional frameworks and that of individuals' decision-making processes on trajectories (de Valk et al. 2011). From a methodological point of view, qualitative and quantitative approaches both can be effective in answering life course research questions (Giele and Elder 1998). Both methodological strands provide specific methods in order to do so. Nevertheless, combining quantitative and qualitative data might be fruitful in analyzing the

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interplay between structure and agency in the construction of trajectories. Furthermore, much research works and many comparative projects on immigrants and their children have been done since the 1990s.¹ One goal behind those cross-national comparisons is to understand how far institutional arrangements (educational system, employment policy, labor market situation, etc.) build a structure in which individuals act according to opportunities and constraints. The latter obviously differ more or less strongly from one country to another.

The first part of this contribution explores the potential application of the life course approach to migration research and addresses the methodological aspects of such an undertaking. The second part discusses selected results from a research project² on the educational trajectories and labor market entry of immigrants' descendants in France and Germany using a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, and also addressing the benefits and limitations of such an undertaking.

5.2 Some Theoretical and Methodological Considerations from the Perspective of Migration Research

The analysis of individual biographies, life trajectories, and transition dynamics has a long tradition in sociology. Interestingly, it started in the field of migration research with Thomas and Znaniecki's (1919) pioneering biographical analysis of the immigration experiences of Polish farmers in Europe and the US. The foundational models of assimilation that were then developed by the Chicago School considered integration as a process comprising a series of steps in which immigrants incorporate themselves into a new society by shedding their own ethnic identity and taking on the identity of the majority. However, these models did not make an explicit link with the biographical perspective developed at the beginning of the century. A long tradition of theoretical work on assimilation (the term generally used in the US context) and integration (the term favored in the European context³) has given rise to numerous studies dealing with the measurement of integration and assessing the relationship between different dimensions of this process. Gordon's work (1964) was central in conceptualizing the multidimensionality of assimilation.⁴ Up to now,

¹ See for example the EFFNATIS project in the mid-1990s and, later, the TIES and ELITES projects or those carried out in the framework of the Norface network.

² The project was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the French National Research Agency (ANR) and carried out between 2009 and 2012 by Olaf Groh-Samberg, Ariane Jossin, Carsten Keller and Ingrid Tucci.

³ The concept of assimilation has also been used in France to define the process by which individuals enter into the French "melting pot", gradually give up their previous cultural identity and take on a French political identity (on the different uses of the French and the American concepts of assimilation, see Beaud and Noiriel 1989). Due to the negative connotations of the assimilation concept, that of integration is more commonly used in European migration research today.

⁴ He distinguishes between seven types or stages of assimilation: cultural, structural, marital, identificational, marital, attitude receptional, behavior receptional and civic assimilation.

migration researchers have focused primarily on testing these theoretical models and on identifying relationships between the dimensions they address. Although life course concepts (trajectories, transitions, events or turning points) fit very well with the idea of conceiving integration as a process, these core concepts have not been explicitly used to theorize the way immigrants and their descendants construct their life in society (see introductory Chapter of this volume). The life course approach might well be fruitful for analyzing processes over time and mechanisms. It might enable research in the field of immigration to go beyond interpretations in terms of “integration vs. non-integration”.

5.2.1 Bringing the Life Course Perspective into Migration Research

A large number of studies in migration research have looked at inequality in outcomes, most of them examining a particular outcome such as high school graduation or unemployment (Crul and Schneider 2010, see also Guarin and Rousseaux’ Chap. 3 in this volume). While analyses of the residual effect of variables related to “ethnic origin” provide a good understanding of so-called ethnic penalties on socio-economic attainment, they are limited in their ability to explain the role of institutional arrangements, structural conditions, and individual orientations and strategies in the life course. *Between- and within-group variations* in the trajectories of immigrants’ descendants can be understood as results of the interplay between, for example, the organization of the school system and the points at which selection occurs as well as individual and parental educational aspirations and orientations.

