

Chapter 1

Personal behaviours and strategies in the face of socio-economic change

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In today's society, which is constantly faced with uncertainty and instability, economic and social changes and deregulations, how do people adapt? How do they react to events that destabilise their daily lives? Of course, individuals do not live in isolation. His or her behaviour is more or less strongly determined by his or her social situation, in particular his or her professional situation, economic resources, beliefs, cultural affiliations and orientations. However, we should not minimise the subjective aspects of behaviour, the importance of the representations and feelings on the basis of which the person reacts (attacks and defends him/herself), evaluates him/herself (self-esteem, appreciation or depreciation), orientates him/herself, communicates, etc.

Objectives and structure of the book

The notions of *precariousness* and *vulnerability*, which we will have to define and specify, offer the example of interactions between extrinsic factors (precariousness: supposedly negative external influences) and intrinsic factors (internal vulnerability as a psychological consequence of external pressures). But such a conception of the subject as a victim of destabilising events and at the very least passive, seems to us to be questionable.

We start from the assumption that many people, including researchers, have an *undesirability bias*. This prejudice consists in assuming almost automatically that a person with physical, economic, social or cultural difficulties will necessarily have psychological difficulties.

We therefore propose to question this hypothesis on the basis of a theoretical model of the functioning of the person in situations. These situations are necessarily social, but they are not experienced in the same way by the people involved, even when they perceive the events as disturbing or extreme, they develop reactions, defensive or offensive, individual or collective strategies, allowing them to adapt, to solve problems, to assert their identity or their desire, to reduce their stress.

This book seeks to verify the psychological effects, both negative and positive, of precarity, both through previous research and publications and through empirical investigation. It thus consists of two main parts:

In the *first, theoretical part*, the following will be presented in succession

- The notions of *precariousness* and *vulnerability* ;
- The history of *precariousness in Portugal or France*;
- The dynamics of *integration* and the importance of *social support* ;
- The central role of *self-esteem* ;
- The diversity of *coping* strategies ;
- The influence of *beliefs, values* and *projects* on the orientation of behaviour.

In the *second, empirical, part*, we will analyse the results of a survey undertaken with 450 people consulted in the region of Toulouse (France) and Coimbra (Portugal), in a precarious situation or not. We start from the hypothesis that *the way of living precariousness depends on the cultural context*. But it also depends on multiple social positions: for example those related to gender, conjugality (married or not), parenthood (with or without children), beliefs and convictions, reference values, etc.

In particular, we will analyse the effect of precariousness, in relation to the various variables mentioned, on subjective representations of social integration, on the level of self-esteem and on subjective health evaluation, on the intensity of stress, on the strategies adopted to cope with stress (coping) and on the appreciation of values.

It should be noted that this research is in fact only a pre-investigation of a more in-depth research currently underway in the framework of the international activities of the *European Centre for Investigation (Research) on Conduct and Institutions (Ceici)*.

Comments on the person in difficult situations

The past and recent history of humanity is full of extreme situations (wars, natural disasters, etc.) in which people suffer or die, cities are destroyed, regions ravaged, countries in mourning. But the same history also shows us how groups and individuals are able, through solidarity, control and *DIY creativity*, not only to survive, but also to cope with the most dramatic and stressful events, to find in themselves the strength to get back on their feet and to know how to manage the opportunities that the most devastated situations still offer.

These laudable behaviours can of course be contrasted with reprehensible attitudes based on hatred and contempt for others, moral insensitivity and the denial of social or civic values without which community life becomes unbearable.

So go men, charged with the best and the worst or guided by them; so go also the institutions they set up, thanks to which social life takes shape and colour, but which can also, if we are not careful, reduce citizens to the rank of mechanics or social puppets, for the benefit of a few.

Faced with these heart-rending paradoxes of human behaviour, philosophies, religions and politics have sought to provide answers throughout history. But today, cultural references are themselves mired in the trap of sectarianism in beliefs and practices, in the spiral of identity-

based revenge, which in turn stems from feelings of humiliation and powerlessness and from the denial of individual or collective dignity.

This book does not aim to deal with these problems in all their global complexity. But to speak of socio-economic insecurity and its consequences on representations and individual behaviour, especially if these consequences are negative for the development of people throughout their lives (fragility and vulnerability), is not necessarily to analyse the very origin of this insecurity in relation to the uncertainties of the labour market, the strategies of employers at all levels (international, national, local) in relation to financial pressures and organisational and technical needs, which are themselves perceived differently depending on the observer's position in the industrial and commercial organisation chart or in the social and cultural hierarchies?

