

Complex Triple Triangulation: analysis of training and employment discourses

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ABSTRACT – Complex Triple Triangulation: analysis of training and employment discourses. The economic difficulties and job insecurity suffered by Spain during the crisis produced an increase in unemployment among people older than 45 years. In this context, this study aims to understand the social drama that surrounds them – which is present in various discourses – by using a new methodological design known as complex triple triangulation. With this design the discourses of four sources are analysed: people older than 45 years, official datum, mass media, and experts. The main findings reveal certain differences and similarities between the discourses derived from these sources. It is concluded that a number of factors are involved in the unemployment rates of older people, with training overflow being a multidisciplinary problem.

Keywords: Training. Employment. Adults. Discourses. Triangulation.

RESUMEN – Triple Triangulación Compleja: análisis de discursos de formación y empleo. Las dificultades económicas y la precariedad laboral sufrida por España en la crisis, generó un incremento del desempleo de los mayores de 45 años. En este contexto, este estudio pretende comprender el drama social presente en los diferentes discursos que giran en torno a ello mediante el uso de un nuevo diseño metodológico: la triple triangulación compleja. Con este diseño se contrasta el discurso de cuatro fuentes: mayores de 45 años, datos oficiales, medios de comunicación y expertos. Los principales hallazgos muestran discursos dispares con algunos puntos de encuentro entre las fuentes. Se concluye que muchos factores que intervienen en el desempleo de los mayores, rebasan el ámbito de la formación, siendo un problema multidisciplinar.

Palabras-clave: Formación. Empleo. Adulto. Discurso. Triangulación.

Rationale¹

The context in which this study originates and develops is framed within the economic crisis that has hit society and its economy in recent years, the consequences of which have not affected everyone with the same intensity, since the most vulnerable groups have suffered and continue to suffer its effects more directly and pervasively, intensifying and laying bare the inequalities that exist among the population.

Among the people who have been hit hardest by the economic crisis are the unemployed, particularly those over the age of 45 (Amber; Domingo, 2017a; Izquierdo; López-Martínez, 2013; Olesya, 2020), whose unemployment rate soared during the years in which the economic crisis was felt most strongly in society. Moreover, these rates have not yet been restored to those of yesteryear, given the new plague of job insecurity that has ensued as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic (García-Calavia, 2020). According to the Labour Force Survey of the National Institute of Statistics (INE, in its Spanish acronym, 2020), in Spain, in the second quarter of 2007 (prior to the economic crisis), 410,700 people over the age of 45 were unemployed, whilst for the same period of 2015 (the year in which the economic crisis was subsiding), this estimated total was 1,773,300. These data show how, in only a few years, the unemployment figures have quadrupled for these people, figures which, unfortunately, have barely declined, with estimates reaching 1,184,200 people in 2020, in the midst of the current public health crisis.

Many of these unemployed people were trained in declining professional sectors that cannot accommodate them at this time. They thus find themselves adrift in a globalized, digitized, highly competitive labour market characterized by uncertainty and transience (Bauman, 2018; Beck, 2016). With a fully formed professional identity, the emotional decline caused by unemployment affects all domains of people's lives, producing a gap in their professional and life trajectory that forces them to rethink all their experiences, which, in short, represents an identity crisis (Dubar, 2002).

Amid these social and personal circumstances, and with age acting as a factor of exclusion from the labour market (Subirats, 2004), access to employment is extremely difficult. The need to respond to this problem, which has been scarcely addressed by the research literature, with low social and media visibility (Amber; Domingo, 2015), and for which there has been limited social or formative responses, formed the rationale for this research work, which seeks to analyse and understand the discourses that are generated around this process of social and labour exclusion. In doing so, and by comparing the discourses generated by the main sources of information on the issue, we set out to reveal the meanings attributed to the problem, as well as to give visibility to this social conflict that affects unemployed people above the age of 45. In parallel, this work presents a new methodological design, which is relevant for the analysis of complex and multidimensional discourses — complex triple triangulation.

The present research, due to its scope, breadth and multidisciplinary nature, is approached from the paradigm of complexity (Morin, 2008), through the use of different prisms and views that constitute reality. The social networks and circumstances that surround the unemployed over 45 years of age are expressed and manifested in parallel discourses that address reality from different perspectives and whose compendium brings us closer to understanding the problem. In this sense, it is not only important to delve into social perspectives that combine various discourses from the eyes of others, but also, particularly in the gaze of the older unemployed person, as a professional, member of a society, owner of their identity and the end product of a vital trajectory. It is also a matter of importance to determine how adults and people responsible for their lives feel, perceive, value or question that they need training to improve their levels of competence, employability and permanence in these current times of difficulty for the labour market. With this, key features were evident from the training proposals received, those that are offered to them and those that would be significantly adapted to their personal and working life trajectories, with real and feasible potential for improvement.

