Conclusions regarding life course

Dr. Nancy Konvalinka
Departamento de Antropología Social y Cultural
UNED

1- The characteristics of the life course models that people conceive to be desirable work as a *habitus*, in the sense of Bourdieu. This helps us to understand the changes that people implement in their life courses when the external conditions change.

2- The fulfillment of people’s life course expectations is affected not only by the political-economic and social conditions that they experience but by certain biological constraints and by the degree of flexibility that, culturally, is allowed in the order and duration of the life stages that make up the life course. In the case of the people who shared their lives with us in this project, an order that was conceived as quite rigid in the stages (finish school and university education, get a job, stabilize the job position, find a stable life partner, buy or rent a home, have children) combined with the lengthening of the time necessary to transit through the different stages, due, among other factors, to a difficult economic situation, leading to a notable increase in the age at the birth of the first child.

3- The distribution of care-giving responsibilities that people (and especially women) must face throughout their life courses varies noticeably when family formation is later than usual. The periods of care for small children and, once they are grown, elderly, infirm parents, are no longer distributed over a longer time period; rather, both become concentrated in a shorter period. Late-forming families cannot benefit so much from the assistance of grandparents who are much more elderly; these families often find themselves caring simultaneously for small children and elderly parents, in a context in which the sibling groups who are responsible for elder-care are much smaller in size. This creates a situation of stress due to an overload of care-giving obligations in these families.