It is also true that individuals and groups experiencing the same events may give them different meanings and thus react to them differently. This meaning may be the direct result of the individual's history, the conscious product of values that the person has been able to appropriate or reconstruct. It can also come from the way in which the subject has been able to cope with the difficulties of daily life, since it is true that difficulties, accumulating day by day, can have consequences as negative as, and sometimes more so than, the dramas generally perceived as major (the loss of a loved one, the loss of freedom, the loss of a job, divorce, etc.).

But *making sense of life events* also means becoming aware of yourself, your *potential* (what we are capable of doing, saying, overcoming, enduring, challenging, etc.) but also your *limits* (what depends on us and what no longer depends on us, what depends on others or the context). It is therefore also about taking into account the help we can expect and receive from other people, from the groups we belong to and from social organisations.

This quest for meaning is associated with several other quests, which are particularly decisive for the development of the person throughout his or her life:

- the search for *a personal identity*, based on autonomy and responsibility, implying the need for *continuity*, minimal internal *coherence* and *positivity* (*self-esteem*, *sense of personal worth*);
- the quest for *social recognition* based on the inalienable rights of every individual to be *considered as a person*: dignity, respect for private life, the right to work, recognition of services rendered, trust granted, etc. Normative references linked to ethics and law are thus introduced. These references vary in importance depending on the culture, the socio-economic environment and the individual. But the latter are also subject to pressures that tend to limit their rights: pressure to *conform*, to *participate through insertion and integration*, to *identify with belonging* (family, national, religious, professional pride), to express positive feelings towards others (attachment, friendship, love, recognition in return, etc.).

But these processes at work since childhood tend to become more complex in adulthood. "If the child's identity and desire are strongly linked to the history of successive identifications, the adult's identity is undoubtedly much more dependent on the social means at his disposal to support his difference in conflicts and, by the same token, to get out of identifications. The author of this hypothesis, in his work on *Identity at Work* (Sainsaulieu, 1977, 332), ¹refers to the importance of the work situation in the construction but also in the endangerment of the constructed identity. At a time when precariousness was not yet the order of the day, he already noted the importance of the social context in the emergence of the identity crisis: 'Let us only note how much clinicians are led to reflect on the vulnerability of individual identity to the manipulations that are exercised on the subject's social environment. The loss of identity ... would be a kind of logical response of the subject to a situation of social powerlessness. Unable to defend himself against pressures that

¹ Renaud Sainsaulieu, a sociologist who recently passed away, contributed a great deal to the understanding of the interaction processes between personality and work behaviours in companies. We would like to pay tribute to him here, in particular by mentioning his thesis work: *L'identité au travail (Identity at work)*, published in 1977 but reedited several times since then, which has become a "reference" in terms of work and organisational psychology.

are too strong, the subject would choose to escape from himself, to leave his identity to flee an untenable situation' (*op.cit*, 314).

It should be noted that in the 1970s and 1980s, it was mainly a question of showing that personal identity needed to be supported by professional identity, but that the latter could only develop on the condition that it was positively associated with the relationship of power (for example in the company). Access to identity would require the management of conflicts linked to the non-recognition of the subject by others in interpersonal relations (intra or interprofessional in particular) and to his or her inability to situate himself or herself in a dynamic of *empowerment* (emergence of the power of the person to be, to say, to do, access to autonomy, to responsibility in their relations with social power, etc.)

Power and empowerment in everyday life

According to Talcott Parsons (1951, 1966), power is not an object; it is one of the media of interpersonal exchange (more or less binding), the one associated with the *pursuit of goals*. The other media, used in inter-human relations, are: money (associated with economic exchanges), influence (associated with exchanges by persuasion to favour integrative assimilation), and commitment (associated with exchanges based on cultural potential).

The notion of psychological empowerment (Tap and Oubrayrie-Roussel, 2003), used in the context of management, is often defined by the fact of *empowering* a person to accomplish a given task. This empowerment would allow the person to develop a sense of personal value, to help him or her master the causes of his or her powerlessness or weakness, to encourage dynamism through action, and to mobilise intrinsic factors, in particular his or her motivation to work.

But empowerment also refers to the spontaneous tendency of people to experience control over themselves and situations, a sense of self-worth and self-release.

Thus, empowerment implies two ways of referring to access to power. The first is simply equated with *giving power to someone*. The second implies the assumption that *power is not given but is gained*, through conflict, through power relations. In this case, it is not just an empowerment of the subject by leaders or experts. The subject tends to *appropriate the means of power*, based on his or her own motivations, and to adopt attitudes and behaviours likely to facilitate not only the accomplishment of the task, but also *a tension of self-realisation through the actualisation of a project*. These two definitions, one more external, the other more internal, are both admissible on condition that their inter-structuring or opposition is specified.

