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## The Relative Success of Individual Job-Seeking Practices: Young University Graduates in Spain, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom

Selene Camargo Correa

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2015

Selene Camargo Correa

THE RELATIVE SUCCESS OF INDIVIDUAL JOB-SEEKING PRACTICES

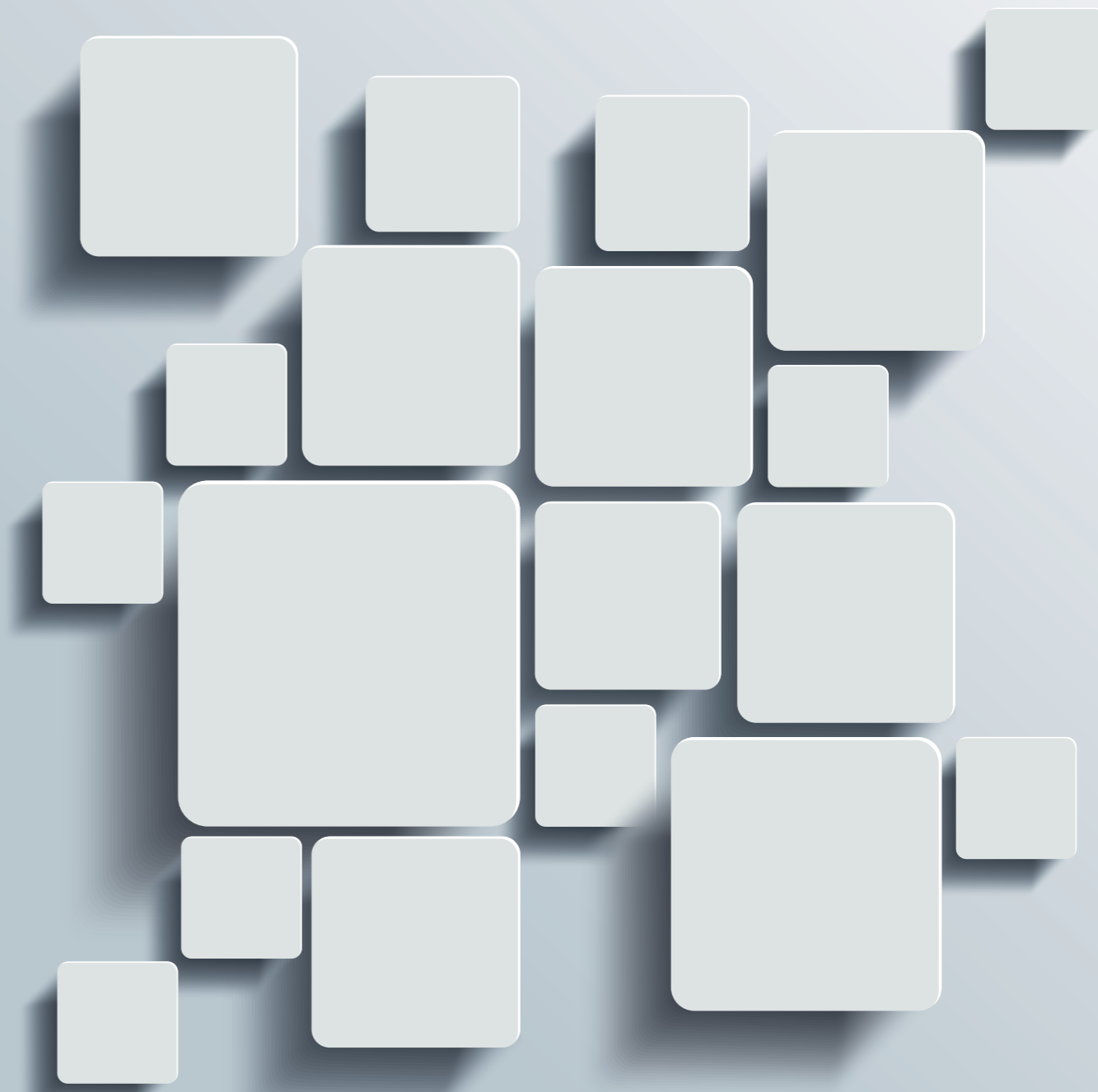


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THE RELATIVE SUCCESS OF INDIVIDUAL JOB-SEEKING PRACTICES
Young university graduates in Spain, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom

Doctoral Dissertation
Selene Camargo Correa



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Prof. Marisol García



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**UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA**

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DEPARTAMENTO DE TEORIA SOCIOLOGICA, FILOSOFIA DEL DERECHO Y  
METODOLOGIA DE LA INVESTIGACION SOCIAL

Doctoral Dissertation:

**The Relative Success of Individual Job-Seeking Practices: Young  
University Graduates in Spain, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom**

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European PhD in Socio-Economic and Statistical Studies  
University of Barcelona

Advisor: Prof. Marisol García

Barcelona, September 2015



*To my parents*



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## Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

«Since the history of the individual is never anything other than a certain specification of the collective history of his group or class, each individual system of dispositions may be seen as structural variant of all the other group or class habitus, expressing the difference between trajectories and positions inside or outside the class» (Bourdieu 1977:86).

In 2010, the New York Times drew attention to the Millennials, the generation born after 1982, in an article entitled ‘The Why-Worry Generation’ (Warner 2010). Since then, Millennials have inspired countless books and research projects. Among the traits that distinguish them: they grew up with resources and high expectations; they matched and even surpassed their parents’ educational achievement levels, as they benefited from the worldwide expansion of higher education, and they witnessed the transition to the so-called knowledge-based economy and the digital revolution. Millennials grew up in a world that promised them dream jobs and a rapid career progression (see Boxes 1 to 4). In fact, Millennials were called «the next great generation» (Howe and Strauss 2000).

The knowledge economy has marked the lives of Millennials in both positive and negative ways. The increasing productive relevance of knowledge, and especially the diffusion of new technologies of communication and information, has introduced new forms of competition for business and jobs. These developments define the opportunities and challenges faced by today’s university graduates (e.g. Gibbons et al. 1994). As Allen and Van der Velden point out, three major trends affect the demands that twenty-first century workers face in the new context: 1) increasing emphasis on education and training, 2) increasing volatility of labor market processes, and 3) increasing internationalisation and globalization (2011:ix). The knowledge society demands from higher education graduates much more than the mere possession of the right academic credentials.

In this introduction, I describe labor market conditions in the knowledge economy. Then, I discuss the effects that the recent economic crisis has had on graduate employment and on the job search. The crisis has shattered the dreams of success with which Millennials grew up. Given the great uncertainty and insecurity surrounding the contemporary labor market, figuring out what is the best job search strategy has become paramount for graduates keen on avoiding the scarring effects of an unemployment spell in the early stages of their professional careers. Finally, I outline the questions that organize this dissertation as well as the dissertation's overview.

### **1.1. University graduates and the requirements of the knowledge economy**

The rise of information and communication technologies has promoted the emergence of new occupations and tasks, just as it leads to a radical transformation in the social organization of work<sup>1</sup>. National and international agencies implicitly assume that the changes are uniform across sectors and occupations and promote the acquisition of key competences that meet the new demands: communication in foreign languages, digital and mathematical competences, and basic competences in science and technology (European Commission 2006; OECD 1997, 2000)<sup>2</sup>. Compared to low-skilled workers, university graduates are theoretically well-equipped for the requirements of the knowledge economy: they have a diploma in higher education that embodies the new skills and they often master two or more foreign languages.

The expansion of higher education, however, exacerbates competition for jobs. Following the reform of European higher education under the Bologna process (launched in 1999), the graduate population across Europe has risen by ten percentage points in the last fourteen years (Figure 1.1). Notably, it has done so regardless of policy and economic traditions, in as diverse countries as Spain, Greece, Finland, and the United Kingdom, Norway and France. Contrary to expectations, this generation of university graduates is struggling in the

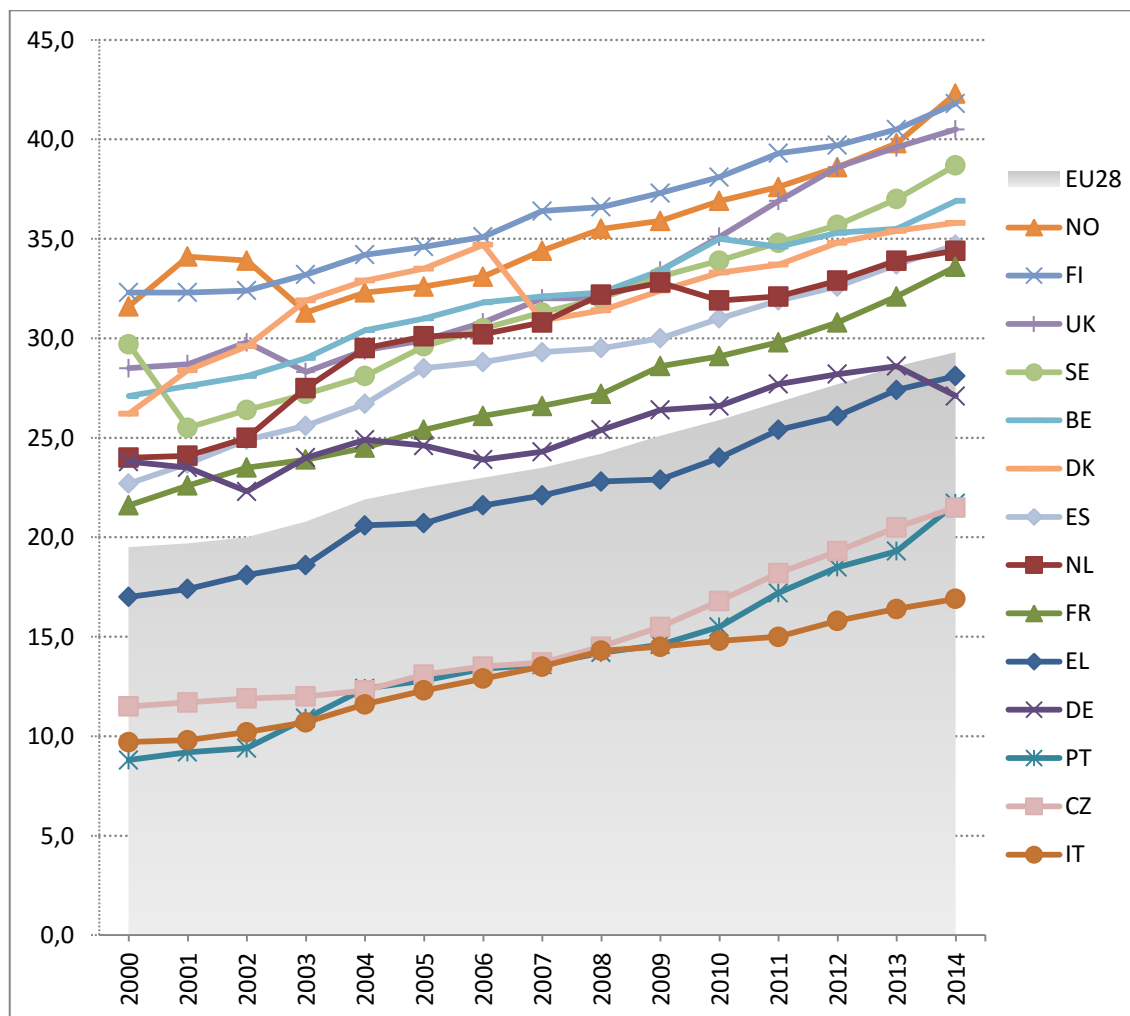
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<sup>1</sup> As Stephen Barley and Gideon Kunda suggest the knowledge economy can be «usefully viewed as a matrix, which incorporates not only markets and organizations, but occupations as well» (2006:32).

<sup>2</sup> Change has not been uniform, however and several studies show that the new demands are far from universal (Brown, Hesketh, and Sara Williams 2004; Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2010; e.g. Burton-Jones 1999; Thrift 2005).

competition for jobs. This is because “knowledge-economy” jobs are in fact in short supply relative to the demand for them<sup>3</sup>. Unlike their parents, who lived in a world of full employment and job security in mainly industrial economies, Millennials enter a post-Fordist labor market characterized by flexible and contingent work arrangements and where first jobs are just a stepping stone to better employment (e.g. Uzzi and Barsness 1998).

Figure 1.1. Population with Tertiary Education, by Country (percentages)



Source: Own elaboration, based on Eurostat [edat\_lfse\_07].

Notes: Population aged 25-64 with ISCED levels 5 to 8, that is, short cycle tertiary (5); Bachelor's or equivalent (6); Master's or equivalent (7); and Doctoral level (8). In the case of the European Union, data from 2000 and 2001 correspond to EU27.

<sup>3</sup> Brown et al., for instance, estimate a ratio of sixteen graduates for every graduate job offered in the United Kingdom by blue-chip companies, that is, well-established organizations (2004:61–62).

Discourse on the rise of the knowledge-economy, which suggests that the transition is a linear process, is also contradicted by the reality of rather shocking homogeneity across countries (see also Brown, Hesketh, and Sara Williams 2004). This homogeneity is consistent with what Brown et al. call the *80/20 Economy* (2004:52). Their calculations suggest that «no more than 20 per cent of [the American] workforce—some 29 million out of a total of 145 million workers—are primarily engaged in what might be described as knowledge work» (Brown, Hesketh, and Sara Williams 2004:55). They also calculate that the share of the workforce in the knowledge sector in the United Kingdom barely differs from that in the United States (2004:58).

According to Eurostat (2008), university graduates generally find employment in the more traditional service sector instead of in the knowledge-intensive economy (figures range from 89,7% in Sweden to 75,6% in Germany) (not reported here). No more than 10,5% of the university graduates in Germany worked in high and medium technology manufacturing sector in 2013. In Greece and Portugal, the percentages are much lower (1,2% and 1,8% respectively). Meanwhile, the more traditional market services sector employs

**Box 1.** Daisy (28). From Zeist, the Netherlands, living in Utrecht, the Netherlands/ Master's degree in film production.

I grew up being told that I could become anything I wanted, as long as I worked hard and educated myself. I did all of these things, but even after receiving my master's degree two years ago, it is still hard to find a job that really suits my interest. I have applied to many, many different jobs over the past two years. I have worked in several restaurants. I've had a few part-time jobs in media as well, film jobs.

At the beginning of this year, I was only working in a cafe serving coffee, and that was really when I didn't want to get out of bed. I didn't study for five years to make a cup of coffee. But I realized I had to accept the situation, develop a flexible mind-set and combine different jobs.

At the moment, I have money coming in from four jobs: besides working in a cafe serving coffee, and working as a cleaning lady, I am writing for a local newspaper as a freelancer and working as a reporter on food waste for a nutrition center. The latter two jobs actually come close to my professional ambition, but I am earning only €850 to €1,000 a month (...).

Source: Fehr, Tiff and David Furst. 2013. "Out of Europe's Jobs Crisis, Voices of the Young." *The New York Times*. November 15.

20,8% of university graduates in Spain, 17,5% in France and 16,3% in Greece (see Figure 1.2). The economic crisis has done little to change this pattern.

### 1.2. The effects of the economic crisis on graduate employment

Today's labor market for university graduates thus differs greatly from the rosy future that Howe and Strauss (2000) depicted for the Millennials (see above). For the generation that massively entered the labor market between 2007 and 2014 the job market has been less than paradisiacal. As Millennials experienced the transition to adulthood, the global economic recession hit Europe with the force of a blast. Since then, job-seeking strategies have become more relevant than ever, as university graduates look for jobs not only in their local and national contexts but also, increasingly, in foreign labor markets. This applies particularly to Southern Europeans. Although official statistics on skilled migration of young nationals are hard to come by, an estimated 100,000 university graduates have left Spain, and hundreds of thousands more have moved to Germany, Britain, and the Nordic states from hard-hit countries in Southern Europe, as they look for jobs in engineering, science and medicine (Alderman 2013; Fehr and Furst 2013).

**Box 2.** Laura (26). From Nottingham, England, living in Coventry, England /Master's degree in conflict studies and human rights

I left graduate school and struggled to find job opportunities in my field. I took an internship working for a research center in Cambridge. To pay for it, I had taken a job running a bar in the Arctic the winter before. It was dark all day and night, freezing cold, and I worked 12-hour-days, six days a week, for less than minimum wage. It was bloody hard work, but I did get to see the northern lights a lot.

When I did get offered a paid job in development, it happened to be working for the church, which was a surprise for me. My career really took off from there, and now a few years down the line I am working for one of the top research institutes in my field, managing some major research projects and building a reputation for myself. I travel frequently, and I know that what we do here really makes a difference. Even though I now have a stable job with a good salary, I also have a lot of debt and no savings (...).

Source: Fehr, Tiff and David Furst. 2013. "Out of Europe's Jobs Crisis, Voices of the Young." *The New York Times*. November 15.

**Box 3.** Esther (25). From Spain, living in Copenhagen /Master's degree in education

At first, moving to Copenhagen was pretty hard. I came with the expectation of finding work as a Spanish teacher at a private academy, but I could not find anything there or at other schools. Everywhere I went, people wanted me to speak good Danish (and I could not wait the time it takes to learn Danish without working). I thought about returning home many times, but I had nothing to do in Spain. So little by little, I learned Danish and taught Spanish to private clients to earn some money (...). I still occasionally think of going back because life here is much harder than in Spain, and I am very lonely, but I guess I'm here because in Spain there is nothing to do (...).

Source: Fehr, Tiff and David Furst. 2013. "Out of Europe's Jobs Crisis, Voices of the Young." *The New York Times*. November 15.

Data from Eurostat show the effects of the economic crisis on employment growth between 2007 and 2014<sup>4</sup>. Most European countries registered negative figures in 2009, although Spain and Greece registered the biggest drop in employment growth between 2009 and 2012 (-6,3% and -7,8%, respectively). In contrast to these two Mediterranean countries, the United Kingdom, Norway and Germany have been more resilient and also experienced a faster recovery in levels of employment in 2014 (2,3%, 1,1% and 0,8%, respectively).

According to Eurostat, 26.109 million people were unemployed in 2013 in the European Union, of which 5.581 million were young people (under 25). In the period 2007-2013, overall unemployment rates for young people

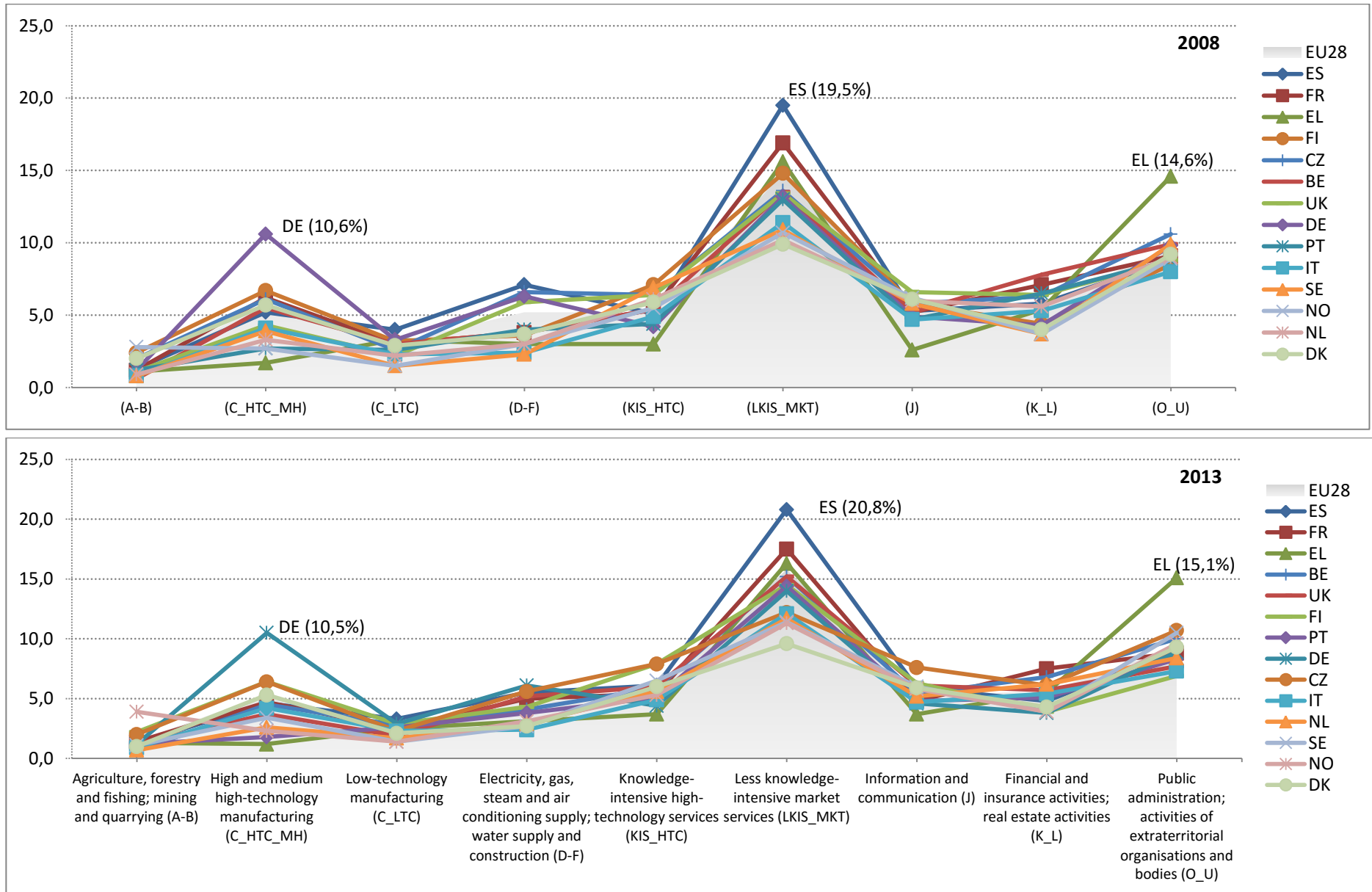
in the EU increased by eight percentage points, from 13,9% to 22,2% (Figure 1.3). Although the low-skilled overall still face the highest risk of unemployment, young people with higher education (ISCED levels 5-8) have experienced a big increase in unemployment. The EU average unemployment rate for young university graduates increased by seven percentage points for those aged 20-24 years-old (from 11,5% to 18,9%) and by five percentage points for those aged 25-29 years-old (from 6,3% and 10,8%). Unemployment rates vary widely across Europe, however. In 2014, for instance, the unemployment rate for young university graduates aged 25-29 was 6,2% and 3,8% in the

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat data code: [lfsi\_grt\_a].

Netherlands and in the United Kingdom, respectively. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for university graduates in Spain was 24,2%.

The unemployment crisis has led to different political responses depending on the severity of the problem. In the past, international agencies promoted investment in skills so as to increase the employability of graduates and high-skilled workers (e.g. Teichler 2011). They also invested efforts and resources to facilitate graduate mobility within and between national states (i.e., by facilitating the recognition of degrees and academic qualifications, and by promoting exchanges between institutions). In the last recession, however, these agencies –and national governments- did relatively little to tackle university graduates' unemployment and to improve this group's *employability*. Instead, employment-promotion programs focused on the most vulnerable populations, that is youth segments who are not in educational institutions or else are employed or undergoing training –so-called NEET–. In this context, the university graduates' only options left have been to hope for a recovery of national economies and to rationally design clever job search strategies to improve their chances in the job market.

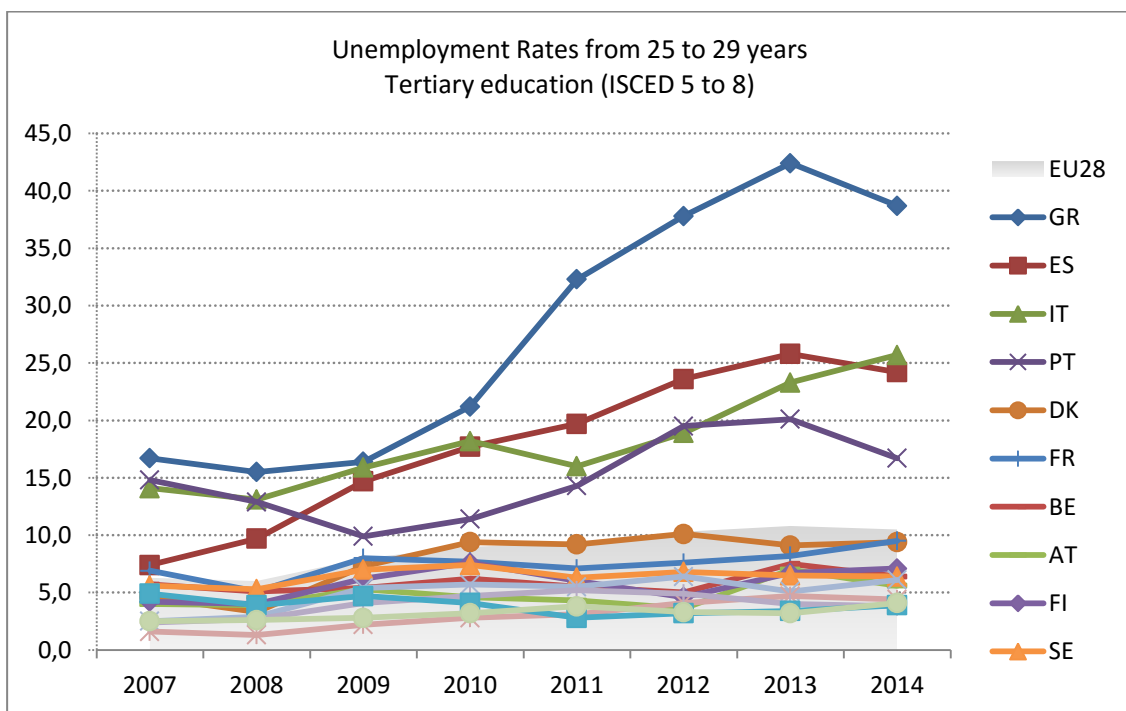
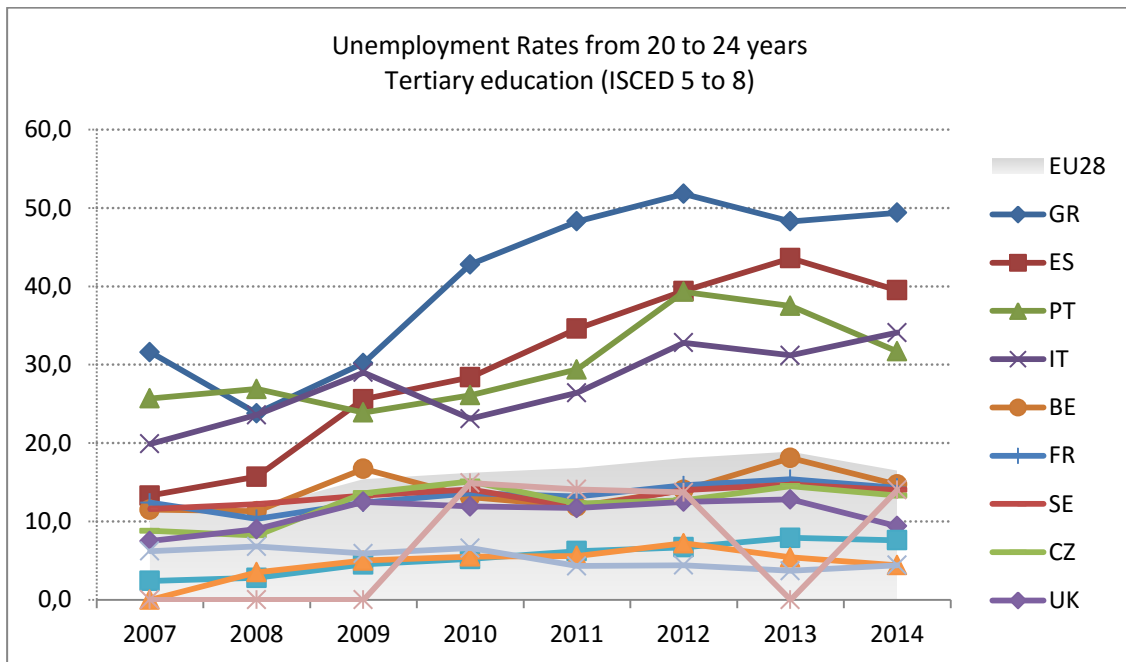
Figure 1.2. Graduate Employment in Technology and Knowledge Intensive Sectors, by Country and Year



Source: Own elaboration, based on Eurostat ([htec\_emp\_nisced2]). Employment in technology and knowledge-intensive sectors at the national level. Graduates with first and second stage of tertiary education (ISCED levels 5 and 6).



Figure 1.3. Unemployment rate of Tertiary Education graduates, by Age and Country (percentages)



Source: Eurostat ([lfsa\_urgaed]), own elaboration.

### 1.3. On the relative success of university graduates in the job market

«Modern growth, which is based on the growth of productivity and the diffusion of knowledge, has made it possible to avoid the apocalypse predicted by Marx and to balance the process of capital accumulation. But it has not altered the deep structures of capital—or at any rate has not truly reduced the macroeconomic importance of capital relative to labor» (Piketty 2014:234).

In the text I follow convention and refer to university graduates as high-skilled. I depart from the literature, however, in disputing the claim that the skills that graduates bring to the market necessarily give them a competitive edge vis à vis less educated graduates. Higher education no longer confers automatic advantages (see, e.g., Brown, Hesketh, and Sara Williams 2004; Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2010). Advantages ensue only when higher education is supplemented by other skills or background characteristics, like extended professional networks and job experience. Contemporary university graduates must struggle to make their way into the labor market and in order to be successful they must develop appropriate non-academic skills. In the early stages of the professional career, a higher education credential is no longer a passport to a job because the skills that the market demands are not provided by higher education institutions for the most part, even by the most prestigious ones. As I show in this dissertation, recent university graduates must invest a great deal of effort in getting information about jobs.

More than fifty years ago, George J. Stigler suggested that labor market information is capital is produced through the expenditure of money, time and effort in searching (1962:103). Job market information is a scarce good, as any other capital. This is particularly true for information about job vacancies which is not sufficiently disseminated or immediately available to job-seekers. As there are always economic and time constraints, it is not surprising that individuals seek information through various search methods. The dissertation's title, *The relative success of job-seeking practices*, refers to the fact that the outcomes connected to alternative job-search strategies vary across institutional and cyclical conditions. In the knowledge-economy, the relevance of networks and institutional affiliation for the success of the job search is stronger than ever.

**Box 4.** Leslie (25). From Cork, Ireland, living in Oakland, Calif. Master's degree in modern and contemporary art history

I had a job at home, working in a hostel, but it was unrelated to my qualifications, and I wasn't paid well. I wanted to work at a museum or gallery, something in visual arts. I came to San Francisco because of the arts scene there. Now I'm living in Oakland and working for a nonprofit in San Francisco, a high school exchange program for international students. I'm working full time, but it doesn't pay well. It is temp work. I was hired for three months, and it keeps getting extended. It pays about \$12 an hour (...).

Source: Fehr, Tiff and David Furst. 2013. "Out of Europe's Jobs Crisis, Voices of the Young." *The New York Times*. November 15.

Social connections, the market, and intermediaries play a critical role in matching high-skilled labor to jobs.

This dissertation helps to fill the gap in the literature by investigating the role of context and cyclical conditions in shaping the job-search. Few studies have concentrated on and revealed, as this study does, the context-dependence of graduate job-seeking and job-finding practices (see chapter 2). To illustrate this dependence, one can compare results from the web survey that I conducted for this dissertation in Spain and the Netherlands (see chapter 3) and from the British DLHE to those from three larger datasets, CHEERS, REFLEX, and Eurostat.

CHEERS and REFLEX are two large international studies that contain comprehensive and detailed information on graduate job-seeking and job-finding practices (Figure 1.4) whereas Eurostat provides statistics on the topic referred to the general population only. The comparison between the studies helps highlight the role of context because they center on different countries or sets of countries and on different time periods and economic conditions.

My study concerns graduate practices in three specific European countries observed during the recent financial and economic crisis whereas the CHEERS study (acronym for 'Careers after Higher Education – a European Research Study') was conducted among 36.000 graduates in higher education in the late 1990s and targeted individuals who got their degree in the 1994/1995 academic year (Teichler 2007) and the REFLEX study (acronym for 'Research into Employment and Professional FLEXibility') was conducted among some 30.000

graduates in higher education in 2005 and targeted individuals who got their degree in the academic year 1999/2000 (Allen and van der Velden 2011).

The contrasts revealed by comparing the findings across studies are consistent with the hypothesis that job-finding strategies vary across labor markets and institutional settings. Family, friends and acquaintances, for instance, play an important role in both my and the REFLEX study but not in the CHEERS dataset; also, sending applications to employers proves to be a successful strategy in the CHEERS study but much less so in the REFLEX study. But the main contrast by far between the studies' findings concerns the extent to which graduates rely on private employment agencies. Whereas my survey and the DLHE study show that graduates rely quite often on this job-seeking strategy, the CHEERS and REFLEX studies show otherwise.

Figure 1.4. Job-Finding Methods, By Survey Data (percentages)

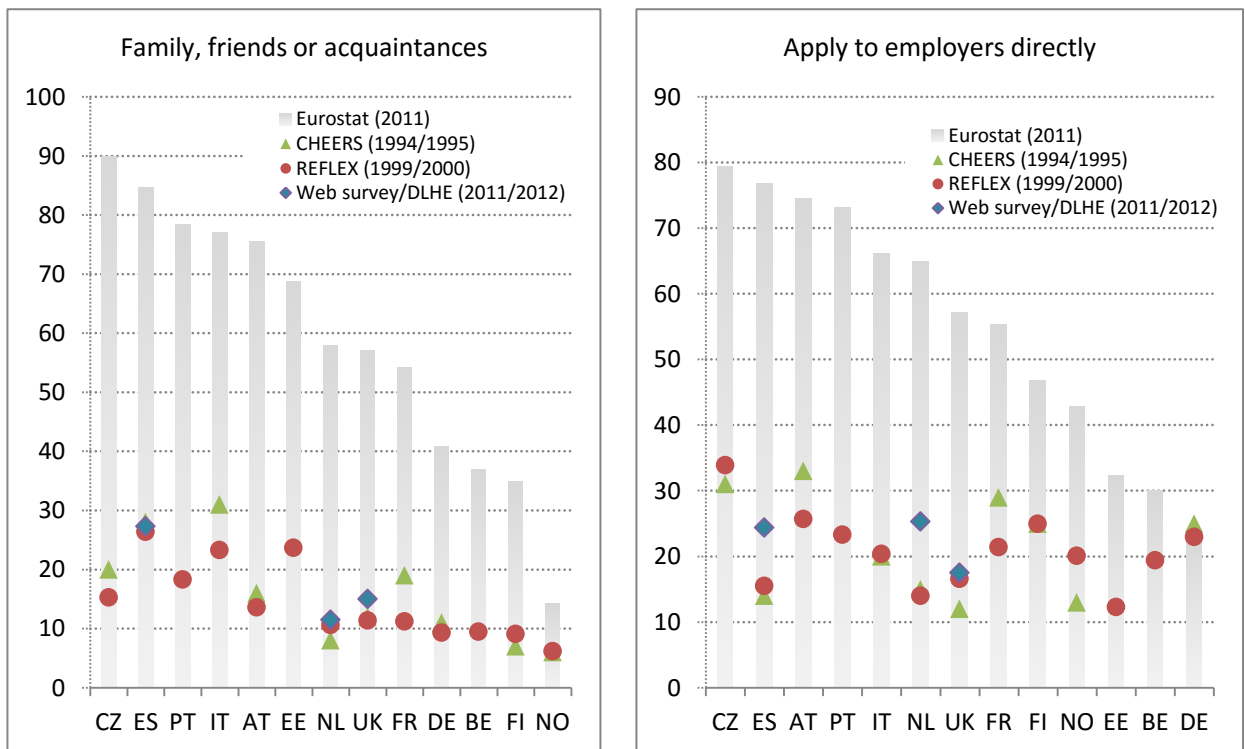
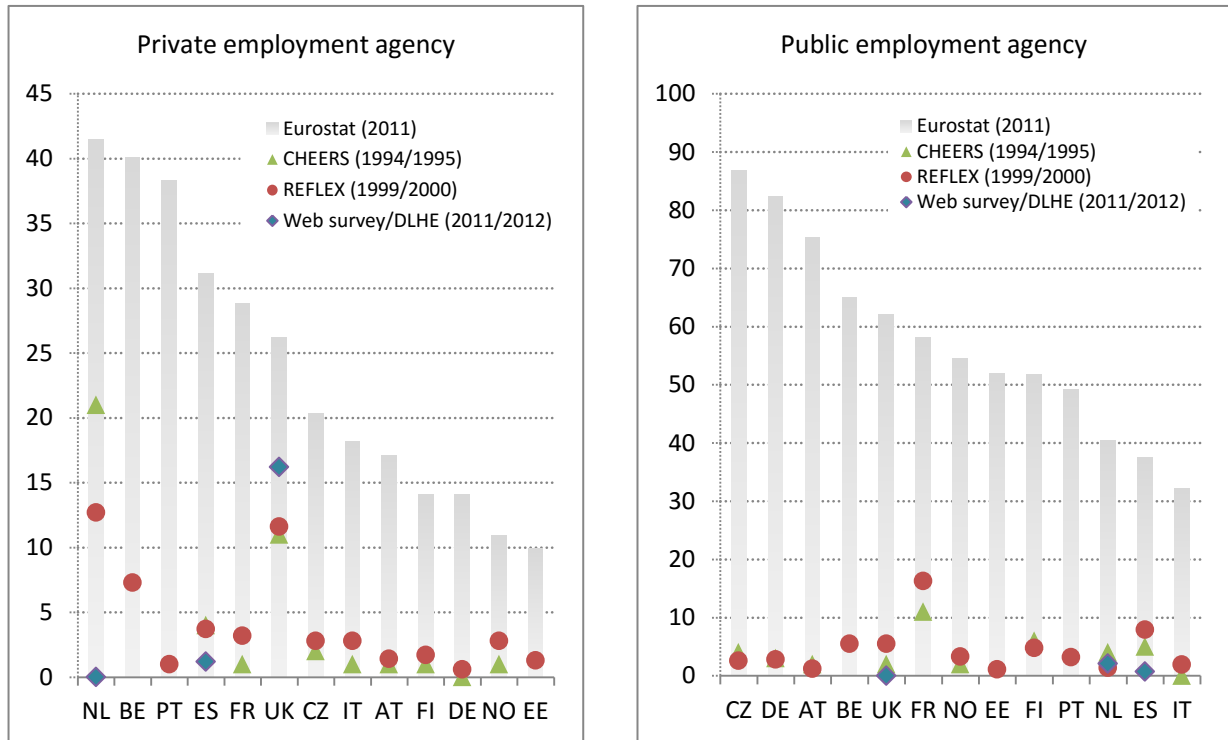


Figure 1.4. (Cont.)



Source: Own elaboration, based on Eurostat ([lfsa Ugmsw]), REFLEX database; Allen and Van der Velden (2007:61); the DLHE survey, and original data.

#### 1.4. Research questions

How university graduates find a job during an economic downturn is socially relevant because of the scarring effects of unemployment. In this dissertation, I follow in a long research tradition that demonstrates that the risk of unemployment and sub-employment depends on the stage in the economic cycle and also on graduates' ability to send the right signals to employers. These two factors are part of the explanation for why we also see bad matches between the young graduates' education credentials and the jobs they hold. Furthermore, as mass higher education produces a growing number of graduates, the university degree has ceased to guarantee a good, well-paid graduate job (e.g. Brown, Hesketh, and Sarah Williams 2004).

The dissertation focuses on the following research questions: what are the strategies that individuals follow to find a job? What social factors determine the use and sequencing of various strategies? How do the labor market,

institutions, and culture shape job-search strategies in different countries? And, what is the impact that these strategies have on employment achievement? To answer these questions, I analyze practices and strategies of labor market integration among a cohort of 23 to 29 years old university graduates and the demand for particular skills by a sample of employers.

The central argument of this dissertation is that chances in the labor market are embedded in institutional and cultural contexts. Therefore, job-search strategies are associated with the practices of other individuals, groups and institutions in a specific field (or *economic field*, according to Pierre Bourdieu). Following the theory of fields of Pierre Bourdieu, I argue that one must study both sides of the labor market, that is, the job-seekers' and the employers' side.

The analytical framework that I use borrows from the theory of fields as developed by Pierre Bourdieu and representatives of the new economic sociology (DiMaggio 1990; Fligstein 2001; Zelizer 1983, 2007). I attempt (a) to show and describe empirically the existence of three types of strategies in the job-matching process and (b) to demonstrate, as the theory of fields suggests, that predominant strategies are determined by a country's institutional and cultural arrangements. The main underlying hypothesis is that institutional and cultural contexts affect the job-search process and favor specific strategies. Following Bourdieu and the employment regime approach, I also show that the strategies of workers and employers are embedded in particular employment cultures. These employment cultures favor particular behavioral patterns and underlie specific institutional arrangements.

