

# I. SOCIOLOGIJA, SOCIALINĖ POLITIKA, TEISĖ

## TIMING OF TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD IN LITHUANIA: THE EXPERIENCE OF FOUR COHORTS

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of the research is to examine the changes in the timing of transition to adulthood in the biographies of four Lithuanian birth cohorts. Five important trajectories—formal markers of transition to adulthood—are discussed: leaving the parental home, finishing formal education, starting first job, first partnership and giving birth to first child. The timing of these events in course of life is different for subsequent generations. Changes in timing are determined by a combination of different factors: personal preferences, socio-cultural norms and socio-political context. Based on contemporary theories of life course (Elder, Johnson, 2001; Settersten et al, 2005; Elder et al, 2006; Macmillan, 2005), quantitative research method and inter-cohort dimension are applied. Data from the project “Trajectories of Family Model and the Social Networks: Intergenerational Perspective” (Famo-Socnet) are used to provide analysis of cohort trajectories indicating persons’ movement into adulthood. Data of cohorts born in 1950-1955, 1960-1965, 1970-1975, and 1980-1985, with each represented by 500 respondents, is used. Findings indicate a new, delayed and protracted, trend of transition into adulthood for the cohort (born in 1980-85) approaching adulthood in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

**Keywords:** *life course, timing of transition to adulthood, cohorts, Lithuania.*

## Introduction

Transition to adulthood is conceived as a multidimensional process. There are some commonly agreed formal markers of transition into adulthood: leaving the parental home, finishing formal education, starting first job, first partnership and giving birth to first child (Corijn, Klijzing, 2001; Mikulioniene, 2000; Kraniauskiene, 2011). The timing of these events in the course of life is different for subsequent cohorts (Fussell, Gauthier, Evans, 2007; Mikulioniene, 2000; Kraniauskiene, 2011). Changes in timing are determined by a combination of different factors: personal preferences, socio-cultural norms and socio-political context (Macmillan, 2005; Alwin, McCammon, 2006). During the last decades Lithuania has experienced enormous multifaceted changes brought on by the transition period. Uncertainty about trajectories of economic and social developments in the country became a distinctive feature of Lithuania, affecting the life chances and opportunities of young people making the transition into adulthood. Researchers worldwide record that compared to past generations, it takes longer for youth today to attain various markers of adult status (Smith, 2004; Das Dores Guerreiro, Abrantes, 2004; Lloyd, 2005; Shulman, Blatt, Walsh, 2006; Xenos et al, 2006; Rankin, Kenyon, 2008; Côté, Bynner, 2008; Vieira, Gamundi, 2010; Furstenberg, 2010; Billari, Liefbroer, 2010; Settersten, Ray, 2010). This protracted period of transition to adulthood has implications for their life courses, for the sustainable development of society. New social inventions to address the delayed transition to adulthood are called for.

The aim of the research is to examine the changes in the timing of transition to adulthood in the biographies of four Lithuanian birth cohorts. Five important trajectories—formal markers of transition to adulthood—are discussed: leaving the parental home, finishing formal education, starting first job, first partnership and giving birth to first child. The article is composed of three sections. The first part is devoted to the presentation of a theoretical background, data and research methodology. In the second section the inter-cohort comparison of timing of transitional life events and changes in duration of transition into adulthood are revealed. The third one discloses the recent trends in social statuses related to transition to adulthood in Lithuania. The article is closed by conclusions and the bibliography.

### 1. Theoretical Background, Data and Methodology

**Theoretical background.** Despite J.J. Arnett's (2000; 2004) arguments that in today's society there is no unanimous agreement on universal markers (roles, statuses) of adulthood, and a subjective psychological feeling of a person's mature age is crucial, the author was criticized (Côté, Bynner, 2008; Hendry, Cloep, 2010) and research on transition into adulthood was continuously elaborated (Shanahan, 2000; Corijn, Klijzing, 2001; Grant, Furstenberg, 2007; Billari, Liefbroer, 2010; Robette, 2010). Measure-

ment of transition to adulthood in surveys is limited to the relatively objective and observable events that make up the framework of the transition. Conventionally these include leaving school, initiation into formal work experience, leaving the parental household, first marital union, and first child's birth. Some researchers suppose it important to add to this list so-called non-formal life events (smoking, alcohol drinking, drug use, etc.) and/or life events reflecting a person's physical maturation, and/or of boy/girl initiation rituals (Xenos et al, 2006).