According to some authors (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990 and Spreitzer, 1995, cited by Tap and Oubrayrie-Roussel, 2003), psychological empowerment is facilitated by four feelings:

1. a sense of *meaning*, involving a degree of agreement between personal beliefs and values on the one hand, and professional behaviours and goals on the other;
2. the feeling of *self-efficacy* (or competence), involving the belief, more or less realistic, in the possession of the skills and abilities necessary to carry out a job or to correctly complete a task (cf. Bandura, 1982 and his notion of self-efficacy);
3. an ingrained sense of *self-determination*, associated with the belief that the individual has the necessary autonomy or sufficient control over the factors that positively affect his or her work performance; and
4. the *feeling of being able to personally influence the working environment*, implying a continuous control over the totality of the work and its results.

To these four feelings, one could add *confidence* and *self-esteem*, as also proposed by Whetten et al.

Legal capacity and incapacity

As we can see, empowerment has been studied mainly in the context of work situations, but it seems possible to broaden its use. In legal terms, empowerment can be associated with the

capacity to enjoy (the ability to have rights that one can enjoy) and the *capacity to exercise* (the ability to exercise alone and by oneself the various rights one can have).

But it seems to us that it is useful to associate empowerment with its opposite: alienation causing feelings of powerlessness and humiliation, the repression of being and acting, the limitation of oneself through deprivation (of freedom in particular), through loss and disability. Lawyers refer to the notion of *legal incapacity*, of which three levels can be specified, gradually approaching empowerment:

1. *Representation/guardianship* is used for persons who are incapacitated, deprived of the exercise of their rights and unable to manage them themselves. A third person acts in their place as guardian, this "substitute" person manages their situation. It should be noted, however, that in legal terms *representation - guardianship* - does not apply to "essentially personal" decisions (marriage or employment contracts, making a will, divorce);

2. *Assistance/accompaniment* is a more flexible process that allows the person to act on their own provided that a "capable" person is present at the time of the act to help them;

3. *Authorisation* differs from assistance; it is the last level of legal incapacity before the emergence of empowerment. Authorisation depends on the other. It implies prior assent to act alone, without assistance (e.g. emancipated minors), i.e. not necessarily involving the continued presence of a guardian. The fact of having to ask for authorisation can however be badly experienced, and perceived as humiliating, proof of the emergence of the need for autonomy and the desire to take responsibility. The power here is dissymmetrical, external, it must be sought in order to be able to do, say, live... But it will become internal: it will also have to be solicited in terms of "authorising oneself to".

Authorisation is in a way the obligatory passage in *the dynamics of power shifts*, which also involves three successive or parallel procedures. We see these procedures implemented in any social organisation (companies, public services, families, etc.).

The Shift of Power.

The three procedures progressively specify how the transition to empowerment and responsibility takes place. They are: *delegation, transmission, redistribution of power*.

4. Through *delegation*, the person is invested with *the power* to represent another, in a focused and temporary way. The power here is dissymmetrical, it is external and imposes on the subject a mediation function, implying a temporary transfer of power (or of power). The delegation of power resides in the fact that the subject can be officially or unofficially invested by his superiors with a responsibility that usually falls to them. This "delegation" can be experienced in different ways (pride or feeling of exploitation, or feeling of being of service). This procedure implies the assumption of confidence in the person's ability to manage the corresponding responsibility. But this capacity may be ad hoc and revisable, as it is not perceived as sufficiently stable or general to be taken into account outside ad hoc and/or urgent situations.

5. In *the transmission of power*, it can be perceived as "something to be passed on" (passing the baton, succeeding...), as a reified object. There is often a difficulty in transferring power, as the successor may also be perceived as insufficiently competent or capable. Transmission has a replacement function involving a definitive transfer of power. The transmitter permanently discharges a power associated with a type of activity, a function, a status, etc.

6. *The redistribution of power* is often mentioned in conflict situations where those in charge are challenged. The grassroots demand that responsibilities be reviewed and redistributed in a more logical or egalitarian way.

This demand refers to an attempt to move from a vertical relationship (hierarchy/dependence) to a horizontal relationship (network/cooperation). It implies the contestation of the origin of power.

Conflict management involves *negotiation* requiring a redistribution of responsibilities and benefits. Negotiation implies the extension and displacement of the power space.