### 1.5. Dissertation overview

The dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the literature on job-search strategies since the seminal work of Granovetter, *Getting a Job* (1974, 1995). I identify major trends in the economic and sociology of the job search and discuss the implications of these trends for my argument. The classic literature on job-seeking assumes that individuals use cost-benefit calculations when looking for a job or considering a job switch, and that the process of decision making is based on individuals' reservation wages (e.g. Lippman and

McCall 1976; McCall 1970; Mortensen 1986; Mouw 2003). These studies inform us about the crucial role of social connections, intermediaries and the market, but they do not say enough about how the high-skilled use these resources in different contexts. Missing from this literature is an explanation about what mechanisms lie behind the choice of job-seeking methods. In the remainder of that chapter, I outline my argument on the role of employment cultures in the job search.

In chapter 3, I describe the study I conducted. I researched job-seeking practices through a web survey that targeted recent university graduates in Spain and the Netherlands and for the United Kingdom I rely on a similar survey conducted by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). In this chapter, I provide a summary of the methodological strengths and pitfalls of web surveys and describe the process of data collection in detail. Then, I describe the characteristics of the Eurobarometer #304 on *Employers' Perceptions of Graduate Employability* (2010) and the main variables on which I focus.

In chapter 4, I highlight contrasts in the institutional features of the countries under study and situate the university graduates' job-seeking behavior in their national contexts. Following the theory of fields of Bourdieu (1977, 2005) and Neil Fligstein's concept of employment systems (2001), I argue that job-seeking practices are embedded in patrimonialist and meritocratic employment cultures. I use these ideal types to highlight contrasts between European countries. A patrimonialist culture promotes individuals' connections whereas a meritocratic employment culture fosters individual competition and the use of intermediaries. In countries like the United Kingdom and the Netherlands the dominant channel to jobs is the market and intermediary agencies and in countries like Spain the dominant channel to jobs is personal connections. In this chapter, I also pay great attention to three special features of these cultures: the linkages between universities and firms, the demands of the labor market for graduates, and the economic cycle.

In chapter 5, I address the university graduates' employment situation. I examine the characteristics of the sample population, test the main hypotheses

of this dissertation, and present the research findings. I present empirical evidence of the job-search strategies that university graduates follow to find a job and of the social factors that determine the use and sequencing of various strategies. Although reliance on social networks is widespread across countries, I show that sending curricula to employment agencies is relatively more prevalent in the Netherlands while searching for and replying to job advertisements is relatively more prevalent in Britain, and reliance on contacts provided by one's social network is relatively more prevalent in Spain. I also suggest that different job-search strategies have a different impact on employment achievement. Reliance on social connections, for instance, is more often associated with a bad match between qualifications and the characteristics of the jobs than is reliance on other channels.

In chapter 6, I turn to employers, the gatekeepers who govern access to graduate jobs. Using Eurobarometer data, I investigate what employers want from university graduates candidates and what are the linkages, if any, that they maintain with higher education institutions. I show how in the context of changing labor markets employers increasingly demand cognitive and communicational skills. I also show that the type of skills that are useful in the job market vary across labor markets and economic sectors. This chapter also shows that the skills that are appreciated by employers can generally be learnt outside academia (e.g. interpersonal skills, non-cognitive behavior).

Chapter 7 ties together the dissertation's empirical chapters to summarize how university graduates find a job and what skills employers demand from them. I also reflect on the broader implications of the results from a field approach perspective and revisit the dissertation's call for a shift of focus from atomized to cultural approaches. The employment culture approach emphasizes that in meritocratic cultures, market and intermediary agencies dominate the job-search and hiring processes whereas in patrimonialist cultures social connections dominate these same processes. I also draw some connections between the use of social networks and pernicious employment outcomes. Finally, I discuss the study's limitations and provide suggestions for further research.



## Chapter 2. THEORETICAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF JOB-SEARCH

«A key problem in economic and social theory is the extent to which individuals behave “rationally”. For my respondents, two somewhat contradictory threads emerge. Given their goals and possibilities, they do seem to have chosen courses of action that would serve their purposes; their contacts and employers did the same. At the same time, enormous constraints narrowed the range of actual alternatives from which they chose [...] and the mobility of information-spreading of strangers» (Granovetter 1995:96).

Mark Granovetter’s influential book *Getting a Job* (1974, 1995) challenged the adequacy of rational job-search models<sup>1</sup>. His study was based on the job-seeking practices of a random sample of 282 professional, technical and managerial workers in the suburbs of Boston, Massachusetts. In *Getting a Job*, Granovetter outlined three fundamental propositions: (a) that many workers find their jobs through social contacts and not just through formal channels - such as direct applications, employment agencies or answering job advertisements; (b) that social networks allow jobseekers to gather better information on the availability and characteristics of jobs, which then result in better wages and higher job satisfaction; (c) that weak ties provide better information on the labor market than do strong ties. In the afterword to the second edition of *Getting a Job* in 1995, Granovetter acknowledged that new evidence confirmed his main premise of the relevance of social connections for employment allocation (1995:139–141).

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<sup>1</sup> The classic economic approach focus on job information flows (Boorman 1975; Calvó-Armengol and Jackson 2004; Montgomery 1991), the cost of interactions (Conley and Topa 2002; Holzer 1986), individual incentives of network formation (Calvó-Armengol 2004), and, in an effort to bridge the gap between economics and sociology, the effectiveness of job-finding methods, such as work quality, the nature and causes of job satisfaction (Antoninis 2006; Fougère, Pradel, and Roger 2009; Hoyer and Saks 2008, 2008; Mouw 2003).

Table 2.1 reports the findings of sixteen of the most relevant studies in the field since Granovetter's pioneering work<sup>2</sup>. Over half of the empirical work has been carried out in the United States, and the other half in Europe, and it reflects diverse designs and theoretical approaches. Most of these studies focus on relative undifferentiated populations of unemployed individuals, but they show the relative power of job-seeking strategies: a job-search method that dominates in a market, may prove less successful in another. For instance, whereas personal contacts are decisive in most of the samples taken in the American context, the literature has produced mixed evidence on the effects of networks in Europe.

As one can learn from the literature -and most labor surveys-, individuals get jobs through different channels. Well-educated job-seekers use networks, the market and intermediaries. Unlike other social groups of job-seekers with less education<sup>3</sup>, university graduates are well placed to benefit from all three strategies. As mentioned in chapter 1, it is not difficult to imagine why: university graduates have access to networks of kith and kin, that is, family, friends and classmates; they are well-equipped with the needed credentials to compete in today's economy; and finally, they have access to institutional resources, especially to those from their home universities.

The use of networks is one of the most common channels to find out about jobs. There are several reasons for this popular preference. Networks are effective in providing information at high speed and minimum costs. Everybody is embedded in a web of connections, despite differences in density, structure and information.

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<sup>2</sup> This is an updated version of Montgomery's Table 1 (1991:1409). In that Table, Montgomery reported the findings of four early studies: Myers and Shultz (1951); Rees and Shultz (1970); Granovetter (1974, reported also here); and Corcoran et al. (1980).

<sup>3</sup> Roger Waldinger and Michael Lichter dwell further on the instrumental and effective use of social connections by low-skilled migrants in Los Angeles, CA (2003). They show how "pioneer" immigrants established themselves and provided privileged paths for newcomers. From the employers' viewpoint, however, recruiting through connections provides advantages only in the short run. Managers tend to see that the chances of hiring the "best goods" on the market narrow if one only recruits through established workers. By contrast, workers without contacts to insiders are largely disadvantaged. In this sense, the authors conclude, «the social organization of labor sometimes expands and sometimes limits the potential immigrant employment base of a firm» (Waldinger and Lichter 2003:226).

Table 2.1. Sources of Job information

Source/Data	Percentage of jobs found using each method					Sample Size	Country
	<i>Networks</i>	<i>Market mechanisms</i>	<i>Intermediaries</i>	Other			
	Personal contacts	Direct application	Job Ads				
<b>Granovetter (1974)</b> /Sample of workers in Newton, MA							
Professional	56.1	18.2	15.9	— <sup>a</sup>	9.8	132	
Technical	43.5	24.6	30.4	—	1.4	69	US
Managerial	65.4	14.8	13.6	—	6.2	81	
<b>1. Young (1974)</b> /Bureau of Labor Statistics							
University graduates, cohort 1971/1972	21.7	44.5 <sup>b</sup>	5.1	24.7 <sup>c</sup>	3.9	873M	US
<b>2. Lin, Vaughn and Ensel (1981)</b> /Sample of males in Albany, NY							
	57	22	22	— <sup>d</sup>	—	399	US
<b>3. Holzer (1987)</b> /Nat. Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1981-1982 <sup>e</sup>							
Unemployed whites aged 16-23	31.8	30.4	6.0	2.9	19.1	1.405	US
Unemployed blacks aged 16-23	25.5	19.9	2.8	3.7	25.6	609	
<b>4. Holzer (1988)</b> /Nat. Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLS) 1981 <sup>f</sup>							
Young blacks and whites aged 16-23	14.3	12.1	4.0	4.8	5.0	608	US
<b>5. De Graaf and Flap (1988)</b>							
/Dutch survey gathered in 1982	32	24	43	— <sup>g</sup>	—	466	NL
/German survey gathered in 1980	43	23	34	—	—	628	DE
<b>6. Osberg (1993)</b> /Canadian Labor Force Survey							
Jobless females	12.7	16.8	14.6	27.3	42.2	4.386	CA
Jobless males	14.4	14.3	11.9	26.0	43.0	682	
<b>7. Drentea (1998)</b> /General Social Survey							
Jobless females	73	21	18	15 <sup>h</sup>	3	213	US
Jobless males	73	19	16	12	6	200	
<b>8. Addison and Portugal (2002)</b> /Portuguese Labor Force Survey							
	15.0	17.0	13.8	13.6	18.5	16.032	PT
<b>9. Try (2005)</b> /Norwegian Graduate Surveys							
University graduates, cohort 1995-2000	15.9	39.7	69.5	24.8	13.8	11.513	NO
<b>11. Franzen and Hangartner (2006)</b>							
/Int. Social Survey Programme	44.1	—	—	—	—	29.082	EU27+US
/Swiss Graduate Survey - University graduates, cohort 2001	19.6	27.0	—	24.9	31.4 <sup>i</sup>	8.151	CH

Table 2.1. Sources of Job information (Cont.)

Source/Data	Percentage of jobs found using each method					Sample Size	Country
	<i>Networks</i>	<i>Market mechanisms</i>	<i>Intermediaries</i>	Other			
	Personal contacts	Direct application	Job Ads				
<b>12. Allen and van der Velden</b> (2007)/CHEERS Survey data University graduates, cohort 1994/1995	31	52	71	75	9	36.694	EU12
<b>13. Pellizzary</b> (2010)/European Community Household Panel	32.7	—	—	—	67.3	50.554	EU15
<b>14. Allen and van der Velden</b> (2011)/ REFLEX Survey data University graduates, cohort 1999/2000	14.7	20.8	13.7	15.6	35.2	30.527	EU15+JP
<b>15. McDonald, Benton &amp; Warner</b> (2012) /Nat. Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLS) 1994-2000	21	— <sup>j</sup>	52	—	27 <sup>k</sup>	7.392	US
/German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP)	17	—	43	—	40	1.126	DE
<b>16. Benton et al.</b> (2015)/German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) East Germany	18	— <sup>l</sup>	38	41	40 <sup>m</sup>	2.228	DE
West Germany	17	—	42	41	41	4.671	

Source: Own elaboration.

Notes: **a)** Public and private employment agencies, interviews, placements sponsored by universities or professional associations and advertisements, are collected together and reported under the category Job ads. This category corresponds to what Granovetter called “formal means” (1995:10-11). **b)** Direct application includes “civil service application” (see Young 1974, Table 5, pp. 37). **c)** Public and private employment agencies, school placement office and professional organizations are included under the label “employment agencies” (see Young 1974, Table 5, pp. 37). **d)** Employment agencies, newspaper ads, and trade union are collected together and reported under the category Job ads (see Lin et al. 1981, pp 1165, 1169). **e)** Percentage of Job seekers who obtained job through each method (see Holzer 1987, Table 2, pp. 448). **f)** Percentage of Job seekers who reported acceptance from use of each method (see Holzer 1988, Table 2, pp. 10). **g)** Employment agencies, employment bureau and job ads are collected together and reported under the category “Job Ads” (see de Graaf and Flap 1988, Table 2, pp. 461). **h)** Employment agencies and “recruiters” are reported together (see Drentea 1998, Table 1, pp. 328). **i)** Other includes “received offer from employer” (see Franzen and Hangarten 2006, Figure 2, pp.360). **j)** Direct application, employment agencies and job ads are collected together and reported under the category “Job ads” (see McDonald et al. 2012, Table 2, pp. 85). **k)** Other means here “non-search” (see McDonald et al. 2012, Table 2, pp. 85). **l)** Direct application, employment agencies, responding to an advertisement, returning to a former employer, and other methods are collected together and reported under the label “Job ads” (see Benton et al. 2015:914-915). **m)** Other means here “non-search” (see Benton et al. 2015:914-915).

Individuals at the bottom of the social ladder use networks as their primary source of information, among other reasons, because they tend to lack credentials or formal training (e.g., Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Networks are crucial for individuals at the top of the social ladder but for different reasons: their resource-rich networks provide them with information about vacancies; meanwhile, managers in top-tier firms seek information about potential candidates in elite universities where the upper strata disproportionately enroll (e.g., Rivera 2015).

Unlike networks, markets offer a space for impersonal competition. In open markets, job-seekers can broaden their job opportunities far beyond the scope of their networks by sending out resumes and answering to job ads. For similar reasons, recruiters advertise job positions in the old-fashioned job ads section of newspapers and in modern on-line professional networks. University graduates are well-equipped for this open competition. Compared to individuals with lesser credentials, their diplomas give them an edge at the moment of selection (Addison and Portugal 2002; Try 2005). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of answering job ads as a job-search strategy is closely related to the structure of a particular job market. For instance, since public sector jobs must be advertised, job-seeking through ads may be more useful in countries with large public sectors. Thus, in Norway, almost 70% of the university graduates find jobs through ads, and three out of four of these graduates find a job in the public sector (Try 2005).

Intermediaries, such as public and private employment agencies and school placement offices play a significant role in connecting both sides of the labor market. Job intermediaries inform about the social infrastructure available to job-seekers and firms. Today one finds public employment services, used mainly by former employees; private employment agencies that cater to firms and job candidates for short-term or entry-level jobs; and, more recently, university placement offices and job banks that also connect graduates with the world of work. Intermediaries can break the power of networks and unrestrained markets, and make youth less dependent on social connections (e.g., Harsløf 2006:569–570; Rosenbaum et al. 1999).

The chapter is organized as follows: in the next section, I lay down the conceptual framework that guides this investigation. Section 2.2 describes two ideal-type rationalities that shape job-seeking processes. Section 2.3 describes the role that context-related variables play in the job search, and I dwell further on cross national variations. Section 2.4 and 2.5 presents the working hypotheses and case selection criteria. The chapter ends with a summary.

### **2.1. How networks and intermediaries shape individuals' job-search**

Given that individuals use various strategies, what social factors determine which become dominant? Taking a Weberian approach to the job-search process, the main argument here is that different rationalities dominate in each market and guide the job-seekers' behavior. This approach draws on theoretical insights of the new economic sociology that followed the first edition of Granovetter's *Getting a Job* (Granovetter 1985; Swedberg 1987; Swedberg, Himmelstrand, and Brulin 1987; Granovetter 1990).

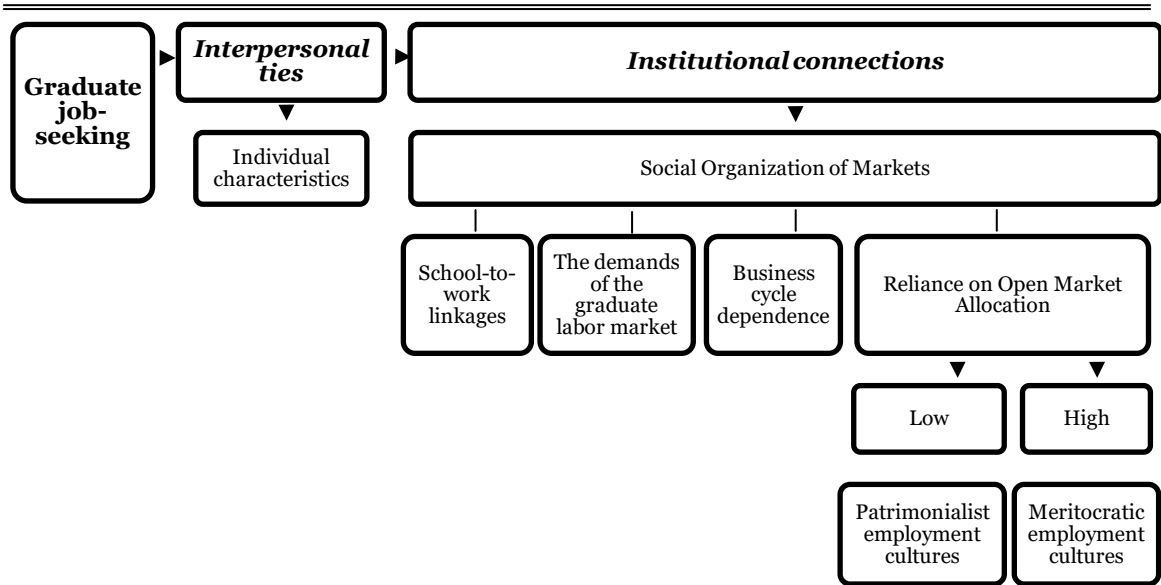
In the twenty-one years that followed the first edition of Granovetter's *Getting a Job*, a novel approach, the new economic sociology, has promoted theoretical alternatives to the explanation of this and other core market processes. Mainstream economic sociologists agree that all economic activities are embedded in social structures --in the form of networks of interpersonal relations. They have also built a new interest in culture. In particular, Vivian Zelizer, Paul DiMaggio and Neil Fligstein have long opposed a view that only includes social networks at the expenses of other dimensions in the understanding of specific market processes (see Swedberg 2003 for a review on this topic). They understand that economic action is embedded both in networks and in culture.

In *Morals and Markets* (1983), and then in *Pricing the Priceless Child* (1985), Zelizer analyses the effect of changing definitions of risk on the development of life insurance, and the shift in the economic and sentimental evaluation of child life during the nineteenth century in the United States. In these two studies she shows how a market can be shaped by both moral values and by social structural factors, such as class and family structure. Paul DiMaggio, on

the other hand, argues that a way toward improving the lack of precision of cultural approaches is to draw on the concepts and methodological advances of cognitive research (DiMaggio 1990, 1997). Cognitive psychology portrays individuals «as active processors of information» (Alexander, Marx, and Williams 2004:242), who are able to «attribute accuracy or plausibility to statements of fact and opinion» (DiMaggio 1997:267). Meanwhile, Neil Fligstein borrows from Pierre Bourdieu the conception of the economy (or a particular industry or a firm) as a *field*, that is, as a structure of relations between groups with its own «local cultures» that provide cognitive elements to interpret the actions of others (Fligstein 2001a:15).

These insights are suitable to study the job-search process. They suggest that one's understanding of how labor markets work is shaped by the experience of self and members of one's social milieu, and by the social organization of the job market itself (Figure 2.1). I describe these particular variations as «employment cultures». It is possible to see this concept closely related to DiMaggio's definition of culture, that is, as a specific type “social cognition” based on practices, beliefs and the “taken for granted” in the labor market (DiMaggio 1990:113). Individuals create, reproduce, and share this social knowledge with other participants. This knowledge is available to youth trying to rent a flat or looking for a new inmate, families trying to buy affordable furniture, or parents looking for alternative schools for their children. Individuals draw on close or/and previous experiences as *unthinking belief* (Simmel), or a *conscious bet* (Coleman; see Smelser and Swedberg 2005:17). In sum, there are reasons to believe that individuals use the experience of others in making their own decisions and that this knowledge is built upon the actions of all people who have made the choice earlier. Thus, job-seekers make a choice based on information that flows through personal and institutional connections.

Figure 2.1. Theoretical argument



Source: Own elaboration.

## 2.2. Rationalities and reliance on different types of employment allocation

In this dissertation, I argue that interpersonal ties and institutional connections intervene in the job-seeking process within specific employment cultures and country-specific environments. I aim at showing that the employment cultures approach offer room for fruitful comparative analysis. Comparative research has drawn well-known typologies that aim to explain different national arrangements, from the welfare regimes to the varieties of capitalism literatures (Esping-Andersen 1990; Evans 1995; Hall and Soskice 2001). These macro-level approaches have produced a great deal of empirical work on the developments and change of modern economies (e.g., Streeck and Thelen 2005). However, when it comes to the analysis of labor markets, these rich theoretical frameworks fail to capture specific trends in the relation between firms and workers, labor mobility and job allocation processes. Therefore, I want to make a contribution to the existing knowledge by comparing the job search process across national contexts.

The most successful approaches are found in what is known as the sociology of markets. Here I would refer to the work of Neil Fligstein on «employment systems», that is, on models of organizing careers and work that



structure labor market interaction (2001:101–116). Fligstein’s political-cultural approach integrates the role of states, firms and training institutions, and helps to link micro and macro phenomena (2001:19–20). He distinguishes three employment systems: a) vocationalism (i.e., conceptions of work and career that emphasize occupational communities and vocational training -Germany as best example); b) professionalism (i.e., conceptions of work and career centered around professional peer groups and collegiality -France and the United States as mixed instances of this system); and c) managerialism (i.e., conceptions of work and career that emphasize commitment to a particular work organization - Japan as best example).

The theoretical argument proposed in this study draws inspiration from economic sociology’s emphasis on the social organization of markets and processes of employment allocation. I identify two specific employment cultures that account for observed differences in job-seeking practices: *patrimonialist* and *meritocratic cultures*. They differ in their trust in open market allocation. Within this framework, low reliance on open market allocation is characteristic of patrimonialist cultures whereas high reliance on open market allocation is typical of meritocratic cultures.

### 2.2.1. Patrimonialist employment cultures

Patrimonialist cultures are defined by the reliance on personal relationships in the allocation and redistribution of resources; exchanges are often governed by the logic of reciprocity; trust depends on face-to-face personal relationships; social and family relationships are paramount, in part due to the significant gap between available public resources and social needs. Furthermore, the extension of Patrimonialist practices is related to a weak bureaucracy that can only exert a weak influence on economic practices (Roth 1968). One can venture that in Southern Europe, where this culture prevails, there is a feedback loop connecting a weak state bureaucracy and low investment in public redistributive policies, the strength of reciprocity as market-regulating mechanism, and the strong prevalence of family-businesses (e.g., Ghezzi and Mingione 2007).

These countries have no tradition in active labor market policies, display low levels of employment protection, and under invest in weak vocational training programs. In these education systems, career paths begin at a later age than in most other European countries. Theoretically, young people age 18 and older have the same opportunities to access higher education, irrespective of the discipline that they choose (Blossfeld et al. 2008; Blossfeld and Mills 2005). In this unstratified system, the job training process occurs at the work place. Employers seem in fact committed to informal on-the-job training.

### 2.2.2. Meritocratic employment cultures

In meritocratic cultures, trust tends to be impersonal. Exchanges are governed by the logic of redistribution. This type of culture is associated with a strong bureaucracy -not necessarily of great size, but very efficient, and citizens rely on a solid institutional structure oriented to the market. Based on the logic of redistribution, institutions are adapted to each particular economic sector. These countries have, in general, strong traditions in active labor market policies, higher levels of employment protection, and an extended net of vocational training institutions. This combination of incentives and training is particularly attractive to employers (e.g., Sennett 2006:89–90).

Both workers and employers rely on educational institutions as a tool to find a job and find job candidates. Continuous innovation in a competitive market environment requires a highly specialized workforce. In these education systems, career paths begin at an early age (Blossfeld et al. 2008). This allows students to choose their undergraduate degrees with an already defined professional orientation and makes employers confident that potential candidates are well trained.

### 2.3. On the role of institutional variables

So far I have described how employment cultures can shape individual behavior in the labor market. My claim is that different rationalities –or employment cultures- are at the very heart of the job-search process. These rationalities inform and help maintain more concrete forms of organization of the labor market (see, e.g., Fligstein 2001:15). Instead of focusing on large categories to

understand the labor market process, such as organizations (e.g., Fernandez, Castilla, and Moore 2000; Castilla and Benard 2010), class and social background (Rivera 2011, 2012, 2015), and labor market segments (Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Waldinger, Lim, and Cort 2007), in this section I focus on three institutional features that have a direct impact on the graduates' job-seeking behavior: the linkages between HE institutions and firms, the demands of the labor market for graduates, and the economic cycle.

### 2.3.1. School-to-work linkages

As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, university graduates enter the labor market with institutional assets, that is, with capital and resources from their home universities. The transition into employment reflects the strength of the linkages between educational institutions and firms<sup>4</sup>. These institutional linkages are far from being homogeneous. In some countries institutional and semi-institutional linkages are central to the transition into employment. Japan is a well-known case of an established meritocratic mechanism in job allocation (e.g., Rosenbaum and Kariya 1989; Kariya 1998; Chiavacci 2005). In the Japanese meritocratic system the universities' placement offices established strong linkages to firms that use educational credentials as «track records» and powerful signals for entry-level jobs<sup>5</sup> (Kariya 1998; Kariya and Dore 2006:137–138). Apart from formal institutional mechanisms, both Japanese universities and firms rely on semi-institutional mechanisms and strongly encourage alumni-student relations for referrals and recruitment (Kariya 1998:324–325). These two types of linkages offer privileged job information to potential employers.

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<sup>4</sup> Differences in the transition to work can be found between countries with vocational and generalist education systems. In VET systems, more professionally oriented, graduates find jobs more easily than their university graduates counterparts. These positive outcomes stem in part from the strong linkage between training institutions and firms (van der Velden and Wolbers 2003). Conversely, in generalist education systems there is a less institutionalized pattern to employment. Within this system, university graduates have few chances of engaging job experience and job training either at their home institutions or in the workplace.

<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that merits are the only variable for employment allocation. As Kariya and Dore suggest, since employers increasingly rely on the prestige and networks of HE institutions, opportunities of getting top-tier credentials is affected by the «parental ability to buy educational privilege» (2006:145).

In other countries, prototypical linkages include external organizations. The Netherlands is a good example of organizational networking through temporary employment agencies that connect firms and graduates with different educational backgrounds<sup>6</sup>. Just behind advertisements, commercial employment agencies are the second most important path toward finding a first job after graduation<sup>7</sup> (Allen and van der Velden 2007:61). Commercial agencies are less conducive to a job in other countries. Data provided by Allen and van der Velden shows that university graduates who enlisted the help of employment agencies to find a job took longer to find a job than did those relying on alternative strategies in countries like Italy and Spain. The same happened to graduates who used the career placement offices of their home universities in Spain, France and Finland (Allen and van der Velden 2007:68–69).

### 2.3.2. The demands of the graduate labor market

As mentioned in chapter 1, the demands that the modern *knowledge society* places on higher education graduates go beyond their academic credentials. To meet the demands of current markets, employers and policymakers alike have been calling for «flexible professionals», that is, graduates with a strong international orientation, motivated and well-prepared for an increasingly volatile labor market (Allen and van der Velden 2011).

The demand for flexible professionals is quite universal, that is, it crosses the boundaries of fields of study, disciplines, economic sectors and national job markets. Based on the results of a rather unique and large-scale research project on the new challenges faced by HE in 16 countries, Jim Allen and Rolf van der Velden (2011:15–23) identify five skills that the market expects from today's university graduates: a) professional expertise (i.e. domain-specific knowledge

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<sup>6</sup> The Netherlands has the highest rate of temporary agency workers in the European Union, and unlike other countries, employers use of temporary agencies with few regulatory restrictions and employees use them as stepping-stone to regular work (de Graaf-Zijl, van den Berg, and Heyma 2011; de Graaf-Zijl and Berkhout 2007).

<sup>7</sup> In the European context, this figure is only comparable to the one for the United Kingdom, where employment agencies are the fourth most important method for finding a job among university graduates (after advertisements, direct application to employers, and personal connections).

and the ability to solve complex problems), b) functional flexibility (i.e. ability to adapt to new situations and improve one's "fit" for the job), c) innovation and knowledge management (i.e. ability to create environments for creative thinking and gain access to new ideas developed elsewhere), d) mobilization of human resources (i.e. ability to work autonomously and as part of a team, and leadership and decision-making skills), and e) international orientation (i.e. mastery of foreign languages and ability to navigate different cultures). Notice that most of these competences can be better developed outside academia, despite efforts by competitive higher education institutions to introduce changes in their study programs to better meet these new demands.

In which competences are recent university graduates over and under-equipped? Allen and van der Velden found that graduates in all countries feel that their study course has provided them with professional competence. Beyond this, they measured large country differences. A large percentage of Italian graduates perceived, for instance, that their program had not prepared them in any of the dimensions, whereas Dutch and Norwegian graduates felt satisfied about the level of competence acquired in all dimensions, especially foreign languages. Then, there were country-specific peculiarities. Spaniards, for instance, felt that they are under-prepared in the area of innovation and knowledge management whereas British graduates admit to poor training in foreign languages (Allen and van der Velden 2011).

The new demands of the knowledge economy in a globalized world also include transnational skills. Spending time abroad whilst in HE, for instance, shortens the transition from education to employment (Allen and van der Velden 2011:187–189; Jahr and Teichler 2007:221). A recent study on the impact of the Erasmus program also suggests that more than one in three Erasmus students who did a job placement abroad were hired or offered a position by their host company (European Commission 2014:18). This study also found that 64% of employers consider experience abroad to be important for employability (European Commission 2014:18; Janson, Schomburg, and Teichler 2009:46). Generally speaking, studies suggest that polyglots do better than monolinguals. Jobs requiring a high level of foreign language proficiency

are associated with good career prospects and high-level positions, especially in the production sector of the economy (European Commission 2014:193–194; Jahr and Teichler 2007:221–222).

### 2.3.3. The buoyancy of the economy

If the labor market nowadays privileges the highly skilled, as economists and sociologists frequently claim, one would expect recent university graduates to experience a smooth transition from school to work. Employment opportunities should present themselves for most of them without much effort. As I show in the previous chapter, the employment prospects for university graduates are highly contingent, however, on the upturns and downturns of the economic cycle. This became clear after the global crisis of 2007/8. The crisis showed that in recessionary times university graduates face the same hurdles as other groups of the population.

There is also some evidence to the effect that the pay-off to specific job-search strategies varies at different phases of the business cycle. The use of connections when looking for a job, for instance, tends to be less useful in bad times. Unemployed individuals have relatively low chances of finding a job through social networks, mainly because a large proportion of one's network is also unemployed (Osberg 1993; see also Granovetter 1995). Strong ties, however, appear to be the most important resources for finding employment during periods of economic recession (Preisendörfer and Voss 1988). An example taken from a recent publication by Granovetter illustrates the job-search's «business cycle dependence»<sup>8</sup> quite well:

“The interdependence among careers and networks of different individuals leads to interesting modeling possibilities. For example, characterize those who constitute one's social network as balls in an urn. Let contacts with useful job information be red balls and others white. A model of pure heterogeneity suggests that urn composition is constant, and better connected individuals are those with a larger proportion of red balls in their urn. But a state dependence model would suggest that when a person finds a new job through her network, she makes new connections, so that at the next

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<sup>8</sup> See also Osberg (1993:352).

draw, there would be a larger proportion of red balls in her urn. What empirical data suggest really happens is more complex still: that this proportion also depends on whether the people you know have themselves changed their own urn's proportions, by moving around from job to job and improving their own networks, which makes them a better source of information" (Granovetter 2005:37).

Closer look at actual job markets reveals the existence of insiders and outsiders, as classic labor segmentation theory suggests. This differentiation allows for a better understanding of why networks become less useful in bad economic times. Insiders are those workers with full-time and long-term contracts (the *red balls* in Granovetter's example). Their job situation is hardly affected by changes in the economic climate. Then, there are the outsiders, those, like recent university graduates, who have not yet had a job, unemployed workers, the underemployed, and those on part-time jobs. They lack significant work experience and extended business networks (they are the *white balls* in Granovetter's example). As the unemployment rate grows, job mobility in both segments becomes extremely low. Insiders and outsiders thus become 'bad sources' of relevant job information. On the one hand, since insiders are less mobile, their social networks tend to be narrow. On the other hand, since outsiders are constantly moving from non-standard to non-standard job, they cannot improve the quality of their networks through strong linkages to insiders. Outsiders also have fewer chances of finding "structural holes" (Burt 1992). In sum, when the economic situation is volatile, even university graduates with the right credentials and competences may find it difficult to find a job and have to rely on a variety of job-seeking strategies.

#### **2.4. Hypotheses**

The present study attempts to demonstrate that cultural and institutional contexts impact on the job-search process by encouraging some strategies and discouraging others in different employment cultures. This approach draws on insights from the economic sociology literature and from Pierre Bourdieu's

earliest and latest work<sup>9</sup> (Bourdieu 1977, 2005). My approach emphasizes the relative fit of different job-seeking practices across contexts. Put it another way, the job search can be analyzed on the basis of institutional arrangements that affect the functioning of the labor market<sup>10</sup>. This is predicated on the premise that the pay-off from different actions are relatively known and that the transmission of this information facilitates the learning of optimal strategies (e.g. the use of personal connections in patrimonialist cultures, or the answer to job ads in meritocratic cultures). It also builds on a comparative analysis of institutional characteristics –such as the demands of the graduate labor market and the linkages between universities and firms- in shaping job-seeking behavior (Table 2.2). I argue that job search strategies are embedded in employment cultures. These cultures provide guides for action and are embodied in specific institutions. Strategies are closely related to specific employment cultures, which define general guidelines for social practices in the labor field (Bourdieu 2005; Fligstein 2001; Ghezzi and Mingione 2007).

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<sup>9</sup> For a review on Bourdieu's impact on the new economic sociology, see Swedberg (2003:245) and Zelizer (2007:1058).

<sup>10</sup> The concept of embeddedness is widely used to understand the logics underlying the formation and transformation of social institutions in contexts of market exchange (Ghezzi and Mingione 2007; Polanyi 1957). Polanyi shows how these processes occurred historical and cross-culturally. In *The Great Transformation* (1944), Polanyi explains how certain institutions were established to minimize the negative impact of laissez-faire on market exchanges. He shows that institutional arrangements in capitalist societies are characterized by a double movement of dis-embeddedness and re-embeddedness. In *The Economy as Instituted Process* (1957), Polanyi identifies three types of relationships or patterns of integration that provide the necessary exchange institutions: the market exchange, redistribution and reciprocity. Redistribution (for example, welfare state programmes) and reciprocity (family, kinship, and community care strategies) express two different logics of social organization. The first stems from membership in a broader community, with a particular configuration of internal power relations. In this stable configuration social relationships are organized hierarchically and are politically legitimized, and resources are extracted from individuals to the benefit of society as a whole. Meanwhile, the logic of reciprocity is built upon the collective interests of small groups with strong and close ties (Ghezzi and Mingione 2007:16). In this form of exchange, standards that promote the reproduction of the social groups take precedence over immediate individual interests.



Table 2.2. Analytical framework

Job-search strategy that dominates in each Employment Cultures	
<i>Patrimonialist Employment Cultures</i>	Friends or relatives are relied upon most in countries with a clientelist or patrimonialist employment culture and low rates of spending on active labor market programs.
<i>Meritocratic Employment Cultures</i>	<p>Job advertisements are the dominant strategy in countries with meritocratic employment cultures and a free market ideology (neo-liberal model).</p> <p>Employment agencies are relied upon most in countries with a meritocratic culture, high rate of spending on active labor market programs, and early specialization in the higher education system</p> <p>The institutional contexts that support graduates' transition to employment and their meritocratic strategies, through a strong public sector for job matching and outplacement services tend to display lower rates of unemployment among university graduates and are less sensitive to economic fluctuations.</p>

Source: Own elaboration

The hypotheses concern the extent to which individuals follow the dominant practices in their particular social milieus (Table 2.3). These dominant practices spread throughout a field in the form of long-lasting dispositions and always tend to reproduce the objective structures of which they are the product. Structures govern practices, not through a process of mechanical determinism, but through guidelines assigned to the habitus's operations of invention (see Bourdieu 1977:95). These operations of invention are defined by the volume of capital available or *inherited*, i.e. either by ascriptive factors such as social origin of parents, or acquired progressively through life history stages (e.g. educational qualifications, marriage strategies, etc.).

Then, an agent's position is defined by the unequal distribution of capital (for example, those who have less social or cultural capital may try to acquire it through formal training, diplomas, degrees or certificates) and his or her structural possibility to access certain resources (e.g., through the bureaucratic field, public and private institutions, formal contacts, etc.). Using this perspective, I hypothesize that the use of social capital in the job search process -i.e. through use of current or potential contacts-, varies across social positions.

Table 2.3. Summary of Hypotheses

Hypotheses
(H1) Individuals tend to trust successful practices in their “milieu” when seeking a job; only if these strategies fail do individuals use alternative strategies.
(H2) Upwardly mobile graduates use weak ties more frequently than do middle class ones, mainly because their strong social contacts do not provide useful information for finding high-skilled jobs.
(H3) The use of social capital (strong or weak ties) instead of the market or employment agencies (impersonal ties) produces a poorer match between qualifications and jobs obtained.

Source: Own elaboration.

## 2.5. Case Selection Criteria

Based on the theoretical argument above, I have selected three European Union countries for analysis: the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (as examples of state-based and market-based meritocratic culture, respectively), and Spain (as an example of Patrimonialist culture). In what follows I briefly review their main characteristics (more details can be found in Chapter 3).

The Netherlands, exemplifies the State-based Meritocratic culture, where job-seekers rely primarily on competitive strategies and intermediary institutions. Among the most widely used methods for finding a job are direct application to employers (68 percent in 2012), and contact with private employment offices (43 percent in 2012, one of the highest ratios in Europe, along with Belgium). The Dutch welfare State has a tradition of sharing political space with the social partners, employers’ organizations and trade unions (e.g. Jelle Visser and Hemerijck 1997; Becker 2005a; Rhodes 2001a; Slomp 2002). From the 1980s onwards, the move from high to low unemployment rates was achieved through activation measures and a strong emphasis on citizens’ obligations through work-related benefit rules and conditions<sup>11</sup>. The Dutch success story «mainly consisted of a giant redistribution of the work available» and it was particularly true for individuals with high level of education and

<sup>11</sup> Lowest unemployment rates remains in the Netherlands partly due to demographic changes and measures adopted to encourage re-employment of groups most at risk (Hannan, Smyth, and McCoy 1998). Among these measures, the promotion of temporary work agencies features prominently. Temp agency work «as an institutionalized form of temp work is much more rooted in the Netherlands than in other European countries» (Tijdens et al. 2006).

women as compared to disabled workers, older unemployed and ethnic minorities (Oorschot, Abrahamson, and van Oorschot 2003). It is not surprising, then, that the Dutch population has internalized universalist standards and a meritocratic culture. Labor market flexibility is here combined with strong welfare support (Wilthagen and Tros 2004)<sup>12</sup>. After the economic crash of 2008, the liberal government led by Mark Rutte introduced crisis-related measures to subsidize training for specific target groups (especially the young in need of social assistance and those who want to move into a new economic sector), and allowed employers to temporarily reduce working hours to more established workers.

The British culture, is essentially meritocratic and deeply committed to the market principle (Somers and Block 2005). According to Eurostat (2012) the most widely used method to find a job is advertisements (84 percent in 2012). Prospective employees and employers rely on ads to learn and communicate job opportunities. This may be related to the fact that the UK' system of labor relations is strongly deregulated. The process of deregulation began in the 1980's but it was Tony Blair (1997-2007) who «embarked on a broad strategy of “third way” reform, fine-tuning benefit rules to neutralize the ‘traps’ created by welfare-to-work schemes, and launching a fight against poverty and social exclusion by increasing minimum wage and income guarantees, reforming the tax code and introducing new targeted programs» (Eichhorst and Hemerijck 2008). Among the most distinctive features of the New Labor approach are the requirements of active job-search and training as a pre-requisite to benefits entitlement (Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby 2003; Eichhorst and Hemerijck 2008; Trickey, Ivar, and Heather 2001). Training programs account for about 33.3 percent of UK public expenditure against 22.2 percent in Spain and 14.2 percent in the Netherlands (Eurostat 2007). Above all, the New Labor Government decentralized and privatized public services, and played a central role in collective bargaining (Eichhorst and Hemerijck 2008; Hall 2000). Under Conservative rule, labor market policy has been dominated by ideas about the

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<sup>12</sup> Flexicure systems like this are «based on minimal job protection but [offer] decent standards of social protection for the unemployed [and] are [thus] best able to bridge the gap between insiders and outsiders» (Hemerijck 2007).

«Weightless State» and work-first approaches and eschewed more social alternatives.

Spain exemplifies the Patrimonialist culture, where job-seekers rely primarily on family and social ties. As stated in Banfield's classic study (Banfield 1958), one feature of Southern European countries is the strong intergenerational solidarity («amoral familism»). Eurostat data (2012) shows that the most widely used method to find a job is contact with friends and relatives (86 percent in 2012). This strength of the family has been used in the scientific literature to understand the specific characteristics of the so-called Mediterranean welfare regime that prevails in countries like Spain and Italy (Ferrera 1996; Martin 1996; Naldini 2003; Reher 1998). More than in other European welfare states, family support plays a major role in providing for people's well-being. Monetary transfers and other types of redistribution of resources are persistent family practices in many contexts (e.g. gifts between family members, proliferation of family businesses, and financial support for young people as they move out of home -support in getting a house, stipends). Compared to the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, Spain is also characterized by a large informal sector, the weak presence of sector of intermediary actors to match job-seekers to firms, and by under-resourced employment policies<sup>13</sup>.