To tackle the problem outlined, and with the intention of responding to the established objectives, we outline the methodology that has helped us to carry out this work, as well as the structure of the network of pathways that give body to this study and the methods used for the analysis.

Methodology

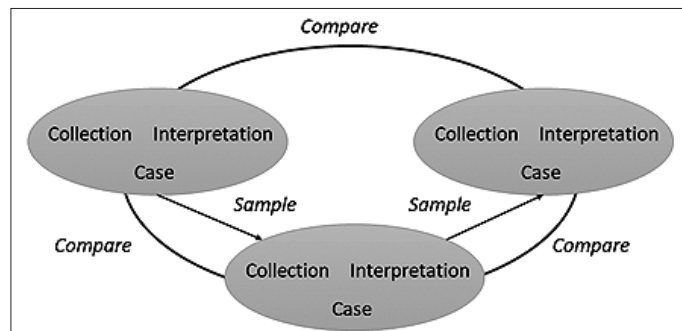
This research addresses the reality of unemployment faced by people over 45 years of age, with the aim of understanding its complexity, avoiding the simplified approach based on isolation and the abstraction of elements, as criticized by Morin (2008).

The unemployment problem is undoubtedly a multidimensional issue, which can be approached from multiple perspectives, since its complexity is undeniable. In response to this network of interrelations that make up and link the reality that surrounds the issue of unemployment, this work is presented from a kaleidoscopic perspective. Based on this approach, a qualitative methodology was chosen, since this is considered appropriate for obtaining a more in-depth understanding of the study phenomena (Flick, 2018a). However, given the singularities of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and their excellent complementarity (Creswell, 2005), in the previous analyses that support this study, both techniques were combined and integrated, depending on the nature of the sample.

This complex research process entails the use of a cyclical methodology (Flick, 2007), based on a circular, flexible and continuously adapting research model, represented in Figure 1. Thus, the findings of the preliminary analyses are linked to the discover of new research interests, which require a new sample, new interpretations, which, in

turn, create new research concerns in a cyclical process of continuous review, improvement and constant progress. We should recall the significant quote by Antonio Machado that illustrates, even without intending to do so, this conception of the research methodology “Walker, there is no path, the path is made by walking” (1965, p. 100).

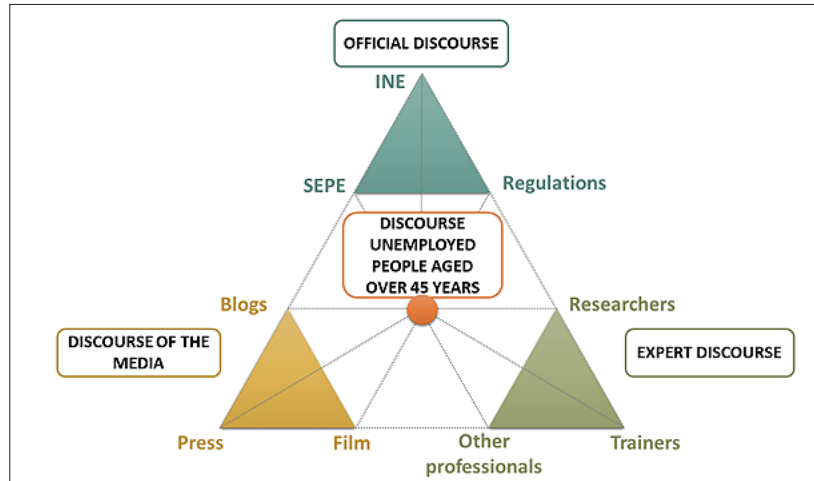
Figure 1 – Circular Model of the Research Process



Source: Flick (2007).

Methodological Structure

Given that a single method or source cannot capture all the dimensions of a social reality, and in order to ensure validity of the findings, a sequential triangulation process was followed (Flick, 2018b), until reaching theoretical saturation (Denzin; Lincoln, 2011). The use of a variety of sources and strategies allow us to delve into the object of study and add strength to the analysis (Heath, 2001; Tejada; Giménez, 2007). This process is facilitated by the fluid and varied concerns emerging from the initial studies, which have linked the analyses from which this research began, and which are organized according to four types of discourse, in a methodological structure generated for this purpose that we have named *Triple Complex Triangulation*. This new triangulated design is characterized by gathering the perspectives from three different approaches, which, in turn, are approached from a triple slope that revolves around a central axis. The individual analyses represented by each of the vertices of the triangles shown in Figure 2 are related to each other and converge at a central point, since they all position themselves on the same problem from their own idiosyncrasy. This central point, the essence of the study, represents the main analysis, which, in turn, is tested with all the findings obtained from the other partial studies, leading to the integrated set of results presented in this work.