From a theoretical point of view, the segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2006), which has introduced a new way of conceiving the integration process, is the one that can best be linked to the life course approach. The segmented assimilation theory predicts three distinct “paths of incorporation”⁵ for second-generation youth. Each of them has two key dimensions of trajectory construction, a “cultural” one and a “structural” dimension. These three paths of incorporation are crucially defined by the political and social context into which the immigrants (parents) are received (the so-called “mode of incorporation”), by their human capital and by characteristics of the ethnic community. In the first path, the second generation experiences upward assimilation, i.e., integration into the middle class accompanied by cultural assimilation. In the second path, which can be referred to as selective assimilation, an experience of upward mobility is accompanied by continuing strong ties within the ethnic community in the host country but also to individuals or communities living abroad. In the third path of incorporation, the second generation experiences downward assimilation and is assimilated into the “underclass”.

⁵This is the concept used by Portes and his colleagues.

With only three distinct incorporation paths, the segmented assimilation approach is able to account for the “diversity” of trajectories to only a limited degree. Also, each path of incorporation is generally associated with a particular immigrant group.⁶ This means that the theory does not help to explain why individuals within the same group of origin have divergent trajectories (on this point, see also Santelli 2007, as well as her contribution in this volume, and Tucci et al. 2013). Interestingly, in one of his papers, Rumbaut (2005) employs the central concept in the life course approach of turning point (Elder 1974; Hareven and Masaoka 1988; Abbott 1997). Following Elder, Rumbaut defines turning points as “new situations that ‘knife off’ the person’s past from the present and serve as catalysts for long-term behavioral change by restructuring routine activities and life course pathways, enabling identity transformations and setting in motion processes of ‘cumulating advantages and disadvantages’” (Rumbaut 2005: 1043). Describing the downward assimilation of one segment of the second generation, Portes and Rumbaut (2006) point later to possible negative effects of segregated neighborhoods and peers engaged in informal activities. Immigrants’ descendants change in orientations and in their logic of action and shift their life course in other directions: “For second-generation youths, the activities of gangs, sale of drugs, and other elements of ‘street’ culture amount to an alternative path of adaptation, away from school and homework and in direct opposition to their parents’ expectations” (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: 262).

One drawback of segmented assimilation theory is that it does not *explicitly* conceptualize the possible switch of individuals from one pathway to the other. As pointed out by Bidart, analyzing the life courses of young adults “implies (...) a focus on turning points rather than on continuity, the identification of driving forces, the consideration of subjective as well as objective changes” (Bidart 2012: 3). In order to do so, methodological approaches that go beyond the analysis of individual outcomes and the use of specific data are needed. In this chapter we advocate for the aggregation of different types of data.

5.2.2 *Methodological Approaches for the Analysis of Life Trajectories*

The quantitative analysis of life course trajectories implies the use of retrospective data, or, in the ideal case, of panel data that provides information on the same individuals over an extended period of time. If trajectories are conceived as sequences of statuses between different points in time, a first goal could be to reconstruct those sequences in order to describe trajectories. Following Lesnard (2006), one needs methodological approaches that “cast light on social rhythms, on the social structuration of the timing of events” (Lesnard 2006: 21). Sequence analysis is a method

⁶As an example here, Portes and Zhou (1993) see the school success of the children of Punjabi Sikhs in California despite a strong prejudiced experienced by this group as a consequence of the strong influence of the ethnic community in the neighborhood over the second generation.

“transposed” from biology to the social sciences (Abbott and Tsay 2000; Lesnard 2006; Blanchard et al. 2014) in order to grasp the timing of events while looking not only at life course events, as is done with duration models or event history analysis techniques (Blossfeld and Rohwer 2002), but also at the sequencing of different statuses reached during the trajectory. In recent times, the optimal matching method has been used more and more frequently in demography and family sociology while it remains less common in the field of migration and integration research (Widmer and Ritschard 2009). Sequence analysis is useful first to find out what typical trajectories of immigrants’ descendants might be, and secondly, to explain inequalities in trajectories between second generation and young people without a migration background, for example. In a third step, it is possible to identify the social and individual dynamics underlying the respective trajectories.

