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THE SIGNIFICANCE AND MEANING OF FAMILY TRANSITIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. THE CASE OF SERBIA IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore the significance and meaning given to family transitions: independence from the family of origin, partner relationships, marriage, and parenthood, during the transition to adulthood made by young people in Serbia. After discussing the theoretical issues related to family transitions within a life-course and individualization thesis perspectives, we perform our exploration by interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data related to the practice and normative models of transition to adulthood. We further discuss and explore the centrality of family transitions on a comparative level within the Balkan region. There is a contradiction within family formation trends between their demographic and ideational and relational levels in the region. There is also a crucial difference between the significance of family transitions (which is a common feature) and its diversified meaning. We conclude that various social contexts, the structural and cultural factors that influence family formation call for an alternative conceptualization of young people's transitions to adulthood.

Key words: Family transitions, young people, Serbia, the Balkans, independence, normative models, transition to parenthood

L'IMPORTANZA E IL SIGNIFICATO DI TRANSIZIONI FAMILIARI PER I GIOVANI: IL CASO DI SERBIA IN PROSPETTIVA COMPARATIVA

SINTESI

La relazione si propone di investigare l'importanza e il significato attribuiti alle transizioni familiari – indipendenza dalla famiglia di origine, relazioni tra partner, matrimonio e il diventare genitori – nell'ambito del passaggio all'età adulta dei giovani di Serbia. Dopo il trattamento delle questioni teoriche relative alle transizioni familiari che rientrano nella prospettiva del corso di vita e della tesi dell'individualizzazione, l'investigazione continua con l'interpretazione dei dati quantitativi e qualitativi relativi ai modelli pratici e normativi di passaggio all'età adulta. Nella parte della disamina si esplora la centralità delle transizioni familiari a livello comparativo nella regione balcanica. Esiste una contraddizione nell'ambito delle tendenze riguardanti le formazioni familiari tra i loro livelli demografici, d'ideazione e relazionali nella regione. Si verifica anche una differenza cruciale tra l'importanza delle transizioni familiari, come caratteristica comune, e il loro significato, che è diversificato. Si conclude che i vari contesti sociali, nonché i fattori strutturali e culturali che influenzano la formazione di famiglie, richiedono una concettualizzazione alternativa del passaggio dei giovani all'età adulta.

Parole chiave: transizioni familiari, giovani, Serbia, i Balcani, indipendenza, modelli normativi, passaggio alla maternità e paternità

INTRODUCTION

By their demographic features, family formation patterns in Serbia resemble the trends in Western countries: a decline in the number of marriages (decrease in nuptiality rate from 0.82 in 1980. to 0.68 in 2000.), and in the birthrate (average number – fertility rate -1.4), postponement of marriage (average age at first marriage: 26.3 for women, 29.6 for men – in 2007), and postponement of having children (average age at first childbirth 26.2 for women – in 2007), a rise in the number of non-marital births (from 13.5% in 1991. to 20.2% in 2002.). On the other hand, these trends are not accompanied by the diversification and pluralisation of family forms indicated by a continuing low level of cohabitation¹ and divorce (divorce rate 0.8). The other features of Second Demographic Transition (SDT) are also lacking: the transformation of gender roles and transformation of values. The transformation of gender roles within the family domain (division of domestic work, decision-making, partnership, parenthood) is rather slow (Bobić, 2006; Babović, 2006; Tomanović, Ignjatović, 2006a). The transformation of values and value orientations among young people is not generally taking the trend towards post-materialist values (Pavlović, 2009). These contradictory trends in family formation are common for all the post-socialist countries in the Balkan region² and they cause the validity of the Second Demographic Transition theory to come under question (Bobić, 2006).

It is our aim in this paper to explore the significance and meaning given to family transitions: independence from the family of origin, partner relationships, marriage, and parenthood, within transition to adulthood by young people in Serbia. We intend to interpret both quantitative and qualitative data related to the practice and normative models of the transition to adulthood. The interpretation of patterns and significance of family transitions will be carried out by exploring them on a comparative regional level, and by looking for an explanation of structural and cultural features that influence those trends.

The evidence comes from two sources. The first is the multidimensional survey on the transitions of young people carried out on the representative national sample

for Serbia (without Kosovo) in June 2003 (Tomanović, Ignjatović, 2006a). The research design was based on a quota sample of 3180 young people between 17 and 35 years of age. Quotas were set for age, gender and employment status (students in secondary schools, university students, employed and unemployed). 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 age.³ Interviews based on a complex multidimensional questionnaire were used as a method of data collection. The second source consists of evidence coming from 20 case studies from the third wave of the longitudinal qualitative study with children and their families in Belgrade (Tomanović, 2004).⁴

We start by drafting the analytical framework currently used to explain family transitions within the transition to adulthood and the debates associated with them. Special reference will be given to normative models of adulthood and their relevance for interpreting transitions to adulthood. Then, we move on to explore the significance and meaning of family transitions among young people in Serbia. First, the quantitative data indicating the centrality of family transitions both on a normative and practical level will be explored. Second, we will explore the significance of family transitions on the qualitative data on normative models of adulthood given by young people. We will then discuss and attempt to provide an explanatory framework for the centrality of family in transitions to adulthood on a comparative – regional level.

