

## Learning Lives at the ESREA Network Conference in Greece

From 2 to 5 March nearly 150 delegates from across Europe attended the annual conference of the Life History and Biography Network, part of the European Society for Research in the Education of Adults (ESREA). This year's Conference followed the Network's custom of locating in a new country each year and 2006 found the delegates as guests of the University of Thessaly at Volos in Greece. The Conference theme was *Transitional Spaces, Transitional Processes and Research*.

Several members of the Learning Lives team attended the Conference. **Ivor Goodson**, the Project



Director from Brighton University, gave a keynote address at the closing session entitled 'Curriculum and Life Politics'. He characterized current society as being an 'era of the small scale' and noted how literature and the arts tend to presage awareness of social change rather more acutely than researchers and academics. Today there is greater interest in 'life narratives' than 'grand narratives' and business, politics and the professions have increasingly adapted to stories and narratives within the personal domain. Ivor drew on Lasch to note how the private domain has been opened by late modern capitalism to 'quasi-official organised virtue', the host of teachers, advisers, therapists, counsellors

and carers ready to advise people on ways to lead a more fulfilled life. Ethnography and biographical research could prove to be simply the most recent exploitive development! Ivor warned of three dangers in life history research: that personal life stories may prove to be an *individualising device* that obscures collective circumstances; that life stories are *socially scripted*, they fulfil particular archetypes or follow established scripts, but need to be culturally located; that life history data can be too easily *decontextualised*, and need to be located within a broad historical context. Ivor proposed the notion of *narrative capital* to convey a personal and institutional quality needed for modern life. He outlined in some detail the promise and of the Learning Lives project as a means of exploring such issues empirically.

Michael Tedder  
University of Exeter  
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