However, quantitative approaches reach their limits when confronted with the analysis of some of the driving forces in life trajectories, because micro-social processes and subjective orientations of action (the “agency” element of the life course paradigm, see introduction of this volume) cannot readily be captured by statistical data (Kelle 2001). Methodological approaches that consider objective aspects related to the positioning of individuals as well as subjective orientations that underlie their trajectories are necessary (Wingens et al. 2011: 6). In recent times, qualitative studies have proven to be fruitful in analyzing the determinants of upward mobility in second-generation youth in Germany (Hummrich 2002; Raiser 2007; King et al. 2011). In the US, as well as in Germany, parental immigration and specific government integration measures have shown to be influential on children’s life trajectories (Portes and Fernández-Kelly 2008; Raiser 2007). Raiser (2007) shows, for example, that norms and values such as solidarity, reciprocity, and trust transmitted from one generation to the next or within the immigrant community can act as social capital—in the sense of Portes (1995)—taking the form of self-confidence, discipline and industriousness.

Research questions aimed at providing a better understanding of the social dynamics underlying typical trajectories of children of immigrants might require methodological designs that combine quantitative and qualitative data. Too little work has so far been done for connecting quantitatively and qualitatively driven migration research. In most of existing researches, the approach used to analyze the integration of immigrants and their children into the host society is to study between-group differences. Studies interested in processes analyze, for example, the social mobility of immigrant groups in a given society over time (Hans 2010) or between the first and subsequent generations (Bolzman et al. 2003). A focus on between-group variations requires the construction of categories referring to the national or ethnic origin of individuals: treating all individuals with a migration background as a homogeneous population would mean ignoring not only the migration history that underlies each migratory phenomenon⁷ but also the heterogeneity of life conditions

⁷This migration history can be linked to historical events, such as, in some regions, colonization and wars. Likewise, in Europe, the social opportunities of children of asylum-seekers differ starkly from those of children of Europeans benefiting from free movement within the Schengen Area.

in the countries of origin. The analysis of processes of economic and social participation and of ethnic identity formation implies the consideration of people's past experiences. By adding a qualitative approach, quantitative findings pointing at the possible effect of the ethnic origin can be deepened in order to assess the role of migration as a familial and/or individual experience in shaping trajectories. As Wimmer (2013) points out, the interpretation of a residual effect for a specific group in multivariate regressions, i.e. controlling for other factors that are likely to also explain the outcome, might be misleading because, in most cases, the disadvantage faced by this specific group is interpreted as the consequence of an assumed cultural difference, or as the consequence of discrimination. Wimmer makes an incisive observation on this point: "Finding significant results for ethnic dummies should represent the beginning—not the end—of the explanatory endeavor" (Wimmer 2013: 38). To assess what is behind a residual "ethnic group" effect, quantitative analyses are not only of limited value. Indeed, in some cases, they can also favor ethno-centrist interpretations and the production of essentializing categories of ethnicity. Combining quantitative and qualitative data might be a more suitable research design, not only to address the processes leading to the disadvantaging of specific groups and to adequately account for the diversity of strategies of economic, social, and cultural participation. Mixed methods research designs can help to understand how ethnic identity is forming, whether it is relevant for individuals' action and in which situation it is performing. Linking a qualitative study to a quantitative one thus might also provide a better understanding of the role of ethnic boundary making and exclusion processes in the formation of the second generation's life trajectories. It makes it possible to analyze the subjective experience of disadvantages and of discrimination and to analyze the effect on the strategies deployed by individuals to cope with or to adapt to these disadvantages.