FAMILY TRANSITION IN TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

Transition to adulthood is a vague concept, usually operationalized by using markers that indicate changes in the most important domains after the adolescence phase: family, household, education, and employment status. Although there is a growing interest in many academic disciplines for issues of life course and notably transition to adulthood, it is a highly debated concept today. The reason for this is related to current tendencies in the post-adolescent life phase, especially with regards to markers of adulthood. There are indications that life

1 In general population – 1.4% according to national survey survey from 2003 (Bobic, 2006). Independent single life is neither practiced nor valued by young people in Serbia, while cohabitation is highly accepted (by 78% of respondents) as legitimate practice, but it is considerably less practiced (by only 3%, including those who live together in their parents home, and it is mainly considered as "an introduction to marriage" (Tomanović, Ignjatović, 2006a, 280).

2 See comparative data given by Kuhar and Reiter in this volume, and data on Bulgaria in Kovacheva and Manolova (2009), and data on Slovenia in Ule, Kuhar (2008).

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

4 The first wave was carried out when children were 4 to 7, through structured interviews with parents in 100 (working class and middle class) families and 12 case studies in 1993/1994. The second wave – through case studies in 21 families was in 2000 (children 11 to 14). The third wave – through case studies in 20 families was in 2007 (children 17 to 21).

course has become more flexible and markers of adulthood seem to have become dispersed and reversible: partner relationships are not necessarily succeeded by marriage, there are a variety of quasi-family living arrangements, the reversibility of employment/unemployment status etc. There is a body of empirical work that has documented a number of changes that profoundly influence the lives of young people and their transition to adulthood, including a change of values, as well as changing patterns of employment, education, family formation and gender identities (Walther, Stauber, Pohl, 2009).

Current tendencies in the transition to adulthood have been discussed from different theoretical positions. The first paradigm is developed within the life course discourse – *heterogenization of life course*. This model has first been applied to the former welfare states from the 1980s that has succeeded the period of standard patterns of entering adulthood that had dominated in western countries until the 1970s. The paradigm has been recently applied to explain tendencies in developing countries and post-communist societies (Fussel, Gauthier, Evans, 2007, 391). The hypothesis states that the process of heterogenization of life trajectories has been diffusely spread from developed countries to developing countries, resulting in a converging process of de-standardization or heterogenization of life course.

The second position is basically a sociological perspective, though it goes in line with the previously mentioned hypothesis of heterogenization. It is the *individualization thesis*, which stresses three main aspects of the individualization process: detraditionalization,⁵ de-standardization ("choice biography" replaces "normal", or standard biography⁶), and self reflexivity.⁷ De-standardized, individualized and detraditionalized life courses of young people posed a challenge to sociology to capture this turn (Wyn, Dwyer, 1999; Chisholm et al., 1990; Du Bois Reymond, 1998; Furlong, 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, Wallace 1992; Jones, 1995; Kugelberg, 2000; EGRIS, 2001) have been introduced. There is also a modified concept of individuali-

zation theory, the *structured individualization thesis*, which focuses on institutions and structure in transition to adulthood (Roberts et al., 1994; Brannen et al., 2002, 33). The authors emphasize that personal biography is determined by personal choice but also by social constraints. Contrary to Beck's paradigm, theoreticians of structured individualization define personal biography as social biography that is shaped mostly by education, social status, gender and other factors (Tomanović, Ignjatović, 2006a, 271). Nevertheless, the general concept of individualization of life course and transition has not been abandoned.

In each of these two perspectives, research evidence has shown that family transitions still represent important markers along the life course, notably in the phase of becoming an adult.⁸ Family transitions are one of the key indicators of transition to adulthood and it incorporates the transformation in the family status of a young person. Family transitions are interdependent with other aspects of transition, notably residential status and employment.

The heterogenization theory has been tested in six developing African and South-American countries, where the institutional changes, especially the increasing number of children in schooling similar to that of the western trend in the last decades, were expected to be a factor that would induce change in life course (Grant, Furstenberg, 2006, 426).⁹ On the contrary, the results indicate that heterogeneity has not increased as expected in the cohorts studied. Moreover, patterns of family transitions (marriage, parenthood, and establishing the household) have remained a key generator of diversity among countries in spite of an expected global convergence of life course towards heterogenization and de-standardization. Studies conveyed in developed and developing countries indicate that marriage and parenthood patterns are still mainly determined by socio-cultural factors and value orientations. Their conclusion that *family transition is still country-specific regardless of similar trends in demographic indicators such as decreased fertility rate, increased age of childbirth and increasing cohabitation living arrangements that precede or replace formal marital status*, is particularly relevant to post-socialist countries in the Balkan region, notably Serbia.