Figure 2 – Complex Triple Triangulation Scheme

Source: Authors' own.

This triangulation strategy shares comment elements with the triangulation of instruments and information sources of Tejada and Giménez (2007), that is, the multiplicity of methodological approaches and sources of information. The triangulation provided by the diversity of views included in this study and the cyclical methodology itself, allows for a consistent analysis of the data. In addition, the use of different perspectives allows us to analyse how the phenomenon under study is perceived from different approaches (Stake, 2013).

The ten sources used — displayed in Figure 2 — focus on four types of discourse that are positioned on the unemployment situation of those aged over 45:

- Discourse of unemployed people aged over 45 years.
- Official discourse: official statistics from the National Institute of Statistics (INE in its Spanish acronym), official statistics from the State Public Employment Service (SEPE) and regulations on training and employment.
- Discourse of the media: blogs, press, and film.
- Expert discourse: trainers, researchers and other professionals.

The four types of discourse are jointly addressed in this work in the section on integration of results, conducting a triangular and comparative analysis between them. The data were collected and analysed progressively through a cyclical process in a period between 2012 and 2016.

Information Analysis Methods

This triangulation was created from the results obtained through various research methods and techniques that were combined and

complemented in the different partial analyses of the discourses. These methods were tailored to the nature of the data and the source. Table 1 displays the data collection methods, techniques and instruments, as well as the sample used in each of the partial analyses.

Table 1 – Methods, Techniques and Instruments and Sample of Partial Analyses²

DISCOURSE	SAMPLE	METHODS, TECHNIQUES AND INSTRUMENTS
Unemployed people over 45 years of age	10 unemployed people over 45 years old ³ (selected through a snowball process).	Multiple case study, biographical-narrative analysis, content analysis (through in-depth interviews).
Official	Official statistics. Current regulations on training and employment (154 documents of European, Spanish and Andalusian scope).	Content analysis, documentary analysis and secondary analysis (meta-analysis).
Media	12 blogs selected by a group of experts (45 specific posts). 7 newspapers (628 news items from the year 2014). The Spanish film “Mondays in the sun” by Fernando León de Aranoa.	Content analysis, linguistic analysis, film analysis.
Experts	15 training and employment experts (selected through snowball process).	Content analysis (from in-depth interviews).

Source: Authors' own.

The strategies and methodological approaches used in the initial partial analyses and the findings obtained from them allowed for a new comparative analysis of the information collected, through the cross-comparison of data. In this study, this initial information was used by analysing the discourse from its most critical aspect. The relevance of these analyses is evident in the fact that the discourses show social reality, mobilize people, motivate them, raise awareness, direct them, exert social pressure, create reality, and are capable of forming public opinion. Discourse — both oral and written — is of such great social importance that Van Dijk (2009, p. 158-159), in his well-known book *Discourse and Power* claims that “[...] those who have greater control over more and more influential discourses (and over more discursive properties) are also, according to this definition, more powerful”. Thus, it is interesting to know the ins and outs that a discourse contains through its analysis, being aware of the subjectivity of language and its opacity:

We know that language is not transparent, signs are not innocent, that connotation goes with denotation, that language shows, but also distorts and hides, that sometimes what is expressed directly reflects what is thought and sometimes it is only a slight indication, subtle, cynical (Santander, 2011, p. 208).

The analysis of the discourse conducted in this work was essentially approached from the life trajectories of unemployed people (analysed from the biographical-narrative approach) and their contextualization (Bolívar; Domingo, 2019), since the discourse of those over 45 years of age is the central element of this study. This approach brings us closer to understanding the causality of social events from the perspective of the subjects involved in them, who are given a voice, since following Stake “[...] may be the best way to acquire a good understanding of the weaknesses and weaknesses. strong and moving towards improvement” (2006, p. 273).

Next, from a multidisciplinary, interrelated and triangular approach to the discourses, mediated by their critical analysis, the integration and discussion of the results of this work is shown, following the processing, interrelation and integration of the main findings obtained in the partial analyses of each of the four discourses, establishing the life stories of people aged over 45 as the central axis.

