

ATTITUDES ON TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN SERBIA³

Stavovi prema tranziciji u odraslost među mladima u Srbiji

APSTRAKT U radu se razmatraju stavovi o odrastanju među mladima u Srbiji. Analiza je zasnovana na multidimenzionalnom interdisciplinarnom istraživanju sprovedenom 2003. godine. Nakon objašnjenja analitičkog okvira rasprave, razmotrićemo tranziciju u odraslost na normativnom nivou, tj. stavove mladih u vezi sa odrastanjem, sa naročitim osvrtom na sledeće komponente tranzicije: osamostaljenje od porodice porekla, partnerski odnosi, brak, partnerstvo, percepcija sopstvenog delovanja. U završnom delu rada ćemo razmatrati rezultate kroz komparaciju sa nalazima nekih istraživanja tranzicije u odraslost, sa fokusom na obeležja odraslosti, u zapadnoevropskim i post-socijalističkim zemljama u regionu.

KLJUČNE REČI mladi, stavovi, tranzicija u odraslost, Srbija

ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to explore the attitudes on transition to adulthood among young people in Serbia. The empirical basis of our analysis was a multidimensional study carried out by an interdisciplinary team of experts and organized by the Center for

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*Policy Studies from Belgrade*⁴. After outlining the analytical framework for youth transition on the normative level, we intend to analyze the attitudes of young people concerning adulthood with special reference to family transitions: independence from the family of origin, partner relationships, marriage, parenthood, as well as perceptions of their agency in transition to adulthood. In the concluding part, we will interpret the findings by comparison with the trends outlined in studies of young people from some Western and post-socialist countries in the region.

KEY WORDS young people, attitudes, transition to adulthood, Serbia

Framework

Transition to adulthood

The concept of *life course transition* has become rather questionable in recent academic discussions. It applies to all sorts of transitions over a lifetime: transition to adulthood, transition to late-life etc. Since defining transition to adulthood has become very difficult, it is the most indicative phenomenon in respect of life course transitions. Thus, various definitions are in use and consequently many operationalizations of the concept are applied in research.

There is a body of empirical work that has documented a change of values in Western culture over time, identifying a “culture shift” from material to post-material values (Inglehart 1990). It has coincided with changing patterns of employment, family formation and gender identities.

The predominant analytical framework through which these changes are explored and interpreted lies within the individualization thesis, which stresses three main aspects of the individualization process. One of the main consequences of processes of detraditionalization is that structural factors (class, gender, ethnicity, etc.) cease to be determinants for the individual in pursuing the late modernity imperative of “living life of one’s own” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 26). Consequently, life becomes a “planned project” (Beck-Gernsheim 2002), while “choice biography” replaces “normal (or standard) biography”: earlier standard life-

⁴ The study is the first comprehensive piece of research on youth in Serbia since 1988. Launched by the private research agency Centar za Proucavanje Alternativa - Center for Policy Studies (CPA/CPS) from Belgrade together with the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia and funded by a consortium of NGOs, the study was intended to provide foundations for national youth policy strategy. Therefore, it involved a team of 11 experts who covered several topics such as: political socialization; family transition; value orientations; ethnocentrism; proactive capacities; political culture; cultural habitus; risk behavior; work strategies (CPA/CPS, 2004).

course sequences cannot be taken for granted anymore, and the individual's life becomes less predictable. Inevitably a "life of one's own is a reflexive life" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 26); individual biographies become "self-reflexive" and "self-determined", and self becomes a "do-it-yourself" project (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

This generation of young people is considered to be the first to live the post-modern shift, and as such a suitable object of study (Wyn and Dwyer 1999; Du Bois Reymond 1998; Chisholm et al. 1990). Following the broad social shift in societies of late modernity, traditional patterns of transitions to adulthood have either disappeared or become fragmented and extended, making relationships to adulthood ambiguous for young people. Destandardization of life courses of young people has challenged the notion of "normal adult biography".