## 2.6. Summary

In this chapter I have argued that university graduates get jobs through different channels (e.g. networks, the market, and intermediaries). Unlike other social groups of job-seekers with less education, university graduates have the resources to benefit from all three channels. Given that well-educated

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<sup>13</sup> Investment in active labor market policies remains very low, however, compared to other European countries. Data from Eurostat (2009:104) show that Spain has one of the lowest shares of expenditure on active measures in relation to the total public expenditure on Labor Market Policy (e.g., supported employment and insertion measures account for 3.4 percent against to 69 percent in the Netherlands). Socialists and conservative alternating governments have introduced modest policies which have had relatively little impact in the behavior patterns of job-seekers.

individuals use various strategies, I argue that interpersonal ties and institutional connections intervene in the job-seeking process and determine which job-seeking practice becomes dominant.

Theoretical insights from the new economic sociology and from Pierre Bourdieu's work are suitable to study the job-search process. The economic sociology's emphasis on the social organization of markets suggests that one's understanding of how labor markets work is shaped by the experience of self and the members of one's social milieu, and by the social organization of the job market itself. Apart from these different rationalities, my approach also builds on a comparative analysis of institutional characteristics –such as the linkages between universities and firms, the demands of the graduate labor market and the upturns and downturns of the economic cycle- in shaping job-seeking behavior. Thus, university graduates make a choice based on information that flows through personal and institutional channels.

I identify two specific employment cultures that account for observed differences in job-seeking practices: patrimonialist and meritocratic. Low reliance on open market allocation is characteristic of patrimonialist cultures whereas high reliance on open market allocation is typical of meritocratic cultures. Based on this theoretical driven typology I have selected three countries for analysis: the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (as examples of state-based and market-based meritocratic culture, respectively), and Spain (as an example of Patrimonialist culture). In the next chapter I present the research methodology and the data collection procedures.

## Chapter 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The research design of this study is geared toward quantitatively assess university graduates' job-seeking strategies across contexts. Several datasets provide information on graduate employment at the national and sub-national levels<sup>1</sup>. Each survey, however, has different questions, answer categories, and sample designs. This hinders one's ability to compare outcomes across countries. In the late 1990s, cross-national surveys such as CHEERS (Careers after Higher Education-European Graduate Survey, 1994/1995 graduating cohort), and REFLEX (Research into Employment and professional Flexibility, 1999/2000 graduating cohort) provide the most thorough comparative information to date on graduate employment in Europe. Scholars have produced a great deal of empirical work with this data. It is hard, however, to find harmonized datasets for the analysis of more recent trends in the graduate labor market. One would need, ideally, data sets that first target the high-skilled, and that then focus on the specific timeframe of the labor market entry (that is, the first years after graduation) (e.g. Teichler 2000).

A more viable alternative to meet the research objectives is to design one's own survey. Web surveys are appropriate when the target population is young, Internet-literate, and geographically mobile. The web survey implemented for this study gathered information on the graduates' experiences in the few months after completion of a full study program (i.e. a Bachelor of Arts). I designed the web survey so as to generate information on four dimensions: a) graduates' employment status after graduation, b) graduates' preferences and use of fourteen different job-search strategies, c) previous job-experience, along with mastery of various skills (e.g. foreign languages and transnational experience), and d) family background (e.g. parental experience in HE and occupational

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<sup>1</sup> In the countries under study one finds, for instance, the Observatory of Young people's Transition to the Labor Market -a longitudinal study carried out every three years by the Spanish IVIE (Instituto Valenciano de Investigaciones Económicas); the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE), a survey carried out twice a year by the United Kingdom's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); and the HBO-Monitor conducted every year by the Research Centre for Education and the Labor Market in the Netherlands (ROA, Researchcentrum voor Onderwijs en Arbeidsmarkt).

status). For the Spanish and Dutch cases I rely on data collected with this web survey, whereas for the British case I rely on secondary data from the DHLE survey. The description and analysis of the obtained data constitutes the main body of chapter 5.

As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, employers' preferences when hiring university degrees matter. To sample this side of the graduate labor market, I use data from the Flash Eurobarometer "*Employers' perception of graduate employability*" (#304), a telephone survey that provides cross-national information on the skills that employers look at when recruiting Higher Education graduates<sup>2</sup>. The Flash Eurobarometer targeted companies employing 50 or more persons (i.e., medium and large-size firms) from 27 Member States of the European Union. The questionnaire dealt with a variety of firm-level and skill-specific topics. Employers were asked 1) about eleven skills and abilities that they may want from graduates (e.g. analytical and problem solving skills, and foreign language skills); 2) about the factors that influence the level of graduate recruitment in their firms (e.g. actual or anticipated growth in business, and higher turnover of staff), 3) about the amount and type of training given to university graduates (e.g. training and development programs in-house); and 4) about their linkages to HE institutions. Also, the survey includes demographic information about firms, such as company size, ownership structure and main activity. The data analysis of the Flash Eurobarometer constitutes the main body of chapter 6.

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology used to achieve the objectives outlined in the previous chapter. In the next section, I provide an overview of the methodological strengths and pitfalls of web based surveys. Then, I outline the process of data collection and database preparation. In the last sections, I describe the characteristics of the Eurobarometer data on employers' perceptions of graduate employability and the main variables used in this study. The chapter ends with a summary.

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<sup>2</sup> Flash Eurobarometers are ad hoc thematic telephone interviews conducted at the request of the European Commission. Additional details about the survey procedures can be found in The Gallup Organization (2010).

### 3.1. An introduction to Web-based surveys

Web-based surveys became increasingly popular in the last decade. Although surveys have been administered electronically since the late 1960s, the development of faster Internet connections and the increasing use of Internet among the population –both in households and in workplaces- make it possible to rely more than ever on these electronic instruments<sup>3</sup>. Among the most quoted advantages of this new mode of delivery are its low-cost, wide-scale accesses to internationally or geographically distributed populations, the speed with which completed questionnaires are returned, automated data-entry, programmable context-sensitive skip patterns, and the almost infinite design possibilities it offers: graphics, voice and images in particular<sup>4</sup>.

The same basic methodological guidelines apply to web-based surveys as to traditional paper-pencil surveys. The researcher must define the study population, use random sampling techniques, and strive to attain as high response rates as possible (Dillman and Bowker 2001). Web-based response rates are typically as low as 10% (Deutskens et al. 2004; de Leeuw, Hox, and Dillman 2008). This is the reason why scholars often argue that sample size should be increased so that sufficient data is collected for statistical analysis (Lang 2002). The effects of design choices on the information one gets have thus become one of the major issues in the literature (Table 3.1). The literature on web-based surveys highlights different issues regarding design, implementation, and data quality that impact on the reliability of the obtained results (Lang 2002). In what follows, I provide details on *pre* and *post-fielding*, the two main stages of web survey design (see, e.g Callegaro, Lozar Manfreda, and Vehovar 2015; Dillman, Smyth, and Christian 2014).

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<sup>3</sup> During the decades of 1980 and 1990, web-based surveys were used for targeting hard-to-reach audiences and to treat very sensitive topics such as drug abuse, drug dealers, or illegal activities (Coomber 1997). With the spread of internet use and fastest connections, this mode of carrying out surveys is now used for the most diverse topics and publics.

<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, not all these advantages have to do with the researcher side. The exponential growth of mobile internet connections allows users to choose the preferred context and the time of the survey.



Table 3.1. Key issues in the recent web-based survey literature

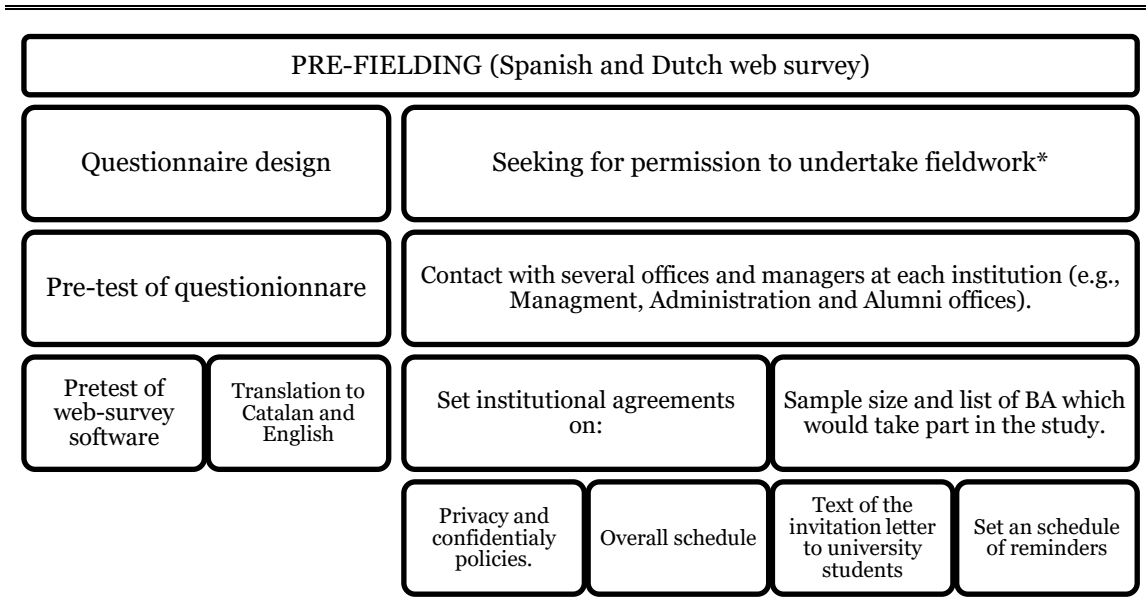
Key issue	Author	Purpose/Research goals
<b>Effects of design choices on responses</b>	(Couper, Traugott, and Lamias 2001a), (Dillman and Christian 2005), (Heerwegh 2005), (Porter and Whitcomb 2007), (Peytchev et al. 2006) (Fan and Yan 2010)	Lists a wide range of factors influencing the response rate at the stage of survey development.
	(Caplan, Grijalva, and Jackson-Smith 2007)	Compares the results of student feedback gathered through paper-based and web-based approaches.
	(Heerwegh and Loosveldt 2008)	Investigates the differences in data quality between a face-to-face and a web survey.
	(Toepoel, Das, and Soest 2008)	Compares the effect of instrument design between trained and fresh respondents.
	(Millar and Dillman 2011)	Tests different ways to maximize web response rates in a highly Internet-literate population with full Internet access.
<b>Sampling methods</b>	(Dillman and Bowker 2001), (Andrews, Nonnecke, and Preece 2003), (Jansen, Corley, and Jansen 2007)	Explores non-probabilistic and probability-based methods
<b>Data reliability</b>	(Braunsberger, Wybenga, and Gates 2007)	Investigates whether web panels can produce more reliable data estimates than telephone surveys
	(Malhotra 2008)	Investigates the relationship between primacy effects and rapid completion time for different groups of respondents.
<b>Design Guidelines for web-based surveys</b>	(Lang 2002), (Archer 2003), (Hayslett and Wildemuth 2004), (Callegaro et al. 2015)	Provides details on the several stages of the web survey design, as on the managing of paradata and metadata.

Source: Own elaboration

### 3.2. Pre-fielding: Rationale for data collection instruments

I designed a two-wave panel web-based survey, six-months apart, that focuses on university graduates who had already finished the final year degree program in 2011 or 2012. The goal of the survey was (1) to examine at each round what are the dominant job-seeking strategies and (2) to analyze job-search outcomes. Following the literature on web surveys, the next sections provide a detailed description of the target population, sampling techniques, and questionnaire design. I also outline several issues related to mode and design effects that can boost or hinder response rates (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Pre-fielding: Steps in conducting the web survey



Source: Own elaboration. (\*) In Spanish HE institutions (University of Barcelona and Complutense University-Madrid); in Dutch HE institutions (University of Amsterdam and University of Utrecht); and in British HE institutions (University of Southampton, University of Lancaster, University of Warwick and Brunel University).

### 3.2.1. Target Population and sampling

The target population consists of university graduates with higher education qualifications or First Degree (e.g. Bachelor of Arts) who met the requirements for graduation in the academic year of 2011<sup>5</sup>. Participant universities were selected based on common elements: a) status (e.g. whether they are predominantly funded by public or private means) b) student-population size (middle-size to large institutions); c) provision of a similar academic curriculum (bachelor's degree programs); d) geographical location (in capital cities or principal regions, which makes them referents in both Higher Education and national labor markets) (Table 3.2).

Universities were granted a special role at the sampling stage Each university cooperated through contacting the most recent wave of university graduates, with information about the project, and an invitation to visit the web-

<sup>5</sup> A focus on a cohort that has just graduated allows me to reduce recall error and makes it possible to follow this cohort for a period of six months soon after graduation.

link where they could complete the survey if they so desired<sup>6</sup>. In Barcelona and in Amsterdam, cooperation from the university's Alumni offices made it possible to get a sampling frame of students. Each university generated a list of regular B.A. programs and produced the total number of students who fulfilled the requirements to finish their degree by July 31, 2011. As the subject in which students graduate is relevant to their chances of getting a job upon graduation, in the Spanish and in the Dutch case I have focused mostly on the same range of academic degrees (68 and 59 bachelor degrees respectively). In sum, Alumni Offices contacted a list of 7979 university graduates at the Spanish university and 5014 university graduates at the Dutch university. Knowing the total number of the graduate population facilitates the calculation of response rates and the designing of a strategy to increase participation.

In the British case, I rely on data from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (commonly known as DLHE survey), which offers a general overview of B.A. graduates' employment outcomes<sup>7</sup>. The DLHE survey is carried out twice a year by the United Kingdom's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), and provides information about how graduates found a job after graduation, the graduates' educational career and their social background. The target population includes all students who reported to HESA during the period from 01 August to 31 July that they had the relevant HE qualifications and were studying full-time or part-time (including sandwich students and those writing-up theses). The survey covers students from the 161 UK higher education institutions and the eligible DLHE population in 2011/12 was 699,330 leavers. Data collection is undertaken by each HE institutions across the United Kingdom following a uniform procedure prescribed by HESA. University graduates are invited to complete the DLHE survey six months after graduation, that is, in January and April of the following year. I selected the University of Manchester, which is similar to the Spanish and Dutch universities in my study.

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<sup>6</sup> By doing this, universities avoided confidentiality problems, in the sense that I would not get any access to the students' email addresses, nor their names.

<sup>7</sup> I negotiated with four British universities to implement a joint study. All major universities in the United Kingdom, however, have a statutory obligation to undertake the DLHE survey conducted under the aegis of the Higher Education Statistics Agency. When I contacted university administrative managers, they were manifestly afraid of jeopardizing data collection, even assessing the most flexible survey schedule.

Table 3.2. Main characteristics of participant universities

	Barcelona (ES) 2011/2012	Amsterdam (NL) 2012/2013	Manchester (UK) 2011/2012
<b>Funding</b>	Public-funded University	Public-funded University	Public-funded University
<i>Annual Budget (m)</i>	€379.4 <sup>(1)</sup>	€586.4 <sup>(3)</sup>	£809.0 <sup>(4)</sup>
<b>Student Population</b>			
<i>Total students enrolled</i>	80.608 students <sup>(1)</sup>	32.739 students <sup>(2)</sup>	39.732 students <sup>(4)</sup>
<i>International students</i>	9.759 (12.1% of student population)	2.257 (6.9% of student population)	8.344 (21 % of student population)
<i>Total enrolment in Bachelor Degrees</i>	47.446 (58.9% of student population)	19.124 students (58.4% of student population)	28.514 (71.7% of student population)
<i>Students awarded with Bachelor Degrees</i>	6.382 students (7.9% of student population)	4,577 students (14% of student population)	s/d
<b>Academic curriculum</b>	71 Bachelor's programs <sup>(1)</sup>	63 Bachelor's programs <sup>(2)</sup>	~56 Bachelor's programs <sup>(4)</sup>
<i>Overall rankings</i>	Shanghai Ranking (ARWU) 2011: World: 201-300; Spain: 1-4.  Times Higher Education, 2011-2012: World: 201-225, Europe: 88, Spain: 2  QS World University Rankings, 2011: World: 178, Europe: 80, Spain: 2	Shanghai Ranking (ARWU) 2011: World: 102-150; the Netherlands: 3-6.  Times Higher Education, 2011-2012: World: 92, Europe: 30, The Netherlands: 4  QS World University Rankings, 2011: World: 63, Europe: 19, The Netherlands: 1	Shanghai Ranking (ARWU) 2011: World: 38; United Kingdom: 5.  Times Higher Education, 2011-2012: World: 92, Europe: 11, United Kingdom: 4  QS World University Rankings, 2011: World: 29, Europe: 8, United Kingdom: 7
<b>Geographical location</b>	Catalonia	North Holland	North West England
<i>University graduates employment rate<sup>(5)</sup></i>			
20-24 years-old	41.3%	75.2%	71.0%
25-29 years-old	71.0%	90.3%	85.6%

Sources: (1) University of Barcelona "Facts and Figures 2013", (2) University of Amsterdam "Facts and Figures 2013"; (3) Annual reports individual HEIs, NWO (2008), in OECD 2010: Higher Education in Regional and City Development: Amsterdam; (4) University of Manchester "Facts and Figures 2013"; (5) Eurostat 2011, [lfsa\_ergaed] Employment rate (ISCED 5-8).

### 3.2.2. Questionnaire design and contact delivery mode

In the Spanish and Dutch cases, the questionnaire contains 51 items concerning the job-search activity of employed and unemployed graduates, and is organized around four sections. Prior to first administration, early versions of the questionnaire were pre-tested on a small sample of eight graduate university students from different fields and with different job-experience. Several changes were introduced to the questionnaire based on this pre-test. The first section of the final questionnaire asked employed respondents about the job-search strategy that proved successful out of a set of fourteen different ones. It also asked them about their job's skill requirements and about work arrangements (18 items). The second section of the questionnaire included detailed questions on the unemployed respondents' preferred job-search methods, on how intensely they used each of them, and how useful they were in the end (14 items). In the third section, the questionnaire included questions on socio-demographic characteristics like age, gender, family background (e.g. parents' education and parents' occupation), and time spent in different activities (e.g. learning new languages, childcare or voluntary work) (19 items). In the final section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked if they were willing to participate in a follow-up survey.

The survey was administrated via email, and typically took 15 to 20 minutes to complete. In Spain, graduates were given the option to fill-in the survey in Spanish or Catalan, and in the Netherlands the survey was administrated entirely in English. Data collection for the first wave was completed between November 28 2011 and January 7 2012 in Spain and between October 14 and December 14 2012 in the Netherlands. Given that responses rates in web surveys are not as high as in traditional surveys (Hayslett and Wildemuth 2004), I followed four strategies to increase response rates and to minimize panel attrition: a) delivery of the survey through a well-known sender (i.e. the Alumni office of graduates' home university); b) a schedule of reminders; c) a prize draw incentive, and d) a survey questionnaire tested to perform well on small and big-screen devices.

As I mentioned above, Alumni Offices emailed the letter of invitation using the distribution list of former students (Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3). This approach ensured that respondents could easily recognize an email sent by their home university and thus find the source legitimate. Surveys sponsored by academic and governmental agencies have higher response rates than those sponsored by commercial ones (Malhotra 2008). The literature also stresses the pay-off of a good letter of invitation. Several studies have tested whether personalizing emails increases the chances of a positive response (Heerwegh 2005; Heerwegh and Loosveldt 2008; de Leeuw et al. 2008; Porter and Whitcomb 2007; Rookey et al. 2012). The personalization of the salutation, the inclusion of the job title, and the senders' signature are significant predictors of higher response rates in email surveys (Fan and Yan 2010). Since the universities sent the letter to the selected respondents, I was not able to personalize it. I conveyed, however, how important participation in the study was by including a statement that told respondents that they were part of a small selected group chosen for this project and that the deadline of survey participation was approaching. Details like this have been shown to increase response rates (Fan and Yan 2010; Porter and Whitcomb 2007).

I also scheduled periodic reminders and offered incentives to participants<sup>8</sup>. Since follow-up reminder emails also appear to spike participation (Dillman, Smyth, and Christian 2009; de Leeuw et al. 2008; Smith 1997), I sent at least one reminder seven to fifteen days after initial contact<sup>9</sup>. As in traditional surveys, providing monetary or non-monetary stimulus to boost participation is also a common strategy. I offered respondents a small incentive upon completion of every round of data collection to acknowledge their cooperation (a prize drawn among all participants).

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<sup>8</sup> In a recent study, Sánchez Fernández (2012) has shown that personalization improves response quality when used separately or in conjunction with more traditional parameters, such as the periodicity of follow-up mailing or incentives based on prize draws. Heerwegh (2008) also found that response rates increase when personalization is applied, although it could decrease the perceived level of anonymity and privacy.

<sup>9</sup> In order to obtain a better response rate, a higher frequency of reminders may work best when time is limited, whereas a lower frequency may be suitable in the absence of time constraints (Muñoz-Leiva 2010; Sánchez-Fernández et al. 2012).

Figure 3.2. Screenshot of the letter of invitation to Graduates in both Catalan and Spanish

**From:** Planificació Academicodocent  
**To:** alumnesub-l@ub.edu  
**Sent:** Monday, November 28, 2011 2:38 PM  
**Subject:** Enquesta

Benvolgut/da,

A través de la Universitat de Barcelona, us convidem a participar de l'enquesta sobre les estratègies de recerca d'ocupació d'universitaris.

Només es necessiten 15 minuts per completar l'enquesta.  
 Aqueles estudiants que responguin l'enquesta participen automàticament en el sorteig d'una **Tablet**.

**Per contestar l'enquesta en català, si us plau faci clic en aquest enllaç: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/jobseekers-spain-cat>**

Aquesta enquesta forma part de la Tesi Doctoral titulada "*Job-Seekers: Estratègies de recerca d'ocupació de joves universitaris a Espanya, Holanda i el Regne Unit*".

Moltes gràcies per la seva col·laboració!

Si us plau, no respongui aquest e-mail. Si té qualsevol dubte o suggerència contacti amb [scamargocorrea@lve.com](mailto:scamargocorrea@lve.com)

Selene Camargo Correa  
 Estudiant de Doctorat, Universitat de Barcelona  
 web de l'estudi: [Jobseekers-PhD-Research \(http://jobseekers-phd-research.blogspot.com/\)](http://jobseekers-phd-research.blogspot.com/)

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Apreciado/a,

A través de la Universidad de Barcelona, lo/a invitamos a participar de la encuesta sobre las estrategias de búsqueda de empleo de los universitarios/as.

Completar la encuesta sólo le tomará 15 minutos aprox.  
 Aqueles estudiantes que respondan la encuesta participan automáticamente en el sorteo de una **Tablet**.

**Para contestar la encuesta en castellano, por favor siga este enlace: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/jobseekers-spain-es>**

La encuesta forma parte de la Tesis Doctoral titulada "*Job-Seekers: Estrategias de búsqueda de empleo de jóvenes universitarios en España, Holanda y el Reino Unido*".


¡Muchas gracias por su colaboración!

Por favor no responda a este mail. Si tiene cualquier duda o sugerencia contacte con [scamargocorrea@lve.com](mailto:scamargocorrea@lve.com)

Selene Camargo Correa  
 Estudiante de Doctorado, Universitat de Barcelona  
 web del estudio: [Jobseekers-PhD-Research \(http://jobseekers-phd-research.blogspot.com/\)](http://jobseekers-phd-research.blogspot.com/)

Figure 3.3. Screenshots of the letter of invitation to Graduates in English

**Selene Camargo Correa, Visiting Student, University of Amsterdam** Wed, Nov 14, 2012 at 4:00PM  
 <scamargo@ub.edu>  
 Reply-To: scamargo@ub.edu  
 To: "scamargo@ub.edu" <scamargo@ub.edu>  
 Subject: Job-seekers Survey



Dear student,

With authorization from the University of Amsterdam, I have undertaken the **Job-seekers Survey**, a three-country comparative study designed to gather information on graduate student job-search strategies, the relative degree of success of different strategies, and the graduate students' subjective appraisal of the skills they bring into the labour market.

The countries included in the study are the Netherlands, Great Britain and Spain. The survey is conducted under the framework of the European PhD Programme in Socio-Economic and Statistical Studies ([www.europhd.org](http://www.europhd.org)).

By **completing the survey**, you will provide us with precious information for this research endeavour.  
 As a small token of appreciation for your effort, we give you the opportunity to participate in a lottery and **win a Kindle Fire™ mini Tablet**.

If you need further information, please contact me at [scamargo@ub.edu](mailto:scamargo@ub.edu)

Best wishes,

Selene Camargo Correa

Visiting Student, University of Amsterdam  
 PhD Candidate, Dept. Sociological Theory, University of Barcelona  
 European PhD in Socio-Economic and Statistical Studies

Incentives do not improve response rates in a linear way (Görizt 2006; Görizt and Wolff 2007), but they help to elicit more motivated responses<sup>10</sup>.

Unlike traditional paper-pencil and telephonic surveys, there is no physical interviewer in web surveys. Web surveys are visual research instruments. The format of each question (e.g., the font types and sizes, the text width, and bottom sizes), and the layout of the questionnaire (e.g. color, space) has to provide both guidance and motivation to survey respondents (see, e.g. Callegaro et al. 2015:87–97). Differences in questionnaire layout have been shown to affect response rates in conventional surveys. There is no agreement in this literature, however, on the effects of the number of items per screen. In some studies few differences have been found between different designs (Peytchev et al. 2006), whereas in other experiments multiple-item questionnaires have taken significantly less time to complete than single-item-per-screen versions (Couper et al. 2001).

The length of a questionnaire also matters, although shorter questionnaires do not necessarily produce higher response rates (Witmer, Colman, and Katzman 1999). Another design strategy consists in implementing a progress indicator that shows on the screen and that informs respondents of their progress through the questionnaire. This, apparently, motivates respondents to complete the survey (Couper et al. 2001) . I thus included a progress bar in each screen of the survey. Finally, given the widespread use of multiple electronic devices by the university graduate population, I optimized the web-server to properly display on a small mobile screen and in desktop browsers. Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.5 shows screenshots of the multiple-items-per-screen questionnaire, for both computer web browsers and smartphones<sup>11</sup>.

In the British case, the questionnaire contains 31 items and 5 sections. The first section concerns graduates' employment status (i.e., working full or part-time, due to start a job, engaged in further study, training or research, unemployed and looking for work). The second section asks for job characteristics and the job-finding method (17 items). The question on job-

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<sup>10</sup> As Dillman notice, pre-paid incentives such as vouchers or gifts given in advance are the most useful methods for improving response rates in the web (Dillman, Smyth, and Christian 2009).

<sup>11</sup> The full questionnaire for graduates figures in Appendix A (pp. 59).



finding method is the only job-seeking related question included in the DHLE survey. Then, the third section of the questionnaire targets newly qualified teachers (5 items); the fourth section inquires about the graduates' post-graduate studying, training or research (6 items), and finally, the fifth and last section of the questionnaire includes items related to the overall HE experience (3 items).

The DLHE survey is administrated through various channels. British HE institutions contact respondents and ask them to complete the questionnaire on-line, on paper, or by telephone. When using mail questionnaires or telephone interviews universities also input survey answers in a database or student record system provided by the HESA. HE institutions are also required to meet or exceed specific target response rates. Those vary between 80% for UK-domiciled respondents to 50% for all other EU students. At the end of the data collection process, each HE institution submits the data to the HESA servers.

Figure 3.4. Screenshot of the online questionnaire (computer web browser)

UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

DEPARTAMENT D'ECONOMIA I ESTADÍSTICA

INSTITUTE OF ECONOMIC AND STATISTICAL STUDIES

22%

How long did your job search take until you found your actual employment?

Months: [dropdown]

How did you find this job?

Please tick one box only.

- Through relatives
- Through friends or acquaintances
- Through colleagues or classmates
- Through university professors
- Replying to advertisements for a job
- Placed an ad in newspaper or Internet
- Applied directly to employer's (e.g. getting interviews, filling out an application, submitting a resume)
- Took tests or competitive examinations
- Through a professional organization
- Through trade unions
- Through a university placement office (e.g. at the job bank)
- Through the public employment office or service
- Through a temporary work agency
- Through a private employment agency
- Other (please specify) [text input]

Which of the following aspects has contributed most to your getting your current job?

Please tick one box only.

- Higher degree or previous studies
- Previous professional experience
- Contacts
- Your personality
- Luck
- Other (please specify) [text input]

What level of education do you feel is required for this work?

- PhD or equivalent
- Master degree
- Bachelor degree
- Less than university education
- No education needed

How many job interviews did you go through before getting your current job?

Interviews: [dropdown]

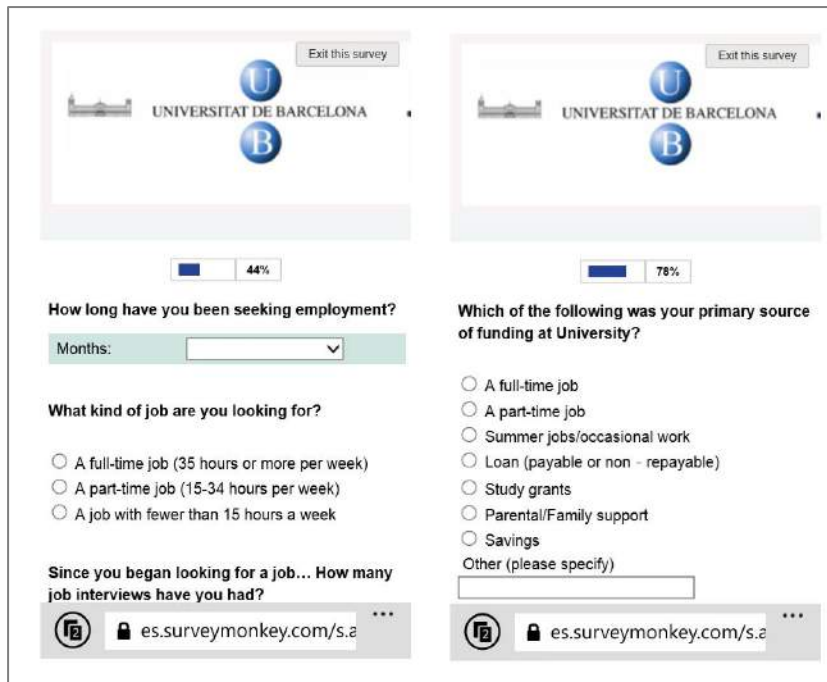
What is your current occupation or job title?

Occupation: [dropdown]

Other (please specify) [text input]

Prev Next

Figure 3.5. Screenshots of the online questionnaire (smartphones)



### 3.3. Post-fielding: Database preparation

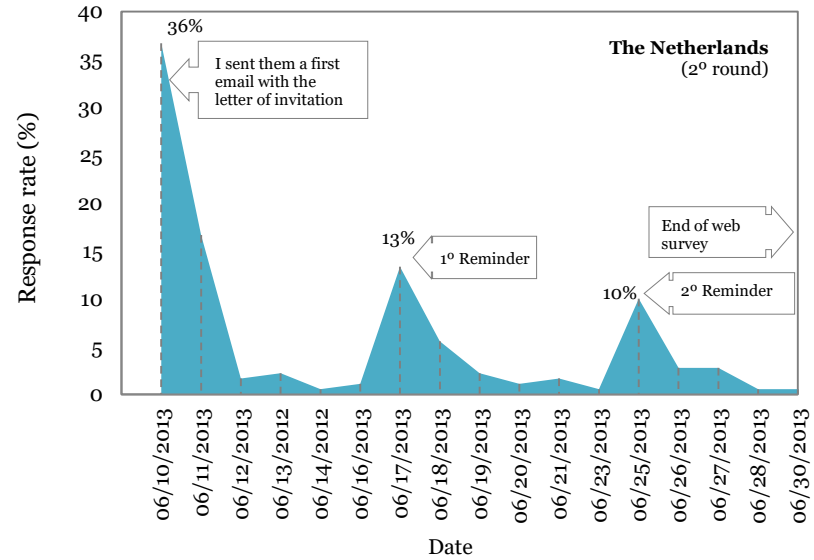
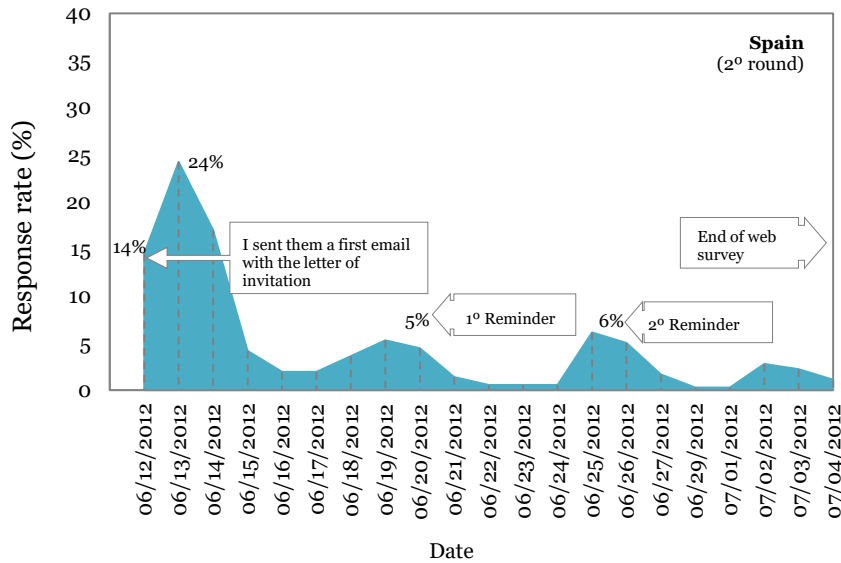
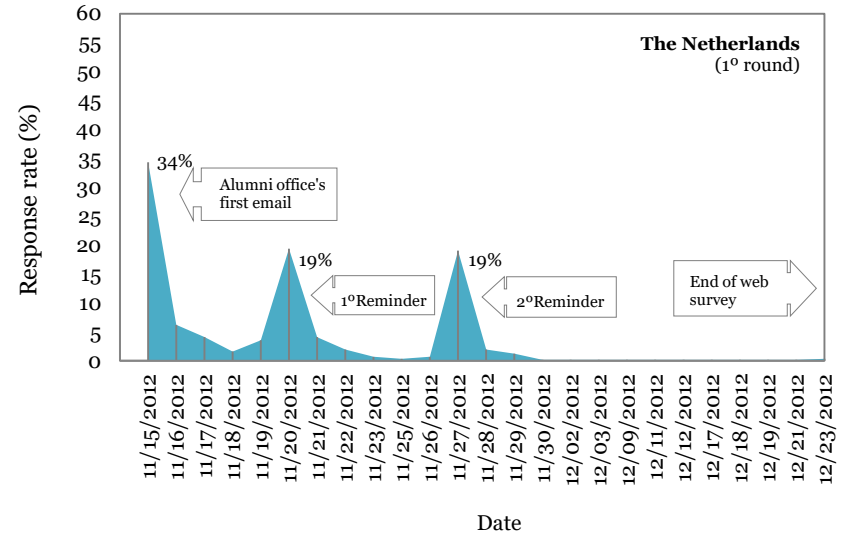
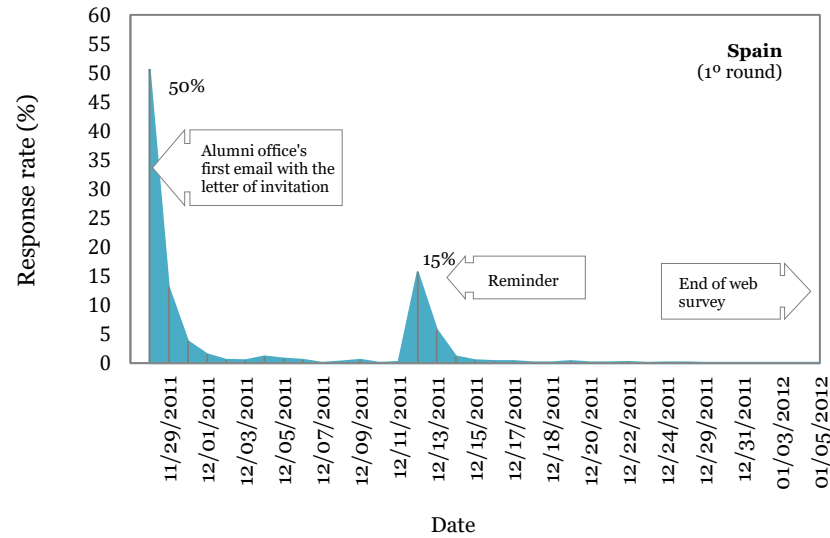
Through paradata, that is, through a collection of measures on the activity of respondents while filling in the survey, I tracked the response rate day by day (Figure 3.6). As can be seen, reminders increased response rates by 30% in the Spanish case, and by 55% in the Dutch case. Even so, the response rate for the Spanish and Dutch web survey was as low as expected (11, 9% on average) and, therefore, one must be aware of possible selection bias when analyzing and interpreting the data. In the first wave, 1100 out of 7979 selected participants completed the questionnaire in the Spanish case, compared to 734 questionnaires out of 5014 selected participants in the Dutch case (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Questionnaires' completion rate

University of Barcelona	University of Amsterdam	University of Manchester
1100 (out of 7979)	734 (out of 5014)	5460 (out of 7260)
13,78%	14,63%	75,20%

Source: Own elaboration

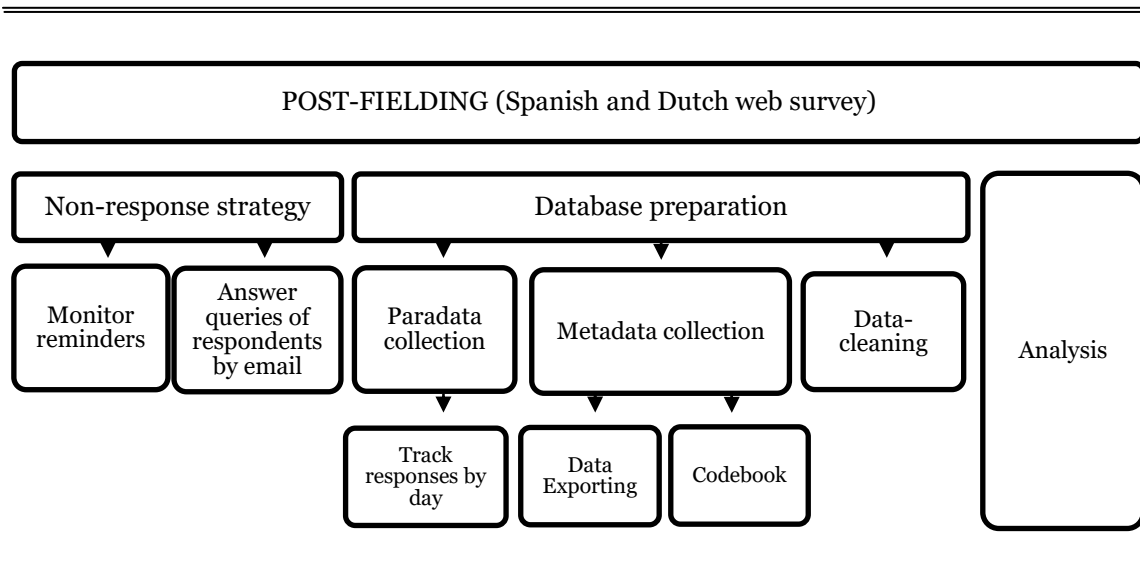
Figure 3.6. Web survey Response Rates, by Day (percentages)



Source: Own elaboration.

Those who so desired were given the opportunity to take part in a follow-up survey. As a result, I tracked 444 participants six months after the first round. In the British case, 5460 out of the 7260 selected participants completed their questionnaire, narrowly meeting the target response rate required by the HESA.

Figure 3.7. Post-fielding: Steps in preparing the database



Source: Own elaboration.

Upon completion of the data collection, I cleaned the data files by systematically obtaining univariate statistics for each variable and coded the open-ended responses (Figure 3.7). The Spanish and the Dutch samples are small but when added they result in a large enough dataset for statistical analysis. In chapter 5, I use multivariate methods to examine contrasts between countries.

Depending of the nature of the dependent variables, I have estimated linear or logistic regression models to analyze the effects of different job-search strategies. The dependent variables concern the job-seeking strategies of unemployed and employed respondents, and the job-search strategy that proved successful by leading to a job.

The independent variables include job characteristics and a set of individual background characteristics that could impact on the choice of job search strategies, on people's perception of the success of various strategies and, on the means through which people got their jobs in each of the countries (Table 3.4). Most of the variables in the web surveys match those in the DHLE survey.

The first block of variables refers to job-characteristics: it includes a variable that measures the average duration of the search process (in months) until the respondent found her/his current job. The final block of variables focuses on individual and family background. It includes variables like the field of study in which graduates hold a degree, a measure of whether respondents have had internships as part of their academic curricula; and a measure of whether respondents have had job experience. It also includes a measure of whether respondents have spent time abroad while in Higher Education and a variable that measures whether respondents master two or more foreign languages (the questionnaire specified that by speaking a foreign language is meant that respondents can have a conversation in that language).