Integration of Results and Discussion

First, it is necessary to clarify the significance of the fact that only on few occasions is reference made to the group in question, along with the problems presented by the media and the high degree of generalization present in official reports and statistics. These facts are indicators of both the neglect and social importance of the object of study, which is relegated to other levels and overshadowed by themes of greater social impact.

In this section, a comparison is made between the sources of information analysed, which generates a joint, triangulated and compared vision of the partial findings, mediated by the methodological design used, which at the same time allows a discussion of the main theories and results of other studies related to other parallel works. The complexity of the reality studied, along with the multiple relationships found between its elements makes it pertinent to present the results in an integrated way, since all the elements are linked in a sea of complex relationships, the breakdown of which is meaningless. Since all the discourses converge on the unemployment situation of those over 45 years of age, the three main emerging dimensions of their discourse are addressed to organize the results as follows: 1) Employment; 2) Feelings and emotions derived from unemployment and 3) Training. These are the elements of the discourses presented by the participants and constitute an organizational framework, and serve as a frame of reference for discussion and comparison with the rest of the discourses that are made about them.

Employment

Employment is perceived by older unemployed people as a symbol of identity. But only in their discourse does the process of loss and

rupture of identity that unemployment generates in people (particularly in those with a long-established professional career) stand out strongly. A strong relationship between identity and profession is evident in their words, which is reminiscent of the observation reported by Lassus et al. (2015) in their study on older unemployed people. Thus, in the discourse of the elderly, employment stands out as a symbol of identity, above its other meanings. However, as stated by Dubar (2002, p. 233) “[...] not everyone prioritizes the professional sphere: the family, religion, politics or leisure can represent areas as legitimate as that of ‘main’ identification”. This is the case with Themis and Hestia, two of the women interviewed, whose identity is associated with the family and not with employment, thus perpetuating traditional gender roles.

Another key influence on the construction of professional identity that emerged from the discourses is professional experience. This, which is taken for granted in those over 45 years of age in the discourse of the media (particularly in the press, which sometimes speaks of them as mature and experienced professionals) and also in that of experts, who highlight it as one of the potentialities of this group, is not always an asset for the unemployed person. From the discourses, the idea emerges that experience can be understood by employers as a factor of resistance, vindication and criticism or questioning of the company’s procedures. Some of the unemployed think that experience is not valued by the current market, that companies dispense with it in order to reduce costs, despite the fact that there is agreement that this is fundamental for professional performance (Ruesga et al., 2014). In addition, the contrast between social perceptions and real cases questions the social belief that all older unemployed people have extensive experience in a professional field, since not all of them have had continuous contracts in the same sector throughout their career path. On many occasions, these professional careers have been disrupted for family reasons, particularly in the case of the women interviewed. However, there is no doubt that over the years they have accumulated learnings and experiences, both in the professional field and in life. The maturity and experience of an adult, from the point of view of the experts, can be a source of learning for the new generations, since they propose the mentoring of youngsters as an alternative to employment for the older generation. In this proposal, the experts agree with the unemployed in pointing out the practice of generative activities as an option for redefining the productivity of older people and improving their well-being in accordance with the tendency towards generativity that is typical of adult development (Serrat et al., 2017; Zacarés; Serra, 2011).

The proposals that focus on the interaction between the various generations are not limited to mentoring initiatives and the promotion of intergenerational learning. In the critical-reflective discourse of the analysed blogs it can be seen that these are committed to promoting intergenerational teams in companies, which address the problems from different generational viewpoints, a strategy that could provide older people with a way of accessing the labour market.

Among the possible strategies for accessing the labour market and remaining in employment, those aged over 45 particularly value professional competence and the qualities associated with it (responsibility, commitment, loyalty to the company...), as these are the qualities allow them to access and keep their jobs for years. Curiously, in the rest of the discourses, this aspect is either obvious or side-lined. This striking discrepancy supports the theoretical approaches suggesting that the current labour market is governed by new rules, which ignore loyalty and the bond between company and employee, since its fundamental characteristics are the dynamism, mobility and transience of labour relations (Añez, 2016; Sennett, 2006). Therefore, the new discourses generated by the media and experts conform to the current hegemonic discourse and emphasize other aspects such as orientation, qualifications, and a proactive attitude. Only the official regulations seem to reward the loyalty of the worker towards the company, giving priority to permanence in the face of dismissals. The effectiveness of this legal initiative can be brought into question, considering the unemployment figures in seniors offered by official statistics.