Destandardized, individualized and detraditionalized life courses of young people posed the challenge to sociology to capture this turn (Wyn and Dwyer 1999; Chisholm et al. 1990; Du Bois Reymond 1998; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; EGRIS 2001; Brannen et al. 2002; Thomson et al. 2004). In order to respond to the increased complexity and ambiguity of youth transitions, the concepts of "post-adolescence" (Du Bois Reymond 1998; Galland 2001) and "young adults" (Jones and Wallace 1992; Jones 1995; Kugelberg 2000; EGRIS 2001) have been introduced.

The comparative analysis of some Eastern and Western European countries shows that age-status transitions were strongly standardized under communist modernization, and that the main events of transition to adulthood took place in more predictable ways than in Western Europe (Wallace and Kovatcheva 1998: 131). The standard "socialist" trajectory: finishing education – employment – marriage – leaving parents' household – childbirth, characterized the socialist period in Serbia too.

Specific features mark youth transitions in transitional societies in post-socialist countries of Central and East Europe, such as a great flexibilization in patterns of transitions: from school to work, family transitions, housing and lifestyle transitions. That, according to some authors, has led to greater diversity and individualization (Kovacheva 2001: 21). While they are facing the influences of features common to societies of late modernity such as globalization, individualization and underemployment, young people from post-socialist countries are facing specific risks of transitional societies: mass impoverishment, housing shortage, educational decline, depopulation, "criminalization", etc. Kovacheva argues that "their 'reflexive biographies' are created amidst greater risks and insecurity than those of their Western counterparts" (ibid: 22). She sees the advantage for young people from CEE countries in the fact that they consider their

youth as “transitional” in a “transitional” society, thereby orienting themselves to more flexible strategies and having higher hopes for the future.

Our study of young people’s transition in Serbia documented that even the most basic marker of transition – gaining independence from parents, is fairly undeveloped (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic 2004; 2006). Structural features, notably those that are contextual, still have a considerable impact on shaping young people’s biographies. The implications of turbulent and radical macro-level changes are overwhelming for young people who are among the most vulnerable social groups. The mutually reinforced constraints stemming from the context of blocked transformation and the cultural patterns of infantilization and retraditionalization become dominant in terms of unifying young people’s transition. This means that the significance of education, gender, and other stratification determinants has been reduced. Consequently, there is a highly standardized form of transition to adulthood, both in terms of the timing and the order of life events: the biographies of young people who have experienced key life events have the standard form, while those events take place over a short period of time (ibid. 283).

Perceptions and markers of adulthood

Transition to adulthood comprises variety of milestones/markers pertaining to changes over life course in different domains of life change (e.g. family, career, residential arrangements). However, the scope and number of milestones as well as age limits are highly divisive issues. Namely, within the structural context of late modernity it becomes increasingly unclear what defines an adult and around what markers adulthood is constructed.

A provisional categorization of multifold conceptualizations of youth transitions encompasses notions such as life concepts (Du Bois Reymond 1998), biographies (Furlong and Cartmel 1997), orientations to time (Brannen and Nilsen 2002), to adulthood (EGRIS 2001) etc. Studies that are mostly based on qualitative analyses of material gained from interviews and focus group interviews distinguish different models of transition to adulthood⁵.

⁵ Thus, for instance, based on findings from their longitudinal qualitative study of young people in the Netherlands, Du Bois Reymond (1998) detected five models of what she calls “part projects” of young people in conceptualizing adulthood: “the ‘gaining time – variety of options’ life project”; “the ‘profession in connection with developing one’s own personality’ life project”; “the ‘professional future’ life project – being flexible”; “the ‘partnership, family and job: an open future’ life project”; “the ‘growing up: a little, later or never’ life project”. In a similar way, by relating young people’s accounts from focus group interviews in the UK and Norway on their views on the future with the concept of time orientations, Brannen and Nilsen (2002) distinguished three ideal typical models: “the model of deferment: living in present – keeping the future at bay” (or

Uncertainty of the future as the prominent feature of “risk society” has a considerable impact on young people’s perception of adulthood and transition to adulthood. Having in mind the so-called “status inconsistency”⁶, i. e. that young people could be for instance economically independent but still in education, or economically independent but not wanting to marry (“old bachelors”) or not having children, some authors suggest distinction between social (objective) and individual (subjective) transition – as seen by young people themselves (Westberg 2004).