In addition to this measure of multilingualism, and in order to better understand the impact of transnational skills on employment achievement, I have included another variable that measures the respondents' self-assessed fluency in English, since it is the most demanded foreign language in the labor market. Since family resources may affect the individual's reservation wage and therefore the decision to accept a job offer or continue the job search (e.g., Dolton and Makepeace 1986), I finally measure whether the respondents' parents a Higher Education degree and whether the respondents' parents have intermediate and professional occupations.

Table 3.4. Operationalization of main variables of the surveys to graduates

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Variables: Brief Description</i>	<i>Web survey item</i>	<i>DLHE item</i>
<b>Job-search and job characteristics</b> <i>Unemployed respondents</i>	Job search activity: relatives, friends or acquaintances; colleagues or classmates; university professors; replying to advertisements for a job; posted an ad in newspaper or Internet; Applied directly to employers; Took tests or competitive examinations; professional organization; trade unions; university placement office; public employment office or service; temporary work agency; private employment agency. Search duration (in months)	[stadvert/ stanswerads stcolleagues stemployers stexams stfriends strelatives stprofessor (...)] [searchtilljob]	-
<i>Employed respondents</i>	Job-Finding method: relatives, friends or acquaintances; colleagues or classmates; university professors; replying to advertisements for a job; posted an ad in newspaper or Internet; Applied directly to employers; Took tests or competitive examinations; professional organization; trade unions; university placement office; public employment office or service; temporary work agency; private employment agency.	[foundjob]	Q15

Table 3.4. (Cont.)

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Variables: Brief Description</i>	<i>Web survey item</i>	<i>DLHE item</i>
	Search duration (in months)	[searchlasting]	-
	Full/part-time job	[timejob]	Q7
	Qualification required for job: PhD or equivalent; Master degree; Bachelor degree; Less than university education; No education needed	[jobeducation]	Q12
	Monthly income	[income_monthly]	Q6
<b>Individual Background</b>	Field of Study: Education, Humanities and arts, and Social Sciences; Science and Engineering, Health and welfare, and Business and law	[degree] [isced123] [isced456]	Q26
	Internships as part of BA degree (Yes/No)	[internships]	-
	Job experience (Yes/No)	[jobexper]	Q16
	Job experience (duration in months)	[jobexper_months]	
	Foreign language skills (monolingual/polyglots)	[speakers]	
	Time abroad whilst studying in HE (Yes/No)	[timeabroad] (dummy)	
	Mother and father's experience in HE (Yes/No)	[edumother] [edufather]	R1*
	Mother and father's main occupation (Intermediate and professional occupations/manual workers)	[occupmother] [occupfather]	R2

Source: Own elaboration.

Notes: (\*) Parental education – whether parents hold a higher education qualification (dummy).

### 3.4. Eurobarometer on Employers' perception of graduate employability

The Flash Eurobarometer “*Employers' perception of graduate employability*” (#304)<sup>12</sup> is a telephone survey conducted by the Gallup Organization at the request of the European Commission. The study is designed to provide reliable information on the importance of skills required of graduates, the challenges that companies face in hiring graduates, and the type of linkages between firms and educational institutions. It targets human resources officers or chief executives in companies employing 50 or more persons (i.e., medium and large-size firms) in Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and other EU member states. Data are based on 7,036 companies that were interviewed in the summer of 2010 (between August 30 and September 7).

<sup>12</sup> Flash Eurobarometers are ad hoc thematic telephone interviews conducted at the request of the European Commission. Additional details about the survey procedures can be found in The Gallup Organization (2010).

The number participants in the Flash Eurobarometer survey varied from 100 to 400 depending on the size of the respective country. In sum, 400 firms were interviewed in Spain, 200 firms in the Netherlands, and 400 firms in the United Kingdom. There are at least three positive aspects to this dataset. Firstly, the information comes directly from recruiters, so that one accesses the attitudes and behavior of those most directly involved in the staffing process<sup>13</sup>, that is, those who have direct information about vacancies, qualifications and expected performance. Secondly, rather than focusing on a undifferentiated population of workers, the survey questionnaire specifically asks recruiters to focus on candidates with Higher Education for which employers may have different skill demands and expected performance at the workplace than for other workers. Thirdly, the data was collected in the end of the summer of 2010, at the peak of the economic recession, and just a year before my survey to university graduates. This allows me to control for contextual variables that may have affected the graduates' and the employers' behavior (e.g. economic contraction, high unemployment, freezing wages, compulsory redundancies and public spending cuts).

From this study's perspective, the most relevant question in the Flash Eurobarometer is the one that asks respondents to rate eleven skills and competencies in terms of how important they are when recruiting higher education graduates -i.e., very important, rather important, rather unimportant or not important at all (Table 3.5). Based on this dataset, the multivariate analysis in chapter 5 focuses on four dependent variables, in order to determine what skills are most valuable for employers, after controlling for several independent variables (e.g. firms' size and economic sector, graduates' field of study, an training schemes offered by firms).

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<sup>13</sup> This data was collected directly from employers, across different countries and in multiple settings, contrary to the most typical supply-side surveys of unemployed individuals, the small-scale work-place research designs or studies based on content analysis of job advertisements.

Table 3.5. Main variables of the Flash Eurobarometer #304 (2010).

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Variables: Brief Description</i>	<i>EB item</i>
<b>Economic sector and workforce</b>	Activity: Industry; Construction, Transport, ITC; Trade, Accommodation and Food Services; Public services; Non-public services	Q14
	Overall % of HE graduates currently employed: 1-100%	Q21
<b>Recruiting preferences</b>	Very or rather important factors in recruiting more or fewer graduates: Anticipated growth in business; Actual growth in business; Higher turnover of staff; Increasing complexity of tasks; Higher number of applicants	Q41/ A-F
	Very important skills when recruiting HE graduates: Ability to adapt to and act in new situations; Analytical and problem solving skills; Basic skills such as being good with numbers; Communication skills; Computer skills; Decision-making skills; Foreign language skills; Good reading/writing skills; Planning and organizational skills; Sector specific skills; Team-working skills	Q33/ A-K
	Work experience is a crucial asset for new recruits: Strongly agree / Rather agree / Rather disagree / Strongly disagree	Q45A
	It is very important that new recruits have studied abroad: Strongly agree / Rather agree / Rather disagree / Strongly disagree	Q45B
	Greatest challenge in filling vacancies: Offering a competitive starting salary; Shortage of applicants with the right skill and capabilities in country; Offering a competitive graduate training and development program; Limited resources to market graduate vacancies adequately; Graduate candidates withdraw applications because hiring process is slow	Q51
	How frequently do you cooperate with higher education institutions to discuss curriculum design and study programs? Very frequently / Rather frequently / Sometimes / Never	Q61
How frequently do you cooperate with higher education institutions in recruiting their graduates? Very frequently / Rather frequently / Sometimes / Never	Q64	
Best way to cooperate with higher education institutions on recruitment: Participation in internship program; Direct recruitment from schools with HE; Cooperation with career centers; Participation in debates or seminars organized by HEi; Personal discussions with study program directors or teachers; Answering surveys	Q65	

Source: own elaboration

### 3.5. Summary

The key instrument of this study is an original longitudinal web-based survey addressed to university graduates of two HE institutions, the University of Barcelona and the University of Amsterdam. I designed my survey so as to



generate comparable information on various dimensions related to graduates' preferences and use of fourteen different job-search strategies.

In this chapter, I have provided details on the pre and post-fielding stages of the web survey design. In the Spanish and Dutch cases I relied on the cooperation of participant universities who contacted the most recent cohort of university graduates whereas in the British case I relied on data from the DHLE survey collected six months after graduation. Upon completion of the data collection, I cleaned the data files, obtained univariate statistics for each variable and performed multivariate analyses (presented in Chapters 5 and 6). The main advantage of my research design is that it allows for quantitative analysis of a standardized dataset. Then, my comparison of the graduates' attitudes and behavior to the employers' expectations rigorously follows Bourdieu's prescriptions for the analysis of a «field».

This study suffers from a number of limitations, however. Ideally, I would have liked to have similar data for the three countries under study. I was unable to conduct the planned survey in the United Kingdom. At the moment of planning I could not anticipate many administrative obstacles in this country. As I mentioned in Figure 3.1, I contacted four different universities but all of them refused to send the web survey to their graduates. Differences between the questionnaire of my web survey and the British survey thus jeopardize my comparison.

Then, in order to get a view from the employers' side of the labor market I use data from the Flash Eurobarometer on employers' perception of graduate employability. Before using this dataset, I conducted a web-survey to get information on employers' recruitment practices and preferences when hiring university graduates. I managed to collect only 58 questionnaires, despite of the fact that I contacted 1800 firms through Amadeus, the European directory of firms (the results can be found in the Appendix of chapter 6).

### 3.6. Appendix

#### Appendix A. Master questionnaire for graduates in Spain and the Netherlands

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**Q1. What is your current status?**

Full-time student (study is my main activity)

Part-time student

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q2. Do you have a job?**

Yes → Q3

No → Q18

**Q3. How long did your job search take until you found your actual employment?**

Months: \_

**Q4. How did you find this job?** Please tick one box only.

Through relatives

Through friends or acquaintances

Through colleagues or classmates

Through university professors

Replying to advertisements for a job

Posted an ad in newspaper or Internet

Applied directly to employers (e.g. getting interviews, filling out an application, submitting a resume)

Took tests or competitive examinations

Through a professional organization

Through trade unions

Through a university placement office (e.g. at the job bank)

Through the public employment office or service

Through a temporary work agency

Through a private employment agency

**Q5. Which of the following aspects has contributed most to your getting your current job?** Please tick one box only.

Higher degree or previous studies

Previous professional experience

Contacts

Your personality

Luck

Other (please specify)

**Q6. What level of education do you feel is required for this work?**

PhD or equivalent

Master degree

Bachelor degree

Less than university education

No education needed

**Q7. How many job interviews did you go through before getting your current job?**

Number: \_

**Q8. What is your current occupation or job title?** (In case you are not currently employed, please provide a description of your most recent job, if any?)

Managers

Professionals

-- Science and engineering professionals

-- Health professionals

-- Teaching professionals

-- Business and administration professionals

-- Information and communications technology professionals

-- Legal professionals

-- Social and religious professionals

Creative and performing artists

Technicians and associate professionals

Financial and mathematical associate professionals

-- Sales and purchasing agents and brokers

-- Business services agents

-- Administrative and specialised secretaries

-- Regulatory government associate professionals

Clerical support workers

Service and sales workers

Agricultural, forestry and fishery workers

Craft and related trades workers

Plant and machine operators, and assemblers

Armed forces occupations

Other

**Q9. Which type of contract do you currently have?**

Unlimited term

Fixed-term (*e.g. for training, project*)

None (*e.g. family business, self employment, scholarship*)

Other (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_.

**Q10. How many hours per week do you usually work at your main job?**

35 hours or more per week (full- time job)

15-34 hours per week (part- time job)

Less than 15 hours a week

**Q11. When did you start working in your actual position?**

Please specify: (date)

**Q12. In which city do you work?**

City \_\_\_\_\_ (list)

**Q13. How many people work in/at your organization are employed?**

1-9

10 - 49

50 - 249

250 or more.

**Q14. What is your net income approximately (after deductions: taxes, national insurance contributions, pension payments, health insurance payments, etc.)?**

Per month

Per year

Less than 1.249 €

Less than 15.000 €

1.250 to under 2.000 €

15.001 to under 24.000 €

2.001 to under 3000 €

24.001 to under 36.000 £

3.001 £ or more per month

36.001 € or more per year

**Q15. How satisfied are you with your current job?**

Very satisfied

Satisfied

Dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

**Q16. All in all, do you think you will try to get a job with another firm or organization in the next 12 months?**

Yes, definitely

Likely

Unlikely

I am not going to look for another job

**Q17. To what extent, do you worry about the possibility of losing your job?***Please tick one box only.*

A lot

A little

I don't worry at all

**Q18. Are you looking for a job?**

Yes → Q19

No → Q23

**Q19. How long have you been seeking employment?**

Months: \_

**Q20. What kind of job are you looking for?**

A full time job (35 hours or more per week)

A part- time job (15-34 hours per week)

A job with fewer than 15 hours a week

**Q21. Since you began looking for a job... How many job interviews have you had?**

None

1 to 3 interviews

4 to 6 interviews

7 to 9 interviews

10 or more

**Q22. Have you ever rejected a job offer the last 12 months?**

Yes No

**Q23. In the past 12 months... have you applied for a scholarship or grant to pursue further studies? (e.g. a Master's degree or PhD program).**

Yes No

**Q24. Have you ever had a paid job while at University apart from casual or holiday work?**

Yes → Q25

No → Q26

**Q25. How long did you work over all?**

Months: \_

**Q26. How confident are you that a Higher Education title improves your employment prospects?**

Very confident

Somewhat confident

Not at all confident

People use different strategies in their job-search. ...

**Q27. Have you done any of the following in order to get a job during the past 12 months?**

Have you...	At least once a month	Less frequently	Never
Asked relatives			
Asked friends or acquaintances			
Asked colleagues or classmates			
Asked university professors			
Answered advertisements for jobs			
Advertised for a job in newspaper or Internet			
Applied directly to employers ( <i>e.g. getting interviews, filling out an application, submitting a resume</i> )			
Took tests or competitive examinations			

**Q28. Have you ever contacted an employment agency or a similar organization?**

	Yes	No
A public employment office or service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A private employment agency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A temporary work agency		
An university placement office ( <i>e.g. the job bank</i> )	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A professional organization	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trade unions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Q29. How many people do you think are getting a job through relatives or close friends?**

- All of them
- Most of them
- Few of them
- None of them

**Q30. Please indicate how useful you find the following job search strategies to you personally. Please tick one box in each line.**

How useful do you find it is to...	Very useful	Useful	Not useful at all
Ask relatives			
Ask friends or acquaintances			
Ask colleagues or classmates			
Ask university professors			
Reply to advertisements for a job			
Post an ad in newspaper or Internet			

Apply directly to employers (e.g. getting interviews, filling out an application, submitting a resume)			
Take tests or competitive examinations			
Contact a professional organization			
Contact trade unions			
Register at a university placement office (e.g. at the job bank)			
Register at the public employment office or service			
Register at a temporary work agency			
Register at a private employment agency			

**Q31. And in your opinion, which is the most effective strategy to get a job?**  
Please tick one box only.

Ask relatives

Ask friends or acquaintances

Ask colleagues or classmates

Ask university professors

Answer advertisements for jobs

Advertise for a job in newspaper or Internet

Apply directly to employers (e.g. getting interviews, filling out an application, submitting a resume)

Take tests or competitive examinations

Ask a professional organization

Ask trade unions

Register at university placement office (e.g. at the job bank)

Register at the public employment office or service

Register at temporary work agency

Register at private employment agency

---

*Finally, we would like to ask you about your education and family background...*

**Q32. In which field did you get your last degree?**

(List) \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g. economics, civil engineering)

**Q33. When did you enroll in this program the first time?**

Year: \_

**Q34. What was your grade point average (*gemiddeld eindcijfer*)?**

Voldoende (6-6,9)

Ruim voldoende (7-7,9)

Goed (8-8,9)

Zeer goed (9-9,9)

Uitstekend (10)

**Q35. What is your mother tongue, that is, the language/s used at home while growing up?** *Multiple answers possible.*

Catalan

Spanish

Dutch

Frisian

English

Irish

Scottish Gaelic

Welsh

Cornish

French

German

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q36. Which languages do you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation, excluding your mother tongue?** *Multiple answers possible.*

Catalan

Spanish

Dutch

English

French

German

Chinese

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q37. Which of the following was your primary source of funding at University?**

A full-time job

A part-time job

Summer jobs/occasional work

Loan (payable or non-repayable)

Study grants

Parental/Family support

Savings

Other (please specify)

**Q38. Did you take part in one or more work placements/internships as part of your degree?**

Yes No

**Q39. Did you spend any time abroad while studying for your degree?**

Yes No



**Q40. Did you ever interrupt your studies for more than 3 months?**

Yes    No

**Q41. What is your gender:**

Female        Male

**Q42. Date of Birth:**

Date: \_

**Q43. What is your country of birth?**

(Country List)

**Q44. Where were your parents born? If applicable, your partner?**

Your mother	Your father	Partner
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
Other, please specify _____	Other, please specify _____	Other, please specify _____

**Q45. What are your current living arrangements?**

I live....

alone

with parents and/or siblings

with friends/flatmates

with a partner and/or children

Other (please specify)

**Q46. Do you have any children?**

Yes    No

**Q47. What is your main source of economic support? Please tick one box only.**

Income

Grant / Scholarship

Parents support

Partner support

Unemployment benefits

Other sources (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Q48. What is the highest level of education your father and mother attained? If applicable, your partner?**

	Mother	Father	Partner
Less than Primary (ISCED 0)			
Up to Lower Secondary (ISCED 1, 2)			

Upper Secondary (ISCED 3)			
Post-secondary Non-Tertiary (ISCED 4)			
Short-Cycle Tertiary (ISCED 5)			
Bachelor degree (ISCED 6)			
Master degree (ISCED 7)			
Doctoral or equivalent degree (ISCED 8)			
Not applicable			

**Q49. What is your parents' current job status? If applicable, your partner's?**

	Mother	Father	Partner
Working full-time (35+hs. weekly)			
Working part-time (15-34 hs. weekly)			
Working part-time (15 hs or less)			
Not working, but looking for a job			
Retired/pensioner			
Unemployed			
Student			
Other (e.g. home duties)			
Do not know /Not applicable			

**Q50. What is your parents' current or most recent occupation?**

Mother: \_\_\_\_\_ (List)

Father: \_\_\_\_\_ (List)

**Q51. Finally... in a typical week, about how many hours do you spend in...(hs)**

further education or other training related to your professional development?

child rearing or family care?

unpaid/voluntary work?

Learning a new language?

**LOTTERY**

To be entered into our prize draw to win [\_\_\_\_\_] please give us your e-mail address below.

**FOLLOW-UP SURVEY**

It is possible that this study will be repeated in a few months from now. Would you be willing to participate in such a follow-up study? If so, please provide us with your email address.

## Chapter 4. EMPLOYMENT CULTURES AND INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the university graduates' job-seeking behavior in their national contexts. I argue that patrimonialist and meritocratic employment cultures account for cross-national variations in job-seeking practices. In Patrimonialist employment cultures, job-seekers' practices are dominated by family and social ties. Patrimonialist cultures are defined by the strength of personal relationships in the allocation and redistribution of resources. Social and family relationships are paramount, in part due to the significant gap between available public resources and social needs. In Meritocratic employment cultures, on the other hand, both job-seekers and recruiters rely primarily on competitive methods such as direct job applications, answering ads, and employment offices. The meritocracy thesis suggests that the key influences on occupational destiny are individuals' talents and effort (Bond and Saunders 1999). Although valuable information can be provided by social connections, meritocratic selection and competition require the explicit evaluation of skills and abilities (Bartus 2001). Educational credentials and abilities thus become signals and determine individual placement in the process of job allocation (Alon and Tienda 2007; Jackson, Goldthorpe, and Mills 2005; Kogan and Müller 2003).

Job-search practices are embedded in cultural contexts. Job information is widely or narrowly distributed in different employment cultures<sup>1</sup>. How institutional arrangements evolve has a direct impact on the job-search strategies of university graduates. Networks and job advertisements, for instance, can have different effects in different employment cultures. Let's consider first the relative power of networks. As I mentioned in chapter 2, social connections are thought to spread trustworthy information, both efficiently and quickly (Granovetter 1974; Lin 2002; Lin, Vaughn, and Ensel 1981). The use of networks, however, can have a less positive side in patrimonialist employment cultures. The side effect of patrimonialist selection is an «opaque» distribution

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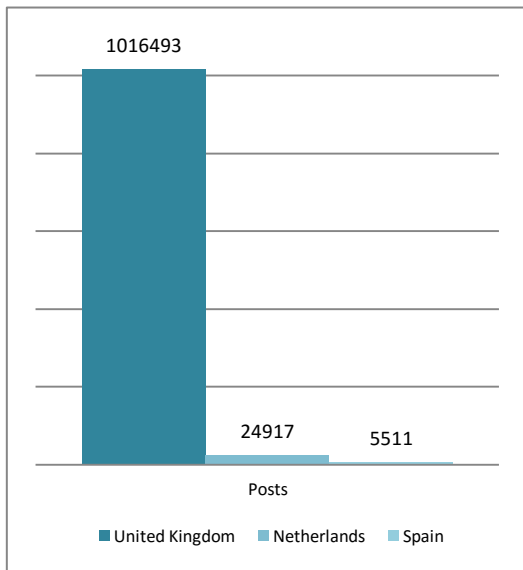
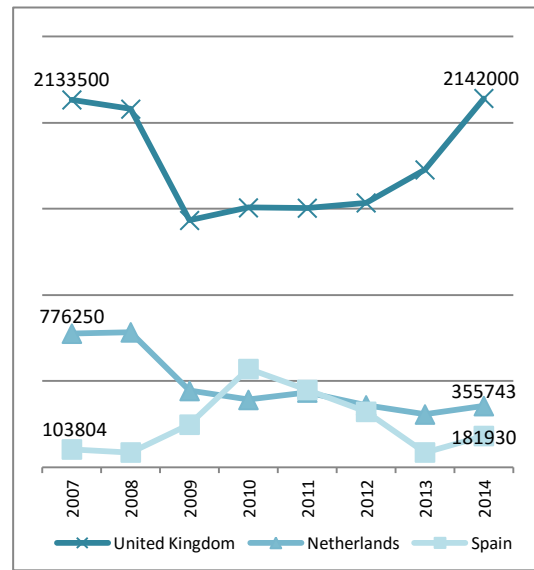
<sup>1</sup> See Bartus' concept of «particularist selection» (2001:4).

of job information, that is, an insufficient flow of information, since patrimonialist practices restrict the flow of information to preexisting social networks -typically more similar and densely connected (Marsden and Gorman 2001). This means that a good entry in the labor market is heavily dependent on individual social capital instead of individual human capital. Protection against the risk of unemployment thus depends on *private* connections instead of on *institutionalized* connections.

Job advertisements are another example of the relative efficacy of job-search channels. Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 show the number of job ads published on a random day at EURES, the European Job Mobility Portal. These data demonstrate that the market logic is more prevalent in Britain and in the Netherlands than in Spain: the greater number of job postings comes from the United Kingdom (1.016.493), and the Netherlands (24.917). In contrast, only 5.511 posts come from Spain. British and Dutch firms publish several dozen more times than Spanish firms (twenty-two and six-hundred more times, respectively), despite the fact that EURES is an open portal so that nothing prevents Spanish firms from posting ads there. Data from Eurostat on job vacancies<sup>2</sup> confirm this pattern of high/low publicity of available jobs in the countries under study for the period 2007-2014. Despite a major increase in Spain in 2010, the number of ads from Britain and the Netherlands is still much higher.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Eurostat, a job vacancy «is as a newly created, unoccupied, or about to become vacant, post: (i) for which the employer is taking active steps to find a suitable candidate from outside the enterprise concerned and is prepared to take more steps and (ii) which the employer intends to fill either immediately or in the future. Under this definition, a job vacancy should be open to candidates from outside an enterprise. However, this does not exclude the possibility of the employer recruiting an internal candidate for the post. A vacant post that is open only to internal candidates should not be treated as a job vacancy».

Figure 4.1 Job ads published at EURES<sup>(a)</sup>Figure 4.2. Number of job vacancies, 2007-2014<sup>(b)</sup>

Source: a) Job ads published on June 17, 2014 at EURES (<http://bit.ly/1iuITxa>). b) Annual average of job vacancies in Industry, Construction and Services, NACE Rev.2 (Eurostat code: [jvs\_q\_nace2]). For the Spanish case, the data come from the National Statistic Agency (INE-Encuesta Trimestral de Coste Laboral), and I used quarterly data when that was the data only available. Thus, for 2007 and 2008, I report figures for the third quarter; and for 2013, I report figures for the third and fourth quarter.

The effects of employment cultures on graduate job-seeking get channeled through three mechanisms: the linkages between HE institutions and firms, the demands of labor market for graduates, and the economic cycle (Table 4.1). An analysis of each of these institutional and cyclical features elucidates how the job-search and the competition for graduate jobs are shaped by institutional opportunities and constraints at the national level. Table 4.1 shows that the share of high-skilled is quite similar in the three countries under study, so as the degree of expansion of higher education. The biggest contrasts lay, however, on the dramatic unemployment rates of university graduates in Spain (28,5%), compared to only 4,7% in the Netherlands and 3,8% in the United Kingdom. As mentioned in chapter 1, in this context, clever job search strategies are key to improve graduates' chances in the job market.

Table 4.1. Employment cultures and national characteristics (selected indicators).

	Country/Employment Culture		
	Spain ( <i>Patrimonialist</i> )	The Netherlands ( <i>Organization-based</i> )	United Kingdom ( <i>Market-based</i> )
<b>Labor market characteristics</b>			
High-skilled employment share <sup>1</sup>	33.4%	47.5%	48.0%
Position in the Global Competitive Index (out of 148 economies) <sup>2</sup>	35 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>
<b>School-to-work transition</b>			
Degree of expansion of HE <sup>3</sup>	34.7%	34.4%	40.5%
Dual System <sup>4</sup>	0	1	0
<b>Business cycle</b>			
University graduates unemployment rates <sup>5</sup>	25.8%	4.7%	3.8%

Source: Own elaboration. Notes: 1) World Economic Forum (2015); 2) World Economic Forum 2013:29; 3) Population with Tertiary education (ISCED 5-8) aged 25-64 in 2014 (Eurostat [edat\_lfse\_07]) 4) A “1” represents that the country has strong links between HEi and firms, “0” indicates the absence of this systems or its weakness; 5) Eurostat data for tertiary education, ISCED 11 - levels 5-8 [lfsa\_urgaed].

As I mentioned in chapter 2, this theoretical argument draws inspiration from economic sociology’s emphasis on the social organization of markets and of processes of employment allocation. This approach is consistent with a body of literature that focuses on how national variation in educational institutions and firms produces differences in the organization of labor (Fligstein 2001) and in the transition from school to work (Allmendinger 1989; Kerckhoff 1995; Shavit and Müller 1998; Breen 2005).

In what follows, I distinguish between macro and micro-dynamics (see Table 4.2 to Table 4.4), based on the literature on labor market transitions (de Lange and Wolbers 2014), and Bob Jessop’s historical approach to the political economy of the contemporary State (2002:9–10). Macro or structural dynamics refers to processes of economic restructuring, labor market reorganization, and other aspects of national politics (electoral stability, party in government, etc). The major structural factor refers to the openness to the globalization process, and how this had an impact on the relationship between labor, firms’ competition, and governments. I finally identify micro-dynamics or cultural aspects in each context, such as the role of female labor participation,

family traditions, the presence of individualistic or communitarian values in the economic and political arena.

#### **4.1. Patrimonialist employment cultures: Insufficient reliance in open-market mechanisms**

Spain is a perfect example of the *Patrimonialist* culture. One can venture that in Spain a feedback loop connects two characteristics: a weak state that invests little in redistributive policies and a strong intergenerational reciprocity as market-regulating mechanism (Gal 2010; Ghezzi and Mingione 2007). In Spain, more than in other European country, family support compensates for a weak bureaucracy in securing people's well-being (see, for example the classical work of Roth 1968 on personal rulership). Monetary transfers and other types of redistribution of resources are persistent family practices (e.g. financial support for young people as they move out of home –support in getting a house, stipends)<sup>3</sup>. Compared to the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, Spain shows a limited development of active labor market policies, low levels of employment protection, a weak sector of intermediaries, and a large informal sector (Table 4.2)<sup>4</sup>.

These factors need to be taken into account in order to understand the constraints and limited opportunities that shape how Spanish university graduates build their strategies to find a job. As I show in Table 4.1, the lack of competitiveness and an economic model that privileges labor intensive sectors undermine the employment opportunities of recent graduates. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom provide a good contrast: both countries have implemented and reinforced measures geared toward encouraging an active

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<sup>3</sup> As stated in Banfield's classic study (Banfield 1958), one feature of Southern European countries is the strong intergenerational solidarity ("amoral familism"). This feature has been a resource widely used in the scientific literature to understand the large responsibility for welfare services delegated to the families and the specific characteristics of the so-called Mediterranean welfare regimes, in countries like Spain and Italy (Ferrera 1996; Martin 1996; Reher 1998; Naldini 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Data from Eurostat (2009:104) show that Spain has one of the lowest shares of expenditure on active measures in relation to the total public expenditure on Labor Market Policy (e.g. supported employment and insertion measures account for 3.4 percent against to 69 percent in the Netherlands).

search for jobs and strengthening the infrastructure for job allocation (see below).

## **4.2. Spain: A patrimonialist culture**

### **4.2.1. School-to-work linkages**

A large body of literature indicates that closer links between schools and employers lead to smooth transitions into solid first jobs mainly because these linkages convey relevant job information to employers about skills and productivity (e.g. Allen and van der Velden 2007; Allmendinger 1989; Kariya 1998; Levels, van der Velden, and Di Stasio 2014; Rosenbaum et al. 1999; Rosenbaum and Kariya 1989). Spain is an example of weak cooperation between HE institutions and firms in co-designing programs and in firm-based training. An important feature of this weak network of public and private services to match employees and employers is that employers do not take into account the prestige of the HE institutions when making hiring decisions (i.e. for employers almost all universities are equal in prestige and status, despite the efforts of the biggest Spanish universities to list in the world's top 200 universities).

Competition for jobs in the Spanish labor market is based on individual networks of relationships between job-seekers and established workers. Firms rely mainly on learning at the workplace, in part due to lack of clearer occupational signals. Because of this «low signalling» (Breen 2005:130), firms also tend to fill vacancies from the pool of their current employees (i.e. on internal labor market) rather than by recruiting them externally (i.e. on external labor market). Thus, informal recruiting dominates the Spanish job market (e.g. Harsløf 2006:565). According to a unique study in 9 countries, Humburg et al. found that Spanish employers –and British employers– prefer graduates with BA degrees over graduates with a master's degree when selecting people for job interviews probably because it is the most common diploma among HE graduates (Humburg, Van der Velden, and Verhagen 2013:33). Career paths also begin at a later age than in most other European countries.



#### 4.2.2. The demands of the labor market for university graduates

Since the early 1980s, the Spanish labor market has been described as «highly-rigid» (Toharia and Malo 2000). The last two decades have witnessed strong labor market segmentation by contract type. In contrast to the Dutch and British cases, where one finds high mobility across permanent jobs, the Spanish labor market is split between privileged «insider» workers who enjoy full-time employment, long-term contracts, high wages, generous social security and other fringe benefits and virtually complete protection from dismissal, and «outsiders», workers who are unemployed or, else, have part-time employment, low wages and minimum benefits (Estivill and de la Hoz 1990; Jimeno and Toharia 1994; Sanchez and Toharia 2000; García et al. 2004; García 2007; Spilerman 2009). Another feature of the Spanish labor market is the high rate of temporary job contracts<sup>5</sup>. Spain had the highest rate of temporary employment of all the OECD countries until the early 1990s (e.g., Polavieja 2006; Ortiz 2010).

Recent university graduates can be considered as outsiders in this context. Given the rigidities of the labor market, university graduates are more likely to enter the labor market in non-standard or flexible employment (e.g. involuntary part-time employment, and fixed-term contracts)<sup>6</sup>. The paradox is that just as the Spanish labor force becomes more qualified, the Spanish economy is increasingly specializing in low productivity and labor intensive sectors with medium or low qualification requirements (e.g. construction, tourism and hotel/catering services). Knowledge-intensive workers account for 32.4% of employment, whereas in the British and Dutch economies they account for 49.5% and 37% respectively. Of the three countries under study, Spain is the least innovative. According to international agencies, it also needs to improve

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<sup>5</sup> As Polavieja suggests, there are three main predictors of the distribution of temporary work in Spain: high employment protection in standard contracts, a high degree of coordinated centralization of collective bargaining, and economic uncertainty (Polavieja 2006:72–73). Since its accession to the European Union in 1986, Spain has increased social welfare expenditures and diversified social services provision, but has also developed decentralized planning and policy implementation processes, which has led to endemic friction between regions and the central government (Arriba and Moreno 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, in good economic times, the percentage of recent university graduates in tenure jobs (indefinite-term contract or civil servant post) is much greater than in any other educational group (e.g., see Ginés-Mora, Garcia-Montalvo, and Garcia-Aracil 2000:234).

access to finance in order to bridge the competitiveness gap with Northern European economies (World Economic Forum 2013:29). Spain ranks 35th out of 148 economies in the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) while the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are among the world's top ten most competitive economies, occupying the 8th and 10th position, respectively.

This context makes the transitions of Spaniards to employment and to adulthood more complex. University graduates deploy a variety of strategies to get a job, ranging from getting additional educational credentials to delaying residential independence. Recent graduates often return to school as postgraduate students in order to gain human capital in times of high unemployment and job insecurity (e.g., Ortiz 2010; Verhaest and Van der Velden 2013). Also, young Spaniards, regardless of their level of education, tend to leave the parental home at late ages. In fact, Spain shows one of the highest percentages of young people living with their parents in Europe (64.3%)(Moreno 2012:30). This is in part due to the low-wages and salaries they earn and to a very expensive home rental market (Moreno 2012:35–36).

#### 4.2.3. Cyclical factors

Although the three countries' business cycles have run in parallel, with sharp recessions in 1992, 2002 and 2007, the extent of recovery and job creation after the crises has varied greatly. In the peak of the last recession, for instance, the change in the number of employed persons was of -1.6% in the United Kingdom, -0.9% in the Netherlands and -6.3% in Spain<sup>7</sup>. In the years before the crisis, job growth in the construction sector allowed for a faster integration of young workers into the labor market in sectors that employ high proportions of low-skilled workers<sup>8</sup>. The financial collapse of 2007/2008 revealed the weakness of an economic model that heavily relied on the low-productivity sector. As result of the burst of the housing bubble and a steady pattern of job destruction, the unemployment rate among workers with HE credentials rose dramatically from

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<sup>7</sup> Eurostat figures for 2009. The employment growth is the year-on-year increase in the number of persons employed (i.e. yearly comparison for annual data).

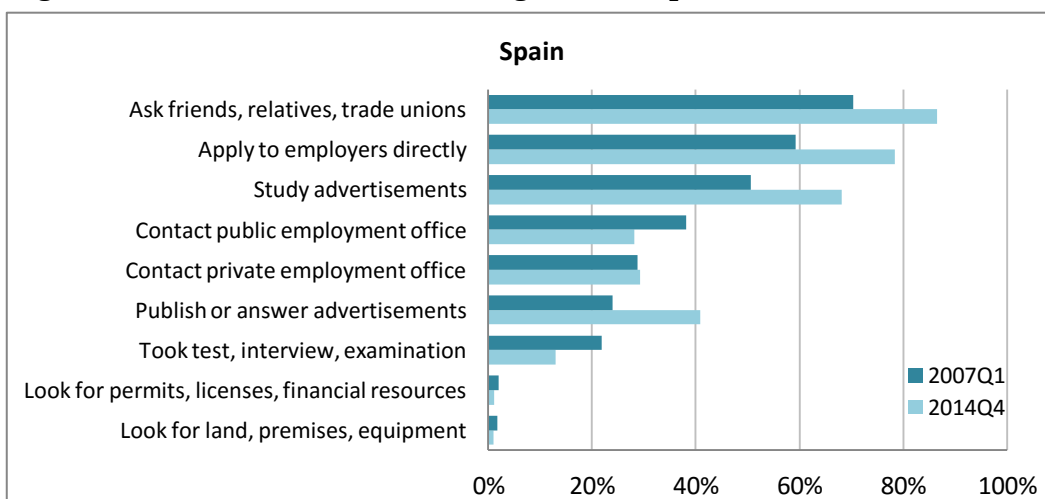
<sup>8</sup> As I show in chapter 1, the end of the labor-intensive growth path turned out to be a trap for school early-leavers: since the beginning of the current financial crisis, a significant number of young people aged 25-29 have withdrawn from the labor force (their rate of participation dropped from 78% in 2007 to 57% in 2013).

7.4% in 2007 to 25.8% in 2013. This 18.4 percentage point difference is more than three times higher than the average 5.1 percentage points in the EU27<sup>9</sup>.

The counter-cyclical labor market policy measures in response to the crisis emphasized austerity and privileged «insiders» over «outsiders». The successive reforms of employment protection pushed through first by the socialist government led by Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero (PSOE), and then by the conservative Mariano Rajoy (PP) aimed at reducing the public sector deficit and at capitalizing the banking system. The government reduced severance pay entitlements for employees on permanent contracts and increased them for those on temporary contracts (Amuedo-Dorantes 2002; Clasen, Clegg, and Kvist 2012a). Finally, instead of encouraging the hiring and job search of the unemployed, the government relied on a system of benefits that guarantees income (Royo 2010).

None of these policy measures directly targeted either the employment situation of recent university graduates or their job-search strategies. A quick look at the most used methods to find a job by the unemployed shows that Spaniards rely more on social connections than they did in the years before the crisis (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3. Methods used for seeking work in Spain (Eurostat, 2007-2014)



<sup>9</sup> Eurostat data for tertiary education, ISCED 11 - levels 5-8 [lfsa\_urgaed].

According to Eurostat, the most widely used method to find a job by employed respondents (regardless their level of education) is to ask friends and relatives (86.2 % in 2014) . In the first quarter of 2007, 70.6% of survey respondents reported the use of social connections. Probably due to the seriousness of the recent crisis one can also observe a decrease in reliance on employment agencies and in tests or interviews. In this context, the greatest protection against unemployment risk in Spain remain social origin, family support, and social networks, more than skills development and occupational-specific training. In a recessive economic context, with skyrocketing unemployment rates among university graduates, there is reason to believe that this over-reliance on social connections has a negative impact on the job-search and labor market integration of graduates in their early career stages.

Table 4.2. Spain: Economic restructuring, labor market reorganization, and cultural aspects (1980-2014)

SPAIN			
<i>Economic restructuring in advanced Western societies</i>	<i>National labor market reorganization</i>	<i>National Politics</i>	<i>Cultural aspects</i>
<p>1980 Crisis of the Keynesian Welfare State and transition to a post-Fordist accumulation regime</p> <p>Trend towards deindustrialization economies;</p> <p>Internationalization of monetary flows; shift from more supply-driven to more demand-driven forms of economic production; competitive pressures posed by both lower-wage and high-tech emerging East Asian economies.</p>	<p>1980 – Spain’s fundamental law, the Workers’ Statute (Ley del Estatuto de los Trabajadores-LET) establish different types of dismissals (Toharia and Malo 2000).</p> <p>1984 – The LET was reformed to make it easier to hire non-permanent workers; introduced several specific contracts such as training and practice contracts for young people, and contracts for new lines of business, the so-called ‘employment promotion contracts’ (Toharia and Malo 2000).</p> <p><b>Expansionary business conditions</b></p> <p><b>1985-1992 Era of temporary contracts</b></p> <p>Establishment of additional incentives for private investment, resulting in increasing competitiveness (Royo 2010)</p> <p>1986 – EC membership</p> <p>Indexation of wages if inflation increases over the government’s forecast for the year (which is used as the basis for the agreement) = increase in unitary labor costs</p>	<p>Transition to Democracy</p> <p>1979-1981 <u>Adolfo Suárez González</u>, UCD Union of the Democratic Centre</p> <p>1981-1982 <u>Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo y Bustelo</u>, UCD Union of the Democratic Centre</p> <p>1982-1996 <u>Felipe González</u>, PSOE Spanish Socialist Workers' Party</p>	<p>Rapid increase in female participation in the labor market.</p> <p>Inadequacy of education and training of the labor force.</p>

Table 4.2. Spain (cont.)

SPAIN			
<i>Economic restructuring in advanced Western societies</i>	<i>National labor market reorganization</i>	<i>National Politics</i>	<i>Cultural aspects</i>
<p>Increasing feminization of the labor force in developed countries<sup>10</sup>.</p> <p>Creation of regional economic blocs<sup>11</sup>.</p> <p>1990. Post-Fordist accumulation regime (the knowledge-based economy).</p> <p>Flexibilization of the labor process based on new information and communication technologies (ICT), continuous supply-side innovation, and collaborative network enterprise<sup>12</sup>.</p>	<p><b>1990-1994 Economic Recession</b></p> <p>1992 – Decree-law to reform the unemployment protection and the labor-contract system (Toharia and Malo 2000).</p> <p>Higher level of unemployment (15.4 percent in Spain in the mid-1990s).1994 – Labor Market Reform. The employment promotion contracts were eliminated, and the procedures for firing were restructured in an attempt to reduce costs. Creation of apprenticeship contract (Toharia and Malo 2000).</p>		
<p>Increasing global interdependence and competition between economic actors (firms, strategic alliances, networks)<sup>13</sup>.</p> <p>Reorganization of the State:</p> <p>Internationalization of policy regimes<sup>14</sup>.</p>	<p><b>Midd-1990 to 2007 Economic Recovery</b></p> <p>1997 – Decree-law to encourage the use of permanent contracts, together with stricter conditions on the use of temporary contracts, and to enhance the role of collective bargaining, after negotiations with the social partners. Creation of a new permanent contract with a lower dismissal cost (Toharia and Malo 2000).</p> <p><b>1999 – Member of the Eurozone (€).</b></p> <p>- Rise of low-skilled jobs in low-intensity economic sectors, such as services, agriculture and construction.</p> <p>- Immigration growth (specially from Latin American countries) (Amuedo-Dorantes and de la Rica 2007)</p> <p>- Reduction of public debt to 39.8 percent of GDP.</p> <p><b>Bursting of the housing bubble 2007-2008</b></p> <p>2008 – Plan E’ stimulus package. Funds for local authorities to organize programs of public works, social security rebates for employers hiring specific target groups of unemployed workers, and the recruitment of additional manpower in the public employment services (Clasen, Clegg, and Kvist 2012b:18).</p>	<p>1996-2004 <u>José María Aznar</u> PP People's Party</p>	<p>Increasing level of education and training of the labor force.</p>
<p>Global Recession: The U.S. financial crisis spread globally.</p> <p>Decline the rate of economic growth;</p> <p>Increase in overall indebtedness;</p> <p>Rise of economic inequality of both income and wealth<sup>15</sup>.</p>		<p>2004-2011 <u>José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero</u>, PSOE Spanish Socialist Workers' Party</p>	

<sup>10</sup> See Bob Jessop’s ‘The Future of the Capitalist State’ (2002:80–84).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibíd.*, p. 182-183.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibíd.*, p. 96-100.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibíd.*, p.187.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibíd.*, p. 200-201.