Career guidance, essential in the job search process for experts and very present in the discourse of the blogs, also emerged in the discourse of the unemployed with a lack of agreement between them. Whilst some criticise the lack of these services, others highlight the perceived uselessness of them. However, cases such as Atenea and Apolo recognize their relevance, particularly as a source of information on resources and opportunities, since they feel that, as stated by Climent-Rodríguez and Navarro-Abal (2016), counselling can help people to re-define their professional identity.

The most notable points of agreement between the discourses regarding strategies and recommendations that promote access to employment are that training, qualifications, a proactive attitude and self-knowledge are all advantageous (Alcoforado, 2013; Schömann, 2011; Thieme et al., 2015). Thus, older people with fewer qualifications are perceived by experts as being particularly vulnerable and having little hope of returning to the labour market.

Entrepreneurship, valued by the literature as a possibility for professional reorientation (Arráiz-Pérez et al. 2020), is the alternative to employment for that is most recommended by experts for unemployed people aged over 45. These experts also propose the need to create an entrepreneurial culture and provide training that helps people manage their own business. In Spain, this has encouraged the promotion of entrepreneurship out of necessity (Martínez; Bogino, 2015). In contrast, the cases analysed (except for Themis, who raised it remotely), reject entrepreneurship as a work option, particularly at their age, due to the risk they would have to take and the limited time that they would have left to work in order to recover their initial investment.

Another aspect that has been raised is social mobilization, which, from the view of the unemployed, was only proposed by Zeus as a tool

for protecting labour rights and improving employment opportunities. A vindictive discourse also emerges in the analysis of blogs, generating a typology of discourse contained in them, which is made up entirely of the words of the unemployed who express themselves through this medium. A medium that, for Zeus, helps to claim for, but does not replace, collective action. The press agrees to include a vindictive nuance in some of their news items, in which the senses of the language they use to refer to the elderly point in this direction. As in blogs, in all press releases with this type of discourse, the elderly unemployed play a participatory role in defining the proposals or arguments that the news presents. The media, therefore, facilitate the presence of this model of discourse, which is also included in the film *Mondays in the sun*, represented by the character Santa (Amber; Domingo, 2016). In contrast to mobilization as a tool for employment success, one of the experts speaks out and assures us that the attitude of protest is contrary to the requirements of the labour market, which demands flexibility and adaptation (Añez, 2016), and thus it can be viewed by the employer as a reason for labour exclusion, in line with the results of the study by Valdez-Montesdeoca and Tapia-Espinoza (2020), which points to age as a limiting factor from a business perspective. The official dialogues, indirectly point towards the appeasement of the social upheavals that may be undertaken by the individuals affected by unemployment. To this end, efforts seem to be aimed at encouraging individualism (Beck; Beck-Gernsheim, 2003; Sennett, 2006) and at dismantling collective actions by workers (Bernad et al., 2011). The failure of the union initiatives is clearly represented in the analysed film, which shows the unsuccessful efforts of its protagonists to defend workers' rights. The messages of resignation, implicitly hidden in the discourses, seem to bombard society. The high unemployment rates, shown by official statistics, are perceived by Zeus as a means of submission to the labour market, which has led to the acceptance of current working conditions that would at other times have been unthinkable. Some messages contained in the blogs provide new signs of submission, by pointing out the advantages and social benefits that promote dependency and precariousness, as an instrument to appease and feed the silence of the most vulnerable.

Delving into the factors that accentuate unemployment, the economic crisis dominates all discourses as the main underlying cause of the unemployment suffered by those over 45 years of age, along with other groups. In a competitive market, with few job opportunities, elderly people are perceived as particularly vulnerable, as victims of the economic situation, as is evident in the main use of language by the press when referring to them. Older people are subject to age-related discrimination, as confirmed in other studies (Arese, 2020; Gunderson, 2003; Weller, 2007; Olesya, 2020), this being a vulnerability factor that has been picked up by the media, highlighted as a barrier by the experts and, in accord with the study by Cheung et al. (2011), is something that is particularly felt by the unemployed themselves. This discrimination, which supposes a negative predisposition of the employer, manifested

in the discourse of experts and the unemployed, creates a barrier of exclusion that is difficult to overcome.