Not having aimed at constructing the models of transition, Thomson and Holland and their associates, in their longitudinal qualitative study of transition to adulthood that was carried out in five sites in the UK, wanted to take account of young people's construction of their own versions of adulthood (Thomson and Holland 2002; 2004; Thomson et al. 2004). They found out that “although many of the markers of adulthood are fragmented and contested, parenthood and an 'independent' home appear to be at the center of most young people's understandings of adulthood” (Thomson and Holland 2004: 22)⁷. Also, there was little evidence of detraditionalized models of adulthood. Analysis of the individual interviews and particularly the extracts based on the so-called “lifeline” methodological tool⁸ revealed the most striking normative pattern that emerged in the area of personal lives and relationships. Namely, almost all of the young people in their study expected to be married or in a steady life-in relationship and with children by the age of 35, most expecting marriage (Thomson and Holland 2002). At the same time, this very common normative model of settling down was expected to be reached in different ways, which are classed and gendered.

They also found structural differences among young people in their definition of adult identities. Where they are economically dependent on parents (associated with prolonged, either vocational or higher education), they tend to associate their identities with youth lifestyles⁹, consumption and social life. Where young people go straight from school to work, they tend to invest into more traditional aspects of adult identity, such as increasing responsibilities. They found tensions between an

“extended present”); “the model of adaptability: a contingency mentality”; and “the model of predictability: striving in the long term for security”.

⁶ Hurrelmann, K. (1989) “The social world of adolescents: a sociological perspective”, in: Hurrelmann, K. and U. Engel, eds. *The Social World of Adolescents. International Perspectives*, Berlin: de Gruyter; quoted in Westberg 2004.

⁷ The significance of parenthood as an uncontroversial and irreversible marker of adulthood is documented in the survey among young people in Sweden (Westberg 2004).

⁸ “Lifeline“ is a methodological tool designed to grasp young people’s aspirations, expectations and plans for the future. Respondents are asked to predict their situations on a number of discrete elements (e.g. housing, education, work, relationships) in certain time (e.g. in three years' time or when they are at certain age - Thomson and Holland, 2004: 17)

⁹ in Brannen and Nilsen terms “the model of deferment” or “extended present”, 2002: 520

individualized model of adulthood in which young people stress their feelings of maturity and autonomy and a socialized (relational) model of adulthood in which young people stress responsibilities of care for others (Thomson and Holland 2004: 23).

These findings correspond to the concepts of synchronized and unsynchronized youth introduced by Mirjana Ule in her comparative analysis of young people in Slovenia¹⁰. The first one is related to the traditional type of synchronized and coordinated attainment of economic independence, permanent employment and family formation, while the other type is marked by temporarily less synchronized and substantially less coordinated attainment of “adult social roles” (Ule 1986: 102). On the normative level, these patterns of transition to adulthood are related to two different concepts of youth. Young people experiencing the synchronized pattern of youth transition incline towards adult-centered concept of youth: they are oriented to becoming adults and taking over the roles related to adulthood. On the other hand, young people experiencing the unsynchronized pattern of youth transition incline towards youth-centered concept of youth: they are oriented to maintaining the youth status as long as possible and postponing and dismissing taking over the roles related to adulthood. Her research findings documented that biological (the end of puberty) and traditional (e.g. marriage) markers of adulthood lose their significance while being replaced by economic independence as a marker of greater importance (ibid: 106).

Ilišin and Radin (2002) came to similar conclusions when they detected some trends towards unsynchronized youth in their study that compared two surveys (from 1986 and 1999) of young people in Croatia. Nevertheless, they also detected polarization between adult-centered and youth-centered concepts among young people in Croatia unlike young people from other countries (e.g. Slovenia) who incline towards youth-centered concept of youth (Ilišin and Radin 2002: 32 ff). In combination with detected acceptance of paternalism and relative pessimism towards future, these findings led the authors to conclusion that “...Croatian society is still marked by traditional attitudes – including particularly evident patriarchalism and paternalistic relations towards young people – and considerable modernization is yet to follow” (ibid: 44).