Using sociological terms these life events could be defined as role transitions (Rankin, Kenyon, 2008). Also some research results showed that people place different importance on role transition markers (Rankin, Kenyon, 2008), role transitions could still be important markers of a new social status, namely, adulthood (Kenyon et al, 2007; Molgat, 2007). In this study, the five most important formal markers of transition to adulthood are discussed: completion of formal education—the role transition fixed is: studying—not studying; starting first job—the role transition fixed is: isn't working—working; leaving the parental home—the role transition fixed is: living in a shared household with at least one parent—leaving the parental; getting married—the role transition fixed is: not married—married; and finally, having at least one child—the role transition fixed is: having no children—having at least one child.

**Data.** Based on contemporary theories of life course (Elder, Johnson, 2001; Settersten et al, 2005; Elder et al, 2006; Macmillan, 2005), the quantitative cross-sectional research method and inter-cohort dimension are applied (Alwin, McCammon, 2006). Data for the research comes from the project "Trajectories of Family Model and the Social Networks: Intergenerational Perspective," which is supported by the European Social Fund (project code No. VP1-3.1-ŠMM-07-K-01-106).<sup>1</sup>

Characteristics of the sample are as follows: N=2000, random stratified sampling is applied, nationally representative sample of population born in 1950-1955, 1960-1965, 1970-1975, and 1980-1985 (set of four birth cohorts); time of field work: November 2011–May 2012. Characteristics of research instrument: questionnaire (more than 100 questions). The database allows a detailed examination of social processes of male and female transition into adulthood in Lithuania. The research design was developed in cooperation with colleagues from Portugal (Institute of Social Sciences at University of Lisbon, ICS-UL) and Switzerland (Universities of Geneva and Lausanne, UNIGE and UNIL). In later stages of analysis this will allow introducing a comparative dimension into the survey.

**Methodology applied.** In the study, cohort analysis was used. To measure inter-cohort differences in experiencing core transitional life events, there are plans to perform a complex analysis in the future. At the very first stage, the mean age at separate life events, related to transition to adulthood, was calculated taking into account variables of age (cohorts) and gender (male, female). The timing of five life events is

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1 The questionnaire survey followed the key ethical principles of sociological research—voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The potential respondents were fully informed about the interview procedures and the main goals of investigation, they gave personal consent to participate.

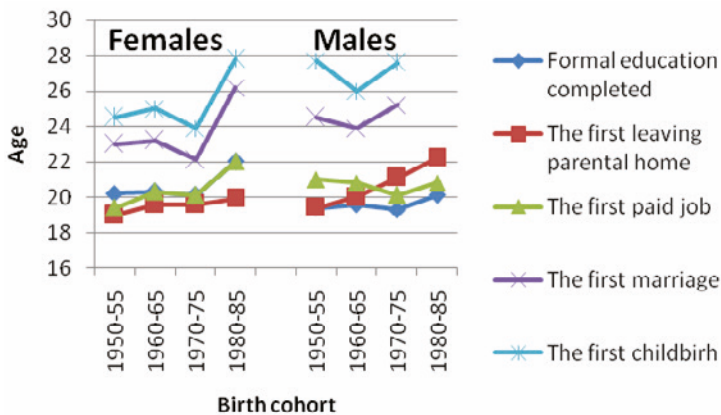
examined: leaving first the parental home; first employment; first exit from formal education; first marriage and first child born. The timing of transitional events was calculated for four birth cohorts of males and females.

This analysis involved quantitative measures of mentioned life events—the age of the respondent. The age at which a person experienced change of statuses—specific life event—was measured with accuracy in months.