<sup>15</sup> See Wolfgang Streeck’s lecture ‘Has Capitalism seen its day?’ (2014).

Table 4.2. Spain (cont.)

SPAIN			
<i>Economic restructuring in advanced Western societies</i>	<i>National labor market reorganization</i>	<i>National Politics</i>	<i>Cultural aspects</i>
	<p>Labor Market Reform (Royal Decree-law 10/2010)</p> <p>2010 Focused on introducing more “internal flexibility”, to slow down the excessive use of dismissal and temporary hiring as adjustment mechanisms; lower unit costs of open-ended contracts, and introduction of restrictions on the use of fixed-term contracts.</p> <p>2011 – Budget Cut Agreement “Urgent Measures on Budgetary, Tax and Finance Measures”</p> <p>Freezing of public sector wages and public sector job offer (a 10% civil servant replacement rate was implemented).</p> <p>2012 – Measures aimed at “Guaranteeing Budgetary Stability and Boosting Competitiveness”</p> <p>The extraordinary December bonus is suspended for all civil servants and all regional governments.</p> <p>Unemployment benefits are reduced from the seventh month for new benefit recipients, setting the amount of benefit at 50% of the calculation basis.</p> <p>2012 Labor Market Reform</p> <p>A new permanent contract for full-time employees in small firms has been introduced with an extended trial period of one year (Contrato de Apoyo a Emprendedores).</p> <p>Reform of the training and apprenticeship contract (Contrato de formación y aprendizaje); creation of a dual system that combines employment and study; introducing competition in services offering training for employment (OECD 2013).</p> <p>New framework agreement for collaboration with job-placement agencies (OECD 2013).</p>	<p>2011-Present.</p> <p><u>Mariano Rajoy</u>, PP People's Party</p>	

Source: Own elaboration.

### 4.3. Meritocratic employment cultures: Trust in open-market allocation

In meritocratic cultures, trust tends to be impersonal. Exchanges are governed by the logic of redistribution. This type of culture is characterized by a strong bureaucracy –not necessarily of great size, but very efficient–, with citizens relying on a solid institutional structure oriented to the market (Table 4.3). Countries with meritocratic employment cultures have strong traditions in

active labor market policies, higher levels of employment protection, and an extended network of vocational training places. This combination of incentives and training is particularly attractive to employers (see for example Sennett 2006: 89), since continuous innovation in a competitive market environment requires a highly specialized workforce (e.g., Allen and van der Velden 2011). The Netherlands and the United Kingdom are examples of meritocratic employment cultures. As I show below, the Netherlands exemplifies the Organization-based Meritocratic culture, and the United Kingdom exemplifies the Market-based one.

#### **4.4. The Netherlands: A state-based meritocratic culture**

##### **4.4.1. School-to-work linkages**

In the Netherlands education-work linkages are stronger than in Spain and the United Kingdom. Cooperation between HE institutions and employers fosters a labor market that is highly integrated: «employers are involved in the education process in order to balance the skills provided and the skills needed in the labor market» (Tholen 2010:102, see also, 2014). When it comes to credentials, Dutch employers do not discriminate between graduates with an BA degree and graduates with an MA degree (Humburg et al. 2013:32).

Competition for jobs in the Dutch labor market is based on educational credentials and employment records. High levels of stratification and vocational specificity make it possible for employers to select employees based on their specific qualifications; and high levels of standardization makes the signals provided by highly-educated workers highly reliable<sup>16</sup>. In the Dutch «dual system», educational credentials provide good guidance in the allocation process of individuals to jobs (van der Velden and Wolbers 2003; van de Werfhorst 2004). Dutch firms rely more on the value of credentials than their Spanish counterparts. This is because Dutch HE institutions provide graduates with «high-signalling» (Breen 2005:130).

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<sup>16</sup> For a detailed review on the vocational specificity of the Dutch education system in international comparison, see van de Werfhorst (2004:317) and Kucel and Vilalta-Buffi (2013:576).

#### 4.4.2. The demands of the labor market for university graduates

The Netherlands is usually portrayed in the literature as a «job miracle» and a quintessential example of competitive corporatism, in which governments, unions and firms shape labor market policy (especially regarding wage bargaining)<sup>17</sup>. The «Dutch Polder Model» gained international reputation in the mid-1990s<sup>18</sup> as an example of successful cooperative behavior between stakeholders (Woldendorp and Keman 2007a). The Dutch Government developed social assistance programs, including market-oriented approaches, to promote individual responsibility in the field of labor protection. Flexicure systems like this are «based on minimal job protection but [offer] decent standards of social protection for the unemployed [and] are [thus] best able to bridge the gap between insiders and outsiders» (Hemerijck 2007). Labor market flexibility is thus combined with strong welfare support (Wilthagen 1998; Wilthagen and Tros 2004).

The benevolent vision of this competitive corporatism *par excellence* became more controversial in the 2000s. Social scientists and policy makers

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<sup>17</sup> In mid-1970s, the Dutch economy faced a severe economic crisis, due in part to the negative macroeconomic effects of the oil crisis of 1973, its high exposure to foreign trade and high dependence on exports (Hemerijck, Unger, and Visser 2000:25–26; Woldendorp and Keman 2007:323–324). State income from the exports of natural gas led to an overvalued currency that had boosted social spending and the public debt (den Butter et al. 2003; Salverda 2005; Woldendorp and Keman 2007). Between 1975 and the early 1980s, the vicious circle of increasing unemployment, high social security transfers and high levels of public debt was known as the ‘Dutch disease’. From the 1980s onwards, the move from high to low unemployment rates was achieved through activation measures and a strong emphasis on citizens’ obligations through work-related benefit rules and conditions. In 1982 a government Coalition was formed between the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the right-leaning Liberal Party (VVD) led by Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers (CDA). The CDA usually actively supports the involvement of unions and employers in policymaking, while the VVD is ideologically closest to the most important Dutch employers’ associations VNO-NCW (Hendriks 2011:76–77). The Coalition government agreed on cuts in all social policy areas, although the strong emphasis on social security transfers instead of social services and the reliance on working time reduction were not changed structurally (Starke, Kaasch, and van Hooren 2011:10–11). Employers and unions agreed to restrain wages in order to regain competitiveness and in exchange for social rights. Based on the Wassenaar Agreement (1982), parties, government, and central bankers redesigned the labor market by reducing working hours and giving up their resistance to part-time jobs (Hancké and Rhodes 2005; van Lomwel and van Ours 2003). This pact was believed to be the foundation of the shift to a high employment economy with a peak of 74 per cent in 2001 (Becker 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Specifically, the perception of miraculous improvement in the Dutch economy started between 1995 and 1997 (Salverda 2005:40).



warned that the success of the Dutch model should not be exaggerated<sup>19</sup>. From this perspective, there is no typical or successful Dutch Polder Model. Given the changing context in which the party in government and social partners have to make their strategic choices, this new literature argued, Dutch corporatism in fact varies over time (Woldendorp and Keman 2007:318). Since the behavior of actors reacts to macroeconomic circumstances and exogenous influence one cannot speak of a «Dutch model». While corporatism may account for policy formation and implementation, it hardly does for economic performance (Vis, Woldendorp, and Keman 2012:73). The crisis seemed to prove these critics right. The deterioration of unit labor costs, the shrinking of domestically produced exports, and slow productivity growth forced the Dutch government to radical re-adjustment of its previous policies (Becker 2005:1094)<sup>20</sup>.

The increasing flexibility of the Dutch labor market means that university graduates are also entering the labor market under more flexible contractual conditions (i.e., part-time employment, fixed-term contracts). This flexible start, however, hardly jeopardizes the career advancement of university graduates. It has become a stepping stone toward secure job positions (e.g. de Lange, Gesthuizen, and Wolbers 2014). Flexible entry of university graduates is in fact fairly protected by collective bargaining. Employers can offer up to three

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<sup>19</sup> According to more critical perspectives (Oorschot, Abrahamson, and van Oorschot 2003:295), the Dutch success story 'mainly consisted of a giant redistribution of the work available' and it was particularly true for individuals with high level of education and women as compared to disabled workers, older unemployed and ethnic minorities. Furthermore, much of the strong employment growth was due to the rise of women's labor force participation and part-time jobs (Salverda 2005:48). It was also viewed as the first part-time economy in the world (i.e. Visser 2002).

<sup>20</sup> In late 2000 Dutch GDP growth started to decline and unemployment rates went up. The global contraction of economic growth in 2002 and 2003 also had its negative impact on the Dutch politics and economy. Since 2002, every cabinet has resigned without completing their full four year term. Five elections were held between 2002 and 2012, until the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, VVD) reached an agreement with the Labor party (Partij van de Arbeid, PvdA). Despite the electoral instability, the most important factor seems to have been extra demand which in those years was stimulated by the stock market and, in particular, the house price bubble (Becker 2005:1089). Both unemployment and the budget deficit again increased considerably. By then, it was clear that the Netherlands «had participated in an international bubble economy» (Becker 2012). As a result, scholars said that competitive corporatism had failed to provide extra incentives for innovation, and relied too much on «beggar-my-neighbor wage restraint» (Becker 2005: 1097).

consecutive temporary contracts and then the contract needs to be terminated or else tacitly transformed into a permanent contract.

#### 4.4.3. Cyclical factors

After the financial crisis of 2008 spread globally, both the Dutch economy and Dutch politics were constrained by pressure to take austerity measures and stop the national debt growing further. Under the guiding principle that «*anyone who can work should work, and that work must pay*»<sup>21</sup>, the new government<sup>22</sup> had to cut its budget for the reintegration of jobseekers and in other policy areas, which entailed cuts in central government payments to municipalities<sup>23</sup> (Government of the Netherlands 2012). The new 2012 Cabinet and its social partners agreed on a package of short-term measures to stimulate economic recovery. The government opted for an alternative approach: «bearing more responsibility and combating unemployment more actively by helping people find new work before they become unemployed»<sup>24</sup> (Government of the Netherlands 2013a). Dutch policy thus primarily focuses on vulnerable groups and young people who grow up in risky environments, and has implemented policies aimed at reducing early school leaving (Netherlands Youth Institute 2012, Euwals 2013)<sup>25</sup>. The Dutch Work and Social Assistance Act (*Wet Werk en Bijstand*) thus provides welfare and social assistance to applicants aged under

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<sup>21</sup> (Government of the Netherlands 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Four months after the parliamentary elections of 2010, a new cabinet was installed. A coalition agreement was reached between the liberal VVD and the centre party CDA (Christen-Democratisch Appèl), with support of the anti-immigration party PVV, and led by the Prime Minister Mark Rutte's VVD.

<sup>23</sup> Two years later the coalition government fell apart as a result of consecutive conflicts. The more liberal and pro-immigration Prime Minister Rutte resigned in April 2012 after an impasse in talks on the 2013 austerity budget, prompting a general election in 2012. The VVD regained support and a new coalition government was formed, comprising Mark Rutte as prime minister along with 7 VVD ministers and 6 PvdA ministers..

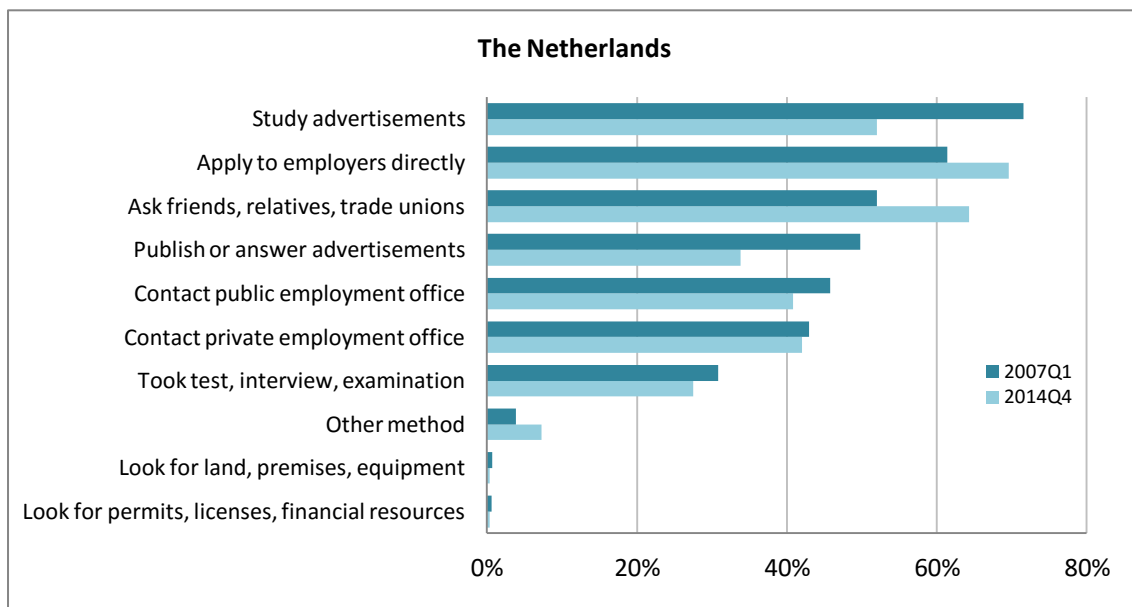
<sup>24</sup> These include measures to help disabled people get back into work, reduction of the maximum tax incentive to accumulate a pension, reduction of unemployment benefits, protection of temporary employees from arbitrary decisions if employment is terminated for commercial reasons ((Government of the Netherlands 2013a)).

<sup>25</sup> In good and in bad economic times, however, there are four main policy measures: combating early school leaving, local cooperation to define tailor-made reintegration plans, and youth minimum wages (Government of the Netherlands 2013b).

27 as long as they demonstrate that they are in education or actively searching for a job<sup>26</sup>.

Probably due to this dynamic and interconnected job-market, the effects of the financial crisis on university graduates experienced were mild. Compared to Spain, the unemployment rate for university graduates remained relatively low (4.7% in 2013)<sup>27</sup>. The rise in their unemployment rate has in fact been moderate, from 1.6 % in 2007 to 4.4% in 2014<sup>28</sup>. Job-search preferences, however, changed during the years of crisis (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4. Methods used for seeking work in the Netherlands (Eurostat, 2007-



According to Eurostat, direct application to employers climbed from 61.4% in the first quarter of 2007 to 69.6% in the last quarter of 2014<sup>29</sup>. Studying advertisements was one of the preferred methods in the first quarter of 2007 (71.6% of the respondents), and then dropped as job-seeking strategy in the last quarter of 2014 (52%). Other methods increased in popularity, like asking friends and relatives which climbed from 52% in the first quarter of 2007 to

<sup>26</sup> In the years 2013-2014, central government invested €50 million to get more (vulnerable) young people into work, which includes public funding and joint schemes by employers' organizations and trade unions (Government of the Netherlands 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Eurostat data for tertiary education, ISCED 11 - levels 5-8 [lfsa\_urgaed].

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Eurostat, Methods used for seeking work- Percentage of unemployed who declared having used a given method (lfsq\_ugmsw).

63.6% in the last quarter of 2014. Unlike among Spaniards and British respondents, the Dutch's reliance on intermediary agencies, however, has remained stable in good and bad times. In the period from 2007-2014, contact with public employment agencies only varied from 45.8% to 40.8% and contact with private employment agencies only varied from 43% to 42%.

Table 4.3. The Netherlands: Economic restructuring, labor market reorganization, and cultural aspects (1980-2014)

THE NETHERLANDS			
<i>Economic restructuring in advanced Western societies</i>	<i>National labor market reorganization</i>	<i>National Politics</i>	<i>Cultural aspects</i>
1980s. Crisis of the Keynesian Welfare State and transition to a post-Fordist accumulation regime	<b>Severe Economic Crisis 1975-1982</b> High exposure to foreign trade and high dependence on exports (Hemerijck, Unger, and Visser 2000) <b>1975-1982 'Dutch disease'</b> Vicious circle of increasing unemployment, rapidly rising social security transfers, growing budget deficit and public debt (Salverda 2005; Woldendorp and Keman 2007a)	1977 – 1982 <u>Dries van Agt</u> , CDA Christen-Democratisch Appèl (The Call of Christian Democracy)	Rapid increase in female participation in the labor market.
Trend towards deindustrialization economies;	1982– Wassenaar Agreement, a pledge of the central organizations to start negotiations over a wage standstill in exchange for shorter working hours (Visser 1998) - Significant shift in female employment - Strong part-time job creation in private services - Wage restraint, labor time reduction and higher labor time flexibility have played a key role in job growth (Hemerijck et al. 2000:229) - Reduction of working hours. Higher level of investment in job creation - Rapid extension of part-time jobs and very small jobs (mainly for married woman and young people) (Salverda 2005; Visser and Hemerijck 1997)	1982 – 1994 <u>Ruud Lubbers</u> (for three terms) CDA Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Political key notion: Organized capital and organized labor, together with representatives of the state and central bankers, share responsibility for the welfare of the nation (Hemerijck et al. 2000:181)
Internationalization of monetary flows; shift from more supply-driven to more demand-driven forms of economic production; competitive pressures posed by both lower-wage and high-tech emerging East Asian economies; increasing feminization of the labor force in developed countries <sup>30</sup> .	1986 – The Wage Act revisited <b>Recession years 1986-1987</b> German unification boosted economic growth (Hemerijck et al. 2000) <b>Recession years 1992-1994</b> 1993 – 'New Direction' Agreement, with more organized decentralization and negotiated flexibility (Visser 1998)		
Creation of regional economic blocs <sup>31</sup> .			
Post-Fordist accumulation regime (the knowledge-based economy)			

<sup>30</sup> See Bob Jessop's 'The Future of the Capitalist State' (2002:80–84).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182-183.

Table 4.3. The Netherlands (cont.)

THE NETHERLANDS			
<i>Economic restructuring in advanced Western societies</i>	<i>National labor market reorganization</i>	<i>National Politics</i>	<i>Cultural aspects</i>
<p>Flexibilization of the labor process based on new information and communication technologies (ICT), continuous supply-side innovation, and collaborative network enterprise<sup>32</sup>.</p> <p>1990s. Increasing global interdependence and competition between economic actors (firms, strategic alliances, networks)<sup>33</sup>.</p> <p>Reorganization of the State: Internationalization of policy regimes<sup>34</sup>.</p> <p>2000s</p> <p>Global Recession: The U.S. financial crisis spread globally. Decline the rate of economic growth;</p>	<p>- New focus on Active Labor Market Policies.</p> <p>- The Public Employment Service was reorganized, now under tripartite control, financed by the government but run independently (Hemerijck et al. 2000:225).</p> <p><b>Economic Recovery 1995-2002</b></p> <p>1995– 2002 ‘Dutch miracle’, reached through the formula of wage moderation and negotiated flexibility of working hours</p> <p>Strong job growth in temporary employment Services and Welfare Reform (Hemerijck et al. 2000):</p> <p>- Reform of the employment service,</p> <p>- Strengthening of activation requirements in social security</p> <p>- Additional job programs in the public sector</p> <p>- Wage subsidies to encourage employers hiring low-skilled Workers</p> <p>- Tax reduction for those in work, negotiated flexibility in working hours</p> <p>- New statutes and pensions</p> <p>- Policies to enhance the growth of part-time work.</p> <p><b>1999 – Member of the Eurozone (€).</b></p> <p><b>Economic downturn 2002</b></p> <p>The Netherlands fell from the top range to the bottom end of GDP performance among EU member states (Salverda 2005:39).</p> <p>Funds to support reduced working hours so that firms can tap the unemployment insurance fund to pay employees for the hours they do not work.</p> <p>2003 – Social Pact, which imposed a wage ceiling.</p> <p><b>2004-2008 Economic Recovery</b></p> <p>2004 – Social Pact, which imposed wage freezes for two years.</p> <p>Labor shortages emerged, especially of skilled labor.</p> <p>Lowest unemployment rate in Europe (at around 3%).</p> <p>Exceptionally high vacancy rate.</p>	<p>1994 – 2002</p> <p><u>Wim Kok</u>, Partij van de Arbeid (Labor Party)</p> <p>2002 – 2010</p> <p><u>Jan Peter Balkenende</u>, CDA Christen-Democratisch Appèl</p>	

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96-100.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.187.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200-201.

Table 4.3. The Netherlands (cont.)

THE NETHERLANDS			
<i>Economic restructuring in advanced Western societies</i>	<i>National labor market reorganization</i>	<i>National Politics</i>	<i>Cultural aspects</i>
Increase in overall indebtedness; rise of economic inequality of both income and wealth <sup>35</sup> .	<p>2004 Dutch Work and Social Assistance Act (Wet Werk en Bijstand) - The law obliged municipalities to offer youths from 18 to 27 years old that apply for a benefit either a job, some form of schooling or a combination of both.</p> <p>2007 'Drive to Reduce Drop-out Rates' (initiative to reduce early school leaving).</p> <p><b>Crash of 2008</b></p> <p>Expenditure of 7% of the GDP on capital injections into the Banking sector (Vis, van Kersbergen, and Hylands 2011). Creation of a crisis-related measure to subsidize training that specifically targets employees who are at risk of losing their job, allowing employees to move into a new line of work in another sector (Yerkes, van der Veen, and Veen 2011).</p> <p>2009– 2011 Introduction of a partial unemployment arrangement (Deeltijd Werkloosheidswet or Deeltijd WW), that allows employers to temporarily reduce the working hours of an employee by a minimum of 20 per cent and a maximum of 50 per cent. Employees receive a partial unemployment benefit to compensate the reduction in working hours (Yerkes et al. 2011).</p> <p>2009-2012 Investment in the Young Act (Wet Investeren in Jongeren). This act obliges municipalities to offer work combined with schooling to young individuals between the ages of 18 and 27 applying for welfare or social assistance.</p> <p>2013 Law 'Work to your abilities' (Wet werken naar vermogen)</p> <p>2013-2014 Budget and ambassador for youth unemployment. Target groups are all young unemployed persons (but a specific age group is not defined). The budget is available immediately to allow municipalities, which are in charge of the labor market reintegration of young people, to start the policy measures as soon as possible.</p>	<p>2010 – 2012, <u>Mark Rutte</u>, VVD Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy - Liberal Party)</p> <p>2012 – Present, <u>Mark Rutte</u>, VVD Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie</p>	
2010S			

Source: Own elaboration.

#### 4.5. The United Kingdom: A market-based meritocratic culture

The United Kingdom typifies the Market-based meritocratic culture. British culture is essentially meritocratic and deeply committed to the market principle. Britain's individualism has legitimated increased competitiveness (Clasen & Clegg, 2003). The Thatcher government lay the foundations for marketisation of

<sup>35</sup> See Wolfgang Streeck's lecture 'Has Capitalism seen its day?' (2014).

public services<sup>36</sup> and stressed workfare as the central element of its policies (Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby 2003a; Damian Grimshaw and Rubery 2012). Standing behind this liberal-individualist political culture is a «highly stigmatizing discourse nurtured by Conservative governments» centered on the «dependency culture» (Clasen and Clegg 2003). The process of deregulation began in the 1980's but it was Tony Blair's Government (1997-2007) that «embarked on a broad strategy of «third way» reform, fine-tuning benefit rules to neutralize the 'traps' created by welfare-to-work schemes, and launching a fight against poverty and social exclusion» (Eichhorst and Hemerijck 2008:25): a higher minimum wage and income guarantees, reform of the tax code and introduction of new targeted programs (Table 4.4). New Labor stressed activation as the centerpiece of its unemployment policy and developed an ambitious «make work pay» strategy, based on minimum wage and tax credits for workers (Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby 2003:631).

The new public management policy has developed in areas like health, social assistance and active labor market policies (e.g., providing training schemes instead of unemployment benefits for disadvantaged young people). It became a major component of David Cameron's approach to welfare. Two related concepts guide the wider government position: the «weightless state»<sup>37</sup> and the «big society»<sup>38</sup>. The «weightless State» includes the policy of a lowering spending, public sector outsourcing, and market-led growth (Taylor-Gooby 2012:62). The «big society», Cameron's flagship policy and the reverse side of the «weightless state» principle, includes public service reform, community empowerment and, «social action for which the government had to foster a culture of voluntarism and philanthropy» (Watt 2010). According to this strongly neoliberal approach, the «big society» can be empowered to provide services traditionally provided by the State (Grimshaw and Rubery 2012:122).

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<sup>36</sup> This means the «policy of outsourcing public services to the private sector» (Damian Grimshaw and Rubery 2012).

<sup>37</sup> See comment pieces for The Guardian (Toynbee 2014; Williams 2013).

<sup>38</sup> See comment pieces for The Guardian (Brennan et al. 2012; Burbage 2013; Watt 2010).

#### 4.5.1. School-to-work linkages

A distinctive feature in the relation between education and firms in the United Kingdom is the relative autonomy of the educational system. Employers have little influence in the provision of higher education and it is often seen as a “decoupled” training system (Hannan, Smyth, and McCoy 1999:24). As in the Spanish case, there is a weak link between HE institutions and firms. British firms take the prestige and status of HE institutions more seriously than Spanish recruiters, however. (Arthur, Brennan, and de Weert 2007).

Competition for jobs in the British labor market is therefore based on the graduates’ generic credentials and job performance, rather than on specific diplomas (Breen 2005b; Ryan 2001). British employers rely on variety of formal and informal channels to communicate vacancies in the job market. Employers also screen more intensively when recruiting for higher occupational categories, which in turn produces job higher quality matches (Pellizzari 2011). Apart from the use of qualifications and other observable characteristics as threshold for jobs, employers rely on unobservable characteristics such as motivation, reliability and attitude to work (e.g. Chris Hasluck 2011:12–13). British graduates, on the other hand, benefit from a sort of firm-based training, although they lack of any corporatist supervision or regulation as in the Dutch case.

#### 4.5.2. The demands of the labor market for graduates

Between 1990 and mid-2000, the United Kingdom counted among the major beneficiaries of globalization and the financialization of the economy (Lallement 2011). The UK is the leading European centre for investment and private banking, hosting London as one of the world’s top financial centers for international business and commerce<sup>39</sup> and the location of 49,4% of Britain’s jobs in the knowledge-intensive service sector (World Economic Forum 2013:321).

In this context British university graduates should expect a smooth transition to the labor market. The tightening of the British job market,

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<sup>39</sup> Only London's GDP is larger than the national economies of Belgium, Sweden and Switzerland (PwC 2014).



however, has meant increasing competition for entry-level jobs. Lack of opportunities for good and stable jobs forces job-seeking graduates into occupations that they would otherwise not consider (e.g. Chris Hasluck 2011:20). The job market for British university graduates has also opened to foreign competition, which presumably has increased the demand and pressures for skill upgrading on national and international job-seekers. Just after Spain, the United Kingdom has the highest prevalence of over-qualification (41%) in first jobs six months after graduation (45% in Spain and 27.1% in the Netherlands) (Verhaest and Van der Velden 2013:645). Another pressing problem for British university graduates in this context is the high-incidence of horizontal mismatches, that is, recent graduates with non-graduate jobs. In a large-scale study, Purcell et al. found that 20% of UK graduates who earned a first-class degree and 50% of graduates who earned a third-class degree (3-year courses) were in non-graduate employment just after graduation in 2010 (Purcell et al. 20012:28–29).

#### 4.5.3. Cyclical factors

When the U.S. financial crisis spread globally, the British government channeled up to 60% of the GDP to capital injections to the banking sector (Vis et al. 2011). Nevertheless, the UK approach to the economic crash of 2008 remained broadly non-interventionist, with low levels of recorded expenditure (Bonoli 2010; Clasen et al. 2012b; Clegg 2010)<sup>40</sup>. Among the most distinctive features of the New Labor approach (1997-2010) were requirements of active job-search and training as pre-conditions to receive benefits (see Lødemel and Trickey 2001; Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby 2003: 631; Eichhorst and Hemerijck 2008: 25)<sup>41</sup>. Under Conservative rule, labor market policy has been increasingly dominated by job search and ‘work-first’ approaches, at the expense of any other alternatives. Job-seekers have been affected by direct and indirect cutbacks and been subject to a further tightening of benefit conditionality and sanctions (Clasen et al. 2012b). According to British government’ sources, the

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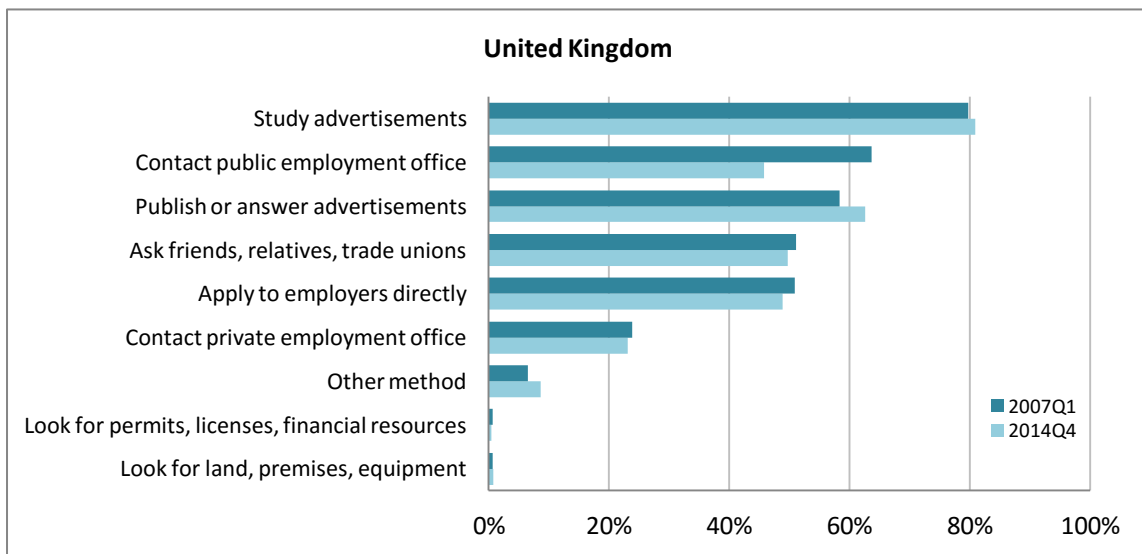
<sup>40</sup> Social insurance only covers modest transfers to low income families and individuals. These policies may have push individuals to accept low wages in the job market.

<sup>41</sup> According to Eurostat, training programs account for about 33.3 percent of UK public expenditure against 22.2 percent in Spain and 14.2 percent in the Netherlands (Eurostat 2007).

introduction of tougher rules in October 2012 resulted in 818,000 job-seekers who had failed to attend appointments or turned down job-offers under the JSA allowance having their benefits payments suspended<sup>42</sup>.

Cameron's administration has increased direct financial compensation from the State to employers who foster part-time employment among young people and who, therefore, invest in the employees' skills and training (Damian Grimshaw and Rubery 2012:115). Most notably between October 2009 and March 2011, this administration continued investing in the 'Future Jobs' Fund to support the creation of jobs that last up to six months and target young and disadvantaged older jobseekers<sup>43</sup>. University students have been particularly affected by the Coalition policies, which moved even more in the direction of a smaller State and thus forced them to rely on personal or other private resources<sup>44</sup>. Public funding has significantly diminished and tuition fees have almost tripled to £9,000 (€11,150)<sup>45</sup>.

Figure 4.5. Methods used for seeking work in United Kingdom (Eurostat, 2007-2014)



<sup>42</sup> According to the UK government's report "Benefit sanctions figures published" (2014).

<sup>43</sup> See the UK government's report "Ad hoc statistical analysis 2011 quarter 1" (Department for Work and Pensions 2011).

<sup>44</sup> "There should be more investment in higher education and this should come from graduates" --key point from Lord Browne's proposal accepted by the Coalition government (Department for Business-Innovation and Skills 2011:2)

<sup>45</sup> See the first part of the UK Government report "Higher education: government response to Lord Browne's review" (Department for Business-Innovation and Skills 2011).

In the United Kingdom, university graduates' unemployment rates have remained relatively low, however, despite the financial crisis. This has been so in part because firms have «hoarded labor, cut hours, and lowered pay» (Bell and Blanchflower 2010:2). The rate of unemployment of the high-skilled increased from 2.4% in 2007 to 3.8% in 2014<sup>46</sup>, still far below the EU27 average of 8.7% in the same period<sup>47</sup>. As in the Netherlands, a dynamic and interconnected job-market probably accounts for these figures. Both employees and employers rely on publicity to learn and communicate job opportunities. According to Eurostat, the most widely used method to find a job in Britain is to study advertisements (79.7% in the first quarter of 2007 and 80.9% in the last quarter of in 2014), and this has not changed during the financial crisis (Figure 4.5)<sup>48</sup>.

Table 4.4. United Kingdom: Economic restructuring, labor market reorganization, and cultural aspects (1980-2014)

UNITED KINGDOM			
<i>Economic restructuring in advanced Western societies</i>	<i>National labor market reorganization</i>	<i>National Politics</i>	<i>Cultural aspects</i>
1980s. Crisis of the Keynesian Welfare State and transition to a post-Fordist accumulation regime  Trend towards deindustrialization economies;	<b>1979-1997 Era of Workfare</b> Reforms to promote employment flexibility, to strengthen incentives to enter employment (particularly for those on state benefits), to encourage private sector competition into public services provision and to reduce the costs of services provision (Damian Grimshaw and Rubery 2012).  Dismantling of the unions' workplace prerogatives (Clasen and Clegg 2003)	1979 – 1990 <u>Margaret Thatcher</u> , Conservative	Behavioral changes by women and employers, under the impact of better education, higher female wages, smaller families, and changing social norms (Hemerijck et al. 2000:217)

<sup>46</sup> Eurostat data for tertiary education, ISCED 11 - levels 5-8 [lfsa\_urgaed].

<sup>47</sup> Eurostat, 2014 [lfsa\_urgaed].

<sup>48</sup> Eurostat data of the first quarter 2014; “Methods used for seeking work- Percentage of unemployed who declared having used a given method”(lfsq\_ugmsw).

Table 4.4. United Kingdom (cont.)

UNITED KINGDOM			
<i>Economic restructuring in advanced Western societies</i>	<i>National labor market reorganization</i>	<i>National Politics</i>	<i>Cultural aspects</i>
<p>Internationalization of monetary flows; shift from more supply-driven to more demand-driven forms of economic production; competitive pressures posed by both lower-wage and high-tech emerging East Asian economies; increasing feminization of the labor force in developed countries<sup>49</sup>.</p> <p>1990s. Creation of regional economic blocs<sup>50</sup>.</p> <p>Post-Fordist accumulation regime (the knowledge-based economy)</p> <p>Flexibilization of the labor process based on new information and communication technologies (ICT), continuous supply-side innovation, and collaborative network enterprise<sup>51</sup>.</p> <p>Increasing global interdependence and competition between economic actors (firms, strategic alliances, networks)<sup>52</sup>.</p>	<p><b>1997-2010 Era of “make work pay” strategy (New Labor agenda)</b></p> <p>Compulsory workfare -‘New Deal’ Programmes. 5 New Deal programmes for various vulnerable groups of workless people, establishing compulsory training and work placement in return for benefits (effectively a workfare/trainfare scheme) for young people and over-25s unemployed for more than two years (Daguerre and Taylor-Gooby 2003a).</p> <p>Radical re-evaluation of the social rights of the unemployed (Clasen and Clegg 2003).</p> <p>1996 – Jobseekers Allowance –JSA</p> <p>Restrictive unemployment benefits were introduced in mid-1990</p> <p>Tax-based wage subsidies for low income earners.</p> <p>1999 – New statutory national minimum wage (NMW) (Damian Grimshaw and Rubery 2012).</p> <p>New rights around European Works Councils, parental leave, and equality for part-time and fixed-term temporary and agency workers.</p> <p>New Labor also implemented the much delayed EU Working Time Directive, bringing in its wake the first statutory entitlements to paid holidays in the UK, of particular significance for part-time workers who often received no paid holidays (Damian Grimshaw and Rubery 2012).</p>	<p>1990 – 1997 <u>John Major</u>, Conservative</p> <p>1997 – 2007 <u>Tony Blair</u>, Labor</p>	<p>= The withdrawal from the labor market was becoming more costly and risky.</p>

<sup>49</sup> See Bob Jessop’s ‘The Future of the Capitalist State’ (2002:80–84).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182-183.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96-100.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.187.

Table 4.4. United Kingdom (cont.)

UNITED KINGDOM			
<i>Economic restructuring in advanced Western societies</i>	<i>National labor market reorganization</i>	<i>National Politics</i>	<i>Cultural aspects</i>
<p>Reorganization of the State: Internationalization of policy regimes<sup>53</sup>. 2000s. Global Recession: The U.S. financial crisis spread globally. Decline the rate of economic growth; Increase in overall indebtedness; Rise of economic inequality of both income and wealth<sup>54</sup>.</p>	<p><b>Crash of 2008</b> Destruction of full-time jobs, and increase in the number of part-time jobs (Lallement 2011) Firms introduced a policy of wage restraint: pay freeze or even a pay cut, holidays without pay, encouragement to work part-time, although, these adjustments were made without financial compensation (Heyes 2013; Lallement 2011). 2009 Market measures to stimulate activation (Chung and Thewissen 2011). Employers received a subsidy of £2,500 (€2,900) when recruiting a person who has been unemployed for over six months (HM Treasury 2009). Activation was encouraged through increasing income tax allowances, except for high income groups (HM Government 2009). 2008 – 2009 ‘Jobcentre Plus’, ‘Train to Gain’, and ‘Local Employment Partnerships’ initiatives The eligibility criteria were relaxed and £350 million was provided to enable SMEs to train employees (Chung and Thewissen 2011; Heyes 2013). 2009 Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act. All apprentices must spend a set number of hours studying away from their work site for qualifications as well as being trained on-the-job for a certain length of time (Unwin 2010)</p>	<p>2007– 2010 <u>Gordon</u> <u>Brown</u>, Labor</p>	
<p>2010s.</p>	<p>2010 – Young Person’s Guarantee A 15 months lasting programme, which offered 18–24-year-olds a place in employment, education or training (UK Government Web Archive 2010). <b>Era of the ‘Weightless State’<sup>55</sup></b> 2010 – Welfare cutbacks in active labor market policy. The Future Jobs Fund and Young Person’s Guarantee were both terminated following the election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in May 2010 (Heyes 2013; Heyes, Lewis, and Clark 2012). 2011 – Work Programme, involving harsher sanctions (by withholding benefits) for unemployed workers who decline job offers (Heyes 2013; Heyes et al. 2012). Under this programme a web of semi-independent providers (from private and voluntary sectors) are contracted to help the unemployed cohort into sustained employment (C Hasluck 2011; Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011). 2012 – New ‘Youth Contract’. Provides subsidies to employers taking on young unemployed people for 6 months (Clasen et al. 2012b).</p>	<p>2010-2015 <u>David</u> <u>Cameron</u>, Conservative Party</p> <p>2015-Present <u>David</u> <u>Cameron</u>, Conservative Party</p>	

Source: Own elaboration.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200-201.

<sup>54</sup> See Wolfgang Streeck’s lecture ‘Has Capitalism seen its day?’ (2014)

<sup>55</sup> See Polly Toynbee’s comment piece for The Guardian (2014).

#### 4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has situated university graduates' job-seeking behavior in their national contexts. I have argued that how graduates enter the labor market significantly depends on the dominant employment culture. Employment cultures shape the organization of labor and hiring decisions. In patrimonialist market cultures, job-seekers and employers place their trust on social connections, partly because of weak linkages between firms and intermediary institutions. Employers have few tools other than their networks to find a pool of job candidates, and tend to fill job vacancies using personal connections which reduce recruiting expenses at the cost of an opaque job-market. In Spain, where this culture prevails, family and social connections play a major role in off-setting both a weak State and a weak network of intermediaries matching job-seekers and employers. In meritocratic market cultures, employers and job-seekers rely on and trust educational credentials and competitive channels. Job markets need to be open to ensure the best match between qualifications and employer needs. In the Netherlands, strong linkages between HE institutions and employers coordinate the labor market for university graduates while in the United Kingdom generic educational credentials and formal channels provide good guidance to allocate individuals to jobs.