5.2.3 Cross-National Comparison and the Role of Institutional Arrangements

Following K.U. Mayer, "individual life courses are to be seen as the product of societal and historical multilevel processes" (Mayer 2004: 166). In sociology of migration, the influence of the national and institutional context on the lives of immigrants and their children is being increasingly studied. A tradition of migration research in Europe has adopted a cross-national comparative perspective on the impacts of the institutional framework on outcomes such as educational attainment or labor market participation (Heckmann and Schnapper 2003; Heath et al. 2008) and, more recently, on the trajectories of immigrants' descendants in different European countries (Crul et al. 2012; Groh-Samberg et al. 2012; Tucci et al. 2013)⁸. In contrast to immigrants, descendants of immigrants go through the entire school system in the country to

⁸The project "The children of immigrants longitudinal survey in four European countries (CILS4EU)" provides the first comparative panel survey in Europe for the analysis of trajectories.

which their parents immigrated and experiences selection processes at different stages. Ideally, the school system is meant to offer equal chances of achieving upward social mobility. But many studies drawing upon PISA data have shown that, for example, social class has a strong influence on school achievement in Germany—stronger than, for example, in France (see, e.g., OECD 2006). This means that children of immigrants, who are from lower social classes on average, face greater disadvantage in the German school system. The national context, with its institutional arrangements, influences not only the participation of immigrants' descendants in different life domains but also their sense of belonging (Crul and Schneider 2010). Situating immigrants and children of immigrants in different national contexts leads us inevitably to consider how immigration histories and philosophies of integration (Favell 1998) affect the way immigrants and their children see themselves as members of a community, how they are seen by others and how they develop their own “patterns of belonging”. Being born in the country, immigrants' descendants also grow up incorporating its values and cultural norms, developing multiple identities and diverse patterns of national and transnational belonging.

The next Sect. 5.3 presents selected results from a French-German research project drawing on quantitative analyses of representative data as well as a field study, and addresses benefits as well as limits of this kind of methodological approach.

5.3 A French-German Comparative Research Applying Mixed-Methods

The research project, entitled “Professional Strategies and Status Passages of Young Adults with a Migration Background in France and Germany”, explored the educational and professional trajectories of young adults with a migration background in France and Germany. The methodological approach as well as a selection of results from this project are presented in the following.

5.3.1 Methodological Approach

The project had a quantitative and qualitative part. On the one hand, school and professional trajectories were analyzed using quantitative data from longitudinal or panel studies. Data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) for Germany and from the *Panel d'élèves du Second degré 1995* (MEN-DEPP) as well as from the *Enquête Génération 1998* (Céreq) for France were used. These surveys contain information on the country of origin and the nationality of the respondent and of his/her parents. This information was used to identify immigrants' descendants in an appropriate way. The kind of data used made not only possible the identification of typical educational and professional career patterns of second generation but also the

comparison of their trajectories with those of young adults with a native background in each country. This enabled the research team to determine, for example, the degree and timing of disadvantages in the trajectories of immigrants' children (Groh-Samberg et al. 2012). Among others, sequence analyses using the optimal matching method (Lesnard 2006; Blanchard et al. 2014) were conducted, followed by a hierarchical cluster analysis to define a typology of trajectories. Then a multinomial regression analysis was estimated to assess the probability of having a specific trajectory, controlling for the relevant predictors, in particular the socio-economic background of individuals. Typical school trajectories from age 11 to 18 and typical labor market entry trajectories from age of 18 and 25 years were identified among the survey respondents in each country.

Fieldwork was besides carried out in disadvantaged areas of Berlin and Paris in which a sample of 140 young adults with a migration background was qualitatively interviewed. This sample was selected in socially disadvantaged areas in order to consider the specific situation of the youth growing up in those neighborhoods, something that was not possible with the survey data used in the quantitative part of the project. Young men and women with both "successful" or stable as well as unstable life courses were selected in the field. The young men and women in Germany were of Turkish and Middle Eastern origin and in France of North African and sub-Saharan origin and were aged between 18 and 35 at the time of the interview.⁹ The interviews covered the following topics: parental immigration, school and occupational strategies, neighborhood, networks, peer groups, aspirations in terms of family and occupations, particularly good phases and negative phases of the life course.