Psychological processes.

Empowerment involves psychological processes through which the person acquires the ability to empower him or herself. Three processes are thus involved in the construction and personal management of power: empowerment, appropriation of power and potentiation.

7. *Empowerment* is the process by which the person acquires skills and recognition by others to act. The subject becomes a peer in his own right but is empowered by an external body that recognises the acquisition of skills. This refers to the accreditation by others of being able to act and the recognition of qualification to act. Empowerment intervenes in the transaction to facilitate the acquisition of an aptitude which will itself be collectively recognised.

The assumption is that the subject's point of view is respected by superiors who recognise his or her ability to *make good use of resources* and to *manage limitations*. But the term *empowerment* means firstly building one's own skills, abilities, competences and secondly, being socially recognised as possessing these same skills. The adolescent needs this recognition, if he/she perceives it as part of a transactional dynamic. They will contest it if it occurs in a unilateral power-limiting relationship (see dimensions 1-3). Empowerment involves support (initiatory, professional and personal) to enable the novice to become an expert, to be a resource person in turn and to increase his autonomy.

8. The notion of *empowerment* is based on a constructive view of competences. It implies that the person considers the learning of competences as an integral part of his/her own personal identity.

The subject, beyond the attributive claims of power, will tend to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the situation to build, from various appropriations, his own strategies and tactics. The appropriation of power is a way of accounting for both the dynamics of the subject in a position of socialisation (internalisation of an external power), but it is also a way of analysing the way in which the subject transforms into his or her own capacity, what was other, external.

9. *Potentialisation.*

Potentialisation involves the previous process but goes beyond it. Appropriation accounts for the way in which competences are constructed and thereby promotes empowerment, responsibility and decision making. But the locus of decision making shifts to the internal level: modalities of decision making, orientation and negotiation, control and self-efficacy, allowing the activation of the capacity to authorise, to express oneself, to criticise, to move the project from intention to realisation. Skills become an active potential. It is from the resources thus 'called upon' that the subject decides, orients himself, negotiates, achieves, but in a mode that is no longer that of counter-dependence. In order to move from intention to realisation, the subject is led to manage his or her potentialised resources.

Thus, the potentialisation of competences implies the power to do and to be. Competences refer to skills and knowledge that the person builds up in the course of his or her development. In this respect, they are not only energetic, they are also cognitive instruments, attitudes, experiences (happy or unhappy) serving as reference points, etc. The capitalisation of competences allows the subject to increase his or her personal dispositions, thus enabling him or her to be more mobile or more flexible in his or her psychosocial adaptation. The subject is led to update and manage his or her skills and even to use hidden resources in difficult situations that were previously unknown. His or her ability to bounce back (*resilience*) and to *endure in* the face of difficulties is therefore linked to this potentialisation of skills as resources available at any time. But it also

depends on the individual's ability to make sense of his or her social, family, school or work experiences and to link them together over the course of his or her life.

These procedures and processes somehow define the rights and duties related to the development and social integration of the person, taking into account the differences but refusing to discriminate.

In this transactional theory of power, all the processes mentioned are at work simultaneously or successively according to the negotiation modalities. This implies that power is both linked to the active characteristics of the protagonists, but it is also situated in the in-between of relationships, interactions, mediation and transaction. Power is also managed in a temporal horizon (anchoring, crises, taking and losing, transition, revival, revolt). If the person is engaged in a period of transition, they will have to learn to manage change, to experiment with "new ways of doing and being". They will experience instability, uncertainty about the positivity and power of their actions over time. Managing the transition therefore implies a renegotiation of the relationship with time and presupposes a sufficient degree of anticipation to avoid the crisis and ensure a "continuity of self". The subject may then have to reorganise his or her behaviour to a greater or lesser extent, or even recompose his or her way of life, particularly in so-called extreme situations (illness, bereavement, precariousness). This anticipation is therefore based on the mobilisation of resources (internal and external) available to the subject to facilitate the implementation of compensatory strategies necessary for adaptation.

Customisation strategies

Personalisation is *"the process by which the individual, from childhood onwards, not only participates in the construction of his or her own personality, in the complex interplay of multiple determinations, but is able, throughout his or her life, to question what has been made of him or*

her, thanks to his or her acquired capacities for discrimination, understanding and autonomy"².

Personalisation does not stop at adolescence. It is, in the course of a person's life history, the set of strategies that he or she puts in place to survive, to promote himself or herself socially, to behave as a "person", and thus to build an itinerary that bears his or her mark, in his or her own eyes and in the eyes of others.