## 2. Timing and duration of transition to adulthood

**Timing of transition into adulthood: inter-cohort comparison.** The analysis uses the very first data of the **Famo-Socnet** project. Namely employed is the mean age at which birth cohorts are undergoing a series of life events, which are treated as social maturity markers: completion of formal education, leaving the parental home, start of first paid job, first marriage and first childbirth (Fig. 1). As data shows, this age is a potential time to experience family life events, therefore calculations for this cohort to some extent might be distorted.

**Fig. 1.** *Timing of transition into adulthood in Lithuania by birth cohort and gender, mean age in years*



Source: data of the Famo-Socnet project, 2012.

The life event introducing adulthood to all birth cohorts and for both sexes was the completion of their educational careers. In the inter-cohort perspective the age at which young people in Lithuania make their first step towards the adult world was quite stable: 19-20 years. Each consequent cohort of males and females entered the new life stage at a slightly higher age. For females, starting transitional life event was leaving the parental home (at age 19 for cohort born in 1950-55 and 19.9 for cohort

born in 1980-85). For young males, transition to adulthood usually was opened by completion of formal education (at age 19.4 for cohort born in 1950-55 and 20.1 for cohort born in 1980-85).

The life event closing transition series for both sexes was the birth of the first child. In contrast to the timing of life event opening the transition, the age at the birth of their first child was quite “mobile” for different cohorts and sexes. In inter-cohort perspective the mean age at the birth of their first child demonstrated a sharp acceleration trend for females and for males, it moved in different directions: from 24.5 to 27.8 (females) and around 27.6 (males) (Fig. 1). As data shows, this age is a potential time to experience family life events, therefore calculations for the youngest male cohort (born in 1980-85) to some extent might be distorted. Therefore we are not displaying them here, but based on preliminary data we could guess that the mean age at the birth of their first child for the youngest cohort of men could demonstrate even sharper acceleration than that of women.

Life events related to educational and professional careers (completion of formal education, getting first paid job) in all cohorts and for both sexes were attributes opening the transition into adulthood. Life events related to family formation (first marriage and birth of first child) for both sexes and for all birth cohorts have always been attributes closing the transition. The only life event, the timing of which changed from cohort to cohort so dynamically, was leaving of the parental home. Each consequent birth cohort shared households with their parents longer and longer: mean age of females at leaving parental home moved from 19.0 to 19.9 and that of men from 19.4 to 22.2. Young men born before the mid-sixties on average left their parents' home just before entering the labour market. In the life of the cohort of men born in the seventies the sequence of these events was reversed: they first got experience of working life and only after that left their parents homes.

Thus, in general, the sequence of life events marking transition to adulthood over the past decades has been quite constant (except leaving the parental home): the cohorts of men have begun the transition into adulthood by education completion, that of women—by leaving parental home, and finished by the first marriage, and finally—giving birth to the first child.

Comparing transition to adulthood by sexes, the essential difference between young females' and males' transition is the fact that the males' movement into the age of majority is formed by two blocks of the life events constituting transition: life events related to the socio-professional career, are concentrated at a younger ages, and that related to family—much later in life. In biographies of female cohorts these two groups of life events were not so clearly separated by time intervals as was in the case of males.

***Changes in duration of transition into adulthood.*** Since the starting time of transition into adulthood has been relatively stable, the main source of fluctuation in transition duration was its ending time. Here it is important to emphasize that taking into account all the analysed series of life events, men's transition into adulthood in all birth cohorts lasted longer (an average of almost two years) than that of women.

The transition to adulthood period tended to shorten for cohorts of males and females born in 1960-65, 1970-75 in comparison to 1950-55 birth cohort. It seems that for the youngest birth cohort born in 1980-85 it will take a much longer time to experience all five life events related to transition into adulthood. The duration of women's transition has decreased from six (4.3) years for 1950-55 birth cohort to four and a half (3.8) years for 1970-75 birth cohort; the duration of men respectively from eight and a half (8.3) years for 1950-55 birth cohort to six and a half (6.4) years for the 1960-65 cohort. The men's cohort born in 1970-75 demonstrates the postponement of family-relevant life events (first marriage and first child) for later in life. Therefore the transition duration for this cohort of men prolonged to more than eight (8.3) years. These trends are a prelude for the new model of transitional behaviour on the way to adulthood, which are observable in the behaviour of Lithuanian cohorts approaching adulthood in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### 3. Recent trends in dynamics of social statuses

Available statistical data on specific life events and social statuses allow us to analyse recent trends in transition into adulthood. The analysis in this part is limited by available statistical data on the timing of some life events attributed to the transition to adulthood. The list of life events and statuses in this analysis is untraditional in some sense: besides well-known life events in this part of the analysis there are included: status of "unemployed," "emigrated," and "divorced."

