

# 6

## The Education to Work Transition

This chapter discusses a number of perspectives on the transition to work, including a review of the increasingly important notion of self-employment. It begins by outlining recent discussions around the notion of career. It then reviews a selection of dominant theories relating to career decision-making and development, using these to improve understanding of transition from education to work in tourism and hospitality. It discusses attitudes towards work among youth as well as early work and placement experiences and how these facilitate or hinder the transition into tourism employment. The chapter closes by looking at the role of SMEs and graduate entrepreneurship as relatively unexplored but important destinations for graduate (self) employment.

### The importance of a successful transition

The education to work transition, sometimes casually referred to as ‘from learning to earning’, constitutes a major step for young individuals on their journey into adulthood. Successfully taking this step used to be taken for granted for the majority of young people. Today however, and not just because of the recent economic turmoil, this step provides a challenging task for many. In what Bendit and Miranda (2015:183), with reference to Argentina, call ‘post-modern contexts’, that is economic modernisation processes, labour market restructuring and the downscaling of social policies, the challenges relating to the transition to adulthood is an issue affecting many modern economies. The transition into work is regarded as critical by policy makers in addressing

a wider set of problems confronting young people (Bynner, 2001). Because of the importance of work in addressing a range of social problems, facilitating successful transitions into employment is a policy priority.

Difficulties in the transition into work affect young people at all levels, not just those with low educational attainment. In the UK in 2012, for example, one in five new graduates, i.e. those who graduated within two years, available for work in the UK were unemployed (ONS, 2012). Sharma (2014) with reference to East Asian economies highlights rising levels of graduate unemployment across a number of nations, from South Korea, to Singapore and China. The problem is not confined to advanced economies. In Nigeria it is estimated that graduates of tertiary education institutions make up about 20% of youth unemployment and often remain unemployed for upward of five years after graduation (Akande, 2014).

## **The meaning of 'career'**

'Perhaps the primary issue in the study of career is, what we do mean by career?' This question, as posed by Herr (1990:1), signals that the study of careers is anything but uncontested. Some commentators, including researchers in tourism and hospitality, have tried to provide relatively value-free, 'factual' definitions of career. Thus Riley and Ladkin (1994) suggest that, at its simplest, a career can be regarded as a series of jobs arranged in a sequence over time. Based on this definition, most people who work will have a career, and it does not matter what kind of jobs they are, how many jobs the individual has held, how long they were held for, or whether progress in terms of skills, salary and prestige played a part. In comparison to what Collin (1998) regards as the most frequently cited definition of career: 'a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered, predictable sequence' (Wilensky, 1960:554) we can see Riley and Ladkin's (1994) attempts at democratising the concept of career, with a move from the view that only certain people have careers (Collin, 2001), i.e. those with certain types of jobs, who demonstrate progression along a predetermined career path. Riley and Ladkin's (1994) neutral perspective is mirrored by Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989:8) who define career as 'the evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time' whereby it is recognised that as an experience, careers are inherently subjective. The same sequence of identical jobs may mean progress to one person and failure to another. It is simply not possible to provide a meaningful definition of career without straying into the realm of values. It is worthwhile

in this regard to focus in more depth on Collin's (2001) work because one of the primary concerns in relation to youth employment and the youth labour market relates to the extent to which graduates find jobs or whether they find careers. Not only is this then a question of 'to be in employment or not to be in employment', but 'to have a career or not to have a career'.

Returning to Riley and Ladkin's (1994) definition of career, it reflects certain assumptions about the human condition in post-modernity. A traditional notion of career may include the idea of progress, linearity, focus and masculinity (Collin, 2001). An analogy is made here by Collin (2001) to the literary notion of the Homeric epic with its singularity of focus and unified world view, in contrast to the modern notion of career, open to numerous interpretations and therefore likened to a novel. Based on Collin's (2001) distinction, the traditional idea of having a career would not apply to many young people employed in tourism, and certainly not to those moving in and out of the sector in jobs where there is limited or no progression.

A change in the meaning of career in modern societies from continuous employment in one organization, underpinned by the image of a ladder (Sennett, 1998), or corporate pyramid (Hall, 1996) and by the individual's subordination to the needs of the organization (Whyte, 1956) is well documented, most notably in concepts such as the 'boundaryless career' (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) or the 'protean career' (Hall, 1996). For Hall, the careers of the 21st Century will be driven by the person, not by the organization, and will furthermore require reinvention from time to time. Hall presents a convincing case that a changing organisational environment leaves the individual with a greater need to take control of their career development:

The new career contract is not a pact with the organization; it is an agreement with one's self and one's work. (Hall, 1996:10)

This was in fact also reflected in a UK study of business leaders' attitudes towards graduate employment, where it was argued that graduates were more interested in what the organization could do for them, rather than what they could do for the organization (News UK, 2013).

Littleton, Arthur and Rousseau's (2000:101) discussion around the future of the boundaryless career makes the same point:

The new environment suggests a shift from pre-ordained and linear development to perpetually changing career paths and possibilities.

Where Hall (1996) nonetheless recognises that much writing on these new careers is overdone, something that appears to be accepted also by Littleton *et al.* (2000:101) in that many individuals 'never really played by the traditional