Personalisation is the cooperative articulation of strategic quests involving the questioning of established styles and the revival of a realising tension. These quests are multiple: quest for power and influence, quest for control and autonomy, quest and hierarchisation of values, quest for meaning and significance.

To introduce this notion is, in a way, to criticize the classical conceptions of personality which are based on the static accumulation of traits, factors or types. It implies, on the contrary, a dynamic conception of the person, a strategic conception. Any *strategy* is at once cognitive, affective, conative and social. It is organised in a *finalised internal logic*, but it also presupposes an *investment energy* involved in the decision-making dynamic, and the implementation *and staging* of objectives, in *realising behaviour*. These strategies are always, to some degree, associated with real or symbolic relations with other actors.

Personalisation strategies would, in our view, consist of managing the present situation (coping strategies), asserting or defending one's identity, both present and past (identity strategies), seeking recognition of a social position (integration strategies, positioning strategies and social commitments) and orienting oneself towards a future, involving project strategies.

Four groups of strategies can be proposed:

- *Identity strategies* are associated with a past to be defended, and through it with a continuity to be maintained. The individual will construct his or her identity by integrating change into continuity. The function of identity strategies is to act on self-definition, to maintain, preserve or

² Malewska-Peyre, H., & Tap, P. (1991) *La socialisation de l'enfance à l'adolescence*, Paris, PUF

increase the degree of self-worth, to assume an "internal logic" through which the subject legitimises, invests and controls. These strategies are the result of an individual and/or collective construction which is expressed in daily adaptation according to the variations and challenges of situations and according to the aims and resources of the subjects (Camillieri et al. , 1990, 49). They are based on the maintenance of a *continuity of self in time*, through the defence of the subject's identity, in what he or she has been (past), in what he or she is (present) and in what he or she wants to be (future), as it is true that identity is linked to the fact of wanting to 'be the same', 'remain oneself', at the same time as 'becoming oneself'. We can call "identization" (Tap, 1979) the paradoxical dynamic by which any person tends to manage simultaneously and in a more or less well articulated or contradictory way, the three following processes:

- * *identity anchoring* (being the same): maintaining and defending, by permanence or at least by continuity, what attaches you to your *roots*, *whatever* the nature of these attachments and roots, (*conservative temporal identities*);

- * *identity affirmation and enhancement* (being oneself): maintaining and defending what we have become ourselves today. This image of the *current self* has of course been constructed from multiple previous identifications, from what has been made of you (your culture, your family, etc.). But the current self has taken on 'shape' (coherence of subjective representations), 'colour' (subjective affects, feelings of self-worth, self-esteem) and 'movement' (dynamics of behaviour); (*structural identities*);

- * *the aspiration to personal change* (becoming oneself) based on the assumption that we are unsatisfied beings, always in search of completeness and surpassing ourselves, constantly re-launched (*innovative temporal identities*).

In fact, these three processes are more or less illusory and idealistic in nature, but they occur to varying degrees throughout life. *Identization* thus appears to be the process that allows the person to give meaning to his or her life, either by retrospectively constructing a linear past in which any

rupture would be somehow reduced by justifying explanations, or by giving absolute priority to the present time, with identity then merging with each of the successive moments whose emotionally coloured variety would be included in a fused but fleeting unity, like a firework.

Identization can therefore also be defined as the process by which the subject (or the group) tends to manage the paradox between the continuity of his or her being (identity) and the observation or the need for self-transformation, according to the meaning given to situations, social behaviours, projects and adaptive processes (stress management). Identization allows the subject to constantly "reassure" himself, to make a changing self-image, an unstable social position, variable projects and fleeting adaptive reactions invariant, in appearance or in fact. The identization implies the implementation of *identity strategies* thanks to which the person builds himself in the action (in a satisfaction-satisfaction relationship, feeling of personal value articulating the being and the becoming, the being in becoming) through multiple defences and relaunchings;