The second decade of individual life is marked by richness of crucial life events in every domain of life: people finish formal education, start their job, create their own family and become a parent. Some of these events are more concentrated at a specific age, others—more age-neutral. Lithuanian younger generations during their twenties exchange the dominant learner role to dominant workers' role (Table 1). At age 15-19, three out of four persons are involved in learning, only 2% are employed; but when it comes to age 25-29, the picture is reversed—three out of four persons are employed with some 12% of respective age population still remaining in the education system. This transition in contemporary Lithuania is not smooth because at a very young age an enormously reasonable part of Lithuania's young population are confronted with unemployment (from 50% in age group 15-19, to 32% in age group 20-24, and 16% in age group 25-29). Also there are large portions of young people struggling to move from the education system to the labour market; still this transition can be named as a standard transition, because it evolves the overall majority of this age population (Table 1).

In some sense personal-life events contrast to massive youth transition from the education system to the labour market. No doubt, the first marriage and the giving birth to the first child still are important life events on the way towards one's recognition as adult and independent person, but it could be observed that these life events are not any more an universal requisite in the life course of younger generation, namely, reasonable part of young people are not hurrying to create their own family and become a parent (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Selected life events and statuses by age group, Lithuania, 2010-2011, number per 100 population

	Studying	Employed	Unemployed*	Emigrated	Got married	Got divorced	Gave birth
15-19	71,9	2,1	49,6	1,7	0,4	0	0,7
20-24	46,2	35,2	31,7	4,6	3,4	0,6	2,6
25-29	12,9	74,4	15,6	4,8	6,1	1,4	5,5
30-34	6,8	77,5	14,6	3,3	3	1,6	4,2
35-39	3,7	78,3	13,7	2,1	1,5	1,5	1,6
40-44	0,5	80,4	12,8	1,5	0,8	1,1	0,3
45-49		77,6	13,9	1,1	0,5	0,8	
50-54		75,2	14,1	0,8	0,4	0,6	
55-59		63,2	16,1	0,5	0,3	0,4	
60-64		35,8	7,5	0,2	0,2	0,2	
65-69		5,4	1,1	0,1	0,1	0,1	
70-74				0,1	0,1		
75-79				0,1			

\* Number per 100 economically active population.

Source: Data base of Lithuanian Statistics, 2012.

Table 1 allows us to state that the second decade of ones' life is a period of intensive changes. For example, the experience of unemployment among people in their twenties is much more widespread than, for instance, marriage or childbirth. Almost as often as Lithuanian young population in their twenties gets married or give birth to a child, they emigrate from Lithuania (Table 1). Also the divorce process is not so pervaded as most other life events; it starts quite early and continues into the thirties. So some life events which traditionally have not been analysed in the frame of process of transition into adulthood occupies quite a specific place among "traditional" life events.

## CONCLUSIONS

The most intensive transition into adulthood in Lithuania occurs during the second decade of one's life. The essence of the transition comprises the replacement of the dominant learner role by the dominant workers' role. This transition in contemporary Lithuania is not a simple and linear process—quite a big share of Lithuania's young population is confronted with unemployment (in 2010-2011 from 50% in age group 15-19, to 32% in age group 20-24, and 16% in age group 25-29). The research results showed that in the contrast to education-work dimension, family life events are no longer a universal requisite in the life course of the younger generation: a much smaller share of them create their own families and become parents.