5 One of the main consequences of processes of detraditionalization is that structural factors (class, gender, ethnicity, family background etc.) cease to be determinants for the individual in pursuing the late modernity imperative of "living life of one's own" (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 26).

6 Consequently, life becomes a "planned project" (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), while earlier standard life-course sequences cannot be taken for granted anymore, and the individual's life becomes less predictable.

7 Inevitably a "life of one's own is a reflexive life" (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 26) – individual biographies become "self-reflexive" and "self-determined", and self becomes a "do-it-yourself" project (Beck, 1992; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

8 For the relevance and significance of family transition for young people in Europe, see also Walther, Stauber, Pohl, 2009.

9 The thesis on de-standardization of life course has also been re-examined and criticized by exploring qualitative data on different cohorts in Germany (Bruckner, Mayer, 2005).

There are a number of studies that implement the individualization thesis on normative models of adulthood. They focus on the normative aspects of the transition to adulthood, such as constructions of youth and adulthood, aspirations for future life, orientations and values, giving them relevance as indicators of different life trajectories.

For instance, in their longitudinal qualitative study of transition to adulthood carried out in five sites in the UK, Thomson and Holland and their associates wanted to take account of young people's construction of their own versions of adulthood (Thomson, Holland, 2002; Thomson, Holland, 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 centre of most young people's understandings of adulthood" (Thomson, Holland, 2004, 22).¹⁰ There was also little evidence of the detraditionalized models of adulthood. Analysis of the individual interviews and particularly the extracts based on the so called "lifeline" methodological tool¹¹ 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 live-in relationship and with children by the age of 35, most expecting marriage (Thomson, 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 education, either vocational or higher), they tend to associate their identities with youth lifestyles,¹² consumption and social life. Where young people go straight from school to work, they tend to invest into the more traditional aspects of adult identity, such as increasing responsibilities. They found tensions between an *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, 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 Slovenia.¹³ 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 a 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 an *adult-centred concept of youth*: they are oriented towards 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 a *youth-centred 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 (Ule, 1986, 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) on young people in Croatia. Nevertheless, they also detected polarization between adult-centred and youth-centred concepts among young people in Croatia unlike young people from other countries (e.g. Slovenia) who incline towards a youth-centred concept of youth (Ilišin, Radin, 2002, 32 ff). In combination with a detected acceptance of paternalism and relative pessimism regarding the future, these findings led the authors to the 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" (Ilišin, Radin, 2002, 44).

Before returning to the comparative regional level, we would like to explore the significance and meaning of family transitions in the case of young people in Serbia by analyzing quantitative and qualitative data from available sources.

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

11 "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, Holland, 2004, 17).

12 In Brannen and Nilsen terms "the model of deferment" or "extended present" (2002, 520).

13 Galland also refers to desynchronisation of path to a adulthood in his study of young people in France (Galland, 2001).

CENTRALITY OF FAMILY TRANSITION IN TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD IN SERBIA

The comprehensive survey on young people's transitions in Serbia from 2003, has documented that gaining independence from parents is a fairly slow process compared to the northern European model of transition (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006a; Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006b). Financial and residential status are still determined by family resources. The survey confirmed that most young people live in their parental home until their early 30s, and most of them were completely or partly dependent on family financial assistance. These indicators correspond to macro-level factors, like unemployment (almost half of young people under 24 were unemployed).

At the same time, the dominant strategy for most young people is postponement (delaying) of key life events: finishing education, employment, leaving the parental household, marriage and childbirth – postponing transition to adulthood.¹⁴

Obstacles in gaining autonomy are internalized in the sense that young people undervalue its importance (by "making virtue of necessity"). 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 it 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 (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006b, 64).

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 a 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 southeast Europe and prevent young people from ever feeling fully autonomous from their parents (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006b, 64).

Correspondingly, the findings from some studies in western countries (Thomson, Holland, 2002), see the normative model stressing family transitions ("settling down") as the crucial aspect of transition to adulthood is very strong among young people in Serbia. Nevertheless, "settling down" is not seen as the end of a personal trajectory of independent lifestyle based on a combination of education, work and leisure, but rather as a prerequisite of the 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 one of the necessary preconditions for independence (and consequently adulthood) – both on normative and practical levels (see Table 1. from Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006b, 62).