Employment cultures and national dynamics also adapt to changing economic circumstances. The economic crisis of 2007/2008 pushed graduates to rely on a wide variety of strategies to get a job, ranging from obtaining additional educational credentials to accepting low-paid jobs in exchange for experience and training. One also sees an increase in the use of flexible and temporary work, among other forms of non-standard work. Although this can be found in all countries it is more evident in some countries than in others. Spanish university graduates deployed different strategies in their struggle to get a job and to emancipate in a market dominated by privileged insiders, skyrocketing unemployment rates, low-paid jobs, job insecurity, and an expensive home rental market. Informal recruiting dominates in the Spanish job-market and the unemployed rely more than ever on social connections.

The Netherlands and the United Kingdom are contrasting cases, with different policy and labor market settings. Dutch university graduates enter the labor market under flexible contractual conditions that provide them with job experience before they get more secure job positions. During the crisis Dutch university graduates experienced low unemployment rates and they continued relying on direct application to employers and on employment agencies. Britons face a labor market characterized by job over-qualification and horizontal job mismatches. This makes the graduate transition to jobs tougher than before. A dynamic job market, however, has kept the unemployment rate for the high-skilled far below the EU average and reliance on advertisements to learn about job opportunities remains quite high. In the following chapter, I describe the strategies university graduates follow to find a job in today's uncertain economic conditions in the three countries under study.

## Chapter 5. GRADUATE JOB-SEEKING

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the use of different job-search strategies by university graduates. The questions to be examined in this chapter are: What are the strategies that individuals follow to find a job? What social factors determine the use and sequencing of various strategies? And, what is the impact that these strategies have on employment achievement? I address these three questions by examining the use and effects of a) social connections, b) market channels, and c) intermediary agencies. I support the analysis with data from an original survey to Spanish and Dutch recent university graduates conducted six-months apart within the first year after graduation, and on secondary analysis of a similar survey conducted in the United Kingdom between 2011 and 2012. The data from Spain and the Netherlands focuses on the job-search of both employed and unemployed university graduates whereas the data from the United Kingdom focuses only on the job-finding methods of employed university graduates.

One can argue that the first year after graduation is too soon for measuring outcomes and employment achievement (Arum and Shavit 1995). I believe, however, that although the data was compiled over a relatively short time-frame, it still affords reliable insights on individual-level factors influencing job-seeking strategies, perceptions about the relative success of alternative strategies, and the actual strategies that lead to a job (e.g. Scherer 2005). Although education eases and speeds up the transition into employment, the initial labor market entry is also associated with risks (e.g. Ben-Porath 1980). The transition to employment not always represents a sharp break with studying. University graduates sometimes delay entry into the labor market by getting more educational credentials and skills or combine further postgraduate education with temporary jobs and non-standard work. Thus, in a relative very short period graduates can take a number of different paths.

The period under study goes from 2011 to 2013. This coincides with a turbulent economic period, especially in the Spanish labor market, which makes more complex but at the same time more interesting the study of job-seeking practices and transitions to work. For some graduates the job-search requires



hard and intensive efforts whereas other graduates find jobs despite enhanced competition for jobs. As mentioned in the previous chapter, differences in the extent of recovery and job creation after the crises are substantial across countries despite overlapping business cycles. Most graduates in Spain, for instance, find it difficult to find regular employment within six months –and even about four years after graduation (see, e.g. García Montalvo, Ginés Mora, and García Aracil 2007)– whereas in the Netherlands and in other Northern countries most graduates have traditional and fast transitions to work.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section examines the characteristics of the sample population. The second section gives a brief overview of the research questions and hypotheses. Finally, the third section describes the data analysis procedures and presents the research findings. The chapter ends with a summary and concluding discussion.

### **5.1. How university graduates seek for jobs in their social milieu?**

As mentioned in chapter 1 and chapter 2, university graduates use a variety of job-seeking strategies. I classify them into three categories: social connections, market channels, and intermediary agencies. “Social connections” refers to strong and weak ties such as relatives, friends or acquaintances, colleagues or classmates, and university professors. “Market channels” comprises methods that connote reliance on open competition, such as when people provide information on personal achievement or when people write to employers (e.g. for interviews, filling out an application, submitting a resume), answer ads, advertise for a job in a newspaper or Internet, and take tests or competitive examinations. Finally, “Intermediary agencies” reflects reliance on those relatively new organizations that provide services to job-seekers, such as temporary or private work agencies, university career offices, professional organizations, the public employment service, and trade unions.

The study includes graduates who have a job and graduates who are seeking for a job at the moment of the survey (in 2011 and 2012). I asked respondents about a set of fourteen job-seeking strategies, their perceptions about the relative success of alternative strategies, and the actual strategies that led them to get a job. First, I asked employed graduates to report which of the

fourteen strategies had led them to a job. Then, I asked unemployed graduates to report on how often they use each of fourteen job-search methods, i.e. on a monthly basis, less than a month or never (with the exception of intermediary agencies, for which respondents simply had to indicate whether they had approached them or not). Table 5.1 and Table 5.2 summarize the answers to these questions.

Table 5.1. Job-finding method, by Country (percentages)

Job-finding method	Percentage of employed graduates by Method used to find their current job		
	ES	NL	UK
<b>Social connections</b>			
Asked relatives	9,7	22,5	15 <sup>a</sup>
Asked friends or acquaintances	17,6	9,0	
Asked colleagues or classmates	2,1	14,5	4,7 <sup>b</sup>
Asked university professors	8,1	7,6	
<b>Market channels</b>			
Answered advertisements for jobs	14,2	4,5	4,9 <sup>c</sup>
Applied directly to employers	24,4	25,3	17,5 <sup>d</sup>
Advertised for a job in a newspaper/ Internet	1,9	,0	-
Took tests or competitive examinations	7,7	0,7	-
<b>Institutional intermediaries/agencies</b>			
Contacted a temporary work agency	2,8	4,2	-
Contacted a public employment office or service	2,1	0,7	-
Contacted an university placement office	6,0	9,0	15,2 <sup>e</sup>
Contacted a professional organization	1,9	,0	-
Contacted a private employment agency	1,2	,0	16,2 <sup>f</sup>
Contacted trade unions	0,5	2,1	-
- Already worked there (e.g. internship)	-	-	13,1
- Speculative application	-	-	2,8
- Other	-	-	10,6
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	431	289	5854

Source: Own elaboration

Notes: Figures correspond the categories (a) Personal contacts, including family and friends; (b) Professional networking; (c) Media (e.g. newspaper/magazine advertisement); (d) Employer's website; (e) Your university/college (e.g. Careers Service, lecturer, website); ( f) Recruitment agency/website.

The data collected for employed and unemployed graduates reveals that they used a variety of job-search strategies and that various paths led them to a job (Table 5.1). Market channels like direct application to employers is the strategy

that more frequently led to a job among Spanish, Dutch and British graduates. Social connections and intermediaries played an important role as well. Jobs were channeled through social networks for one in three Spanish and Dutch graduates, with kin playing a more important role for the Dutch. Meanwhile, British graduates got their jobs mainly through institutional intermediaries and then through direct contact to employers. University placement offices and recruitment agencies also channeled jobs for one in three British university graduates.

Turning now to the job-seeking strategies of the unemployed, one observes that Spaniards and Dutch<sup>1</sup> graduates use market channels most frequently (Table 5.2). Above 73% and 41% of Spanish and Dutch university graduates, respectively, reported the use of advertisements at least once a month. This is followed by direct application to employers and, then, by reliance on intermediary agencies. As expected, private employment agencies and university placement offices are used by six out of ten Dutch graduates. In contrast, temporary agencies are a relatively frequent choice among Spanish graduates, which is not surprising given the high prevalence of temporary jobs in the Spanish labor market. Finally, social connections are more intensively used by Spanish than by Dutch graduates.

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, I cannot consider aspects of the Britons' job-search because the DHLE data at my disposal was not designed to address more aspects of this central issue. The DHLE dataset include only the question "How did you first find out about this job?", which results I report in Table 5.1.

Table 5.2. Job-search methods, by Country (percentages)

Job-search method	Percentage of respondents using a particular Methods with a particular frequency*					
	ES			NL		
	At least once a month	Less frequently	Never	At least once a month	Less frequently	Never
<b>Social connections</b>						
Asked relatives	45,0	44,2	10,8	22,3	37,8	39,9
Asked friends or acquaintances	52,6	41,9	5,4	37,0	46,5	16,5
Asked colleagues or classmates	49,2	41,4	9,4	22,7	47,9	29,4
Asked university professors	5,4	33,2	61,4	6,0	23,6	70,4
<b>Market channels</b>						
Answered advertisements for jobs	73,5	21,3	5,1	41,0	30,0	29,0
Applied directly to employers	63,2	30,5	6,2	36,4	31,5	32,1
Advertised for a job in a newspaper/ Internet	11,6	16,8	71,6	19,5	17,0	63,5
Took tests or competitive examinations	3,7	23,2	73,1	7,5	20,8	71,7
<b>Institutional intermediaries</b>						
Contacted a temporary work agency	75,7	-	24,3	44,4	-	55,6
Contacted a public employment office or service	46,1	-	53,9	32,4	-	67,6
Contacted an university placement office	39,6	-	60,4	17,2	-	82,8
Contacted a professional organization	39,4	-	60,6	28,9	-	71,1
Contacted a private employment agency	34,3	-	65,7	31,9	-	68,1
Contacted trade unions	15,6	-	84,4	2,6	-	97,4

Source: Own elaboration.

\*Comparable data not available for UK.

Table 5.3 provides information on job-search duration. This can be interpreted as a measure of the availability of jobs for young university graduates (Brzinsky-Fay 2011:13). Spanish graduates spent more time looking for a job and took more time to find one (5.5 and 2.7 months, respectively) than did their Dutch counterparts (2.5 and 1.4 months, respectively). This reflects in part that young people in Spain have been more strongly affected by the recession and lackluster recovery than have the Dutch.

Table 5.3. Job-search duration, by Country (percentages)

Average job-search (in months)	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
Months looking for a job (Unemployed Rs.)	5,5	2,5	n/a
Months until find a job (Employed Rs.)	2,7	1,4	n/a

Source: Own elaboration.

I end this brief description of the data in my survey with Table 5.4, which shows that a high share of Dutch and Spanish graduates (86% and 59.6% respectively) had a job while studying. This contrasts with comparable data for the United Kingdom, where a very low percentage of graduates have a job (8.6%) or an internship (1.8%). Jobs provide students with useful professional experience at the same time as they help them fund their studies. Table 5.4 shows that internships are particularly prevalent among Spanish graduates relative to Dutch and British graduates (64.8% versus 36.7% and 1.8% respectively).

Table 5.4. Job experience in HE, by Country (percentages)

<i>Job experience</i>	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
Have a job while studying HE	86,6	59,6	8,6 <sup>a)</sup>
Internships while studying HE	64,8	36,7	1,8 <sup>b)</sup>

Source: Own elaboration.

Notes: a) Figure for full-time or part-time work all year round as previous employment; b) Figure for internship as previous employment.

## 5.2. How well-prepared are university graduates for the labor market?

The data above shows that university graduates rely on a variety of strategies when looking for jobs. They use social connections, resources from their home universities, and compete with their credentials in the open market. In a demanding labor market like today's, graduates need presumably more than a smart search process. Before turning to the multi-variate analyses, this section highlights various individual characteristics of the surveyed population that may impact on their choice of job-seeking strategies and on their success in getting jobs. These characteristics are 1) the discipline in which graduates hold a degree, 2) the graduates' transnational and professional skills and 3) the graduates' social background.

The discipline in which students major at university is one of the factors most closely associated with the use of particular job-search methods (Try 2005), together with early success in the labor market and with the fit between qualifications and jobs (Róbert and Blaskó 2007; Semeijn et al. 2006; van de

Werfhorst 2011)<sup>2</sup>. Table 5.5 shows that university graduates with Social Sciences, Business and Law degrees are a majority in the sample, although there is variation across countries. Graduates from the Social Sciences represent half of the Dutch respondents (49,2%) compared with less than a fourth (22,3%) and less than a sixth (15,6%) of the Spanish and British graduates, respectively. In the British sample, on the other hand, graduates from Science and Engineering, Health and Welfares represent 43,9% of the surveyed population, a much higher percentage than those obtained for Spain and the Netherlands.

Table 5.5. Field of Study, by Country (percentages)

Field of Study <sup>(a)</sup>	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
Education	12,6	3,5	4,8
Humanities and arts	13,1	9,8	21,8
Social sciences	22,3	49,1	15,6
Science and Engineering	16,8	6,7	23,9
Health and welfare	14,1	5,8	20,0
Business and law	21,1	25,1	13,9
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Own elaboration.

Transnational and professional skills can make a difference in a global economy. In the knowledge economy, transnational skills and experience enables graduates to work successfully in internationalized environments and makes individuals more mobile (Allen and van der Velden 2007; Graf 2008; Heijke and Meng 2011; Powell and Solga 2008; Teichler 2012). Although there is no “magic tool for highly successful careers” (Teichler 2012:45), graduates with transnational skills are fitter to navigate different cultures and markets<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Studies show that some disciplines provide to graduates better economic and occupational returns than others in the labor market. University graduates from sciences, for instance, tend to have more unstable job positions than those graduates from humanistic careers (Argentin 2010).

<sup>3</sup> It is reasonable to expect that these characteristics play a role in graduates' labor market outcomes. A recent study of the European Commission shows that Erasmus students after a stay abroad have better employability skills than 70% of all students and that they are in better position to find their first job (European Commission 2014). Other studies complement these findings and also emphasize the role of skills and job experience. Higher levels of skills and job experience usually translate into better chances of employment and higher earnings (Heijke and Meng 2011; Semeijn et al. 2006).

Proficiency in foreign languages and international experience are also rewarded in the labor market.

Table 5.6 highlights some contrasts in proficiency in foreign languages and international experience between the university graduates in Spain and the Netherlands. Only 1 out of 4 Spanish graduates speaks English as a foreign language, while in the Netherlands the ratio is 3 out of 4 graduates<sup>4</sup>. Spaniards are investing more, however, into improving their transnational skills, spending about four hours per week learning a foreign language (125% more time than do the Dutch). Another relevant contrast between Dutch and Spanish graduates is that the former have studied abroad more often than have the latter (37,7% versus 17,3%).

Table 5.6. Transnational and professional skills, by Country (percentages)

<i>Transnational and professional skills</i>	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
Speak English as foreign language	31,0	75,1	n/a
Speak two or more foreign languages	10,7	42,5	n/a
Stage abroad while studying HE	17,3	37,7	n/a
<b>Time spent on... (hs/week)</b>			
Learning a new language	3,7	1,64	n/a
Professional development	15,04	9,89	n/a
Unpaid/voluntary work	4,24	2,92	n/a

Source: Own elaboration.

The last characteristic to be considered in this section is family and social class background. The literature on social stratification has repeatedly shown that

<sup>4</sup> The number of foreign languages spoken on average in the Netherlands is consistent with data from the Special Eurobarometer #386 *Europeans and their Languages*. It shows the Netherlands as one of the eight European countries where a majority of citizens (77%) has practical skills in at least two foreign languages, and where most individuals (94%) are able to speak at least one language in addition to their mother tongue (European Commission 2012:13–16). Spain and the United Kingdom, on the other hand, are among the five European countries where at least half of all respondents (54% and 61%, respectively) say they are unable to speak any foreign language (European Commission 2012:16). According to data from the European Commission's EuroBarometer series (2012), 41% of respondents in Spain are most likely to say they have never learnt any language other than their mother tongue, followed by 32% of respondents from the UK. Needless to say, British graduates have a comparative advantage over other nationals given that English is the most demanded and widely spoken foreign language in 19 of the 25 European Member States where it is not an official language (European Commission 2012:21).

coming from a more privileged social background has a positive influence on early employment and improves the chances of getting a good job and a high income (e.g. Chetty et al. 2014:36; Erikson and Jonsson 1998:31–32). The deployment of class-based resources –particularly cultural capital– can make a crucial difference in the transition to adulthood (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lareau 1989)<sup>5</sup>. Families, for instance, provide a great deal of resources to recent graduates. They can also help funding the financial costs of HE and contribute relevant resources for the job-search<sup>6</sup>. Strong ties are also important for well-educated job-seekers when information on potential vacancies are scarce (e.g. Ben-Porath 1980; Kramarz and Skans 2014).

As I show below, there are significant differences in the graduate population under study (Table 5.7 and Table 5.8). Spaniards, for instance, come from less-educated households than do Dutch and Britons (Table 5.7). University graduates whose parents have Higher Education dominate in the Dutch (68.3%) and in the British cases (47.8%) while they only represent a small percentage in the Spanish case (30.2%). This may be due in part to the fact that access to Higher Education has recently democratized in Spain and only millennials have benefited from this expansion. Actually, higher education for this

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<sup>5</sup> Annette Lareau claims that middle class parents actively foster the development of their children's potential skills and talents (Lareau 2003; Lareau and Weininger 2008; McNamara Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003). According to this body of literature, middle class parents also help their children to evaluate the long-term implications of their school path and course selection. Furthermore, heavy involvement of middle class parents goes beyond providing advice or useful information from their own experiences and closest networks. Middle class parents often remain deeply involved in their children's lives after they have left the university. By contrast, working class parents do not micromanage core aspects of the school experience and when making key decisions they delegate responsibility both to the school and to the children themselves. Working class parents in Lareau's study help their children in many ways. Compared to middle class parents, however, less privileged parents are typically less informed in enabling their children to navigate the complexities involved in HE.

<sup>6</sup> Access to HE is relatively open in Spain and in the Netherlands. The Spanish HE system is funded mainly by public budget and students (and families) only provide up to 17% of the tuition and enrolment costs. Despite regional differences, the lower fees are found in Galicia (starting at 600€ per year) while the highest fees are found in Madrid (up to 1920€ per year). In the Dutch HE system, the annual tuition fees for a degree program start at approximately 1,800€ for year and student. This means that families from very different social and economic backgrounds can easily afford HE for their children. This is not the case in the United Kingdom, where HE institutions are mainly private and students must face annual tuition fees of up to £9,000. Students in UK can borrow money from the government to pay their fees, and pay then loans back when they graduate and are working.



generation in Spain has been relatively inexpensive. The annual average tuition fees charged by public institutions for full-time students amount to USD 1038 in Spain, USD 1851 in the Netherlands, and USD 4840 in the United Kingdom (OECD 2011:267).

Table 5.7. Parental education, by Country (percentages)

Parental education	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
<b>Mother' education</b>			
Primary Education	21,6	2,3	n/a
Secondary Education	46,6	36,5	n/a
Tertiary Education	15,8	10,5	n/a
Higher Education	15,9	50,7	n/a
<b>Father' education</b>			
Primary Education	13,0	2,8	n/a
Secondary Education	44,4	27,4	n/a
Tertiary Education	17,2	8,1	n/a
Higher Education	25,4	61,6	n/a
<b>Parents' experience in Higher Education</b>			
One parent with HE	30,2	68,3	47,8 <sup>a)</sup>
Both parents with HE	11,1	43,9	n/a

Notes: a) It refers to the question: "Do any of your parents (this includes natural parents, adoptive parents, step-parents or guardians who have brought you up) have any higher education qualifications, such as a degree, diploma or certificate of higher education?"

Social differences are relevant to the university graduates' job prospects because they determine in part the quality and amount of information that they get about graduate job opportunities. In particular, middle class job-seekers benefit from better connections for getting a job (e.g. Granovetter 1973).

Table 5.8 shows that over half of the Spanish graduates come from households where routine and manual occupations prevail (nearly 40% of graduates' mothers are employed in Services and sales, and elementary occupations). Managerial and professional occupations, on the other hand, prevail in Dutch and British households. The Dutch graduates' mothers and fathers are primarily employed in professional occupations (80,1 % and 78,9%, respectively), while the British graduates' mothers and fathers are primarily employed in managerial and professional occupations. Dutch and British graduates thus come from more privileged social backgrounds than do Spaniards and probably benefit from better social networks.

Table 5.8. Parental occupation, by Country (percentages)

Parental occupation	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
<b><i>Mother' occupation</i></b>			
Managers	1,50	6,50	27,10 <sup>a)</sup>
Professionals	25,10	62,60	28,70
Technicians and Associate Professionals	23,90	10,90	17,20
Clerical Support Workers	3,80	4,60	8,50
Services and Sales Workers	19,00	9,30	2,20
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry & Fishery W.	0,40	0,80	0,50
Craft and related Trades Workers	0,80	0,00	7,10
Plant and Machine Operators,& Assemblers	4,30	0,30	4,80
Elementary Occupations	18,80	1,40	2,70
Armed Forces Occupations	0,00	0,30	0,20
--Other, Unemployed, Retired/Not working	2,40	3,30	1,00
	100,0	100,0	100,0
<b><i>Father' occupation</i></b>			
Managers	5,2	14,9	n/a
Professionals	27,5	53,1	n/a
Technicians and Associate Professionals	16,1	8,3	n/a
Clerical Support Workers	0,1	1,5	n/a
Services and Sales Workers	10,8	3,9	n/a
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry & Fishery W.	1,6	3,2	n/a
Craft and related Trades Workers	12,3	4,2	n/a
Plant and Machine Operators, &Assemblers	13,2	2,2	n/a
Elementary Occupations	6,5	0,2	n/a
Armed Forces Occupations	1,4	1,2	n/a
--Other, Unemployed, Retired/Not working	5,3	7,3	n/a
	100,0	100,0	

Source: Own elaboration.

Notes: a) In the British case, figures on parental occupation refers only to "parents' as single category, and is available only for students under the age of 21.

Table 5.9 includes information on the sources that help students fund their studies. They illustrate again that Spanish university graduates come from more modest households than do the Dutch and the British. Almost half of the Spanish graduates have funded their university studies through a full or part-time job (45%) and through study grants (38.3%). Meanwhile, Dutch graduates have funded their university studies mainly through part-time jobs (23%) and

parental support (37.3%). Only 5% of Spanish graduates have funded theirs through parental financial support<sup>7</sup>.

Table 5.9. Source of funding at University, by Country (percentages)

Primary source of funding at University	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
A full-time job	34,3	3,2	n/a
A part-time job	10,7	23,0	n/a
Loan (payable or non-repayable)	10,6	18,6	n/a
Study grants	38,3	13,4	n/a
Parental/Family support	5,0	37,3	n/a
Savings	,0	3,0	n/a
Summer jobs/occasional work	1,0	1,6	n/a

Source: Own elaboration.

### 5.3. How university graduates cope with the economic downturn

The transition to employment does not always involve a sharp break with studying, especially in bad times. That is why the surveys included information sensitive to the crisis conditions under which the data was collected (2011-2013). As mentioned in chapter 4, an analysis of cyclical features elucidates how the job-search and the competition for graduate jobs are shaped by institutional opportunities and constraints at the national level.

In Spain and the Netherlands, the panel survey (collected six months apart) offers a glimpse of different school-to-work transitions at work, which can then be compared with information from the British survey. Table 5.10 shows that while only 6,4% of Britons are looking for a job at the moment of the survey, over half of the graduate students in Spain and in the Netherlands are looking for a job. A great proportion of Spaniards and Dutch graduates in fact pursue further training as full-time or part-time students. This may be a conscious strategy to maximize success probabilities under uncertain labor market conditions. There is reason to think that those who pursue further education divide their time between studying and working. Also, individuals

<sup>7</sup> In the Spanish case, there is also a great proportion of graduates who depended on their parents at the moment of the survey (33.1%) but this was after graduation. In the Dutch case parental supports decreases by 11.9 percentage points between T1 and T2 of the survey, which indicates that the majority of them can lead independent lives.

with non-qualified jobs or non-matching jobs probably look for another job more frequently than those with higher qualified jobs and jobs that match their qualifications (van der Velden and Wolbers 2003).

Data from the panel survey also reveal distinctive patterns of transition from part-time to full-time jobs in Spain and in the Netherlands (Table 5.10). The share of Dutch graduates in full-time jobs increased by 11 percentage points between T1 and T2 while the share in part-time jobs decreased by 9.6 percentage points. This shows that they have been able to move into better jobs in a very short period. In contrast, in the Spanish case, the shares of graduates in full and part-time jobs remain pretty much identical across waves (between 20.5% and 22.1% and between 15.8% and 16.9%, respectively).

Table 5.10. Labor market status, by Country (percentages)

Labor market status	Country/Time of the survey				
	SP <sup>(T1)</sup>	SP <sup>(T2)</sup>	NL <sup>(T1)</sup>	NL <sup>(T2)</sup>	UK
Working full-time	20.5 <sup>(a)</sup>	22.1	21.7	32.8	63.0
Working part-time	15.8	16.9	35.6	26.7	7.5
Looking for a job	54.1	48.7	51.0	54.1	6.4
Self-employed	3.9	0.4	0.4	8.9	n/a
Neither employed or seeking a job	10.5	1.1	11.6	3.9	n/a
Engaged in full-time further study, training or research	19.9	16.9	42.5	5.0	15.6
Engaged in part-time further study, training or research	24.2	32.2	3.0	3.9	1.6
- Due to start a job in the next month	-	-	-	-	1.7
- Taking time out in order to travel	-	-	-	-	3.0
- Something else	-	-	-	-	1.2
					100,0

Notes: a) In Spain and in the Netherlands, the sum exceeds 100% since the respondents may report several status.

Table 5.11 focuses on the job characteristics of employed respondents. It shows that over half of the Spanish and British graduates have indefinite job contracts soon after graduation (49.1% and 50.4%, respectively). In the Dutch case, fixed-term contracts are more prevalent both at the time of the first and the second wave of the survey (55.4% and 56.7%, respectively). Also, the group of graduates who work for a family business or is self-employed doubled at T2 in relation to

T1. At less than 1249€, modal monthly earnings among Dutch and Spanish employed graduates remained stable across waves, although one observes a shift toward higher incomes among the Dutch between the two rounds of the survey; for instance, the subgroup of graduates who have a monthly income between 1249€ and 2000€ increased by 7.2 percentage points between Time 1 and Time 2 of the panel survey.

Table 5.11. Job characteristics, by Country (percentages)

Job-characteristics (Employed respondents)	Country/Time of the survey				
	SP <sup>(T1)</sup>	SP <sup>(T2)</sup>	NL <sup>(T1)</sup>	NL <sup>(T2)</sup>	UK
<i>Contract</i>					
On a permanent or open-ended contract	49,1	40,6	34,4	22,7	50,4
On a fixed-term contract	46,1	51,9	55,4	56,7	36,2
None (e.g. family business, self-employment, scholarship)	4,8	7,5	10,2	20,6	2,9
	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	
<i>Firm size</i>					
Micro (1-9 employees)	22,2	20,2	16,7	16,8	n/a
Small (10-49)	25,2	28,3	26,4	29,2	n/a
Medium (50-249)	19,3	20,2	27,6	23,0	n/a
Large (+250)	33,3	31,3	29,3	31,0	n/a
	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	
<i>Net Monthly Income</i>					
Less than 1249 €	73,0	64,8	59,4	51,6	19,6 <sup>a)</sup>
1250 to under 2000 €	23,8	31,4	27,4	34,8	47,8
2001 € or more	3,2	3,8	13,2	13,6	32,6
	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Own elaboration.

Notes: a) In the British case, graduates are asked for the annual pay for their main employment in the Salary field, and where the main employment is not their only employment they are also asked what they estimate their total earnings for the year would be. The DHLE survey uses both of these questions to derive a single total estimated earnings figure for each respondent (15 categories in total). This field is restricted to graduates in full-time paid employment (DHLE clarification). I recoded the DHLE estimations into 3 barely comparable categories: 1) “Less than 15000£”; 2) 15001£ to 25000€, and 3) “25001£ or more”.

Different transitions to employment impact on other key life transitions. This becomes evident when one analyzes the respondents’ living arrangements. Young graduates face relatively high unemployment rates and job insecurity. This renders access to the housing market difficult, especially in countries like the United Kingdom and Spain which have experienced housing bubbles (Moreno 2012). Table 5.12 shows that over half of the Spaniards live with their

parents at T1 and T2 of the survey (53.8% and 51.1%, respectively). In the Dutch sample, graduates have more independent living arrangements, that is, they live alone outside the family home or in cohabitation with friends or partners (16.3% and 19% of Dutch graduates, respectively, live with their parents at T1 and T2 of the survey).

Table 5.12. Living arrangements, by Country (percentages)

Living arrangements	Country/Time of the survey				
	SP(T1)	SP (T2)	NL(T1)	NL(T2)	UK
Cohabitant with parents/siblings	53,8	51,1	16,3	19,0	11.7 <sup>a)</sup>
Cohabitant with friends/flat mates	13,1	14,7	34,0	27,8	n/a
Cohabitant with a partner and/or children	25,8	25,6	29,1	25,9	n/a
Living alone	5,2	5,6	20,2	25,9	n/a
Other	2,1	3,0	0,4	1,4	48.3 <sup>b)</sup>
	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	

Source: Own elaboration.

Notes: a) Figure represents “parental/guardian home”: b) Figure represents “other rented accommodation”.

#### 5.4. Data analysis and hypotheses testing

So far, I have described the survey population along individual and social characteristics. Multivariate analysis provides a clearer picture of the graduates’ job-seeking behavior. I test hypotheses outlined in chapter 1 which relate the effects of different job-search strategies. Hypothesis one reads as follows: (H<sub>1</sub>) *Individuals trust successful practices in their “milieu” when seeking a job; only if these strategies fail do individuals they turn to alternative strategies.* Hypothesis two reads as follows: (H<sub>2</sub>) *Upwardly mobile graduates use weak ties more frequently than do middle class ones mainly because their strong social contacts do not provide useful information for finding high-skilled jobs.* Finally, hypothesis three reads as follows: (H<sub>3</sub>) *The use of social capital (strong or weak ties) instead of alternative strategies (impersonal ties) produces a poorer match between qualifications and jobs obtained.*

I test hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 3 with data from the web survey (N: 447). In order to test hypothesis 2, I only use data from the first round of the panel survey (N: 1930). The first round is better suited to study job-search strategies because it includes a higher proportion of job-seekers (n: 846) (Table

5.13). As mentioned above, the DHLE dataset for the United Kingdom does not include information about the job-search of unemployed respondents and only provides information about the job-search strategy that led *employed* respondents to a job. Therefore, this dataset does not allow for a full test of the argument developed here and in previous chapters. Nonetheless, one can use the DHLE data to test the third hypothesis regarding the effects of social connections on getting a job.

Table 5.13. Hypotheses and dataset

Hypotheses and dataset used in the analyses				
	Focus on:	Target group:	Dataset:	Cases:
H1	Successful vs. Alternative practices	Job-seekers/unemployed respondents	Web survey <sup>(T1-T2)</sup>	ES-NL
H2	Upward vs. middle-class graduates	Job-seekers/unemployed respondents	Web survey <sup>(T1)</sup>	ES-NL
H3	The effects of social connections	Employed respondents	Web survey <sup>(T1-T2)</sup> DLHE	ES-NL-UK

Source: Own elaboration

### 5.5. Analyzing contrasts in graduate job-seeking: Multivariate methods

Multivariate methods help us better understand contrasts in job-seeking behavior among the graduate population. The next section describes six key dependent variables used in the statistical analysis. Depending of the nature of the dependent variables, linear or logistic regression models will be used to analyze the effects of different job-search strategies. In particular, linear regression is used for testing Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 and logistic regression analysis is used for testing Hypothesis 3. Summary statistics for the full panel sample and independent variables are given in Appendix A (pp.127).

The independent variables include a set of individual background characteristics, family-relevant and job characteristics that could impact on the choice of job search strategies, on people's perception of the success of various strategies, and on the means through which people get their jobs across countries. The first two sets of independent variables were used as control variables in the test of Hypothesis 1 and 2, and the third block of variables was included in the test of Hypothesis 3.

The first set of independent variables measures individual characteristics, such as age, gender and the field of study in which graduates hold a degree. It also includes three dichotomous variables: a measure of whether respondents have spent time abroad while in Higher Education, a measure of whether respondents have had internships as part of their academic curricula, and a variable that measures whether respondents master two or more foreign languages (the questionnaire specified that by speaking a foreign language is meant that respondents can have a conversation in that language). In addition to this measure of multilingualism, and to better understand the impact of transnational skills on employment achievement, I have included a dichotomous variable based on the respondents' self-reported fluency in English, since it is the most demanded foreign language in the labor market.

The second block of variables focuses on family background. Family resources may affect the individual's reservation wage and therefore the decision to accept a job offer or continue the job search (i.e., Dolton and Makepeace 1986). This block includes two dichotomous variables that reflect whether the respondents' parents have attended university and two dichotomous variables that reflect whether the respondents' parents work in intermediate and professional occupations.

Finally, the third block of variables refers to job-characteristics. This includes a variable that measures the average duration of the search process (in months) until the respondent found her/his current job. Also, to control for different job arrangements, I include four dummy variables that measure 1) whether respondents are employed on a family business, 2) whether they benefit from a fixed-term contract, 3) whether they benefit from a part-time job (versus a full-time job), and 4) whether they work in a small-size firms (up to 49 employees) versus medium or large firms (more than 50 employees). I make a further distinction between graduates by controlling for the average hours per week that respondents spent in further education and professional training.

## **5.6. Empirical Results and Findings**

Hypothesis 1 states that when looking for a job individuals tend to trust successful practices in their "milieu". As I show in chapter 1, job-seeking



practices tend to vary across time and national contexts (pp. 10-11). First, and to better understand to what extent individuals follow the dominant practices in their milieu (H1), I examine how much successful and alternative job-search strategies contribute to getting a job. I report the results of various models for each group of strategies and country. The estimates for the first models explain the frequency with which respondents use the 1) successful practices and 2) the alternative strategies in their milieu.

I define as «*successful*» the three most successful ones in the Spanish and Dutch contexts (presented at the beginning of the chapter, in Table 5.1). The successful practices in Spain include actively search for work by approaching employers directly, answer job ads and, use friends and acquaintances; in the Netherlands, they include active search for work by approaching employers directly and the use of relatives, colleagues, or former classmates as main sources of job information. Each of these continuous variables ranges from 1 to 7 (low to high frequency). Table 5.14 also includes the results of estimating similar models for the explanation of the use of alternative strategies.

Table 5.14 shows that, net of other factors, the higher the use of alternative strategies, the higher the use of successful ones in both countries. Contrary to Hypothesis 1, these results shows that university graduates split into those who use all kinds of job-search strategies and those who follow relatively fewer strategies. Table 5.14 also highlights several contrasts between Spain and the Netherlands in the roles that individual characteristics, transnational skills and job experience play in the choice of different job-seeking strategies. In Spain, graduates from the fields of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts use successful and alternative strategies less often than do graduates from other disciplines. In contrast, in the Netherlands graduates from these same disciplines rely more often on successful and alternative strategies than do other graduates. This suggests that the discipline in which graduates hold a degree matters in how people go about getting a job and that some disciplines send clearer signals to employers than others.

Table 5.14. Results of multiple linear regression analysis to determine the frequency of use of Successful and Alternative job-search strategies by university graduates

	Spain		The Netherlands	
	Direct application; answer ads, friends	Alternative strategies	Direct application, relatives, classmates	Alternative strategies
	(B)	(B)	(B)	(B)
(Constant)	2,744**	2,715**	-,907	,064
<i>Job-search methods</i>				
Alternative methods in Spain	,161*	-	-	-
Popular methods in Spain	-	,539**	-	-
Alternative methods in the Netherlands	-	-	,233**	-
Popular methods in the Netherlands	-	-	-	,301*
<i>Individual characteristics</i>				
Female (ref. Male)	,286	-,223	,004	-,198
Age (<23)	-,371	-,429	,338	,179
Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (ref. Science and Engineering, Health and welfare, and Business and law)	-,650*	-,874*	,663*	,859*
<i>Transnational skills</i>				
Spent time abroad while studying	-1,088**	-1,167**	,846**	1,866**
Speak foreign languages (>2)	-,594	-,956*	,497	1,311*
Speak English as foreign language	-2,921*	-3,223**	2,151**	3,256**
<i>Job experience/other credentials</i>				
Grade marks	,762*	,337	-,342	-,585
Internships	,982**	1,185**	-,668*	-,817*
<i>Time spent on... (hs/week)</i>				
Professional development (further education/other training)	,009	,021	-,016*	-,035*
Unpaid/voluntary work	,010	,006	,002	-,008
N	285	291	284	287
Df	11	11	11	11
Adjusted R Square	.436	.472	.396	.358

\*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01.

In Spain, graduates with transnational skills use all job-search strategies less frequently than do graduates without transnational skills. This is the case both among those who spent time abroad whilst studying and among those who speak English. In the Netherlands, one finds the opposite. Dutch graduates capitalize on their transnational skills to follow as many job-strategies as possible, relative to those without the skills. Yet another contrast between Spain and the Netherlands is that while Spaniards with internships use both types of job-search strategies more intensely than those without them, Dutch graduates who have had internships use them less often. The latter indicates that Dutch who have had internships face a less intensive job-search, they have to invest less effort in getting a job.

Further analysis of the panel data shows that the odds of having a job by T2 in Spain are the same, regardless of the strategy used. In the Netherlands, however, they are higher among those who relied on Direct application or social networks (1.856) than among those who used alternative methods (1.090). Table 5.15 also shows that in Spain Social Science, Humanities and Arts graduates are more likely to be unemployed than graduates in other fields, regardless of the strategy they use. In the Netherlands, Social Science and Humanities graduates do not seem to suffer from this disadvantage in the labor market. Another interesting finding reported in Table 5.15 is that Dutch graduates who know foreign languages are more likely to have a job at time 2 than do those who do not know foreign languages, regardless of the job-finding strategies that they use. This shows that the rewards that accrue to knowing foreign languages are greater than those that accrue to just speaking the official language or languages. Finally, Table 5.15 reveals that in both countries, but more clearly so in the Netherlands, graduates who follow professional development training or education are less likely to be employed at T2 than are those who do not follow professional development training or education. This suggests that in both countries, but especially in the Netherlands, this type of path is an alternative to working.

Table 5.15. Logistic regression on the odds of having a job, by Job Search Method and Country

	Spain		The Netherlands	
	Direct application; answer ads, friends (ExpB)	Alternative strategies (ExpB)	Direct application, relatives, classmates (ExpB)	Alternative strategies (ExpB)
(Constant)	1,637	1,619	1,856	1,090
<i>Individual characteristics</i>				
Female (ref. Male)	1,298	1,236	0,763	0,791
Age (<23)	1,590	1,509	0,643	0,623
Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (ref. Science and Engineering, Health and welfare, and Business and law)	0,162*	0,184*	0,622	0,669
<i>Transnational skills</i>				
Spent time abroad while studying	0,680	0,718	1,040	0,755
Speak foreign languages (>2)	1,035	0,949	3,026*	3,062*
Speak English as foreign language	1,584	1,768	0,487	0,528
<i>Job experience/other credentials</i>				
Internships	0,570	0,663	0,511	0,500
Grade marks	1,334	1,066	2,109	2,499
<i>Time spent on... (hs/week)</i>				
Professional development (further education/other training)	0,981	0,987	0,968*	0,968*
Unpaid/voluntary work	1,006	1,012	0,961	0,964
N	119	117	176	168
Df	10	10	10	10
Cox & Snell R Square	14,6%	14,8%	15,2%	16,7%

\*p ≤.05; \*\*p ≤.01.

### 5.6.1. The experience of upwardly mobile and middle-class graduates

As I point out in chapter 2, I depart from the existing literature on job-seeking that often refers to undifferentiated populations. I argue that social background and educational attainment impact on the relative success of job search strategies. Hypothesis 2 predicts that upwardly mobile graduates use weak ties more often than do graduates from the middle-class. I define as «upwardly mobile graduates» those individuals a) who are first generation of college students and, b) whose parents have manual and routine occupations. Meanwhile, middle-class graduate students are those a) whose parents have

some higher education and, b) whose parents have managerial, professional and intermediate occupations. I thus estimate separate regression models to analyze how frequently graduates rely on weak and strong ties, market or market channels, and intermediary agencies (Table 5.16). Each dependent variable ranges from 1 to 7 (low to high frequency). Unfortunately, I do not have questions on the specific kind of information that parents and relatives (strong ties) directly provide to university graduates to properly test the second statement of Hypothesis 2.

Upon controlling for individual characteristics, the results show that upwardly mobile graduates use weak ties less frequently than do middle class ones (Table 5.16, column 1). This contradicts expectations. One interpretation of this unexpected finding is that weak ties may not abound in the networks of upwardly mobile graduates. Therefore, graduates from modest backgrounds are bound to rely relatively more frequently than do middle class graduates on intermediary agencies. Middle-class graduates participate in rich networks and probably have access to bridges –linkages between two individuals in a social network–, which provide useful information for the job-search.

Table 5.16 shows some significant country differences, as well as other interesting contrasts. As I predict in my theoretical model, Dutch graduates use strong ties and market channels less frequently than do Spaniards. Also, younger graduates use strong ties more frequently than older ones (Table 5.16, column 2). Probably, their young age leaves them with little option other than relying on family ties. Another finding is that graduates who have better grades use weak ties more often and intermediary agencies less often than those with worse grades.

Finally, Table 5.16 shows that the use of weak ties and market channels is positively related to having spent time abroad while at university. Also, graduates who have spent time abroad whilst they were studying and those who speak two or more foreign languages use market channels with higher frequency than do other respondents. This finding suggests that having both transnational and unpaid experiences increases the amount of social capital. Job experience and other related credentials also impact on the relative use of different job-search methods. Graduates who held internships, for instance, use strong ties

more often than do other respondents. We also see that voluntary work increases the use of social capital (the more hours graduates spent in unpaid and voluntary work, the more frequently they use weak ties).