The focus of earlier studies of young people in Serbia was mostly on value orientations in general. The attitudes and perception of (transition to) adulthood have not been explored so far in Serbia (as well as transition as such). The rare exception is research on attitudes on particular domains of adulthood, such as marriage and parenthood (Blagojević 1988; 1993a; 1993b). Since we explored the transition to

¹⁰ Galland also refers to desynchronization of path to adulthood in his study of young people in France (Galland 2001)

adulthood in detail in the CPA survey (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic 2004; 2006), it is our intention in this article to set, by using data available from that survey, an explanatory basis for the future in-depth study on young people's constructions of adulthood.

Methodology

The survey we are referring to was carried out on the territory of Serbia in June 2003. The research design was based on a quota sample of 3180 young people aged between 17 and 35. The quotas were set for age, gender and employment status (students in secondary schools, university students, the unemployed and employed). Bearing in mind the social context and its profound impact on young people's lives, our research team decided to extend the sample of young people to 35 years of age¹¹. Interviews based on a complex multidimensional questionnaire were used as a method of data collection.

For analytical purposes of understanding the process of transition to adulthood, we divided the sample into three age groups: younger (17 – 24: 55%), middle (25 – 30: 24%) and older (31 – 35: 21%)¹².

In two earlier papers (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic 2004; 2006), we aimed at understanding the practical side of transition (timings, synchronization of life events, etc.), and we used median ages of passing the life events (such as getting married, getting a job, etc.) as statistical measures. The emphasis of our elaboration was predominantly on respondents who passed through their transitional path and not on those who were postponing their transition (op.cit.).

In this paper, all respondents are included in analysis because we intend to deal with attitudes on becoming an adult. However, the reflexive part of young people's transition to adulthood was not examined as a specific subject per se, but rather in an indirect way. For this reason their perception of transition to adulthood will be presented as a provisional model consisting of respondents' attitudes on key aspects of entering adulthood: partnership, marriage, parenthood, gaining independence from their family of origin, and finally, perception of their own agency. Five sets of items were examined as determining points of young people's notion of adulthood. It is noticeable that four categories of markers pertain directly to family transition (becoming independent from family of origin, partnership,

¹¹ While the UN recommends that the concept be "youth" is used for persons under 30 in transitional societies.

¹² Since the age stratum 30/31 was omitted from the sample, the age groups are not equally distributed, which, to certain degree, distorts the analysis.

parenthood, marriage/cohabitation). This choice of variables proved to be justified in our previous study (op.cit.). The prior research findings of young people's transition in practice confirmed that family transition remained the focal point of entering adulthood in general.

Results

Gaining independence from the family of origin as a marker of adulthood

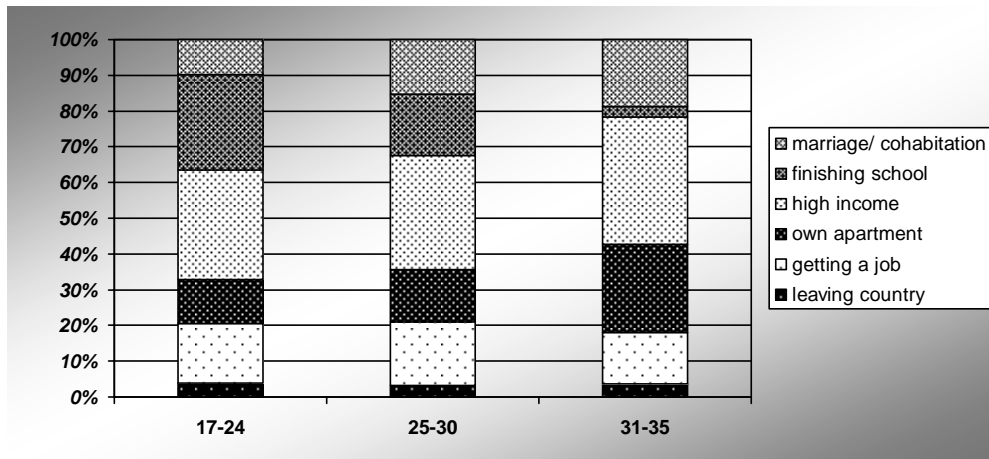
By this set of items we tackled respondents' attitudes towards the key breaking moment of transition, that of leaving the family of origin. Our aim was to reveal the very idea of changing one's family status, as well as respondents' perception of prerequisites and motivation for such change. Only the objective signs (markers) of status change were taken into account, such as moving from family home, becoming financially independent etc.