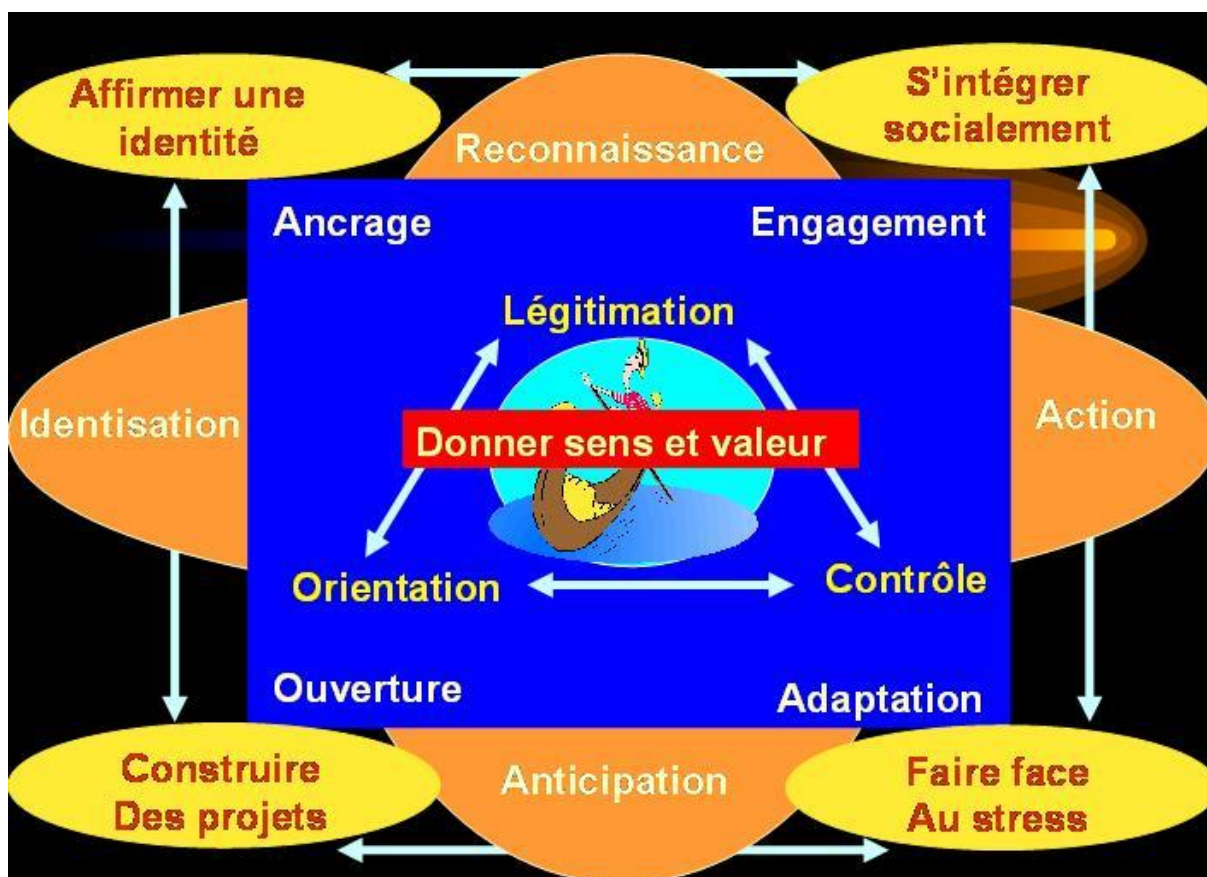
- *Social integration and positioning strategies* consist of finding or inventing a solution to resolve a crisis or conflict, by modifying the relationship of the roles played and by engaging in new networks. The subject's commitment and involvement in relation to others or in the situation experienced and felt to be important, is necessary to enable him/her to take a position, to "pose" as a singular subject, with a role to play and to hold, in order to assert him/herself, to choose, to evaluate and to take a place among others. The adolescent is similar to his or her own, but he or she differentiates himself or herself from them by opposing them in order to establish himself or herself as a person (Wallon, 1941).

- *Coping strategies* allow the subject to control or attempt to control something in the present situation, together with the stress it causes, to be able to act and/or adjust to a new situation and to defend against any hold or subjugation. Coping is a stabilising factor that allows the subject to maintain psychosocial adaptation during periods of stress. The subject does not passively undergo

the situation but constantly tries to modify his or her environment, seeking conditions compatible between his or her desires and the possibilities of the situation.

In his coping responses, the subject takes into account his past experience, his learning, his skills, the memory of his failures and successes, his capacity for self-evaluation and his ability to respond to demand. He may thus be led to adopt four types of strategies when faced with a difficult situation: control, social support, withdrawal and refusal strategies (Esparbès-Pistre, Sordes-Ader and Tap, 1996). To face the situation, to adapt to it, the subject mobilises all his personal resources, his potentialities. However, mobilisation may not be sufficient. The subject will then have to develop an ability to anticipate and foresee events are skills that will enable him/her to act and react adequately to the new situation.