The findings indicate an extremely traditional pattern of formation of the family of orientation,¹⁵ which is marked by merged and inseparable categories of partnership and parenthood. Furthermore, there is no discrepancy between the normative and practical level in transition to adulthood among young people in Serbia (see Figures 1 to 3 below). *Getting married* (marriage is a traditional substitute for partnership which is not recognized as a relationship *per se*) and *becoming a parent*

Table 1: Preconditions for gaining independence from parents by age (%).¹⁶

Tabela 1: Predpogoji za osamosvajanje od staršev po starosti (%).

	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

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

14 See S. Tomanovic and S. Ignjatovic (2006a) on pace of gaining independence : young people in Serbia become independent much later than their counterparts in Western and Northern Europe, for cultural, social and psychological reasons.

15 Unlike the common Parsonian terminology of family of orientation and family of procreation, we have adopted different terminology: family of origin to denote parental family, and family of orientation to denote the family formed by young persons (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006a; Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006b).

16 Refers to the whole sample.

are key manifestations of adulthood.¹⁷ 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 the transition to adulthood. This pattern is opposite to the European trend, where independence from family of origin does not immediately imply starting one's own family.

With this predominantly *socialized (relational) model of adulthood* (Thomson, Holland, 2004) and the congruent prevailing *adult-centred concept of youth*, young people in Serbia more closely resemble their counter-

parts in Croatia (Ilišin, Radin, 2002) than in Slovenia (Ule, 1986) and countries in the West.

As evident from the figures below, there is no discrepancy between the normative and practical level of transition to adulthood among young people in Serbia.¹⁸

As evident from Figure 1 and Figure 2, there is a high level of synchronization and condensation in the time of the key life events (milestones of transition to adulthood), which indicates a highly non-individualized path – life trajectory. The order of events is almost the same for different categories of respondents, but the milestone timings (measured by median age) are slightly different for women and men (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006a, 276).

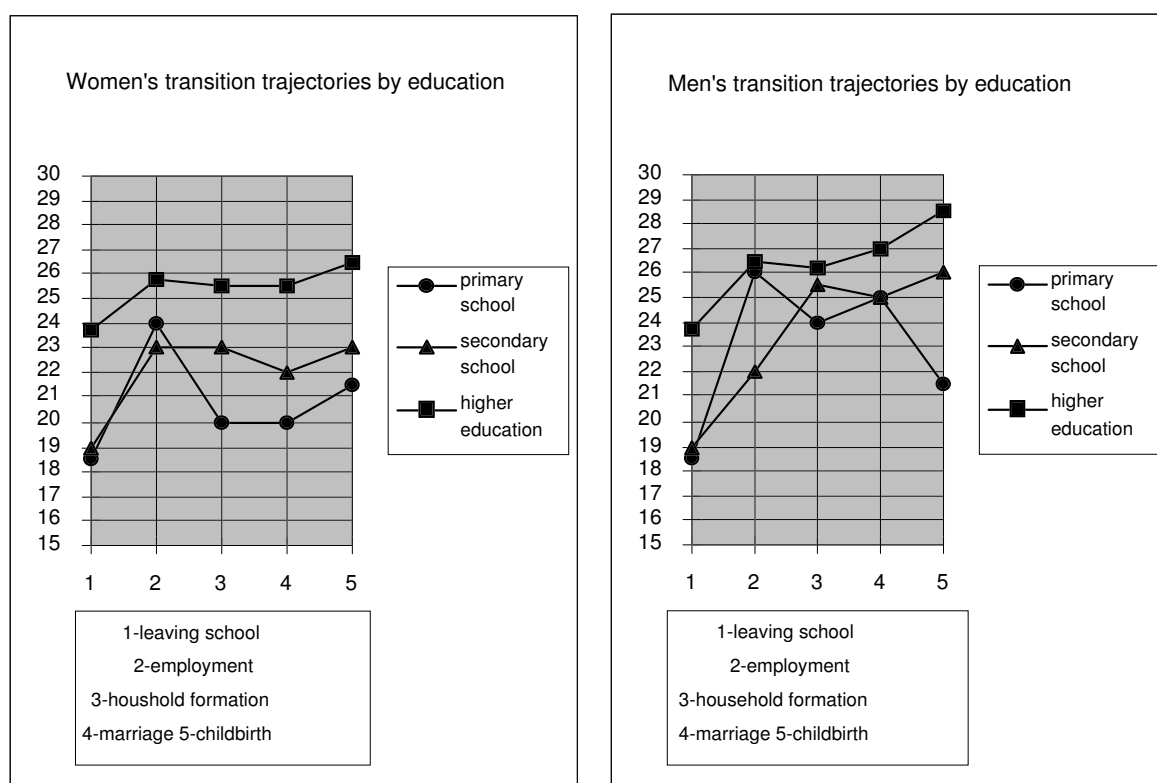


Fig. 1 and 2: Transition trajectories by gender and education.
Sl. 1 in 2: Krivulje prehodov po spolu in izobrazbi.