Exculpation attributed to external factors, such as the economic crisis and age-related discrimination, coexists with other perceptions that hold the subject responsible for his/or own unemployment situation. Linguistic analysis of the blogs revealed a series of aspects that are both positive (experience, talent, ability...) and negative (deficiencies, errors, excuses...) that point to the unemployed as being deserving of their own professional destiny. This position is ratified in the discourse of the press, when one of the ways in which language is used refers to them as stagnant professionals, with little motivation, low-level qualifications or being reluctant to change. Statistical figures support this trend, showing low percentages of participation of those over 45 years of age in training activities. In this line of attribution, most of the recommendations indicated by the experts for access to employment for older people focus on actions that the subject must undertake, such as improving their qualifications, generating a network of contacts, studying languages, and updating their technological skills. The opinions of the unemployed are mixed on this issue. Apollo's individualistic perspective is noteworthy, and is in line with the supportive discourse shown in the blogs, which points to the subject as the main driver of change and job opportunity. Apollo, still aware of social problems, takes charge of his professional future and sets out a path of action based on the belief that no one will do it for him. Other positions, such as those of Atlas or Zeus, do not agree with the individualism that prevails in the market and are critically opposed to it, believing that unemployment should be a social issue, and as such should not be tackled by the individual alone.

Feelings and Emotions Derived from Unemployment

With all the efforts made to appease the union of workers and to promote citizen mobilization mentioned in the previous section, it is not surprising that the most predominant feeling that is evident in the discourse of the unemployed is resignation. In times of crisis, this feeling is particularly accentuated, because as Bernad, Martínez and Molpeceres (2011, p. 37) state "[...] the situation of job instability ends up being assumed as something normal for a significant portion of the population". However, some voices among the unemployed, sometimes with the help of the media (such as blogs) dare to express their demands as a consequence of the blatant violation of their rights.

Sadness and hopelessness are also very present in the discourse of the unemployed, since the loss of a job can be a particularly painful experience (Climent-Rodríguez et al., 2019), with consequences for emotional well-being and health (Álvarez-Gálvez; Suárez-Vergne, 2020). The experts who work with them are also aware of their desolation, and this is expressed in their discourses. This emotional collapse is picked up on by the media, as is evident in the language used by the press when speaking out about older unemployed people, using words such

as hopelessness and discouragement. Even more evident is the desolation shown by the protagonists of the film *Monday in the Sun*, which from the vision of the cinema as a mirror and model (Sell et al., 2014), shows the unease of the characters in the first person, highly charged with drama, and at the same time, bitter reality.

Many of those aged over 45 admit to feeling excluded from the job market, pushed to the side and cast adrift. The feeling of exclusion that coexists with uncertainty and powerlessness in the face of a work situation leaves them on the periphery with few chances of finding a job and, in many cases, without the option of retirement. This feeling of powerlessness is reinforced by the discourses of the media that victimize people, portraying them as passive subjects at the mercy of economic and social changes, discourses that, like the voices that blame them, nullify the notions of autonomy and independence of the people involved (Caballol, 2002).

Guilt is also present in the discourse of the unemployed, although it is rarely seen explicitly and more often disguised as regret or remorse with regard to a bad decision made in the past. The blogs, in their experiential discourses, also echo this sentiment, which can be encouraged in the subjects by the social discourses that accuse them.

On rare occasions, however, hope is the only positive feeling that emerges from the discourses. Hope is usually associated with those individuals with a medium-high level of training amongst the interviewed subjects, in contrast with hopelessness, which is more evident among the discourses of the less educated. The discourse of the experts supports this trend, since among the perceptions of the older unemployed people that they include in their discourse, they only associate possibilities of reintegration with those who have a high level of expertise and professional experience, whilst those with fewer qualifications are perceived as vulnerable and without hope.

Training

The thematic complexity makes the problem unapproachable exclusively from the training framework, since this is unable to address all the aspects derived from it. In line with these approaches, some of the unemployed, such as Apolo (even after successfully securing employment following the completion of a course), state that training is not the most important thing, that many other issues intervene in the process of securing or losing employment, although they recognize that a solid foundation of prior training is essential. The acquisition of this training foundation, on which the experts insist (with the development of basic skills being the most indicated training proposal for older unemployed people), is a training need that is perceived to be of little value in the eyes of the unemployed. The majority of the unemployed interviewed do not consider the acquisition of basic skills to be necessary at their age, since they feel they have the capacities and abilities needed to carry out the profession to which they have dedicated themselves, and, in

their discourses they refer to their competence when it comes to learning, as something they have done daily in their job position and daily life based on their experiences or personal interests. Only two women point out the need to develop basic skills. Calliope refers specifically to digital skills, which she has detected as something that she lacks personally, whilst Hestia argues for this idea as something that should be associated with regulated and compulsory education, as opposed to training for employment. The training of older unemployed people is fraught with controversy. Some of the discourses question the profitability of training for the employment of these people. The experts themselves state that, particularly in times of economic crisis, in which resources are very limited, it is possible that investment in training for this group is being reduced, since they have only a few years left in the labour market to make this investment profitable, or what Zeus refers to as *getting the juice out of them*. Other informants such as Hiperión also question this issue, agreeing with Calvo (2014, p. 355) in pointing out that one of the barriers to training for this group is “[...] the apparent low economic efficiency of spending on training, both for the entrepreneur and for the employee” due to the proximity of retirement.