Table 1. Preconditions for gaining independence from parents by age (%)

	leaving country	getting a job	own apartment	high income	finishing education	marriage/cohabitation	TOTAL
17-24	3.9	16.6	12.4	30.5	26.8	9.8	100
25-30	3.2	17.9	14.5	32.2	17.0	15.4	100
31-35	3.6	14.4	24.7	35.5	3.1	18.7	100

$$\chi^2 = 225.856, C=0.260, p=0.000$$

As evident from the Table 1 and Graph 1, one third of young people in all age groups cited "good income" as the most important precondition for gaining autonomy from parents, and its relative significance increases with respondent's age. "Finishing education" decreases expectedly with age, while "having own place to live" increases significantly in the oldest age group. This distribution reflects an objective reality: 77% of younger (17-24), 64% of middle (25-30) and 41% of older (31-35) respondents live in their parents' home. Also, half of young families of orientation live in joint households with their parents, while the majority of unmarried young people live with their parents even in the oldest age group (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic 2004; 2006).

Graph 1. Preconditions for gaining independence from parents by age (%)

Young people from all three generations underline “marriage”/“living with a partner” as an important prerequisite for autonomy (the older the respondents, the strongest their affiliation to marriage and cohabitation). Family transition is perceived as a precondition (or a marker) of independence (almost 20% of aged 31-35 opted for it) which corresponds to previously examined practical aspect of entering adulthood.

Having noted differences in perceptions among cohorts, we have come to conclusion that there are *structural* prerequisites and *situational (specific)* ones. “Finishing education”, “having own apartment”, and “marriage/cohabitation” are highly related to age. On the contrary, all generations are preoccupied with “getting a job”, “high income”, and “leaving the country”.

Table 2. Preconditions for gaining independence from parents by age and gender (%)

age/ precondition		leaving country	getting a job	own apartment	high income	finishing school	marriage/ cohabitation	TOTAL
17-24*	women	2.2	16.4	12.2	25.9	30.8	12.5	100
	men	5.7	16.9	12.7	35.3	22.5	7.0	100
25-30**	women	0.5	17.2	12.6	26.6	20.2	22.8	100
	men	5.7	18.3	16.2	37.6	13.9	8.2	100
31-35***	women	3.9	16.1	15.8	37.2	3.3	23.7	100
	men	3.2	12.9	32.7	33.9	2.9	14.3	100

* $\chi^2 = 49.923$; $C = 0.169$; $p = 0.000$

** $\chi^2 = 5.488$; $C = 0.261$; $p = 0.000$

*** $\chi^2 = 28.186$; $C = 0.204$; $p = 0.000$

As evident from Table 2, men and women have very similar perceptions of preconditions for becoming independent, though women differ from men in their attitude on marriage/cohabitation as precondition of independence (17% of women and 9% of men chose the above option). On the other hand, men are more likely to opt for “high income” (28% of women and 36% of men) and “own apartment” (13% of women and 18% of men). The gap between women and men increases with age, and differences are least gendered in the youngest age group.

Obstacles in gaining autonomy are internalized in the sense that young people undervalue its importance (by “making virtue of necessity”)¹³. Thus, in the older age groups (25-35), 16% of respondents state that autonomy is not “that important” at the moment. It is not surprising that one third of young people attach autonomy to prior fulfilment of certain conditions, and most of them relate to some structural constraints. In the middle age group (25-30), only one sixth of respondents consider themselves completely independent, since most of them are financially dependent on their parents and live in the parental home. It is surprising that just over a half of older respondents (31-35) consider themselves completely independent - even though they are financially independent, 40% of them do not have place to live on their own.