17 According to Kovacheva and Manolova (2009) this is not the case in contemporary Bulgaria.

18 The data is based on median ages for those young people who have accomplished the mentioned key life events. Since the inactive youth population (high school and university students) could not be expected to experience most of the events (e.g. employment) we excluded this sub-sample from the analysis. The analysis is based on employed and unemployed young people regardless of age and the results were broken down by education level and gender as the most discriminative variables. As far as employment is concerned, this category has been defined as "the first permanent job", rather than formal employment, because of prevalence of informal work in Serbia.

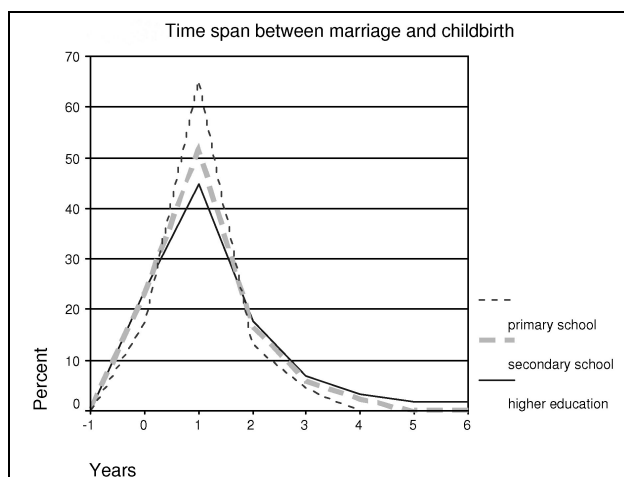


Fig. 3: Time span between marriage and childbirth by education.

Sl. 3: Časovni presledak med sklenitvijo zakonske zveze in rojstvom otroka po izobrazbi.

As evident from the Figure 3,¹⁹ birth practice shows significant time proximity (synchronization) between marriage and childbirth. The most common option is having a child after one year of marriage (between 42% and 63% of young parents, depending on level of education). The next option is childbirth within the first year of marriage. It is followed by a two-year span, while all the other options are significantly less frequent. There are no significant differences according to the respondent's educational level.

Both normative aspects and indicators of practice of family formation confirm that family transitions are central for young people in Serbia.

FAMILY TRANSITIONS WITHIN NORMATIVE MODELS OF ADULTHOOD OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SERBIA

Taking into account the findings from the case studies of young people aged 17 to 21 diversifies the picture of normative transitions to adulthood and relates it to social differentiation. The qualitative analysis of young people's perceptions of adulthood and aspirations for their future,²⁰ revealed several normative patterns of youth and adulthood that we have named: "standard biography – relational", "standard biography – individualized", "post-adolescent", and "non-standard – individualized" (Table 2).

Considering the structural constraints to young people's individualization stemming from the particular social context in Serbia (Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006a; Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006b), the classification is not based on a conceptual framework of individualization as detraditionalized self-reflexive choice and shaping of one's own lifestyle and biography, but rather operationally as an orientation towards the gaining of an independence and autonomy that stresses maturity (Thomson et al., 2004).

The pattern of growing up that we have named *standard biography* is characterized by an *adult-centred* concept of youth – that is conceptualized as a transitory phase in becoming an adult with an aim of assuming the rights and obligations of adults. Transition to adulthood is a clear path with a gradual and timely taking over the adult roles – finishing school, getting a job, gaining material security, marriage and children before age of 35. This pattern is predominant among the young men and women interviewed. Respondents who are oriented towards this pattern, stress two traditional pillars of adulthood: family formation and material independence. Determined by which of the aspirations they stress, they

Table 2: Patterns of transitions to adulthood.

Tabela 2: Vzorci prehodov v odraslost.

Model	Concept of youth	Biography	Focus
Standard- relational	Adult-centered	standard	Family formation
Standard- individualized	Adult-centered	standard	Independence; Education; Profession
Post-adolescent	Youth-centered	standard (postponed)	Leisure
Non-standard individualized	Youth-centered	non-standard	Self-realization; Post-materialist

¹⁹ Based on sub-sample of parents among the young people.

²⁰ Based mainly on analysis of their projections and aspirations for the futures from the "lifelines", but also on their biographies as a whole.

establish the distinction between *relational* (stressing family formation) and *individualized* model (stressing material independence) within the pattern of *standard biography*. Since both young women and men are oriented towards both models, there is no gender differentiation.²¹ The models are socially differentiated – more young people from working class families are oriented towards *relational*, while young people from professional families are oriented towards – *individualized standard biography*.

Notably, although girls from working class families incline towards the formation of family as the focus in their future (*relational model*), they also stress the importance of work and financial independence, as Branka (female,19) did in her interview:

B: At 30, it seems that I will live somewhere with a man. I suppose I'll get married by 30 ... Then I'll live with my husband in the city. Education – no, I will work. I will continue with the job I have started. I don't know, but I will work, I will never just sit there without working and so on. And then – the family – one child by then. Since I like children very much, and I wouldn't want to have child at 35, I can't do that ...