Table 5.16. Use of different job-search strategies by upwardly mobile and middle class graduates (Regression)

	Weak-ties	Strong-ties	Market channels	Intermediary agencies
	B	B	B	B
(Constant)	3,929**	1,953**	4,406**	2,486**
Upwardly mobile graduates	,050	,218**	,336*	,573**
(Constant)	1,373**	,757**	2,022**	1,715**
Upwardly mobile graduates	-,277*	,045	,026	,331*
<i>Job-search methods</i>				
Weak-ties	-	,237**	,307**	,050
Strong-ties	,915**	-	,279*	,233*
Market channels	,165**	,039*	-	,224**
Intermediary agencies	,039	,047*	,321**	-
<i>Individual characteristics</i>				
The Netherlands (ref. Spain)	-,167	-,260**	-,469*	,017
Female (ref. Male)	-,047	,065	,173	,096
Age (<23)	-,032	,092*	-,156	-,163
Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (ref. Science and Engineering, Health and welfare, and Business and law)	,096	,012	-,031	-,051
<i>Transnational skills</i>				
Spent time abroad while studying	,261*	-,089	,359*	-,195
Speak foreign languages (>2)	,126	-,032	,404*	-,023
Speak English as foreign language	-,104	,029	-,129	-,215
<i>Job experience and other credentials</i>				
Grade marks	,241*	-,020	,119	-,210*
Internships	-,258*	,120*	-,045	-,194
<i>Time spent on... (hs/week)</i>				
Professional development (further education/other training)	,002	-,002	-,014**	,000
Unpaid/voluntary work	,015*	-,001	,000	-,008
N	846	846	846	846
Adjusted R Square	.413	.377	.283	.186
Df	15	15	15	15

\*p ≤ .05; \*\*p ≤ .01.

### 5.6.2. The effect of Social connections

As I point out in chapter 2, the relevance of social connections for employment allocation has fueled a vast literature (e.g., Granovetter 1973; Corcoran, Datcher, and Duncan 1980; Lin, Vaughn, and Ensel 1981; Granovetter 1995). Networks of interpersonal relations are effective in providing information at minimum costs. The literature, however, has produced mixed evidence on the effects of networks across diverse populations and contexts (e.g., Pellizzari 2010; Rivera 2011; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). This section explores whether the use of social connections impacts on job quality, especially on the odds of having a job mismatch, temporary employment, and low earnings.

#### 5.6.2.1 Job-mismatch

Hypothesis 3 predicts that the use of social capital (strong or weak ties) instead of alternative strategies (impersonal ties) produces a poorer match between qualifications and the jobs obtained. In other words, I investigate to what extent university graduates who got a job through social connections are working in jobs that do require a Higher Education diploma, compared to those who got a job through market channels and intermediary agencies. In line with other studies (e.g., Hartog 2000), a job mismatch is measured as a discrepancy between the current occupation a university graduate is working in and the level of education required for that position. This variable is based on the respondent's self assessment of his/her job in relation to his/her education. The dependent variable is coded as 1 if the respondent has a job for which a degree in Higher Education is not needed and 0 otherwise.

Table 5.17 displays the statistical estimates of logistic regression models that focus on the effect of social connections (relatives, friends and acquaintances, colleagues and classmates, university professors) and on alternative strategies on the odds of job mismatch. The statistical models distinguish between individuals who declare to have found a job through social connections (column 3), and those who have found a job through alternative job-search strategies (columns 2). The models control for social background,

educational background, transnational skills, and job characteristics. The coefficients for these variables are allowed to vary across job strategy<sup>8</sup>.

Table 5.17. Logistic regression of having a job-mismatch

	Social connections	Other methods
Odds of Mismatch in Spain <sup>†</sup>	10,774*	1,418
Odds of Mismatch in the Netherlands <sup>†</sup>	13,11	1,739
<i>N</i>	317	403
Pseudo R-Square	28,9%	25,2%

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ .

† When all other variables at 0.

The results reported in Table 5.17 show that the odds of a job mismatch when using social networks (10,774) are much higher than when using other job-seeking strategies (1.418). This difference is statistically significant at the .05 level. Also Table 5.17 reports that the impact of the use of social connections on the odds of a mismatch is considerably greater in the Netherlands than in Spain. In contrast with Spain and the Netherlands, in the United Kingdom the odds of a job mismatch when using social connections (0,488\*) are slightly lower than when using other job-seeking strategies (0,878).

#### 5.6.2.2 Temporary employment

Table 5.18 displays the statistical estimates of logistic regression models that examine the role of the type of strategy used to find a job and the odds of having temporary employment, controlling for country and individual characteristics. The odds of having a temporary job are considerably higher (9.19) when the job was obtained through social connections than when obtained through other channels. This contrast is the same in the Netherlands than in Spain. In the United Kingdom the odds of having a temporary contract are also higher (0.446) when using social connections than when obtained through other channels (0,272).

<sup>8</sup> Statistical results for the United Kingdom can be found in Appendix B, pp.128.



Table 5.18. Logistic regression of having a temporary contract

	Social connections	Other methods
Odds of Temporary Employment in Spain	9,189*	0,688
Odds of temporary Employment in the Netherlands†	11,479	2,894
<i>N</i>	317	403
Pseudo R-Square	26.8%	18.7%

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ .

† When all other variables at 0.

### 5.6.2.3 Low earnings

Finally, Table 5.19 reports on the effects of the strategy used to secure a job on the odds of having low earnings (<1249€), controlling for country and individual characteristics. The results show again that the use of social networks is connected to poorer outcomes. The odds of earning low incomes when relying on social connections (1,911) are higher than those when relying on other strategies (0,035). The contrast in outcomes is slightly less pronounced in the Netherlands than in Spain. This is perhaps due to a more egalitarian salary distribution in this country. In the United Kingdom, finally, there is no difference in the odds of earning low income when using social connections (0,016) or other methods (0.014).

Table 5.19. Logistic regression of having low earnings

	Social connections	Other methods
Odds of Low earnings in Spain†	1,911	0,035*
Odds of Low earnings in the Netherlands†	2,102*	0,625
<i>N</i>	317	403
Pseudo R-Square	36,1%	44,3%

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ . † When all other variables at 0.

## 5.7. Conclusion

The chapter has presented empirical evidence on the job-search strategies that individuals follow to find a job, on the social factors determine the use and sequencing of various strategies and, on the impact that different job-search strategies have on employment achievement. I first show that university graduates confront different transitions to employment within the first year after graduation. For some graduates the job-search requires hard and intensive efforts whereas others graduates experience a fast transition to work. Market channels are the strategy that more frequently lead them to a job. Jobs are also channeled through social connections, especially in the Netherlands and in Spain whereas intermediaries play an important role in the United Kingdom. The outcomes of these job-search strategies, however, differ across countries. Information on the job-search duration indicates that Spaniards experienced a slower entry into the labor market than did the Dutch, and spent more time looking for a job and took them more time to find one. Meanwhile, Dutch graduates have been able to move into full-time jobs and higher incomes between the two rounds of the survey.

Turning to the results of the multivariate analyses, the results offer partial confirmation of Hypothesis 1 on the use of dominant practices, support the rejection of Hypothesis 2 on the reliance on weak-ties by upwardly mobile graduates, and generally confirm Hypothesis 3 on the negative effects of social connections on job achievement. The expectation from Hypothesis 1 was that respondents would rely more on job-seeking strategies that are known to be successful in each respective country than on other strategies. The results only partly confirm this expectation. They also show that the real divide is between highly active job-seekers, who use all kind of strategies, and other, more passive, job-seekers. This is clearer in the Spanish than in the Dutch case. Dutch graduates capitalize on their transnational skills to follow as many job-strategies as possible whereas Spanish graduates with transnational skills use all job-search strategies less frequently than do graduates without these skills. The comparison between Spain and the Netherlands reveals other contrasts: Dutch graduates who speak two or more languages are more likely to be employed at the second time of the survey, whereas Spanish graduates from the Social

Sciences are less likely to have a job, no matter what strategies they follow. In the next chapter, I will further explore these contrasts from the other side of the labor market by analyzing patterns of skill demand among employers.

Contrary to what was stated in Hypothesis 2, the statistical results have shown that upwardly mobile graduates use weak ties less often than do middle-class ones. They are more bound than middle-class graduates to prove themselves in the market and to use formal employment institutions. An interpretation of this finding is that upwardly mobile graduates more often find themselves surrounded by people who are either unemployed or underemployed. They are thus forced to rely on the market and on institutional intermediaries to overcome this disadvantage. This interpretation is in line with previous studies that consider how job-seekers adapt their strategies, especially in bad times (see, e.g. Osberg 1993). In contrast to the upwardly mobile, middle-class graduates benefit from resource-rich networks, which they complement through the market and intermediary agencies.

Finally, the analysis for Hypothesis 3 generally confirms the predictions regarding the negative effects of social connections on employment outcomes. Further, comparison between Spain and the Netherlands shows that social connections increase more the odds of a job mismatch in the former than in the latter while they increase more the odds of low earnings in Spain. These results contrast with those obtained from the United Kingdom. Social connections decrease the odds of a job mismatch while they increase more the odds of having a temporary work. These findings indicate that, in all, among the highly educated social connections do not necessarily lead to more and better jobs.

## 5.8. Appendix

### Appendix A. Descriptive Statistics of the panel survey

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Country (0=ES; 1=NL)	0	1	0,4027	0,49099	447
Age (<23)	0	1	0,3736	0,4843	447
Age (24-29)	0	1	0,3647	0,48187	447
Gender (0=Male; 1=Female)	0	1	0,7248	0,4471	447
Education, Humanities and arts, and Social Sciences	0	1	0,5588	0,49709	442
Grade marks	0	3	1,3063	0,49908	444
Part-time worker	0	1	0,2685	0,44365	447
Income (<1249€)	0	1	0,2998	0,45867	447
Work for medium to large size firms	0	1	0,5283	0,50038	212
Work for a family business	0	1	0,0885	0,28482	192
Job mismatch	0	1	0,5654	0,49686	214
Job-search duration	0	24	2,1944	3,09225	216
Internships	0	1	0,5673	0,49601	446
Speak English as foreign language	0	1	0,6152	0,48709	447
Speak foreign languages (>2)	0	1	0,3177	0,46609	447
Spent time abroad while studying	0	1	0,2562	0,43701	445
Time spent on... (hs/week)					
Professional development (further education/other training)	0	56	12,3832	14,51099	441
Unpaid/voluntary work	0	50	4,0793	7,78296	416
Mother with higher education	0	1	0,2841	0,4515	447
Mother with professional and manager occupations	0	1	0,6445	0,47936	346
Father with higher education	0	1	0,396	0,48961	447
Father with professional and manager occupations	0	1	0,6154	0,48717	364

## Appendix B. Statistical analysis for the United Kingdom

Table B1. Logistic regression of having a job-mismatch

	Social connections	Other methods
Odds of Mismatch in the United Kingdom <sup>†</sup>	0,488*	0,878
<i>N</i>	517	2408
Pseudo R-Square	12,3%	18,1%

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ .

† When all other variables at 0.

Control variables: gender, age, discipline of study, experience in internships, job contract, ear and parental education.

Table B2. Logistic regression of having a temporary contract

	Social connections	Other methods
Odds of Temporary employment in the United Kingdom <sup>†</sup>	0,446*	0,272*
<i>N</i>	517	2408
Pseudo R-Square	2,9%	4%

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ .

† When all other variables at 0.

Control variables: gender, age, discipline of study, experience in internships, job contract, earnir and parental education.

Table B3. Logistic regression of having low earnings

	Social connections	Other methods
Odds of Low earnings in the United Kingdom <sup>†</sup>	0,016*	0,014*
<i>N</i>	517	2408
Pseudo R-Square	12%	12,8%

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ .

† When all other variables at 0.

Control variables: gender, age, discipline of study, experience in internships, job contract, earni and parental education.

## Chapter 6. EMPLOYERS' DEMAND FOR SKILLS

«To use Alfred Marshall's apt metaphor, to analyze a market from only one side is like trying to cut with one blade of a scissors. While people are finding jobs, employers are finding people to fill them, and their behaviors, strategies, and purposes play a central but often neglected role in the process of matching people to jobs» (Granovetter 1995:155).

In the previous chapter I showed that some university graduates use their resource-rich networks in the job search, whereas other graduates rely on the market and intermediaries. Then, there are people who use multiple strategies and others who use very few or none. Regardless of how intensive the job search is, university graduates try to capitalize on their credentials to get a job that matches their skills. I also showed that speaking foreign languages pays-off in the labor market and that internships lead to finding a job faster. Recent university graduates need these and other skills to navigate a changing labor market, with emerging professions and new job tasks. In fact, competitive pressures for more and better skills have greatly intensified in a context of occupational upgrading<sup>1</sup> and skill polarization (Mayer and Solga 2008; Powell, Bernhard, and Graf 2012; Powell and Solga 2008; Wright and Dwyer 2003). As I show below, this changing scenario has an effect on the employment prospects of highly-educated workers, for they are often unprepared to meet the demands of the labor market.

Interestingly, the importance that employers attach to formal education in making hiring decisions is *increasingly variable* across jobs and occupations (Jackson, Goldthorpe, and Mills 2005:13–16). For employers, skills and competences go far beyond formal qualifications. Employers select on the basis of different skill sets and look for signals of competence well beyond job applicants' academic credentials: 1) the educational institutions' prestige and status (in Bourdieu's words, symbolic capital), 2) soft attributes such as cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Occupational upgrading, also known as the crowding out hypothesis, refers to the process of expansion of high-skilled jobs and the cyclical substitution of low-skilled workers by high-skilled workers (e.g. Brynin 2002; Devereux 2002; Oesch and Rodríguez Menés 2011).

similarity and lifestyle<sup>2</sup>, and 3) non-cognitive skills such as motivation, self-confidence or extraversion<sup>3</sup>. The combination of professional expertise and interpersonal skills is becoming increasingly relevant for recent graduates' employability (e.g. van de Werfhorst 2014). Research also shows that university graduates with low field-specific skills –i.e. from Fine Arts– have a higher probability of being unemployed than graduates with high field-specific skills –i.e. from Engineering (Humburg et al. 2012; Humburg and Grip 2012).

We know little, however, about how well graduates convey their skills to employers during the job-search, about the credentials and skills that firms in the end demand, and about the actual use that firms make of these skills and credentials on which they base their hiring decisions. Consider, for instance, the case of engineers and graduates in fine arts: to what extent are interpersonal skills relevant to them at the workplace? Similarly, to what extent are non-cognitive skills crucial assets for graduates working in industry or construction sectors? What we know is largely based on anecdotal information<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, there are reasons to think that the value of skills varies in different contexts. As mentioned in my analytical framework in chapter 1, the employers' assessment of qualifications is largely influenced by both the characteristics of the educational system and by national labor markets (Andersen and van de Werfhorst 2010; Bol and van de Werfhorst 2011; Dörfler and van de Werfhorst 2009).

Some scholars have begun to pay attention to differences across countries in the demand for skills (e.g. Müller and Jacob 2008). These studies focus on how macro-level characteristics are related to labor market outcomes (especially, earnings). As a case in point, consider the work of Carbonaro (2006) based on the well-known typology of liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs). Carbonaro focuses on the role of labor

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<sup>2</sup> For an example of how cultural habits and lifestyles have an impact on recruitment and hiring, see the work of Lauren Rivera (2012, 2015). She studies the recruitment of candidates in elite firms and observes which skills and attributes are in high demand in financial firms.

<sup>3</sup> For a review on cognitive skills and non-cognitive traits, see Farkas (2003).

<sup>4</sup> A good exception is the already mentioned work of Rivera (2012, 2015).

market institutions governing the wage setting process. His study suggests that the economic returns to cognitive skills (namely, reading and writing skills) are higher in LME than in CMEs, mainly because greater coverage of collective agreements lower returns to skills in the latter.

There are several reasons why we should study employer preferences and behavior when hiring. Firms control market entry, working conditions, training and skill formation at the workplace. Employers' preferences determine what characteristics of job-seekers are valued at the moment of hiring. The literature also reveals a great deal of heterogeneity across firms (e.g. Gangl 2001; Pager and Quillian 2005; Pellizzari and Fichten 2013). The analysis of differences and similarities across firms would presumably inform us about what works in different national contexts.

Following the analytical model discussed in chapter 1, I assume that employers' preferences vary across economic sectors, by firm-size and, presumably, across employment cultures. I thus examine to what extent employers demand different skills in patrimonialistic employment cultures like Spain and in market-based employment cultures like the Netherlands and United Kingdom. By doing so, I revisit one of the main claims of this study, that is, the role of culture in the explanation of international variation in labor market practices.

This chapter seeks first to examine what signals and skills employers focus on, across firms and across labor markets. In Streeck's words, my aim is to analyze whether there is a «reality of national patterns of skills and skill formation» (Streeck 2012:317). Secondly, this chapter investigates the role of different institutional and cultural characteristics on the employers' evaluation of skills and competences. The chapter is organized as follows. The first section examines current theoretical debates on skill demand. Then, following my theoretical framework and with data from the Flash Eurobarometer on '*Employers' Perceptions of Graduate Employability*' (2010), I examine what signals and skills employers value in each context. Finally, I present the results of a multivariate analysis that examines the associations between firm and



employers' characteristics and the skills they value or seek for in prospective employees. The chapter ends with a summary and concluding discussion.

### **6.1. What do employers want? Four theories and four contrasting empirical designs**

A way of approaching this first question is to revisit contemporary theoretical debates on skill demand. There are four different approaches to the explanation of employers' needs that share or contest the intrinsic value of educational attainment: Human capital, Screening, Signaling and Credential Theory<sup>5</sup>.

Human capital Theory claims that education provides general marketable skills that make educated applicants attractive to employers. For this theory, employers and employees are rational agents who make decisions based on these skills, either trusting or investing in human capital (Becker 1993:18–19). Human capital theorists have been long criticized for ignoring the particular context in which market transactions take place, which might affect such transactions (e.g. Bowles and Gintis 1975).

In contrast, Signaling and Screening Theories highlight the role of imperfect information and uncertainty. For Signaling theory, job-seekers use their educational credentials to convey information about their skills that employers cannot see ahead of hiring them (Arrow 1973). Screening theory says that employers evaluate job candidates by using schooling as a proxy for unobserved characteristics (Spence 1973) This heuristic helps them cut down the pool of applicants (Brown 2001:22). As Weiss notes, Signaling theory is the obverse of Screening theory (1995). For Weiss, the difference lies in who moves first: «*In signaling models the informed [job applicants] move first [while in] screening models the uninformed (firms) move first*» (Weiss 1995:134).

Finally, Credential theory focuses on the abilities of the highly educated to control or monopolize access to the most rewarding job positions (Collins 1979). As already suggested by Boylan (1993), this theory focuses more on how

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<sup>5</sup> As David Bills highlights, these theories are actually among the most contested and prone to different interpretations (Bills 2003).

education provides status rather than on the skills workers bring to the market or that employers look for.

A key problem with much of the literature on the demand-side of the labor market in general is how difficult it is to gather first-hand information from employers. Researchers need data with specific information on recruitment practices in order to infer the employers' preferences. Data on recruitment practices, however, is hard to come by<sup>6</sup>. The theories above approach their subject matter through different research approaches. There are at least four common types of research designs in the literature on employers' preferences and hiring practices: 1) qualitative small-scale work-place studies, 2) content analysis of job advertisements, 3) quasi-experimental designs and 4) studies based on supply-side surveys. They provide different answers to similar research questions.

Small-scale work-place studies based on in-depth interviews provide rich qualitative evidence that helps to understand the recruitment process and the use of information by employers (Bills 1990, 1992; Castilla 2011; Miller and Rosenbaum 1997; Rivera 2012, 2015; de Weert 2007). These studies show that employers use job candidates' records and personal qualities as sorting criteria and that, in doing so, they shape individuals' trajectories. Neither representativeness nor cross-national reliability can be claimed by these studies.

Studies based on content analysis of job advertisements have been useful for analyzing the demand by employers of particular types of skills and qualifications (Dörfler and van de Werfhorst 2009; Jackson 2001; Jackson et al. 2005; Sacchi, Salvisberg, and Buchmann 2005). These studies show that different types of skills are relevant in contemporary economies, especially those related to social or interpersonal skills. In a recent study based on a content analysis of job advertisements in daily newspapers as well as on Eurobarometer

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<sup>6</sup> One of the reasons is that managers may feel unable to share information on vacancies and hiring practices, especially in small-size firms. Contrary to larger companies and organizations which often have highly selective hiring process, traditional small and medium-size firms might face low incentives to post vacancies, since employers are able to fill any available job through informal referrals (i.e., from current employees, colleagues and friends).

data, Gerhards et al. (2015) show that demand for transnational competences, namely, foreign language skills, intercultural competences and knowledge about other countries has increased in the last decades in the German, Dutch and British labor markets. The main limitation of this work is that not all job vacancies are advertised in newspapers or in professional-oriented social networking websites. This is also a major drawback in countries like Spain where market opaqueness (i.e. insufficient flows of information) dominates the job market. An additional limitation is that most of these studies focus on single job markets<sup>7</sup>. So far, there has been little systematic information of job ads across countries.

Some of the limitations of the research methodologies above have been addressed by quasi-experimental designs, which have recently received more attention in the literature. In vignette studies (also known as scenario designs) employers are provided with detailed descriptions of fictional job candidates and are asked to make hiring decisions. These studies offer an excellent opportunity to follow employers' step-by-step hiring decisions. Vignette studies, however, can overlook that employers face both time and economic constraints when hiring new employees, which affects the selection process. These constraints are unlikely to impact their decision-making in an experimental context.

Finally, research based on supply-side surveys is useful because it allows to inferring some characteristics of the employers' behavior from what job-seekers say (Allen, Levels, and van der Velden 2013; Kramarz and Skans 2014; Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel 2000). These studies have been mainly used to determine the relative success of individual profiles, and have often been used as a substitute for direct information on the employers' behavior. The main limitation of these studies, however, is that the information that jobseekers provide is based on limited contacts with only a handful of employers.

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<sup>7</sup> Some of the most relevant examples come from the Austrian labor market (Dörfler and van de Werfhorst 2009), the British labor market (Jackson 2001; Jackson, Goldthorpe, and Mills 2005), and the Swiss labor market (Sacchi, Salvisberg, and Buchmann 2005).

## 6.2. Mechanisms promoting the demand for different skill sets across labor markets

Although the theories described above help explain the relationship between educational credentials and rewards, none of them provides a tentative explanation of cross-national variation in skill demand. There is thus considerable uncertainty regarding differences in skill demand across labor markets. This brings me to a second question: to what extent are employers' evaluation of skills and competences affected by institutional and cultural characteristics? Following the theoretical framework presented in chapter 1 and 3, I argue that the demand for particular skill sets by employers varies across countries due to the singularities of national job markets, that is, the linkages between higher education institutions and firms and market characteristics. In what follows, I briefly examine aspects of the national institutional context that are relevant to skill demand.

As Neil Fligstein states «the challenge, when speaking about employment systems, is to bring the education system into the analysis» (2001:106). Chapter 3 states that linkages between higher education institutions and firms have important implications for skill demand. Employers' behavior is rooted in particular institutional configurations and in broad market cultures<sup>8</sup>. The extent to which firms are successful in reaching their goals depends on their power and capacity to getting allies in interaction with institutions and trade unions (Polavieja 2004; Streeck 2012). In countries with weak intermediaries, for instance, non-standard work arrangements are not always the best means to gain work experience or a stepping stone to a better job; also, employers may not be universally willing to pay for the training cost of recent university graduates, so that the training for better jobs «must be paid by the worker or some other agent on his behalf» (e.g. Streeck 2012:324). In contrast, in collective and multi-employer systems of skill formation, with Germany as the best example, there are strong linkages between firms and HE institutions, so

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<sup>8</sup> This does not mean, however, that social scientists can predict their behavior simply by looking at the social settings in which private actors are rooted. This does neither mean that actors operate to maintain traditional structures; furthermore, they can lead gradual and transformative change (Streeck and Thelen 2005).

that the former shape the content of the educational programs (Busemeyer and Trampusch 2012; Gangl 2004). In firm-based skill formation systems, these linkages are weak or completely non-existent (Graf 2009; Jackson and Deeg 2012; Tahlin 2007).

It is reasonable, then, to expect that these differences affect the labor market entry of recent university graduates. As Breen observes «[h]igh regulation reduces employers' willingness to hire new workers because of the difficulty of dismissing them should the need arise» (2005:127). In Spain, for instance, employers may be hesitant to employ new workers, due to elevated hiring and maintenance costs, while in the more dynamic economies of the Netherlands and United Kingdom employers may have strong incentives for hiring new employees (see Table 6.1, pp. 138).

Let's consider first the Dutch institutional framework. As mentioned in chapter 3, the Dutch government, along with social partners, firms, central bank, and advisory agencies, promote cooperation and trust between policymakers (Becker 2005; den Butter and Mosch 2003; Visser and Hemerijck 1997). In this highly coordinated system, several institutions regulate conditions and endorse skills for labor market entry. As Breen observes (2005), the Netherlands combines high employment protection and a strong linkage between school and work-based training, which send clear signals to employers about graduates' potential productivity. In this sense, the Dutch system is more effective in keeping high levels of youth employment than any other regime<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> The Netherlands has highly stratified, vocationally oriented, and standardized educational system. The Dutch dual system comprises academic education (WO-Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs) and vocational education (HBO-Hoger Beroepsonderwijs). Although both systems have its own institutions and singularities (Universiteiten and Hogescholen, respectively), the occupational orientation is strong throughout the Dutch higher education system. Admission to Universiteiten is open to anyone who holds a VWO diploma or a Hogescholen certificate.

The reverse happens in Spain, which combines high labor market regulation and low educational signals to employers<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, recent graduates have been forced to look for jobs under fairly adverse conditions, with trade unions representing the interest of inside workers and with both trade unions and major employer associations «[using] collective bargaining agreements to *regulate* competition, by imposing wage and employment conditions on all firms» (Bentolila, Dolado, and Jimeno 2012:10, original emphasis). High employment regulation and recessive economic conditions may lead to conservative strategies by employers. Firms may be reluctant to hire new workers because they fear the costs of this transaction.

The United Kingdom is an example of low labor market regulation and low educational signaling<sup>11</sup>. In sharp contrast with the Netherlands and Spain, the British highly deregulated labor market emphasizes individual bargaining instead of collective agreements (due partly to the fact that the majority of economic sectors are weakly unionized and, therefore, tend to show lower degrees of coordination<sup>12</sup>). British firms usually express a «high-profit orientation, a lack of mutual trust, and a relatively short-time perspective [...] preferring on-the-job training and continuing education, and relying on academically trained personnel for higher positions» (Hillmert 2008:58). As

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<sup>10</sup> The Spanish Higher Education system consists almost exclusively of universities, with a strong focus on professional education. Higher Education institutions (HEi) have a great deal of autonomy and self-government within the autonomous regions (e.g. Mora, Garcia-Montalvo, and Garcia-Aracil 2000). Prospective students enter into Higher Education after an entry examination which evaluates standards of educational achievement in High School. There is also little differentiation between Higher Education institutions in Spain, where almost all universities are considered equal in prestige and status. Students exit the university with a diploma of Bachelor's degree in the case of long-cycle programs, or with a Diplomatura in the case of short-cycle programs. These degrees allow entry into the labor market without further training (except for Medicine and Health related degrees).

<sup>11</sup> Higher Education in the United Kingdom has a one-dimensional system comprised by a wide range of universities and former institutes of technology (post-1992 universities). Access to Higher Education is granted via a formal application procedure through the Universities & Colleges Admission Services (UCAS). The Higher Education Institution decides whether to offer the applicant a place. Selectivity is increased by the hierarchy, perceived prestige and status of the university. In this sense, educational credentials awarded from top universities works as the best signaling device (e.g. Gangl 2001:475).

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed examination of the different levels of labor market coordination see Hillmert (2002, 2008), who reviews two of the most contrasting countries, Britain and Germany.

mentioned in chapter 4, competition for jobs (both in the job search and in career building) through the market is more typical than in the Netherlands and in Spain.

Table 6.1. Summary of mechanism promoting the demand for different skill sets across the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom

	NL	ES	UK
<i>Labor market regulation</i>	High labor market regulation	Low labor market regulation	Low labor market regulation
<i>Educational signaling</i>	High educational signaling	Low educational signaling	Low educational signaling
<i>Education-labor market linkage</i>	Strong link between HEi and firms <i>Reliance</i> on detailed vocational qualifications	Weak link between HEi and firms: <i>Reliance</i> on individual networks and work-based learning placements	Weak link between HEi and firms: <i>Reliance</i> on generalist credentials and prestige of HEi
<i>Recruitment based mainly on:</i>	Both Internal and External Labor Markets <i>Trust in open-market allocation</i>	Internal Labor Markets <i>Low reliance on open-market allocation</i>	Both Internal and External Labor Markets <i>Trust in open-market allocation</i>

Source: Own elaboration based on Breen (2005), Hannan et al. (1999), and Kucel and Vilalata Bufi (2013).

### 6.2.1. To what extent firms cooperate with HE institutions?

Country differences in skill demand can reflect a wide array of firm-level characteristics. From the preceding discussion, it is clear that we need direct observation of employers' behavior to get a more accurate portrait of what employers actually want from graduates. Direct information on employers' behavior would be valuable but is actually scarce. The data that I analyze in this section comes from the Flash Eurobarometer #304 "*Employers' perception of graduate employability*" (EB), which provides reliable information on the skills that employers look for when recruiting university graduates. As mentioned in chapter 2, the EB interviewed employers from 400 firms in Spain, 200 firms in the Netherlands, and 400 firms in the United Kingdom. Contrary to most typical small-scale work-place research designs and studies based on content analysis of job advertisements, the main advantage of this dataset is that it was

collected directly from recruiters in different countries and across firm-sizes<sup>13</sup>. Since the data was collected at the end of the summer of 2010, they are an ideal match to the surveys to graduates that I analyze in the previous chapter.

Before moving on to a multivariate analysis, I briefly describe the information on British, Spanish and Dutch employers that the Flash Eurobarometer contains. These data reveal interesting differences across countries regarding cooperation between firms and HE institutions, the factors underlying the recruitment of graduates, and the individual characteristics that employers value most in new recruits.

When recruiters are asked about inter-institutional cooperation, their typical answer is that their firm does not cooperate with Higher Education institutions. Over 50% of the firms in the countries under study say they never cooperate with HE institutions in the design of study programs or in directly recruiting their graduates (Table 6.2).

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<sup>13</sup> In the EB sample there is a great number of medium-size firms in the sample, i.e., nearly 74% of the firms have between 50 and 249 employees. Private ownership is also predominant (72.3% in average) among the surveyed firms. With regard to the main activity of firms, the sample is almost equally distributed over five different business sectors: a quarter of firms belong to the Industry sector and another quarter to Non-Public services, the rest of the firms belong to the Construction, Transportation and ITC sector, Trade, Accommodation and Food services, and Public services. This feature make possible to observe differences across economic sectors and industries.



Table 6.2. Frequency of cooperation with HE institutions, by Country (percentages)

Cooperation with HE institutions	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
<i>How frequently do you cooperate with higher education institutions to discuss curriculum design and study programmes?</i>			
Very frequently	6,2	2,5	4,5
Rather frequently	9,2	12,5	8,0
Sometimes	24,4	31,0	30,8
Never	57,9	52,0	52,3
DK/Na	2,3	2,0	4,4
	100,0	100,0	100,0
<i>How frequently do you cooperate with higher education institutions in recruiting their graduates?</i>			
Very frequently	9,2	4,5	5
Rather frequently	19,2	10	12,5
Sometimes	35,2	42,5	42,2
Never	34,9	41	37,8
DK/Na	1,5	2	2,5
	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Own elaboration.

Spanish and Dutch recruiters believe, however, that participation in internship programs is the best way to cooperate with HE institutions while British firms rely more on direct recruitment from schools and cooperation with career centers. Compared to the Spanish and Dutch firms, a higher share of British firms prefers to discuss with study programs directors (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3. Best way to cooperate with HEi on recruitment, by Country (percentages)

<i>Best way to cooperate with higher education institutions on recruitment</i>	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
Participation in internship programme with HE	41,6	40,5	19,0
Direct recruitment from schools	17,7	18,0	22,8
Cooperation with career centers	11,7	9,5	22,5
Participation in debates or seminars organized by HEi	9,0	8,5	6,0
Personal discussions with study programme directors or teachers	5,0	7,5	16,3
Answering surveys	3,0	2,0	3,1
DK/Na	12,0	14,0	10,3
	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Own elaboration.

### 6.2.2. Which factors are important in recruiting university graduates?

This Flash Eurobarometer also includes questions relative to the economic cycle. When asked, for instant, which are the most important factors in recruiting university graduates, more than 3 out of 4 firms mention their anticipated growth in business (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4. Factors in recruiting more or fewer graduates, by Country (percentages)

Very or rather important factors in recruiting more or fewer graduates	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
Anticipated growth in business	77,3	80,0	80,3
Actual growth in business	75,0	76,5	85,5
Higher turnover of staff	46,1	42,0	53,3
Increasing complexity of tasks	66,8	60,5	65,8
Higher number of applicants	53,7	30,5	50,3

Source: Own elaboration.

When asked about the field of study and educational level of graduates that they see as most adapted to the organization, most of the recruiters refer to highly mobile and international disciplines. Over half of the Spanish and British firms say they would hire graduates from Business and Economic studies whereas Dutch firms say they would hire graduates from Business and Engineering (Table 6.5). Spanish and British recruiters also value graduates from traditional fields such as Law (27,7% and 19,5%, respectively).

Table 6.5. Most mentioned educational fields for the recruitment of HE graduates, by Country (percentages)

Most mentioned educational fields for the recruitment of HE graduates	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
Business and economic studies	56,1	35,0	55,8
Engineering	53,6	25,0	34,8
Law	27,7	4,0	19,5
Communication and Information Sciences	12,2	14,5	37,8
Languages	13,0	2,0	14,3
Humanities	10,0	,0	18,5
Teacher training and education	9,2	1,5	10,0
Medical Studies	9,0	3,0	11,8
Art and design	8,0	2,0	18,5

Source: Own elaboration.

The survey also reveals differences across countries regarding the qualifications that, in the employers' view, would best fit the skill requirements of the future (Table 6.6). British and Dutch firms prefer graduates with BA degrees to graduates with a Master or a Ph.D. degree. This is probably because they prefer to provide “on-the-job” training to entry-level workers. In Spain, on the other hand, firms prefer graduates with a Master Degree.

Table 6.6. Educational level of graduates who would best fit in the organization, by Country (percentages)

Level of graduate would best fit in the company	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
Graduates with bachelor degrees	36,7	74,5	71,5
Graduates with master degrees	46,6	13,5	11,0
Graduates with PhD degrees	9,2	2,5	1,5
DK/Na	7,5	9,5	16,0
	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Own elaboration.

Turning now to skills sought in university graduates, the survey shows that team-working skills are most valued by Spanish recruiters while communication skills are most valued by Dutch and British recruiters (Table 6.7). Moreover, Spanish recruiters deem sector specific skills and team-working skill as very important whereas good reading, writing and communication skills are valued more by Dutch and British recruiters.

Table 6.7. Important skills for new HE graduates, by Country

Most important skills for new higher education graduates	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
Ability to adapt to and act in new situations	25,4	30,0	24,5
Analytical and problem solving skills	33,4	39,0	32,3
Basic skills such as being good with numbers	31,2	31,5	54,8
Communication skills	25,4	59,0	65,5
Foreign language skills	39,4	12,5	4,0
Planning and organizational skills	24,9	24,0	27,5
Sector specific skills	36,9	31,5	39,5
Team-working skills	44,1	43,3	28,0
Other	1,2	5,0	1,2
DK/Na	5,0	4,0	1,5

Source: Own elaboration.

Work experience, finally, is seen as crucial asset for new recruits in the three countries (Table 6.8), while transnational experience in the form of studies or internships abroad are not viewed as so important (Table 6.9). Work experience seems to provide a clear signal of job-specific knowledge and matters more than generic academic skills.

Table 6.8. Work experience as crucial asset for new recruits, by Country

Work experience is a crucial asset for new recruits	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
Strongly agree	48,9	42,5	60,0
Rather agree	37,4	40,5	28,3
Rather disagree	10,7	12,0	9,0
Strongly disagree	2,5	2,0	1,3
DK/Na	0,5	3,0	1,4
	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 6.9. Importance of transnational skills, by Country

Transnational skills	Country		
	ES	NL	UK
<i>It is very important that new recruits have studied abroad</i>			
Strongly agree	6,7	1,0	1,0
Rather agree	19,7	8,5	5,3
Rather disagree	47,6	43,5	44,3
Strongly disagree	25,7	45,5	47,3
DK/Na	0,3	1,5	2,1
	100,0	100,0	100,0
<i>It is very important that new recruits have done an internship abroad</i>			
Strongly agree	7,5	1,5	0,8
Rather agree	19,2	15,5	4,5
Rather disagree	48,4	39,5	40,8
Strongly disagree	24,7	41	51,3
DK/Na	0,2	2,5	2,6
	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Own elaboration.

### 6.3. How important are graduates' skills for employers?

Multivariate analysis helps clarify what skills different types of firms prioritize and how the firms' preferences for particular job candidates relate to the types

of skills they value while controlling for other variables.. I expect Dutch and British firms to display similar patterns, mainly because of the dynamism of their national economies and their emphasis on training at HE institutions (in the Dutch case) and on-the-job (in the British case). Dutch and British firms have also access to a highly qualified labor force that uses English as a main vehicle of communication. Spanish firms should diverge from Dutch and British firms. This is because of a relatively weak linkage between firms and HE institutions and because of the firms' conservative pattern of internal recruitment. Also, compared to the Dutch, a small share of the Spanish labor is proficient in English, despite recent efforts by the government and HE institutions to promote the learning of foreign languages. This factor should make their access to an increasingly international job market difficult. I also expect to find differences across economic sectors. The Trade and Services sector, for instance, should show a higher demand for interpersonal and non-cognitive skills while Industry should value work-specific abilities more.

The statistical analysis focuses on four dependent variables: 1) the demand for cognitive skills, 2) demand for work-specific abilities, 3) demand for non-cognitive behavior and 4) demand for interpersonal skills. My goal is to assess what is the constellation of firm characteristics' and preferences that is associated to valuing each of his categories of skills, while holding other variables constant (e.g. firms' size and economic sector, graduates' field of study, and training schemes offered by firms). In the Flash Erobarometer #304, respondents were asked to rate eleven skills and competencies in terms of how important they are when they recruit university graduates (i.e., very important, rather important, rather unimportant or not important at all). To classify these skills, I guide myself by the characterization of cognitive and non cognitive skills elaborated by Brehm and Rahn (1997), Farkas, England, Vicknair, and Kilbourne (1997), Farkas (2003), Heckman, Stixrud and Urzua (2006) and Barone and van de Werhorst (2011) (see Table 6.10).

The variables in the analysis include 1) characteristics of the firms (size and economic sector), 2) educational fields, 3) conditions under which firms recruit Higher Education graduates, and 4) training schemes offered by firms.

Descriptive statistics for all the different variables included in the analysis are found in Appendix 6.A (pp.153). The first block of variables measures the firms' main activity through four categories represented by four dichotomous variables: Construction, Transport and ITC, Trade Accommodation and Food Services, Public services, and Non Public services<sup>14</sup>. The second block of variables measures the educational fields in which firms recruit Higher Education graduates. This block also includes two variables that measure whether having work experience and transnational experience are seen as crucial assets for prospective candidates.

Table 6.10. Set of Dependent Variables

Dependent Variables			
Cognitive Skills	Work-Specific abilities	Non-Cognitive behavior	Interpersonal skills
1 Analytical and problem solving skills;	4 Decision-making skills	8 Ability to adapt to and to act in new situations	9 Communication skills
2 Basic skills such as being good with numbers	5 Planning and organizational skills		10 Foreign language skills
3 Good reading/writing skills	6 Sector specific skills		11 Team-working skills
	7 Computer skills		

Source: Own elaboration.

Dependent variables based on the question 3.2 of the Flash Eurobarometer #304: "Please rate the following skills and competences in terms of how important they are when recruiting higher education graduates in your company".

I assume that the extent to which employers are willing to hire more workers depends on macro-economic conditions. Therefore, a third block of

<sup>14</sup> In the Flash Eurobarometer #304 each of these five variables comprises the following sub-categories a) Industry: Mining and quarrying, Manufacturing, Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply, and Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities; b) Construction, Transport, ICT comprises Construction, Transportation and storage, and Information and communication; c) Trade, accommodation and food services comprises Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, and Accommodation and food service activities; d) Public services refers to Public administration and defense; compulsory social security, Human health and social work activities; and finally e) Non-public services refers to Financial and insurance activities, Real estate activities, Professional, scientific and technical activities, Administrative and support service activities, Arts, entertainment and recreation, Other service activities, Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods-and services-producing activities of households for own use, and Activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies.

independent variables measures what factors firms consider most important when recruiting graduates. Finally, a fourth block of independent variables measures different training activities in which employees with higher education participate. This last set of variables can be seen as a measure of training opportunities that firms offer to prospective employees.