The chosen mixed methods design had two advantages: first, the quantitative data provided generalizable results on school and labor market entry trajectories of immigrants' descendants compared to descendants of natives, while the qualitative sample added a facet to the picture by considering immigrants' descendants that are underrepresented in the quantitative data, that is, those living in strongly segregated neighborhoods. Second, the sampling of individuals with heterogeneous trajectories in those neighborhoods made it easier to integrate the quantitative and qualitative results.

The qualitative material was analyzed to create a typology of life trajectories (for more details on the typology, see Groh-Samberg et al. 2012; and Tucci et al. 2013). This typology was constructed according to the type of educational and professional trajectory as well as the respondent's strategy of action. The strategy or logic of action reflects individuals' orientations in certain phases of the life course and different investments in important domains of life: in education and the acquisition of diplomas (formal strategy) or, on the other end of the continuum, the mobilization of peer groups and the pursuit of activities with a short-term perspective (informal strategy). Within this project, semi-structured interviews gave insight into how the migration project undertaken by the parents affected their children, what role aspirations and motivations played in achieving educational outcomes, and how role models and peers influenced the decision-making processes of immigrants' descendants.

⁹All of them were born in France or Germany or immigrated before the age of 12.

The typical school and labor market entry trajectories were constructed using the quantitative data on the one hand, and the qualitative analyses of interview data on the other hand. The linkage of both data types was done through the typologies of educational and professional trajectories that were established in each data set.¹⁰ This enabled us to link trajectories to structural opportunities and constraints, as well as to individual strategies of action that were analyzed using the qualitative data. As it will be shown in the following section, some trajectories emerging from the qualitative analysis were absent from the quantitatively defined typology. One advantage of mixing data types is the fact that their combination provides a sometimes complementary and fuller picture of social reality. It is not possible to present all the results obtained in this study here, but selected findings can be highlighted to illustrate the assets of the research design applied in this project.

5.3.2 Selected Results

First, one central result of the quantitative analyses is that ethnic disadvantage occurs early in the life course in Germany while in France it is more pronounced at the moment of labor market entry. This can be explained by differences in school and training systems in each country: in Germany, selection of a school track occurs at age 11, whereas in France, children all attend the same school (*collège*) until the age of 15. An extreme concentration of children of Turkish origin can be observed in the less prestigious school tracks in Germany. In France, immigrants' descendants of North African origin in particular tend to reach university mainly through the technical school track than through the general track of the *Baccalauréat*. This result could be interpreted as an advantage for second generation in France in comparison to children of immigrants in Germany, as more of the former attend the university than the latter. However, several studies show that students with a technical *Baccalauréat* have a high risk not to complete their university studies (Duru-Bellat and Kieffer 2008). All in all, one can say that the French educational system is more permeable than the German system. Interestingly, in Germany, descendants of Turkish immigrants are oriented more frequently into the dual system of apprenticeship after a relatively low school degree, compared to their native counterparts. By contrast, descendants of North African immigrants are in France oriented toward professional tracks which provide lower-valued qualifications. The field study indicated that this experience has produced a strong feeling of exclusion and high frustration among the youths interviewed in France at the opposite of the youths interviewed in Germany.

¹⁰In the research project titled "Transition to adulthood among the children of immigrants: A mixed-methods study based on the SOEP", 26 selected longtime respondents of the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) were qualitatively interviewed. The project was founded by the German Research Foundation and carried out by Olaf Groh-Samberg, Ingrid Tucci, Nicolas Legewie and Martin Kroh.