Another of the discussions that was raised regarding the issue of training is outlined with the words of Orfeo, who states that members of society *already consider us old*. These words are key for understanding the dynamics of the market and for the orientation of the training response for this group. Thus, the conceptions that indicate the older person as a subject with professional experience and maturity, and thus someone who can offer value to the production system and is capable of receiving training to improve their employability, coexist with those that associate the elderly with the derogatory adjective *old* (that only Orpheus dares to express, but whose pejorative connotations appear in other discourses). This colloquial term indicates them to be dispensable by the labour market and therefore supposes that the training response can move away from the employment framework and move closer to entertainment or leisure. Some experts propose offering training activities aimed at making the transition to retirement, while the unemployed interviewed close to retirement age yearn for this retirement and do not seem to need help to take this step, although they do need opportunities and facilities for managing this phase in their lives.

Various perceptions about training coexist in the discourses analysed. The media, statistical reports, regulations and experts all point to qualified training as being of value for the labour market, without which access to it is complicated. However, not all the opinions of the older informants point in this direction. Some participants, particularly those closer to retirement age, show reluctance towards such training, particularly the processes that involve comprehensive training. These participants would only be willing to accept training initiatives that serve as professional improvement, as long as these are based on their experience. This request notably disagrees with the proposals of the experts, which are more focused on comprehensive training processes

and the development of basic skills in subjects, relegating the development of skills for professional improvement to more recent proposals.

There are a variety of reasons why people choose to participate in training activities. For the unemployed interviewed here, training is secondary, since they give priority to securing a job, and training is thus viewed as a way of passing the time or having fun. In this regard, one of the experts even goes so far as to state that training can be seen as *Prozac* for the unemployed, a presumption that is confirmed in the case of Demeter, who claims to embark on training activities to escape feelings of depression and discouragement. In contrast, others like Atlas, fear that, in their unemployment situation, training could be imposed on them, interpreting this obligation as a sentence (Hohmann, 2004).

However, not all unemployed people hold this view of training. In agreement with the figures of official statistical reports, among those interviewed, women and younger people are more inclined to engage in training initiatives. The statistics also back up the idea of greater participation in training activities among those who already have a higher level of training, a consequence of the so-called Matthew Effect (Jiménez, 2009). This trend contrasts with the fact that most of the training proposals disseminated by the press are aimed at unqualified professionals, relating training to needs or deficiencies rather than progress and improvement. This compensatory perception of the training processes is shared by the experts. From the discourses of both press and experts, the idea emerges that many of the people of this age have severe educational deficiencies. This is contradicted by statistical reports, showing that less than 6% of the unemployed in this age group have not completed their primary studies and that 16.01% have completed higher education (Amber; Domingo, 2017b). At the same time, this is also refuted by the informants themselves, some of whom, like Themis, claim that the training courses for employment in which they have participated are at a level that is too low. This experience raises questions about the need to adapt initiatives to the levels of the participants involved, a proposal that is strongly emphasized by experts.

Regarding the challenges and problems that should be considered when designing training programs for the unemployed, certain similarities can be found among the discourses. One of the most notable points on which the experts and the unemployed agree concerns the importance of using a practical methodology, adapting the training to the labour market and delivering useful content. Both also point out the importance of designing a flexible training program that is tailored to the availability of the group. In the case of the unemployed, it should be noted that this proposal was put forward by the women, who claim that they must reconcile family life with training.

Increasing training opportunities is a proposal that is highly demanded by the unemployed and supported by experts. Interestingly, this can be compared with the discourse of national regulatory bodies, which boasts of giving priority to the implementation of active employment policies to the most vulnerable groups (RD 3/2011, of February

18). Such measures appear to have had little impact on the population, judging by the experiences of the informants, who report not finding training opportunities, and by the experts, who demand greater training opportunities for the unemployed. In addition, Demeter's account of the two occasions on which she was not selected to participate in a training workshop that could allow her to obtain the necessary accreditation to work outside the field of the underground economy, calls into question the priority given to those over 45 years of age in participation in training activities, due to being a group that face greater challenges in finding work (RD 694/2017, of July 3).