Duration of transition to adulthood of a young female and male in Lithuania is different in terms of time intervals. Transition of males into adulthood is grouped into two blocks: life events related to the educational-professional career, and that related to family. In biographies of female cohorts these two blocks of life events were not clearly expressed—the transition into adulthood of female cohorts was unbroken.

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## PERĖJIMO Į SOCIALINĘ BRANDĄ KALENDORIUS LIETUVOJE: KETURIŲ KOHORTŲ PATIRTIS

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### **Santrauka**

Tyrimo tikslas yra ištirti perėjimo į socialinę brandą Lietuvoje kalendoriaus pokyčius keturių kartų biografijose. Analizuojamos penkios trajektorijos – formalūs perėjimo į socialinę brandą žymenys: išėjimas iš tėvų namų, formalus išsilavinimo įgijimas, pirmasis įsidarbinimas, pirmoji santuoka ir pirmojo vaiko gimimas. Amžius, kai pati-

riami šie gyvenimo įvykiai, skirtingų gimimo kohortų biografijose varijuoja. Perėjimo į socialinę brandą kalendoriaus pokyčius lemia įvairūs veiksniai: asmeninės preferencijos, sociokultūrinės elgesio normos, socialinis politinis kontekstas ir gyvenimo raidų tarpusavio susietumas.

Remiantis šiuolaikinėmis gyvenimo raidos teorijomis (Elder, Johnson, 2001; Settersten et al., 2005; Elder et al., 2006; Macmillan, 2005), taikomas kiekybinis skersinio pjūvio tyrimo metodas ir kohortų analizė. Siekiant nustatyti kohortų trajektorijas, apibūdinančias žmogaus perėjimą į socialinės brandos amžių, analizei naudojami projekto „Šeimos modelių trajektorijos ir socialiniai tinklai: kartų perspektyva“ (Famo-Socnet) duomenys. Atstovaujama 1950–1955, 1960–1965, 1970–1975 ir 1980–1985 metais gimusioms Lietuvos gyventojų kohortoms (kiekviena po 500 respondentų). Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė, jog intensyviausia vaidmenų kaita susijusi su perėjimu į socialinės brandos amžių Lietuvoje vyksta antrajame gyvenimo dešimtmetyje. Perėjimo esmę sudaro dominuojančio besimokančiojo vaidmens pakeitimas dominuojančiu dirbančiojo vaidmeniu. Tačiau perėjimas į socialinės brandos amžių šiuolaikinėje Lietuvoje nėra paprastas ir linijinis procesas – gana didelė dalis Lietuvos jaunųjų gyventojų susiduria su nedarbu (nuo 50 proc. 15–19 metų amžiaus grupėje iki 32 proc. 20–24 metų amžiaus grupėje ir 16 proc. 25–29 metų amžiaus grupėje). Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad priešingai gyvenimo įvykiams edukacinėje ir darbinėje karjeroje, gyvenimo įvykiai šeimos karjeroje jau nebėra universalus jaunosios kartos gyvenimo raidos rekvizitas: vis mažesnė jų dalis tuokiasi ir tampa tėvais.

Jaunų moterų ir vyrų perėjimo į socialinės brandos amžių trukmė (laiko intervalas tarp perėjimą pradedančio ir užbaigiančio gyvenimo įvykio) Lietuvoje skiriasi: vyrų perėjimas labiau išstėtas laike nei moterų. Jaunų vyrų perėjimas į socialinės brandos amžių susiskirsto tarsi į du atskirus etapus: gyvenimo įvykiai, susiję su edukacine ir profesine karjera, ir įvykiai, žymintys prokreacinės šeimos karjeros pradžią. Moterų kohortų biografijose gyvenimo įvykiai, sudarantys perėjimą į socialinę brandą, išsidėsto kompaktiškiau.

Apibendrinant tyrimo rezultatai rodo naują tendenciją – uždelstą ir ilgiau trunkantį perėjimą į socialinės brandos amžių, būdingą 1980–1985 m. gimusiai kohortai, kuri į suaugstės amžiaus tarpsnį žengė XXI a. pirmoje dekadaje.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** gyvenimo raida, perėjimo į socialinės brandos amžių kalendorius, kohortos, Lietuva.