What leads the subject to articulate these various strategies is the *meaning he or she gives to the situation*, to the context in which he or she acts, to the relationship between his or her own history and aspirations. This meaning is not reduced to the elements of understanding and significance. It includes the *way in which the subject applies his hierarchy of values to the necessities of action*, but also the way in which he eventually transforms this hierarchy, according to the effects of the adaptation on his own evolution.



- *Project strategies* enable people to defend their projects, to get out of a problematic situation, to find a gap, an opening, a loophole, to give meaning to a route, to manage conflicts by anticipating or hoping for change through real or imaginary projects, or through dreams. They require the subject to evaluate his or her capacities and skills in relation to the situation and the obstacles to be overcome. Their implementation is based on the legitimisation of one's aspirations, on the justification of the means and possible routes to achieve the goals and objectives set, in articulation with individual and also collective projects (Tap and Oubrayrie, 1993, 1999).

These project strategies are based on a representation of the lived situation and the desire to reorganise and transform it in order to prepare for the future.

Thus, the personalisation strategies mentioned are all means of self-defence or self-promotion that enable the subject to personalise or even re-personalise himself through the *quest for power* (empowerment, mastery of the environment and of himself), the *quest for meaning and*

significance, the *quest for autonomy* (building a personal space and finding one's own limits) and the *quest for self-realisation* (realising in order to realise oneself). We assume that the actualisation of these personalisation strategies is more specifically embedded in a transactional dynamic and in power relations between family, educational, 'economic' and professional actors, within a civic and cultural framework.

The interstructuring of people and institutions

The analysis of personalisation strategies only takes on its true meaning in the *interstructuration* between, on the one hand, subjects and, on the other hand, socio-cultural contexts, situations and spaces. Now, this notion of interstructuration implies that we analyse how structures (of subjects and institutions) develop, interact, conflict, in the time of an era, of a life, of a negotiation, of a conduct. (Baubion, Malrieu and Tap, 1987)

Let us take the example of adult continuing education, in relation to the motivation of adults to enrol. Three structural or temporal processes can be mentioned:

1. The recovery

Why do adults, long after their initial training, engage in training (either self-taught or in continuing education)? The first arguments are based on necessity (e.g. unemployment), on their desire for change or on their need for professional and/or social advancement.

But for a certain number of them, it is because a break-up, a conflict, a crisis, both intrapersonal and interpersonal, forces them to develop a new self-project, a new way of orienting themselves. After a certain period of time, they may start training again, to find themselves, to recover after a phase of uncertainty or blockage, to redefine themselves, to reframe their identity through movement and passion, the quest for new knowledge and new skills. Self-training is therefore a personal strategy for getting out of an alienating context, an unbalanced relationship, a life that is too monotonous or automatic and has lost its meaning, etc.

2. *Transition and change*

The desire to enter a training course often occurs in phases of *transition or change*. You know what you are leaving, but you are committing yourself to an uncertain time, when you have lost some of your confidence in yourself or in others.

Transition occurs when, at some point in life, a person has gaps, difficulties in defining positions, beliefs and goals. They know what they have been, what they want to become, but in the in-between time they do not know how to defend what they have acquired, while at the same time managing the means to acquire something new.

3. *Control*

Organising involves coordination and control: control of the situation, control of time (articulating your past and aspirations in a present time), control of self. Our identity is necessarily multiple. We are many and yet action, together with the gaze of others and our own desire for coherence, forces us to limit our 'dispersion', to fight against opacity, masking, the primacy of *appearances* over *being*. But control is not limited to the axiological aspects of conduct. The person must also control his or her emotions and impulses, coordinate ideas, actions and words.

Personal strategies in conflict situations

Within the dynamics of *social inclusion and marginality*, four important strategies can also be described³.

- The first could be called an *anchoring strategy* (or a "Pantagruel" strategy) based on maintaining the territory of origin and capitalising on it, making it fruitful. The person "perseveres in his or her being", puts him or herself in a position of "prolonged nesting", of settling into habits out of a need for security;

³ These four strategies, presented in a metaphorical way, were proposed by P. Tap and M. C. Llorca.

- The second would be the *mobilisation strategy* (or "Jason" strategy) based on the obsession with a goal that must be achieved at all costs, a polarised life project of sorts.
- The third would be the *strategy of transition* (or Penelope or Moses, as the case may be, with the need to specify their differences! But Ulysses will return, whereas Moses will not be able to reach the Promised Land at the same time as his people!). The transition is symbolically associated with the inevitable death (of the other or of oneself)⁴, but in fact, it pushes one to live again, to resist, to move forward, despite the obstacles to come.
- Finally, the fourth *strategy* would be the *wandering or nomadic* (or Ulysses) *strategy* where the person is supposed to be 'tossed about' by events (like Ulysses tossed about on the sea), by social, political, professional and biological determinisms, but who nevertheless constructs an itinerary (from island to island) involving desires, decisions and adaptive skills (Ulysses is the symbol of this capacity, even if he is apparently the plaything of conflicts between the gods, a way of evoking his indecisiveness, his inner resistance to return)⁵.