Second, a trajectory of early school leavers could be identified only in the French survey data, which means that the German educational system—despite its high impermeability—tends to keep the children longer within the school system than the French educational system. This provides an indication of the institutional structuration of the early life course. The analysis of the qualitative material reveals, in fact, that the German educational system is more able than the French one to offer a second chance to young people who have faced difficulties in their school career (Tucci et al. 2011). Some aspects of the school and training system can thus help to stabilize trajectories and keep the youth “on the right track,” which underscores the important role of institutions in the lives of individuals with precarious trajectories. Another important aspect is in Germany the availability of welfare benefits to young people, whereas France is more restrictive in this regard (Tucci et al. 2013). This may explain why the young adults interviewed in the qualitative study exhibit much more precarious trajectories than those who were interviewed in Germany.

Third, in both countries, young people of Turkish and North African origin were more likely than native youths of similar socio-economic backgrounds to pursue an academic track and attend university rather than joining the high labor market segment after vocational training. This is particularly true for women of Turkish origin, who tend to be found in the academic track more frequently than German women of the same social class. This investment in a relatively long university education could be interpreted as a way to avoid discrimination when trying to enter high positions on the respective country’s labor market. Moreover, in the German case women have less access to enter the dual training system and continue their education at the University rather than leaving prematurely the school (Granato and Schittenhelm 2004). The qualitative interviews show that for the young people in this study, embracing their parents’ migration project as well as having role models representing the host country are important factors for a more “successful” trajectory. These “significant others” (Portes and Fernández-Kelly 2008), who might be teachers, neighbors, or other adults, act as catalysts for some descendants of immigrants, offering new perspectives, motivation, and self-confidence in crucial phases of the life course.

Finally, the combination of the quantitative and qualitative results provides insights in the construction of life trajectories and strategies of action used by individuals. “Precarious” trajectories revealed in the French and German survey data frequently seem to appear around biographical turning points with radical changes in orientations that are seen in the qualitative sample (Keller et al. 2012). A first turning point might occur during the adolescence, when young people tend to focus on their peers and informal activities. Social relationships are especially important in this phase, during which young people often distance themselves to some degree from institutions such as the school system. A second turning point could be found in the trajectories of some interviewees, who showed a shift in orientation towards more formal activities, such as going back to finish secondary school or vocational qualifications after having previously dropped out. Combining the quantitative and the qualitative material allowed us to look at the dynamics underlying typical trajectories and to identify sensitive phases in the early life course that might lead, for example, to “downward pathways” as well as the institutional and social mecha-

nisms enabling young people to “get back on the right track.” One driving force behind such changes is the possibility to get a second chance after dropping out of school. In this sense, the German school system provides more opportunities than the French system.

5.3.3 *Benefits and Limitations*

The mixed methods design has made it possible to consider diverse trajectories and “pathways of incorporation” among the descendants of specific immigrant groups. Quantitative as well as qualitative results show that early life trajectories are relatively diverse *within* “ethnic” groups. It is important to consider this within-group variation to understand institutional and social processes as well as the individual strategies of action underlying these trajectories. The typology produced from the qualitative material allowed identification of trajectories that cannot be revealed with the quantitative results. Hence, the mixed methods design leads to results that are complementary and it gives a broader picture of the situation. One example can be seen in the life trajectories of some young adults who found a place in the ethnic economy through opportunities provided within the (in some cases extended) family context. Even if the trajectory in the ethnic economy did not appear as a typical trajectory in the survey data, it is no less important in the lives of young people with a migration background. For some of these individuals, the ethnic economy constitutes an alternative to the entry on labor market, where the risk of being discriminated against can be high. At the same time, the existence of this kind of alternative, which is considered a real and viable one by some young adults, might also explain a limited investment in school and training. Furthermore, the combination of the two types of data has made it possible to formulate new hypotheses, for example, concerning the between-country differences in trajectories and the experience of discrimination throughout the life course. Interestingly, despite an earlier and much more substantial disadvantage experienced at school by the descendants of immigrants in Germany compared to those in France, complaints about discrimination in school among the young adults interviewed in Germany were less vehement than those expressed in France.