B: At 35, well then – classic mom. But I will work, in any case. I will be a housewife, making dinner and all that ... But I will work as much as I can. I will take care of the children, of course, but I don't want to depend on my husband. I don't know what kind of husband I'll have. I want to have something of my own, that I can rely on myself. Since I do not know what I can expect in life (emphasis added by ST).

Among the respondents – *individualized standard biography* is related to the orientation towards education or profession, which makes social differentiation more distinctive.

In those terms, Stefan's (male,19) vision of his future is an example of a highly determined trajectory, set up by continuing his father's profession and job:

S: At 25, I will probably live in that apartment I've mentioned that I could get in two years. At 25 – education – let me see ...I should finish university by then, if I'm on time... Concerning partner relations and family – at 25, I would probably live with a girlfriend. Job – an architect. I wouldn't look for a job, since, as I said, I have one at my father's firm.

S: At 30, that's already my life. I would buy something of my own, something bigger. Since I suppose I will form a family. I would buy a bigger apartment for my family. Education – I have finished my degree at the Faculty of Civil Engineering. Partner relations – I should

be married. Probably. Work – I will do same job as my father, except I will be a father then.

S: At 35, well ... that depends on how life goes and on the financial situation. Where I would live – that depends ... I would probably buy a house, if I have the financial means. Education – that's finished. I would have the family and children of 4 or 5. Work – I would continue and it depends how I would get on (emphasis added by ST).²²

Young people that support *post-adolescent* pattern of adulthood incline towards *youth-centered* concept of youth: they are oriented to maintaining the youth status as long as possible and postponing and dismissing assuming the roles related to adulthood, they dislike idea of growing up and undermine the importance of adulthood (EGRIS, 2001, 103). Although the elements of the *post-adolescent* pattern of adulthood could be found in several case studies, it is the most explicit in the interview with Jovan (male, 20):

My current motto, more or less, is to ... well I don't know, I wouldn't like to sound silly, but to have as much fun as possible. Every period in life has its phase. When you are a baby – you are a baby. When you are small – you are small. And you need lots of things in that period. When you start school – it's a new phase. Secondary school is another phase. Well, I don't know ... I think that people who are 16 to 20, or to 25-26, or even more if you have opportunity – they should have as much fun as possible, to have as many positive insights in the world, lots of girlfriends, to meet many people, to socialize ... to go to many events. Simply – eventful life. And when you get all that together – you get a lot of experience and information. Then I'll be able to estimate when is the time to settle down – to decide on important issues.

I: And you think it will be around age of 30?

J: Well, yes, that is the most probable. It is the age when the most people start to ask themselves. That is my motto too. Because, as I said, simply every period in life has its phase. And simply, because of that I would not bother asking myself – when is this going to be and when is that ... I will simply let life roll and what "the wind brings to me" (emphasis added by ST).

Features of *non-standard – individualized* pattern of adulthood are self-development, self-fulfilment in material aspect – income, and post-material aspect – travelling, fun, etc., as well as not so clear-cut projections into future, that leave space for open options. Nevena's (female,19) projection of her future is the clearest example of that pattern of transition to adulthood:

21 Furthermore, sexes are not proportional within the case studies sample, due to the fact that 4 girls from the original sample do not live in Belgrade anymore. Since there are 13 young men and 7 young women in the sample now, we could not make any conclusions on gender differences.

22 Housing is a focal point of Stefan's vision of the future, which is congruent with his professional orientation to become an architect.

At 25, I will live alone or with a friend in my own apartment, maybe abroad if I am on some kind of post-graduate studies or the like. So, I will graduate with a degree in Economy and I hope to master at least two foreign languages besides that. At 25, I will not have a boyfriend, maybe some kind of casual relationship. And that's it – I will work on improving, specialization.

... Well, at 30, I will probably have a boyfriend, maybe a husband, certainly a long term relationship (...)

... At 35, first husband or second – we will see. I will work in a foreign or an international major company, where you must travel, where it is all dynamic. I wouldn't like to spend time here in Serbia so much. Where I would be, that's an open question. Maybe my husband could be a foreigner, not necessarily a Serbian, never say never. And, of course, I forgot children – I will probably have one or two children. I hope at 35 to have, to have provided myself more than my parents have provided me. To provide for my children more than my parents have provided for me now. I just love money. It is my current line of thinking – how to earn money. But not for its own sake, but more as means to accomplish some other goals. Travelling is in first place. That is something I would like – to be able to go for a holiday without thinking, to travel whenever I like. That is in first place. To afford a car without a bank loan. Just not to think about money so much (emphasis added by ST).