From *identity at work* to identity in the "workless" or "precarious work".

The publication of Sainsaulieu's book on "*Identity at work*" in 1977 had a significant effect on the representation of the strategies used by people, whether workers, technicians or managers, in their behaviour at work. She showed how the conditions and nature of work could facilitate or hinder the emergence of stable and positive professional identities. But it also showed how much the attitude and strategies developed in a work situation can also depend on life conditions and personal attitudes outside of work (leisure, family life, social commitments, etc.).

⁴ The term "transition" comes from the Latin "transire" which means to pass from life to death. The first "transition" was therefore associated with the passage from the here to the hereafter: a supposed victory against the radical rupture of death and the existence of a new life. Any transition today implies the hypothesis of an effort to avoid the rupture, a passage from life to life, as it were.

⁵ According to the Greeks, humans were able to use *metis*, cunning, practical efficiency. And the most cunning of them all was Ulysses, who was just as multifaceted as the *half-breed* itself! (Vignaux, G. 2003 La ruse, intelligence pratique in *Sciences Humaines*,137,32-35)

Boutinet (2000), in historical terms, discussed this contribution: "This study is intended to be a contribution to an understanding of man at work through the professional identity he constructs for himself; one may wonder whether this contribution by Sainsaulieu, with the slow disorganisation of work beginning to emerge at that time, does not manifest *a contrario* a point of no return, that which sees the profession cease to be a structuring reference of the first rank; one could then interpret Sainsaulieu's approach by perceiving in it the opposite of what it wants to manifest to us explicitly: Rather than looking for appropriate ways to make professional identities more consistent within organisations, it is a question of taking note of the end of professional identities in a post-industrial culture and therefore of the inevitable retreat to personal identities and their fragility: everyone is eager for recognition but now knows that it is no longer primarily through work, at least the work bequeathed to us by industrial society, that this recognition can be negotiated. But Sainsaulieu had already posed this problem in 1980: "Considerable ruptures are disrupting acquired statuses, roles that have been played for a long time, models of behaviour and values that have progressively become part of our customs; the collective discomfort of supervisors, more or less retired managers, young people without a future, dequalified professionals and technicians or robotic employees reflects the importance of these ruptures; not the least of which is certainly the threat of unemployment that comes as a "reward" for years of good and loyal service. *Old professional identities are being shattered by new systemic realities*. Can work remain the dominant universe of reference if it can no longer present itself as the main place where necessities and capacities meet? At present, identity crises no longer seem to be linked so much to particular changes in the internal structures of companies as to a kind of considerable gap between the man at work and the man in the surrounding society. For a few individuals, coherence seems to have been achieved, for the majority there is disillusionment, rupture and a profound gap between the promises of the school, the family, the leaders and the institutions which state the values of the future and the

reality of the initiatives, implications and perspectives of work"⁶. But Sainsaulieu refuses to confine himself to a state of affairs and to lock himself into a pessimistic position. He adopts a voluntarist stance on lifelong learning and cultural revival, which no longer only concern professional identities but the identity of the person outside of work or without work, a person who is certainly weakened but still in search of meaning, autonomy, recognition and freedom. It is true that this quest can be blocked, alienated, made impossible by external constraints and by internal feelings of depreciation and guilt, partly linked to the feeling of not being accepted by others and by institutions.

Twenty years on, we can see how socio-economic insecurity, whether or not associated with unemployment, tends to raise the question of the sources of personal valorisation or devalorisation, the effects of identity affirmation or crisis, and the new conditions, or difficulties, of access to social recognition.

The authors of this book have set out to answer these questions, in historical and theoretical terms, but also through the concrete analysis of the responses of more than 450 people interviewed in the Toulouse (France) and Coimbra (Portugal) regions. This survey, undertaken by the CEICI (European Centre for Investigation of Behaviour and Institutions, Bissaya Barreto University), will serve as a pre-investigation for broader European comparative research.

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⁶ Sainsaulieu, R. (1980) L'identité et les relations de travail in P. Tap (ed.) *Identités collectives et changements sociaux*. Toulouse, Privat, 275-286.

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