We find it interesting that only 64% of married and 31% of divorced young people consider themselves completely independent from their parents. On the one hand, this indicates that if the basic condition for gaining independence – one's own housing – is not achieved, a young person will not have the feeling of autonomy from their family of origin. On the other hand, it points to the presence of strong and durable ties between two types of families: networks of help and support that characterize the cultural circle of South-East Europe and prevent young people from ever feeling fully autonomous from their parents.

A strong proactive orientation towards autonomy (the option “I consider that to be very important and act upon it”) was given by a fourth of respondents. It is more prominent among the middle age group (34%) than among the younger (27%), who are awaiting the conditions for independence, or among the older (18%), who have already achieved a certain level of autonomy.

While the majority of young people are favourable of the idea of independent single life before marriage/cohabitation, there is one quarter of respondents (increasing with age) who dismiss it. There are many possible reasons for that: fear of solitude, traditional pattern of gaining independence through transition to family of orientation, and finally, they might be rationalizing the reality which does not

¹³ See S.Tomanovic and S.Ignjatovic (2004; 2006) on pace of gaining independence: young people in Serbia become independent much later than young Europeans, for cultural, social and psychological reasons.

offer easy solutions for a single life. Housing difficulties and low income make that option far more uncomfortable in comparison to a cosy prolonged post-adolescent life in the "family nest". The "costs" of uncertain and demanding single life put them off the idea of living alone.

Partner relationships, marriage and parenthood as markers of adulthood

Several indicators suggest that young people in Serbia link transition to adulthood (gaining independence) with partnership and family formation, rather than with living an independent life-style. Almost one fifth of them cited marriage/pregnancy as preconditions for the beginning of joint life with a partner (increasing with age)¹⁴. The other prerequisites for starting to live with a partner are almost the same as those at the "gaining independence from parents" variable: good income, job, and a place to live.

Realted to the issue, it is worth noting that the attitude towards cohabitation is relatively positive: 78% of the young people would live with their partner before marriage. However, there is a significant discrepancy between norms and practice, since only between 2% and 3% of our respondents (depending on age) are actually cohabiting with their partner.

Overlapping between transition to adulthood and transition to one's own family corresponds to respondents' *motivation for starting a family*. Incentives for passing that milestone of transition stem from variety of sources, though 43% of young people perceive family formation as an indicator of maturity ("that is a sign of being an adult"). The next listed reason, avoiding loneliness ("don't want to live alone") was opted for by a third of the sample. In comparison with attitudes on "gaining independence from parents", age-based differences at young people's motivation for starting a family are slightly less pronounced. As to family status, those who have started their own families have similar attitudes as those who have not, except for the group of those living in single households (they are significantly less in favour of starting a family as a "sign of maturity").

Respondents' attitudes on parenthood and transition to adulthood are quite similar. The majority of respondents (62%) see parenthood as one of important things in life, while a fifth consider it to be the most important one. As for planning of childbearing, among the respondents with no children, it was the age of 30 that was the most frequently mentioned age to have children (one fourth of them). Most of the responses, regardless of respondent's age, concentrate between ages 25 to 30 (except for the oldest age group who plan to have children between 34 and 38). Both

¹⁴ That is the "solid" traditionally oriented part of the sample.

practical and normative levels point to the trend of postponement of childbirth, especially among the highly educated young people. It should be noted that demographic data correspond to the wishful age. The average age at first marriage was 29.7 for men and 25.7 for women in 2004, while the average age at first childbirth for women was 25.9 (Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia 2006).

The most mentioned optimal conditions for becoming a parent were: one's own place of residence (81%), high monthly income (68%) and a steady job (54%)¹⁵. As the first rank of significance the young people stated one's own place of residence, high monthly income and a steady job, and as the second rank they stated the first two conditions. As the third rank they stated, beside the mentioned, also availability of institutionalized childcare, and help from their parents. There are no significant differences related to age or parental status of respondents.

The findings indicate an extremely traditional pattern of formation of the family of orientation, which is marked by merged and inseparable categories of partnership and parenthood. Normative and practical equalization of partnership, marriage and parenthood indicates the strong influence of the dominant socio-cultural model, which works behind the scenes of socio-economic crisis in Serbian society.