It is evident that her biography is oriented mainly towards herself (see the emphasized) and less to others (family, partner, children). On the other hand, her doubts and uncertainties reveal the elements of post-adolescent attitude towards youth and adulthood:

Living abroad is significant, but preferably that everything is ready, already done for me, so that I don't put much effort in it. Well, I think I already have everything I need here, but I want more. And why would I want to go from an easy living somewhere where I should suffer if there is no need for that? On the other hand, I would like to leave ... So, I am somewhat torn apart by that for now(...).

I: Were you thinking about living together with someone in the future?

N: No.

I: Why?

N: Well, I don't know, maybe because I do not have someone right now. But first of all, I think I am young, so let me live my life as much as I can.. I am in that phase now, that I would live as much as possible till 28, not to be inhibited by anything. I don't like children so much right now. I guess I am not mature enough in that aspect. But, one day – yes to all of that. (emphasis added by ST).

Among the others, there are two conclusions from the case studies that are relevant for the topic of our paper and significant in explaining the place of family formation within the transition to adulthood among young people in Serbia.

First, the accounts show that family formation is highly valued. It has a significant place in young people's plans for the future, whether it is the central point of transition to adulthood as in *relational standard biography*, or it is at the end of the personal trajectory – "settling down" in their thirties, as in other normative models of adulthood. Second, the accounts show reliance on family resources in planning the future: help and support from parents is expected. Accordingly, the described patterns of growing up are socially diversified related to the resources (capitals) possessed and emphasized by their families and by young person him/herself. They are, therefore, indicators of social differentiation, and could be related to issues of social exclusion and reproduction of social inequality.

DISCUSSION

Contradiction within the trends of family formation is common to all post-socialist countries in the Balkans. There is a discrepancy between demographic trends in family formation that resemble those from Second Demographic Transition (postponement of marriage and childbirth, fewer marriages and children, etc.), on one hand, and still a high value placed on family and parenthood as a norm, on the other hand. These trends are not accompanied by the change towards post-materialist values²³ and the reconstruction of gender roles in partnership in most of the countries in the region. In some of the countries, family formation trends are not accompanied by pluralization and diversification of family forms (cohabitation, divorce, voluntary childless couples, etc.). Although these changes are sometimes interpreted as individualization in young people's behaviour and life styles (e.g. in Bulgaria, Kovacheva, Manolova, 2009), we argue for a more cautious and profound approach.

It seems that family formation is still a very important feature in the transition to adulthood in post-socialist countries in the Balkans. We would like to argue that it calls for an alternative conception of the transition to adulthood, especially family transitions. We will try to do that by providing an explanatory framework for the centrality of family transitions through comparing similarities and differences between countries in the Balkan region.

23 See Kuhar and Reiter in this volume.

Serbia belongs to the Mediterranean family-centered countries, where the family plays an essential role with regards to young people whose transition to adulthood is very slow (Galland, 2001; Galland, 2003; Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006a). According to Maria Iacovou's typology of three models of family formation, i.e. Nordic, Southern, and Northern, Serbia clearly belongs to the southern European model, where young people remain in the parental home for longer time and leave it mainly for family formation – by getting married (Iacovu, 1998, 2002). On the other hand, Slovenia is difficult to categorize according to the typology, since young people live in the parental home till their late twenties, but do not leave it for immediate marriage or parenthood (Ule, Kuhar, 2008, 159).

There are also special kinds of intergenerational connections and solidarity within and between families in southern Europe, but also in central and eastern European countries (Wallace, Kovatcheva, 1998; Brannen et al., 2002). There is a strong moral obligation for parents to support their children throughout their lives in central and eastern Europe (Wallace, Kovatcheva, 1998, 147). The support consists of financial help during education, providing housing, help in starting an independent household and help in childcare. Interfamilial ties thus remain strong throughout the individual's life-course, extend beyond both types of families (family of origin and family of orientation) and are based on a strong sense of reciprocity. These are collectivistic familistic cultures,²⁴ where patriarchal distribution of authority has been replaced with paternalistic parental attitudes and educational styles. The familism was prominent within authoritarian nationalist ideologies in Serbia and Croatia during the 1990s – the Family was considered to be one of the key pillars for the new State after the breakdown of federal Yugoslavia.²⁵

It is evident from our analysis above, that young people in Serbia place great value on family life and parenthood. The situation is similar in other countries in the region: in Croatia (Ilišin, Radin, 2002; Tomić-Koludrović, Leburčić, 2001), in Slovenia (Ule, Kuhar, 2008), and in Bulgaria (Kovacheva, Manolova, 2009). For instance researchers in Slovenia concluded, through qualitative analysis of focus groups interviews, that family lifestyles are identified by young people as being desirable and the family has a significant role in their plans for the future. At the same time, according to public

opinion surveys in Slovenia, there is a great implosion towards family life as compared with that from the 80s, together with the high value given to different aspects of family life (Ule, Kuhar, 2008, 156). Studies in Bulgaria also provided evidence on the high significance of family formation and parenthood, since young people in Bulgaria perceive parenthood as "a deep personal need of complete self-realization", and they also express "a feeling of moral and emotional discomfort that they could not have as many children as they want to" (Kovacheva, Manolova, 2009, 10). The difference lies in the meaning of family formation, since, unlike Serbia, in Bulgaria and in Slovenia – family formation is not the mean, mechanism of transition to adulthood, although "heteronormative notions of "settling down" are so deeply rooted..." (Ule, Kuhar, 2008, 166).