These kinds of methodological approach have also some drawbacks. In the research described above, the young adults belonging to the qualitative sample grew up in strongly disadvantaged neighborhoods while the quantitative data are representative for young people of specific ethnic origins in each country. This makes it difficult to link the results directly, even if the combined analysis helps to prevent homogenization of trajectories and reveals mechanisms in the qualitative data that cannot be identified in the quantitative data (e.g., the meaning of the family migration history and parental migration project for the child’s educational and occupational aspirations and trajectory). Another drawback lies in the difficulty of linking the quantitative to the qualitative data because the respondents to the qualitative interviews were not sampled from the survey data. The qualitative interviewing of

respondents already selected in large representative panel surveys could offer a real opportunity (Groh-Samberg and Tucci 2010). Such a survey design was conducted in a research project that started at the end of 2014: a sample of 26 respondents to the SOEP survey, whose parents are immigrants, were interviewed qualitatively in order to obtain a narrative on the respondent's life course and to integrate more directly the quantitative and qualitative data (Legewie and Tucci 2008). The panel design of the SOEP, which provides information on life trajectories and personal data collected over a long period of time, can itself be considered as a kind of narrative and thus be interpreted as a "quantitative auto/biography" (Elliott 2008). Such a research design combining quantitative panel data from a large representative survey and qualitative data collected on the *same individuals* will make it possible to interrelate the second generation trajectories identified through the statistical analysis of the survey data and strategies of action in a more direct way. It will also contribute to advance the reflection on methodological, ethical and epistemological issues related to the realization of such a mixed methods research design.

5.4 Conclusion

The life course perspective necessary implies to take the time dimension into account in analyses and to look at objective aspects such as the succession of social statuses as well as subjective aspects such as orientations, logics of action, decision-making processes and biographical meanings of the trajectories (Wingens et al. 2011). In the case of analyses focusing on young people with a migration background, feelings of otherness, ascriptions by others and self-ascriptions can all be relevant to the construction process of life trajectories. The feeling of being discriminated in the school system, for example, can lead to major behavioral changes, bringing about a turning point in these young people's lives. From an analytical point of view, linking school to work trajectories and processes of union and family formation in the research on immigrants' descendants come to the fore that these two life domains are strongly interconnected. Aspirations for family formation or changes in family structure can explain the emergence of new necessities in terms of educational investments or professional engagement. The results of the French-German project described in the preceding Sect. 5.3 indicate that only some of the young men with difficult school trajectories accompanied by delinquent activities were able to get back on track. Frequently, such a transition to a more positive trajectory was motivated by the desire to start a family, which also requires a certain degree of professional and social stability. To understand such changes in orientation, one needs to understand what meaning is ascribed to education at a specific point in the life course and what motivates individuals to change their commitments and their strategy of action.

Analyzing the trajectories of young adults requires data that enable us to study the driving forces behind individual action. These data have to be qualitative and quantitative, collected in real time and over an extended period. In particular, crucial

crossroads in the transition to adulthood need to be accounted for in such surveys because of the monumental decisions that have to be made in this phase (Elder 1985; Bidart 2012). Combining qualitative and quantitative data makes it possible to generate complementary sets of data that will lead to new explanations of statistical results and more accurate theoretical explanations (Mason 2016; Bohnsack 2008). The use of the life course approach framework combined with mixed methods appears fruitful in revealing the variety of life trajectories that unfold among descendants of immigrants and in identifying the mechanisms shaping their trajectories as well as the crucial moments that might become turning points in their lives. Applied in cross-national comparisons, mixing methods can also help to unveil the links between the macro and micro levels, going further in sociological explanation.

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