#### **6.4. Cross-national variation on skill demand: Findings**

The discussion above posits that various aspects affect the demand for specific skills across countries (e.g. the characteristics of firms, graduates' background, and the linkage between firms and Higher Education institutions). Table 6.11 presents the results of five different models to capture the correlates to skill demand. Separate models are estimated for each skill set, and the coefficients indicate the association between the independent variables and demand for particular skills. All models control for country and firms' economic sector. The table reports the unstandardized multiple regression coefficients, the R-square for the various models, and the coefficients' statistical significance levels for two-tailed tests. The null model (not reported here) shows that «country» accounts for a small proportion (nearly 2 percent) of the total variation in skill demands. The constant term for these models show that firms value cognitive skills, non-cognitive skills, and work-specific abilities, in that order. British and Dutch firms value cognitive skills more than do Spanish firms, but when one controls for other variables, countries do not differ.

These results somewhat contradict Carbonaro's findings (2006), who highlighted that the demand for cognitive skills in coordinated market economies like the Netherlands differs from that in a liberal market economy like the United Kingdom.

Contrary to expectations, the economic sector of a firm has only a moderate impact on variation in the demand for skill sets. Firms in the Construction, Trade and Non-Public Services sectors emphasize work-specific abilities and interpersonal skills more than do other sectors. This may reflect that in these sectors training occurs mainly on the job. These sectors also keep close relationships with customers and traditionally focus on client-centered

frameworks. Moreover, firms in these sectors need professionals who are able to work effectively in teams and with partners.

Table 6.11 reveals a relationship between the preferred fields of study and emphasis on particular skills. When looking for people with cognitive competence firms first look for Business and Law graduates, then for Engineers and, last, for graduates from Education, Humanities, and Arts. This is not entirely surprising given that fields linked to the Business and the corporate world are relatively more connected to processes of innovation that require the use of marketable cognitive skills (such as being good with numbers, analytical or problem solving skills).

As expected, work experience is positively associated with the demand for all types of skill sets. The results also show that having both work experience and internships abroad are positively associated with the demand for interpersonal skills. This reveals that employers value skills learnt outside the university (e.g., work as interns, the practice of a team sport).

Several conditions that impact on whether firms are willing to hire more or fewer graduates also impact on the demand for different skill sets. More specifically, the results show that employers' skill demand is strongly associated with their firm's current and prospective growth. As mentioned in chapter 3, the employment prospects of university graduates and the hiring decisions of employers are highly contingent on the upturns and downturns of the economy. Unsurprisingly, anticipated growth in business is associated with the demand for non-cognitive skills (i.e. the ability to adapt and to act in new situations). Also, actual growth in business is associated with greater demand for all the types of skill. The models also shows that the more complex tasks are, the greater the demand for work-specific abilities.

Finally, Table 6.11 shows that firm and school-based training is moderately associated to skill demand. The only statistically significant association is that between a firm employees' participation in short courses and the firms' demand for cognitive skills. Firms in which employees take part in short courses offered by Higher Education institutions demand cognitive skills more than do firms that do not offer such short courses. In all, these findings show that the demand



for specific skills is largely driven by the structure of the economy. Labor markets where the knowledge economy is more developed emphasize cognitive skills more. This emphasis on cognitive skills goes hand in hand with preference for a particular type of university graduate and with emphasis on investment in updating the labor-force's skills through, for instance, encouraging or requiring employees to attend seminars or courses at HE institutions.

Table 6.11. Regression of Skills' requirements with Economic sector, graduates' characteristics and conditions under which firms recruit new HE graduates

	Cognitive skills					Work-Specific abilities				
<i>Country</i> (ref. The Netherlands)										
United Kingdom	,370*	,367*	,323*	,318*	,289	,508*	,546*	,481*	,314	,238
Spain	-,336*	-,407*	-,455**	-,395*	-,335*	,348*	,384*	,313	,359*	,330
<i>Economic sector</i> (ref. Industry)										
Construction, Transport, ITC	,270	,289	,282	,277	,325	,644*	,711**	,689**	,569*	,492*
Trade, Accommodation and Food Services	-,035	-,050	-,079	-,047	,132	,173	,181	,125	,007*	,000
Public services	,040	,058	,115	,196	,291	,549*	,674*	,829**	,817**	,755**
Non-public Services	,051	,062	,085	,086	,161	,329	,378*	,417*	,277	,195
<i>Graduate' characteristics</i> (ref. Engineering)										
Education, Humanities and arts		-,619*	-,578*	-,774*	-,990*		-,085	-,012	-,081	-,269
Business and Law		,589**	,616**	,604**	,585**		-,006	-,020	-,007	,040
Social Sciences and Communication		-,317	-,415	-,363	-,191		,016	-,082	-,124	-,082
Medical studies and Natural Sciences		,246	,299	,340	,383		-,390	-,348	-,326	-,426
<i>Graduate' job and transnational experience</i> (ref. Study abroad)										
Work experience			,274**	,244**	,270**			,449**	,379**	,354**
Internship abroad			,089	,016	-,024			,154	,023	-,032
<i>Conditions under which firms recruit new HEg</i> (ref. Higher number of applicants)										
Anticipated growth in business				,142	,152				,093	,082
Actual growth in business				,216*	,229*				,358**	,362**
Higher turnover of staff				-,024	-,053				-,057	-,047
Increasing complexity of tasks				,107	,070				,369**	,326**
<i>Firms where employees participate in:</i> (ref. Training and development programmes in-house)										
Short courses offered by higher education institutions					,244*					,089
Part-time study programmes at higher education institutions					,055					,108
Training offered by continuing education institutions					,194					,428*
Distance learning					-,066					,052
Constant	8,009	7,935	6,865	5,682	5,441	6,696	6,685	4,921	3,203	3,209
R Square	.045	.064	.085	.135	.158	.024	.029	.065	.134	.149
Df	6	10	12	16	20	6	10	12	16	20
Observations (N)	977	959	936	838	762	973	956	934	835	761

Table 6.11. (Cont.)

	Non-Cognitive behavior					Interpersonal Skills				
<i>Country</i> (ref. The Netherlands)										
United Kingdom	,747*	,658**	,561*	,440*	,337	-,196	-,249	-,263	-,475*	-,409
Spain	,409*	,430*	,301	,412*	,350	,276	,334	,186	,251	,344
<i>Economic sector</i> (ref. Industry)										
Construction, Transport, ITC	,142	,178	,162	,065	,186	,077	,074	,132	,037	,079
Trade, Accommodation and Food Services	,091	,104	,047	,042	,112	,629**	,622*	,649**	,573*	,603*
Public services	-,017	-,130	-,038	,047	,089	-,092	-,161	,022	-,012	,131
Non-public Services	,207	,224	,242	,177	,235	,385*	,399*	,461*	,400*	,445*
<i>Graduate' characteristics</i> (ref. Engineering)										
Education, Humanities and arts		-,082	-,065	,006	-,053		-,219	-,153	-,151	-,373
Business and Law		-,153	-,125	-,061	-,097		-,178	-,170	-,012	-,062
Social Sciences and Communication		,200	,080	,013	,060		,518	,423	,328	,380
Medical studies and Natural Sciences		,515	,611	,551	,524		,045	,068	-,066	-,033
<i>Graduate' job and transnational experience</i> (ref. Study abroad)										
Work experience			,344**	,297**	,306**			,285**	,292**	,322**
Internship abroad			,212*	,123	,138			,343**	,227*	,194*
<i>Conditions under which firms recruit new HEg</i> (ref. Higher number of applicants)										
Anticipated growth in business				,231*	,214				,002	,075
Actual growth in business				,277*	,276*				,297*	,241*
Higher turnover of staff				,012	-,030				,143	,113
Increasing complexity of tasks				,146	,126				,155	,128
<i>Firms where employees participate in:</i> (ref. Training and development prog. in-house)										
Short courses offered by higher education institutions					-,051					-,038
Part-time study programmes at higher education institutions					,157					,029
Training offered by continuing education institutions					,038					,179
Distance learning					,134					,040
Constant	7,776	7,786	6,308	4,536	4,579	6,877	6,875	5,287	3,779	3,632
R Square	.022	.025	.046	.092	.093	.028	.036	.067	.113	.114
Df	6	10	12	16	20	6	10	12	16	20
Observations (N)	995	975	950	846	770	976	958	933	832	758

\*\* : Significant at 0.01 level, two-tailed; Significant at 0.05 level, two-tailed.

## 6.5. Conclusion

Following the analytical model outlined in chapter 1 and 3, I examined what signals and skills employers focus on when hiring. I have developed the concept of employment cultures in this as well as in other chapters of this dissertation. This guiding concept aims at the study of the different logics that guide job-seekers and employers in the labor market. Employers' preferences matter because of their control of the market entry for prospective employees. Employers determine what skills are rewarded and what graduate profiles lead to a job. Firms are constrained, however, by the institutional characteristics of national markets in which they operate. In the Netherlands, firms and HE institutions have strong linkages while in the United Kingdom and Spain the linkages between firms and HE institutions are weak. The strength of these linkages is likely to impact on the information that university graduates convey employers during the job search and in the recruiters' decision-making process when hiring new graduates.

At a theoretical level, this chapter strengthens the findings of the previous chapters, which highlight the contrast between the rigid Spanish labor market and the more dynamic Dutch and British ones. First, it has showed that the level of labor market regulation (high-low) increases or reduces the firms' willingness to hire new employers. Secondly, it has highlighted that the linkages (strong-weak) between firms and Higher Education institutions impact on the quality of signals that graduates send to employers. For employers, these signals can be a good predictor of the graduates' productivity and taking them into account may help them reduce the costs of further training.

At an empirical level, this study examines what skills employers prioritize across firms and across labor markets. The evidence from the Flash Eurobarometer #304 on graduate employability reveals cross-national variation in the demand for skills. As expected, Dutch and British firms follow a similar pattern of skill demand, especially concerning cognitive skills, work-specific abilities and non-cognitive skills. Dutch and British firms differ, however, with respect to the demand for interpersonal skills. Meanwhile, Spain differs from the other two with regard to the demand for cognitive skills, which is lower.

This chapter has shown that firms look for more than just credentials when hiring graduates from university. Some of the skills that employers value most can be learnt at the university (e.g. cognitive skills), but *many of them* can be learnt somewhere else (e.g. interpersonal skills, non-cognitive behavior). This helps to highlight one of the characteristics of the current graduate job market, embedded in a changing occupational structure that requires new job tasks and social abilities. These skills are not necessarily equivalent, however, across labor markets or economic sectors.

Finally, the findings in this chapter have implications for HE institutions. As Fligstein suggests «university serves as bases of power to legitimate the claims of [professionals and managers] to control certification» (2001:107). Training institutions might improve the type of specialization in industry-specific skills, and generate stronger linkages with firms, which have been shown to generate better occupational outcomes (Allmendinger 1989:247; Dieckhoff 2008, 2011). Put in another way, HE institutions can introduce changes to make the graduates' profiles more attractive to employers.

## 6.6. Appendix

### Appendix 6.A. Descriptive Statistics for the variables included in the Statistical Analysis

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cognitive skills (Scale 0-10)	0	10	8,07	1,52
Work-Specific abilities (Scale 0-10)	0	10	7,35	1,93
Non-Cognitive behavior (Scale 0-10)	0	10	8,33	1,98
Interpersonal Skills (Scale 0-10)	0	10	7,12	1,93
Construction, Transport, ITC	0	1	0,15	0,36
Trade, Accommodation and Food Services	0	1	0,17	0,38
Public services	0	1	0,17	0,38
Non-public Services	0	1	0,28	0,45
Education, Humanities and arts	0	1	0,10	0,23
Business and Law	0	1	0,35	0,35
Social Sciences and Communication	0	1	0,17	0,28
Medical studies and Natural Sciences	0	1	0,10	0,24
Work experience	1	4	3,39	0,75
Internship abroad	1	4	1,81	0,79
Anticipated growth in business	1	4	3,20	0,83
Actual growth in business	1	4	3,21	0,81
Higher turnover of staff	1	4	2,55	0,95
Increasing complexity of tasks	1	4	2,84	0,86
Short courses offered by higher education institutions	0	1	0,55	0,50
Part-time study programmes at higher education institutions	0	1	0,46	0,50
Training offered by continuing education institutions	0	1	0,63	0,48
Distance learning	0	1	0,50	0,50

## Appendix 6.B. Case studies of 58 Small and medium-size firms in Spain, the Netherlands and United Kingdom (percentages unless stated otherwise)

Questionnaire adapted from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality, 1992-1994 (<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/2535/documentation>).

Case studies – Original data	Employers' Recruiting Practices (2014)			
	SP	NL	UK	Total
<b>Size of the sample</b>	35	17	6	58
<b>SECTION A: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIRM</b>				
<b>Position in the company</b>				
The Owner	2.9	.0	.0	1.8
Company Director	20.6	11.8	16.7	17.5
Manager or supervisor	8.8	17.6	50.0	15.8
Employee relations / human resources / personnel manager	5.8	47.1	33.3	52.6
Administrative / Clerical officer	5.9	11.8	.0	7.0
Other	2.9	11.8	.0	5.3
<b>Main activity</b>				
<i>Industry</i>				
Mining and quarrying	5.7	.0	.0	3.5
Manufacturing	20.0	5.9	20.0	15.8
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	-	-	-	-
Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	8.6	5.9	.0	7.0
<i>Construction, Transport, ICT</i>				
Construction	8.6	5.9	.0	7.0
Transportation and storage	-	5.9	.0	1.8
Information and communication	5.7	5.9	20.0	7.0
<i>Trade, accommodation and food services</i>				
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	14.3	11.8	20.0	14.0
Accommodation and food service activities	2.9	11.8	.0	5.3
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	.0	5.9	.0	1.8
<i>Public services</i>				
Public administration and defense; compulsory social security	-	5.9	.0	1.8
Human health and social work activities	11.4	5.9	.0	8.8
Education	-	.0	40.0	3.5
<i>Non-public services</i>				
Financial and insurance activities	2.9	5.9	.0	3.5
Real estate activities	2.9	11.8	.0	5.3
Professional, scientific and technical activities	11.4	5.9	.0	8.8
Administrative and support service activities	2.9	5.9	.0	3.5
Arts, entertainment and recreation	2.9	.0	.0	1.8
<b>Years in operation (average)</b>	27.6	38.8	56.1	34.0
<b>Firm size (by number of employees)</b>				
Micro (1-9)	2.9	6.3	.0	3.6

Case studies – Original data	Employers' Recruiting Practices (2014)			
	SP	NL	UK	Total
Small (10-49)	26.5	43.8	16.7	30.4
Medium (50-249)	55.9	25.0	66.7	48.2
Large (+250)	14.7	25.0	16.7	17.9
<b>Temporary employers (average)</b>	46.1	14.6	5.8	32.8
<b>Net change in the total number of employees since the beginning of 2008</b>				
Positive	41.2	56.3	66.7	48.2
No change	14.7	25.0	.0	16.1
Negative	41.2	12.5	33.3	32.1
Don't know / no opinion	2.9	6.3	.0	3.6
<b>Workforce size since the beginning of 2008</b>				
Grown	41.2	50.0	66.7	46.4
Declined	41.2	12.5	33.3	32.1
Stayed the same	17.6	31.3	.0	19.6
Don't know / no opinion	.0	6.3	.0	1.8
<b>Sales growth since the beginning of 2008</b>				
Grown	38.2	68.8	50.0	48.1
Declined	52.9	12.5	40.0	38.9
Stayed the same	8.8	12.5	.0	9.3
Don't know / no opinion	.0	6.3	20.0	3.7
<b>SECTION B: VACANCIES</b>				
<b>Firms with vacancies immediately available</b>				
Yes	44.1	40.0	40.0	42.6
No	50.0	60.0	60.0	53.7
Don't know / no opinion	5.9	.0	.0	3.7
<b>Number of vacancies (average)</b>	5.9	2.2	8.0	4.8
<b>Type of vacancy</b>				
Director	-	-	25.0	3.1
Manager or supervisor	33.3	9.1	25.0	24.2
Professionals	33.3	41.7	50.0	38.2
Clerical positions	27.8	-	-	15.6
Sales position	27.8	10.0	-	18.8
Manual or blue-collar	6.7	.0	25.0	6.9
Other occupational categories	12.5	-	33.3	10.7
<b>Position that do require an university degree</b>	56.5	38.5	60.0	51.2
<b>Absolutely necessary Job Requirements for positions that do require a university degree</b>				
Some recent work experience, even if unrelated to this job	31.3	40.0	.0	29.2
Specific experience directly related to this job	33.3	20.0	.0	26.1
References	6.3	20.1	33.3	12.5
Vocational education, other previous job training or skill certification	18.8	20.0	.0	16.7



Case studies – Original data	Employers' Recruiting Practices (2014)			
	SP	NL	UK	Total
To be able to speak a foreign language	57.1	40.0	33.1	50.0
To be able to move in to another city	13.3	.0	.0	8.7
<b>Number of applications received for this vacant position (average)</b>	721.5	55.6	10.0	441.9
<b>Annual Salary offered for this vacant position (€/£)</b>	30,272	34,250	35,000	31562,5
<b>SECTION C: LAST PERSON HIRED</b>				
Time to hire the new employee (weeks)	4.5	6.3	6.4	5.27
Gender of the new employee (female)	59.3	23.1	20.0	44.4
Age of the new employee (average)	34.4	34.1	31.6	34.0
<b>Level of education of the new employee (most frequent)</b>				
- Master's degree	3.7	23.1	20.0	11.1
- University graduate	55.6	7.7	40.0	40.0
- Technical or vocational education graduate	25.9	46.2	20.0	31.1
<b>Job position</b>				
- Manager or supervisor	18.5	15.4	-	15.6
- Professional position	37.0	38.5	40.0	37.8
- Clerical position	18.5	7.7	-	13.3
- Sales position	11.1	15.4	40.0	15.6
- Manual or blue-collar	7.4	7.7	-	6.7
- Other occupational category	7.4	7.7	20.0	8.9
- Don't know / no opinion	-	7.7	-	2.2
<b>New employee with a temporary contract</b>	48.1	15.4	40.0	37.8
<b>Recruiting method that generated this employee</b>				
Advertisements in newspaper	3.6	-	-	2.2
Advertisements on social media sites (Linkedin, Facebook, Google+, etc)	21.4	15.4	-	17.4
Own website	-	23.1	-	6.5
Referrals from friends and/or relatives	10.7	-	-	6.5
Referrals from current employees	7.1	-	20.0	6.5
Referrals from colleagues	3.6	-	-	2.2
Referrals from university teaching	-	-	-	-
Referrals from Career Services (School/University)	10.7	7.7	-	8.7
The Employment Service office/Jobcentre	7.1	15.4	-	10.9
A Temporary Placement Agency	-	15.4	20.0	6.5
A Private employment agency	10.7	15.4	20.0	13.0
Referrals from unions	-	-	-	-
Other	17.9	-	20.0	13.0
None	3.6	7.7	-	4.3
Don't know / no opinion	3.6	-	-	2.2
<b>Changes in the recruiting process for such a position in the past 3 to 5 years</b>				
<b>Methods that recruiters use <u>less often</u></b>	50.0	46.2	60.0	50.0
Advertisements in newspaper	64.0	84.6	60.0	69.8

Case studies – Original data	Employers' Recruiting Practices (2014)			
	SP	NL	UK	Total
Advertisements on social media sites (Linkedin, Facebook, Google+, etc)	4.0	-	-	2.3
Referrals from friends and/or relatives	4.0	-	-	2.3
The Employment Service office/Jobcentre	4.0	7.7	20.0	7.0
A Temporary Placement Agency	12.0	7.7	-	9.3
Referrals from unions	8.0	-	-	9.3
Other	4.0	-	20.0	4.7
<b>Recruiters use less often these methods because...</b>				
- Generate a pool of applicants not suitable for the job	77.3	50.0	40.0	64.1
- Keep recruiting costs high	52.4	50.0	80.0	55.3
- It does not help to fill vacancies quickly	84.2	53.8	60.0	70.3
- Attract applicants in whom one cannot be trusted	72.2	18.2	40.0	50.0
<b>Methods that recruiters use more often</b>				
Advertisements on social media sites (Linkedin, Facebook, Google+, etc)	36.0	7.7	40.0	27.9
Own website	-	46.2	20.0	16.3
Referrals from friends and/or relatives	8.0	-	-	4.7
Referrals from current employees	4.0	7.7	-	4.7
Referrals from colleagues	12.0	-	-	7.0
Referrals from university teaching	-	-	20.0	2.3
Referrals from Career Services (School/University)	8.0	-	-	4.7
The Employment Service office/Jobcentre	-	15.4	-	4.7
A Temporary Placement Agency	4.0	15.4	-	7.0
A Private employment agency	8.0	7.7	-	7.0
Other	20.0	-	20.0	14.0
<b>Recruiters use more often these methods because...</b>				
- Generate a pool of highly qualified applicants	63.6	69.2	60.0	65.0
- Keep recruiting costs low	78.3	83.3	80.0	80.0
- Help to fill vacancies quickly	81.8	84.6	80.0	82.5
- Attract applicants in whom one can be trusted	80.0	33.3	40.0	59.5
<b>SECTION D: COMPOSITION OF CURRENT WORKFORCE</b>				
No. of employees in positions which require a university degree (average)	44.8	21.7	7.0	34.6
No. of employees with some university education (average)	45.4	21.4	27.7	36.8
No. of employees under the age of 29 (average)	15.4	17.2	18.5	16.2
<b>RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHICS</b>				
<b>Age (average)</b>	41.8	42	50	43
<b>Gender (Female)</b>	53.8	46.2	80.0	54.5
<b>Education Level</b>				
Some High School	-	-	20.0	2.3
Technical or vocational education graduate	-	30.8	-	9.1

Case studies – Original data	Employers' Recruiting Practices (2014)			
	SP	NL	UK	Total
Some university experience	-	-	20.0	2.3
University graduate	50.0	15.4	40.0	38.6
Some post-graduate study	-	7.7	-	2.3
Master s degree	46.2	38.5	20.0	40.9
Beyond master s but not doctorate	3.8	7.7	-	4.5

## Chapter 7. CONCLUSIONS

This study has explored the question of why individuals engage in some job-seeking practices and refrain from others. My starting point was the empirically grounded finding that national job markets differ in the dominant channels that connect job-seekers and employers. I propose a way to organize the national diversity in job-seeking practices. The main claim is that the job-matching process is embedded in a specific cultural context and that both job-seeker strategies and employers' hiring practices are linked to particular institutional settings. I identify two ideal-types employment cultures that shape the social organization of labor markets and favor particular job-seeking strategies and hiring practices: patrimonialist and meritocratic employment cultures. Although I approach the labor market as a field (Bourdieu 1977, 2005) and I am thus as interested in the job-seeker's as in the employer's side, which should be homologous, resource constraints have led me to focus more on job-seekers than on employers.

In what follows I summarize the dissertation's main findings and contributions.

### **7.1. Research contributions: Main findings of the study of university graduates and employers**

#### 7.1.1. Shifting the focus from atomized to cultural approaches

The literature on job-search strategies conventionally emphasizes the 'who-do-you-know' approach, the role of personal contacts, the flux of information and the cost of interactions. Some of these studies subscribe to the premise that job seekers choose the job-search method that they perceive as having the greatest returns (Holzer 1988, Addison and Portugal 2002). Harry Holzer, for instance, shows that individuals use specific job-search methods based on their positive effect on employment outcomes (1988).

Job-seeking practices have been traditionally studied without invoking cultural, institutional and cyclical variables (Ioannides, Loury, and Datcher Loury 2004). Overall, mainstream research on job-seeking has provided decontextualized accounts of individuals' behavior. The literature from

economics to network analysis is dominated by the assumption of rational job-search. This literature pays little attention to cross-country contrasts and to whether findings for particular countries can be generalized to different target groups and national labor markets.

In fact, there have been few attempts to study how social and cultural contexts affect the choice of job-search strategies. Granovetter's *'Getting a Job'* represents one of the first attempts to analyze the social mechanisms involved. In his equally influential article *'Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness'*, Granovetter exhorts us to avoid both «undersocialized or atomized-actor» accounts of economic action, and those «oversocialized» views that consider individuals driven by internalized social or cultural rules and values (1985:485). I argue, instead, that economic action is in fact driven by social and cultural norms.

Using Bourdieu's theory of fields as my point of departure, I shift the focus to social and cultural contexts. I argue that the functioning of labor markets is shaped by the experience of self and members in one's social milieu, and by the social organization of the job market itself. The social organization of a market is neither universal nor static. I describe this variation in terms of «employment cultures». This approach is close to the one proposed by the new economic sociology and by Pierre Bourdieu, which calls for studying the job-search and hiring practices as *social* economic action driven by economic interests and by traditions (see, e.g. Swedberg 2003:15). This approach draws inspiration from the Weberian tradition. According to Weber, «Action is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course» (Weber 1978:4). In Bourdieu's words:

«[If] there is a universal property, it is that agents are not universal, because their properties, and in particular, their preferences and tastes, are the product of their positioning and movements within social space, and hence of collective and individual history. The economic behavior socially recognized as rational is the product of certain economic and social conditions. It is only by relating it to its individual and collective genesis that one can understand its economic and social conditions of possibility and, consequently, both the necessity and the sociological limits of

economic reason and of apparently unconditioned notions such as needs, calculation or preferences» (Bourdieu 2005:211)

As the theory of the habitus and the field suggest, the social organization of a market has an influence on the behavior and preferences of market participants. Job-search strategies are associated with the practices of other individuals, groups and institutions in a specific field (or *economic field*, according to Pierre Bourdieu).

Following this approach and insights from the economic sociology literature, I argue that features of this context, that is, culture and linkages between schools and firms, account for observed differences in job-seeking. Structural and institutional contexts provide a set of resources and opportunities to job-seekers and to employers. Job-seekers access institutional resources and interpersonal capital, which is contingent on the resources available to socially proximate individuals (Burt 1995:11–12). National contexts have a special effect on job-search processes, which explains differences across job markets<sup>1</sup> (Jackson 2001; Lin 2000; Try 2005). As a recent study posits, «the frequency, character and consequences of informal job matching are likely to be highly contingent on the national institutional context» (McDonald, Benton, and Warner 2012:75).

There is a good reason to think that cross-national differences in the linkages between HE institutions and firms, the demands of the labor market for graduates, and the business cycle impact on job-seeking behavior. In chapter 3, I describe the institutional setting and the economic climate in each country since the 1980s. Spain, the Netherlands and United Kingdom exhibit significant differences. I show that the three countries differ in their structural capacity to confront economic crisis and in their capacity to assure a good match between qualifications and employer needs. They exemplify different employment

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, there is a growing consensus surrounding the national specificities of labor markets, especially regarding the movements of entry (e.g. de Lange, Gesthuizen, and Wolbers 2014; van der Velden and Wolbers 2003). Research has acknowledged national differences in a variety of aspects that range from the characteristics of the HE and VET systems, the quality and stability of first jobs (Kogan and Müller 2003; Kogan, Noelke, and Gebel 2011; Shavit and Müller 1998) (Raffe 2014; van der Velden and Wolbers 2003).

cultures and these differences in turn explain cross-national differences in the young graduates' transition to work.

My approach challenges the view of increasing convergence in advanced economies. Not only do we still find large contrasts in employment growth, youth employment rates, and job vacancies; those differences result from the resilience of national institutional settings and occupational structures (Gangl 2001, 2003). National job markets adjust to new economic demands, but along well established and specific paths (Vis, van Kersbergen, and Hylands 2011).

### 7.1.2. Tracing employment cultures behind the job-search

The concept of employment cultures that I use in the dissertation is close to the concept of «employment systems», as defined by Neil Fligstein (Fligstein 2001)<sup>2</sup> and David Marsden (Marsden 1999)<sup>3</sup>. These authors' approach emphasizes the relationship between workers and managers and the particular logics and rules they use at the workplace. The main difference between these approaches is that Marsden deliberately ignores the State and its agencies whereas Fligstein identifies ideal-typical arrangements that reflect the dominance of various groups, the role of the states, firms, and other organized groups.

I argue that a useful way to think about employment systems is to extend the “employment systems' approach” to encompass job-seekers and new entrants. My approach to employment cultures is thus more holistic than extant ones: the logics of workers, managers, and institutions also shape the university graduates' job-seeking process. Since university graduates can invest time and effort in building human capital, they are in an advantageous position to benefit

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<sup>2</sup> According to Neil Fligstein, employment systems can be defined as «the rules governing relations between groups of workers and employers that concern the general logic of how “careers” are defined and how groups organize to maintain these conceptions. These general logics inform more concrete sets of rules that help explain the organization of particular markets, the mobility of labor and managers, and the ways in which employers and workers organize» (Fligstein 2001:101).

<sup>3</sup> David Marsden uses insights from rational choice and institutional theories of labor markets to treat employment systems as «institutional frameworks which enable firms and workers organize their collaboration while protecting both parties from certain kinds of opportunistic behavior (Marsden 1999:269)».

from interaction with these key actors: they benefit from connections to other high-skilled workers, they have the profile that managers look for, and they are often the best candidates with whom intermediary agencies can work.

High-skilled workers are useful sources of job information and they represent the know-how in firms. High-skilled workers can be also the main source of conflict and competition with new entrants because of their better use of connections to other workers and because of their job experience. Managers, meanwhile, are responsible for hiring and they often reproduce aspects of the business culture in their behavior. They socialize new staff members into the values of the organization and the ingredients of good teamwork. Managers and recruiters are also organizational gatekeepers who set the norms of what is desirable and what is not in a job candidate. Intermediary institutions, finally, play an important role in assigning labor to jobs, by certifying the graduates' level of skill and competences. Their power, however, greatly depends on the use that firms and public organizations make of them.

The employment cultures approach contends that interactions between the set of actors above take different forms across job markets and determine in part the success of different job-search strategies. In this thesis I have contrasted meritocratic employment cultures where the dominant channels are the market and intermediary agencies and patrimonialist employment cultures where the dominant channel is the use of personal connections. The most important difference between the two cultures lies in the extent to which they rely on open market allocation. In a meritocratic market culture, employers and employees place their faith in competitive competition and credentials. By definition, these markets need to be open to ensure the best match between qualifications and employer needs. In a patrimonialist market culture, employers and employees tend to prioritize social connections, due in part to weak linkages between them and intermediary institutions. By using personal connections to fill job vacancies, employers reduce the search and recruiting costs.



### 7.1.3. University graduates mobilize different resources in seeking for jobs

I have shown in chapter 4 that there is international variation in the relative prevalence of different job-search strategies. Although reliance on social networks is widespread across countries, sending curricula to employment agencies is relatively more prevalent in the Netherlands, while searching for and replying to job advertisements is relatively more prevalent in Britain, and reliance on contacts provided by one's social network is relatively more prevalent in Spain. Reliance on social connections is more often associated with a bad match between qualifications and the characteristics of the jobs than is reliance on other channels.

I have found only partial support for the hypothesis that university graduates rely on the dominant job-seeking practices in their particular milieus. It turns out that graduates use intensively both dominant and alternative job-search strategies. This behavior, however, is more prevalent in Spain than in the other two countries, which suggests that multiple job-seeking strategies are an adaptation to bad economic times (the study was conducted in the years of economic recession, 2011 and 2012). Spain registered extremely high unemployment rates among young people at the time of the survey, which might jeopardize the university graduates prospects.

### 7.1.4. The negative impact of social connections

The significance of the social context in people's perceptions and the role of connections -both strong and weak ties- in spreading useful information is a well-known process in network analysis (Granovetter 1973; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948). As sociologists observed long ago, reliance on extra-family support, that is, building up social networks, weakens dependence on the family (Ellis and Lane 1963). Individuals with good networks can get better jobs (Granovetter 1995; Lin 1982). Social capital theorists have long argued that informal job searching is associated with significant advantages

over formal job searching<sup>4</sup>. The literature has produced mixed evidence, however. Early studies often indicate that there is an initial wage advantage among job seekers who use social connections compared to those who use other channels to find a job (e.g. Corcoran, Datcher, and Duncan 1980; Rosenbaum, Deluca, et al. 1999).

The theoretical interpretation of this correlation is simply that high quality information *travels* through higher-level networks and individuals in these networks get better jobs (Erikson 1996:220). Thus, networks can be used to their advantage when seeking a better job. Other studies indicate that informal job-search channels yield non-monetary benefits, such as better career prospects or a better match between employees' education and the job requirements (Franzen and Hangartner 2006). Yet other studies suggests that there is no relationship between the strategies that individuals use to find a job, their wages, and other monetary benefits (Franzen and Hangartner 2006; Mouw 2003).

In chapter 4, I have examined the consequences of using social connections (e.g. relatives, friends and acquaintances, colleagues and classmates, and university professors). I investigate whether university graduates from less advantaged social backgrounds benefit from their weak ties. Contrary to my expectations, however, I find that upwardly mobile graduates (i.e., those who are the first generation with higher education degrees) use weak ties less frequently than do middle class ones. This suggests that the upwardly mobile graduates' social networks are lacking in weak ties. Also, one can speculate that by intensively using alternative channels (such as strong-ties,

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Burt, for instance, coined the concept of "structural holes" to indicate the strategic locations of players with rich connections that provide information benefits. According to Burt «[a] structural hole is a relationship of non-redundancy between two contacts. (...) As a result of the hole between them, the two contacts provide network benefits that are in some degree additive rather than overlapping» (Burt 1992:18). Low-density or sparse networks thus provide better sources of information by connecting individuals with ties into multiple and disparate networks. In other words, the most advantaged networks are those that granted access to heterogeneous individuals in privileged positions.

competitive strategies and intermediary agencies), upwardly mobile graduates can forge weak-ties that may then help them to find a job in the future.

I finally explore the effects of the use of social connections on employment outcomes. Here I find the strongest cross-national variation: the use of social connections entails more deleterious employment consequences (i.e. job mismatch, temporary job) for Dutch graduates than for Spanish graduates. In contrast with Spain and the Netherlands, however, in the United Kingdom the odds of a job mismatch when using social connections are slightly lower than when using other job-seeking channels. Then, I also find that the use of social connections to find a job entails low-paying jobs slightly more often for Dutch than Spanish graduates, and much less often in the United Kingdom. Whereas in the Netherlands and in Spain using social connections increases the chances of low pay relative to using other job-search strategies, in the United Kingdom job strategy does not affect the odds of having a low-pay job. Finally, I find that in all three countries under study the odds of having a temporary contract are higher when using social connections than when using other strategies.

There are thus differential returns to the use of social capital in the job search. My analysis also shows that university graduates, although sharing similar educational credentials, are far from being a homogeneous group: upwardly mobile graduates use strong ties more often than do middle class ones, but this produces a poor match between qualifications and jobs.

#### 7.1.5. Employers want cognitive skills, not just diplomas

The global knowledge economy and technological changes at the workplace spur the demand for skills, especially cognitive and communicational<sup>5</sup>. A successful labor market entry is not only decided by a university degree alone, but is

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<sup>5</sup> I borrow the title of this section from the World Bank's report entitled «Skills, Not Just Diplomas» to make the case that improving the quality of education and student learning (Sondergaard et al. 2011).

related to various combinations of hard and soft skills<sup>6</sup>. In chapter 5, I use Eurobarometer data to analyze the demand for skills in the three countries under study. I find that British and Dutch firms are similar in that employers emphasize work-specific abilities (such as planning and organizational skills), cognitive, and non-cognitive skills (e.g. analytical and problem solving skills, and ability to act in new situations) when selecting job applicants, whereas Spanish firms do not prioritize cognitive skills. This shows that the type of skills that are useful in the job market vary across labor markets and economic sectors. My research also shows that the skills that are appreciated by employers can generally be learnt outside academia (e.g. interpersonal skills, non-cognitive behavior)<sup>7</sup>.

## **7.2. Study limitations and open issues: To what extent one can generalize these findings?**

This study suffers from a number of limitations, mainly related to the quality of the data. The literature has neglected the joint analysis of actors at both sides of the labor market, as the field approach would recommend. Ideally, I would have liked to have similar data for both graduates and employers. As I explain in chapter 5, datasets that fulfill this requirement are rare or scarce. Before using the Eurobarometer data, I conducted a web-survey to employers of small and middle-sized firms to get information on employers' recruitment practices and preferences when hiring university graduates. In the end, I managed to collect only 58 questionnaires, despite of the fact that I contacted 1800 firms through

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<sup>6</sup> Research has acknowledged the role of soft skills (also called non-merit or non-cognitive characteristics) that are rewarded in the process of job allocation (Jackson 1996; Breen and Goldthorpe 2001; Rivera 2012). Soft skills comprise personality, social and interpersonal skills and lifestyles preferences.

<sup>7</sup> As Michel Jackson points out «qualifications are the passport for entry into higher-class positions for those who do not have advantages related to their family origin. Conversely, [...] individuals from higher-class origins who possess few or no educational qualifications are able to maintain their advantaged position by entering 'non-merit' subgroup destinations, where they can use the economic, cultural and social benefits accruing from their class background» (Jackson 1996:382).

Amadeus, the European directory of firms (the results can be found in the Appendix of chapter 5).

In the fieldwork with university graduates, resource constraints forced me to only target university graduates from a single university in Spain and one in the Netherlands. I was unable to conduct the planned survey in the third country in my study, the United Kingdom. At the moment of planning I could not anticipate that I was going to face so many administrative obstacles in this country. I contacted four different universities but all of them refused to send the web survey to their graduates. Differences between the questionnaire of my web survey and the British survey thus jeopardize my comparison, which has a tremendous impact on the analysis.

Another problem in my study is that in the master questionnaire that I used for the web surveys I did not include questions about the kind of information that graduates obtain from their social connections. These data would have been useful to study differences in the quality of information that graduates receive in the three countries across countries. Finally, as most of the research reviewed here, I took for granted that university graduates engage in an active job-search, and overlooked the option of «non-search» in key items of the questionnaire. Recent studies suggest, however, that there is an increasing pattern of non-search, especially in the high-skilled segment of the labor force (e.g., McDonald 2015; McDonald and Elder 2006).

### **7.3. Future research and suggestions for improved instruments**

In this dissertation I use a comparative approach to understand national differences in job seeking. I also illustrate how each country fits in my typology by analyzing their concrete institutional features (school-to-work linkages, the demands of the market for graduates and cyclical factors). One of the advantages of this method is that it allows to identify new and even mixed cases. The other advantage is that the typology of employment market cultures can be further refined by adding new cases and categories.

New cases may uncover new dimensions of complexity. Germany and Norway, for instance, can be described as a meritocratic employment cultures whereas Greece can be described as a patrimonialist market culture. By adding Germany to the study, one would examine whether there are differences in job-seeking strategies between university graduates and vocational education and training graduates. If one were to include Norway as a case study, one would be able to study whether the public sector –one of the major employers of university graduates- shapes graduate’s job-seeking practices. If one were to choose Greece as a case study, one would be able to study what kind of job search strategies university graduates follow under the severe economic conditions currently prevailing in this country (that may include migration and going back to school).

Another fruitful research approach would target different groups within the same national context. One could, for instance, target graduates at top business schools and study what job search strategies they follow during and after an MBA degree. Given that business school’ students generally have middle and upper social origins, one would be able to study how this high-skilled segment uses its background resources during the job-search. Further, one would be able to study how meritocratic or how network-based their job-search is. Business school students have additional cards to play, like the prestige and high-status of their home institutions and a resume with a strong set of transnational skills.

Fortunately, there are already good studies of this type: quantitative surveys like CHEERS and REFLEX, and the Multi-City Study (see below). Qualitative studies also offer invaluable information. A recent example of a qualitative research design that targets both employers and job seekers is Lauren Rivera’s study of Ivy League university graduates and of the recruitment practices in top financial firms (Rivera 2011, 2012, 2015).

Compared to the study of job-seekers’ behavior, the hiring behavior of employers has been relatively neglected. In addition to the information from Eurobarometer that I analyze in this dissertation, it would be good to know what skills employers do prefer and how they recruit high-skilled workers in

good and in bad times. There is evidence that employers' preferences and recruitment patterns vary across jobs and qualification levels (DeVaro 2005; DeVaro and Fields 2005). A good example of this research is the work of Jed DeVaro. He analyses the relationship between recruitment strategies, starting salaries, the duration of the vacancy and the skills required for new contracts in the United States. DeVaro uses data from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI), a survey of employers in the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles, Boston, Detroit and Atlanta, conducted between 1992 and 1995 (DeVaro 2005). He finds that employers draw more candidates from employment agencies (private, temporary) than from recommendations from friends when hiring professionals, whereas they rely more on public employment agencies and recommendations from unions when hiring low-skilled workers. Finally, when hiring university graduates, they rely most on recommendations from universities than on any other method (DeVaro 2005:17–21).

Little is known, finally, of the effects of the business cycle on the job-search process. In this dissertation I provide a picture of job-seeking under bad times. One cannot predict, however, whether the patterns observed here are also the ones prevailing in good times, and whether the crisis exacerbated the use of some job-search methods and deterred university graduates from using others. In fact, several studies have reported that the use of job-search methods depends on the stage in the business cycle (Osberg 1993, McDonald 2010). Once again one finds mixed evidence. Osberg suggests that in periods of growth the use of contacts with friends or relatives provides the highest returns to job seekers –i.e. increases the probability of receiving job offers–, whereas there are noticeable advantages to using public employment agencies when the economy slows down.

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