Perception of one's own agency as a marker of adulthood

The *agency* was operationalized through the following variables: perception of social and personal context, young people's plans (life project), and capacities to change their lives.

The destruction of society is accompanied by a pronounced and constant feeling of insecurity and existential risk. The data from our study portray a rather gloomy picture concerning the dominant feelings towards the life of the individual and family life in the nineties: 27% of young people admitted to a "feeling of deprivation", 25% to a "feeling of fear and worry" and 21% to a "feeling of helplessness and uncertainty". These were followed by "do not know" response - 20%, while only 5.5% of young people choose the option "feeling of security and pleasure" (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2004: 47). Related to age, the only positive option "feeling of security and pleasure" decreases with the increase of respondent's age. The option "deprivation" is equally distributed in all age groups. Options "fear and worry" and "helplessness and uncertainty" increase with age. There is a difference between young people who are parents and those who are not: the former opted more for "helplessness and uncertainty" option. Parenthood presupposes care,

¹⁵ Adds up to over 100% because respondents could choose more than one option.

implicit responsibility for others, and different perception of risk (related to the other – the child and the group – the family).

One half of respondents consider their lives as “average” and one third estimate it as “good”. Only 10% of young people find it “bad”. There are no differences among them according to criteria of age, family type, marital status and parenthood.

As regards personal fulfilment, 42% said that they were mostly satisfied with personal life, and 26% they were not satisfied at all. Only 7% of respondents are completely satisfied. Older respondents are more satisfied with their personal life. Changing one’s family status usually corresponds with age, so we hypothesized that starting a family or changing the family status (including cohabitation) has the strongest influence on someone’s personal fulfilment. It proved to be an accurate assumption since those who have started their own families are more satisfied in comparison to those who have not (18% vs. 4%). Cohabitation (as a form of changing the family status) is correlated with higher satisfaction, too. As expected, the divorced are more likely to be unhappy with their current private life, which confirms the thesis of successful and stable “settling down” as an important factor of personal fulfilment. Parenthood is also related to satisfaction in private domain. There are some striking differences between parents and those without children: the former are more likely to be completely satisfied with their personal life (17%) and the latter are more likely to be completely dissatisfied (29%). It is evident that parenthood is usually the focal point in the life projects of young people (regardless of age) and therefore it is an important factor of personal fulfilment.

Respondents are more critical and demanding as to their professional life (and consequently far more unsatisfied in comparison with private domain). The structure of answers is as follows: 38% “mostly”, 31% “not at all”, 25% “fairly”, 25% “completely” satisfied. The middle generation (25-30) seems to be the most dissatisfied with professional development (comparing to others almost 38% of them are not satisfied at all). Being in the life stage called “from education to work”, they face variety of problems: unemployment, changing a career path etc. Therefore they might be under high pressure to fulfil their plans and expectations. Distribution according to occupation shows that professionals and students are the most satisfied group in regard to career/professional fulfilment.

Analysis of respondents’ perception of their own present life and prospects for the future (both personal and future of the society) reveals differences among cohorts (Tables 3 and Table 4). As to respondents’ attitudes on their own future, there is a marginal (but statistically significant) diversity across the sample. On the contrary, there is no variation as regards their opinion on the future trajectory of Serbian society.

Table 3. Expectations about respondent's own future by age (%)

	pessimist	average	optimist	TOTAL
17-24	3.9	15.7	80.4	100
25-30	4.3	20.3	75.3	100
31-35	5.4	26.7	68.0	100
AVERAGE	4.3	19.1	76.6	100

Table 4. Expectations about future of the society by age (%)

	pessimist	average	optimist	TOTAL
17-24	12.6	29.7	57.6	100
25-30	13.0	33.5	53.6	100
31-35	13.1	31.1	55.9	100
AVERAGE	12.8	30.9	56.3	100

The so-called “exit strategy” was examined as an indicator of extreme form of pro-active orientation. We explored if there was a discrepancy between normative level and practice. The data indicate that between 42% (CPA/CPS 2004) and over 50% (Mojic 2004) of young people chose “emigration” as part of their supposed plans for the future. Of course, only a small minority of them are willing to undertake such an endeavor (10% on average are working on it). As expected, respondents are more likely to choose “I don't want to leave Serbia“ option when they are satisfied with their achievements. However, dissatisfaction does not turn people into active agents. Curiously enough, young people's readiness to take initiative does not stem from their perception of presence/future of the society or their own presence/future: percentages of pro-active “pessimists” and “optimists” are quite similar. It applies to personal/career fulfilment, too.