Among the proposals for the improvement of training aimed at older people, our unemployed informants also commented on the professional characteristics they expect from the teaching staff who deliver such training. They demand, of course, professional competence and knowledge, but they also demand a relationship that allows for the exchange of opinions and participation, that permits a discussion on the thematic areas and procedures, generating a relationship between equals, as adults and professionals, so that the boundary between teacher and student is blurred, and teachers act as mediators of knowledge, providing guidance for learning. Faced with this demand from adults, the perceptions of trainers about their mature students tend to emphasize their enthusiasm and effort when it comes to tackling the training and their willingness to improve, visions that classify them as *good students*, but do not imply the treatment between professionals that older people demand. Some of the experts stated that a greater specialization of the teaching staff is necessary to train adults that have an awareness of the challenges associated with addressing such diverse groups. However, trainers face the increasingly frequent challenge of teaching adults in establishments, groups, and with training plans designed for other generations.

Experts advocate promoting and facilitating accreditation based on professional experience, stressing that it is a matter of social justice. Although the achievement of accreditations through experience is not mentioned by the unemployed interviewed here, the younger informants refer to the accreditation of the training processes as one of their motivations for embarking on training, since they consider that certifications can open doors to employment.

The implications of this work go beyond the field of training for employment and expand into other areas and educational contexts that transcend the group itself. In this sense, experts point out the importance of educational intervention at earlier stages, which could prevent ageism. At the same time, they highlight the need for the development of a solidarity and social economy that links the education of the elderly with that of the new generations, thereby modifying the influence they exert on their offspring. These implications — which are of little importance in the media discourses — represent a point of convergence with the discourse of the older adults, particularly with regard to the need to

transform the business culture in order to reverse the negative predisposition of employers towards hiring older people.

Conclusions

The use of complex triple triangulation as a methodological design for the analysis of complex realities, has facilitated the comparison of the views and approaches present in the discourses around the problem addressed, allowing us to draw some general conclusions and questions for reflection and debate.

First, it has been emphasized that training is not the only and absolute solution to unemployment among those aged over 45. In the labour exclusion of this group, many more factors coexist, mediated by age (Salvador; Sampietro, 2020), and which go beyond the scope of the educational discipline and flow into other areas such as sociology, psychology, politics, education, and economy. Training is undoubtedly essential and it is a push that helps to stop the process of labour and social exclusion, particularly if it continues throughout life and allows for updating professional skills (Pochmann, 2012). However, as claimed by many of the informants in this study and stated by Sánchez (2009, p. 166) “The fight against social exclusion must be done through education and training, but also through paid employment”.

In turn, professional experience also generates controversies, since it can be perceived as either an obstacle or as an asset for job placement. The value traditionally placed on professional experience for access to employment is questionable for the unemployed over 45 years of age. In the current job market, a high level of work experience can be understood as an indication of inflexibility, resistance to change and a source of conflict and rebellion in the company. Experience also has an economic cost that many companies are not willing to assume (Valdez-Montesdeoca; Tapia-Espinoza, 2020).

Moreover, unemployment in this age group represents a break from their previous professional life, which affects the identity of the person and has strong emotional connotations (Climent-Rodríguez et al., 2019). The emotional plane emerges strongly in response to the unemployment situation, particularly in those people who had experienced a long and stable professional trajectory. The uncertainty associated with unemployment is contrasted with the stability that is characteristic of this stage of life (Erikson, 2000), jeopardizing an already created professional identity (Dubar, 2002). The continued personal effort that has previously been valued to progressively achieve professional achievements that feel their own and deserved, is now perceived as useless, since unemployment has deprived them of the fruits of their efforts, creating feelings of disappointment.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider the current unbridled production system, based on obtaining the maximum benefit at the lowest economic cost (Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2012). We must focus on sustain-

able economic development that pursues goals for the common good (Felber, 2012), and is helped by the strong transformative power of education from the earliest stages, with the conviction that indefinite production and consumption is not possible (nor recommended).

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Notes

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- 2 The selection of the samples used, as well as the procedures for collecting, coding and analyzing the information, were specified and defined for each specific discourse, depending on the nature of the source and the type of information collected. These data can be consulted in previous publications by the authors.
- 3 Five women and five men, whose identity is preserved by using Greek deity names as pseudonyms. Three of them had completed primary studies, five secondary education and two had completed university studies. All of them had been unemployed for more than a year.

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