From the perspective of transition to adulthood, 2% of women and 5% of men see emigration as a precondition for gaining independence from their parents (6% of women and 11% of men are working on their plan to leave the country). Marital status seems to make respondents more passive, since one half of the married responded “I don't want to leave Serbia”.

Discussion

In the conclusion of their study, Thomson and associates, point to the paradox that while in practice there is some evidence of change, diversity and detraditionalization, aspirations of young people are still shaped, or constrained by a resilient normative model of adulthood - “settling down” (Thomson and Holland, 2002).

In the case of young people in Serbia, there is no discrepancy between normative and practical level in transition to adulthood. “Settling down” is not seen as the end of a personal trajectory of independent life-style based on combination of education, work and leisure, but rather as a prerequisite of transition to adulthood. Our findings indicate that family transition remained the crucial aspect of transition to adulthood. Young people perceive family transition as the most reliable indicator of entering adulthood. More specifically, traditional markers of family transition are considered to be necessary preconditions for independence (and consequently adulthood) – both on normative and practical levels. *Getting married* (marriage is a traditional substitute for partnership which is not recognized as a relationship per se) *and becoming a parent* are key manifestations of adulthood. All other dimensions of transition, such as educational and career transformation, are usually perceived as prerequisites for transition in family life, which is seen as the central point of transition in general. Therefore, family formation could be considered as a kind of a “strategy” in transition to adulthood. This pattern is opposite to European trend, where independence from family of origin does not immediately imply starting one's own family (Heath 1999).

Putting the emphasis on family and parenthood as markers of adulthood is a manifestation of the pattern that Thomson and Holland (2004) called *socialized (relational) model of adulthood* – stressing responsibilities of care for others. As our findings have indicated, it is congruent with the prevailing *adult-centered conception of youth*. Our previous study has documented the highly synchronized (although postponed) youth transition, which historically precedes the current tendency of de-synchronization of transitional markers such as marriage, employment, leaving home (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic 2004; 2006). In that respect, young people in Serbia resemble more to their counterparts in Croatia (Ilišin and Radin 2002) than those in Slovenia (Ule 1986) and other countries in the West.

As far as the agency issue is concerned, further similarities with young people in Croatia emerge. Beside detected high level of acceptance of paternalism that we have documented in our previous study (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic 2004; 2006), there is also relative pessimism in perceiving the future. As our findings indicate, though, dissatisfaction is not an incentive for a more pro-active orientation.

Generally, by perceiving structural constraints as inhibiting on the individual level (as they do not feel able to take charge of their own lives), most young people in Serbia express little self-determination in creating their biographies. The paternalistic cultural pattern of growing up limits young person's capacity for taking greater control and responsibilities for their own life (a kind of infantilization) and thus generates inhibiting effects on young people agency in transition to adulthood.

It is our hypothesis, yet to be explored, that structurally and culturally inhibited agency leads a young person to accept the traditional, adult-centered

concept of youth and socialized (relational) concept of adulthood, by which adulthood is achieved mainly through taking responsibilities of care for others and not through living an independent life-style.

The above analysis of transitional patterns among young people in Serbia (by generation, education and social status) provided a general image of desirable, acceptable and, above all, feasible way to adulthood from the point of view of young people aged 17-35. A rather wide span of comparison (three generations) was an asset in the study of young people in Serbia. Namely, young people were growing up in a social turmoil, and the choice of a three-generation model was aimed at grasping diachronic dimension, encompassing at the same time, different periods of social transformation. Thus we tried to grasp the phenomenon of double transition: transitional paths of individuals and transition of society at large.

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