The double transition: transition to adulthood in transitional societies is putting young people at various risks common to all the countries in the region: high unemployment, a precarious labour market, scarce housing, the collapse in social security systems that leaves them with no institutional "safety net", etc. (Kovacheva, 2001; Walther, Stauber, Pohl, 2009).

The above described kind of family significance was recognized by socialist system policies, which oriented most rights and privileges towards the family (e.g. housing policy) rather than towards individuals. This brings socialist and, to certain extent, post-socialist systems close to the type described by Esping-Andersen (1990) as *Mediterranean/sub-protective type of welfare state*. Nevertheless, in the post-socialist period, the security basis provided by the socialist system was destroyed, and families became even more important as providers of resources (material and non-material).

The significant factor that shaped the family transition of young people is the general re-traditionalization process in the family domain in Serbia during the 1990s. One of the indicators of the process is the blocked transformation of family structure, which is indicated by a still significant share of extended family households in the overall number of households (Tomanovic, 2008). The extended family households are considered to be one of the family coping strategies in the context of social and economic crisis (notably housing problem, and lack of financial resources). Of course, it is debatable whether the effects of such changes in family life are persistent and long-lasting or if it was only a temporary

24 One type of collectivism – "brotherhood and unity" was replaced by another "national identity" collectivism: "An alysis of traditionalist value orientations showed a strong inclination of the Serbian population towards collectivism, authoritarianism and patriarchal views on the gender based division of labor, both in the periods of late socialism and post-socialist transformation. The shift towards acceptance of values stemming from modernity appeared to be very slow, which makes the already hard and painful process of transformation more troublesome and uncertain." (Pešić, 2006, 305).

25 Nevertheless, the pro-familist and pro-natalist pleas from the authorities and the churches did not succeed in persuading women to give more births, since natality is low and declining in both countries.

regression due to rationalization and not retraditionalization. However, these conditions must have influenced the professional and family strategies of young people who were going through the transition to adulthood during the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s.

There is also a high level of documented dependence on family resources with a proclamation for autonomy but an acceptance of paternalism. For example, in Croatia pragmatic reliance on family resources, with the prolonged protective role of parents, is very similar to Serbia – young people live in the parental home, the only source of income comes from parents (Tomić-Koludrović, Leburic, 2001, 15).²⁶ Family resources are of the most significance in providing housing (in Serbia: Petrović, 2004; Tomanovic, Ignjatovic, 2006a). Family is also the most significant provider of social capital for young people (Serbia: Tomanovic, 2008; Bulgaria: Kovacheva, 2004), particularly in their transition from education to work, but also as a resource of support for parenting (Serbia: Tomanovic, 2004; Slovenia: Ule, Kuhar, 2008). This leaves young people "... critically dependent, both materially and emotionally (and much more so than in the previous system), on family support, especially in their transition to adulthood." (Ule, Kuhar, 2008, 155).

The emotional dependence has been evidenced in Serbia, but also in Croatia as conformist relations with parents, and life orientations towards present rather than planning the future (Tomić-Koludrović, Leburic, 2001, 15). On the other hand, researchers in Bulgaria have detected the cultural shift from paternalistic (and pre-modern) to liberal (modern and post-modern) inter-generational relationships within the family (Kovacheva, Mitev, 2004; quoted in Kovacheva, Manolova, 2009).

It is reasonable to conclude that a high level of dependence on family resources could not be associated with individualization, since it is opposed to detradditionalization and limits young person's chances for making choices and developing an independent lifestyle. Furthermore, the high dependency on family resources capital and their uneven distribution is related to stratification differences. Besides limiting a young person's chances for individualization, it also reproduces social inequality.

This "domestication of youth" (Ule, 2009), seems to be the common feature in all post-socialist countries in the Balkan region. It could be related to "anti-modern" processes in some transitional societies, which should first reach and than "overcome industrial modern state" (Tomić-Koludrović, Leburic, 2001, 9). While the high *significance* of family transition is a common feature in the countries in the Balkan region, its *meaning* is diversified depending on whether it is considered to be the main path in entering adulthood or its final stage. According to Kovacheva (2001), one particular feature of youth transitions in post-socialist countries (and particularly in the Balkans) is that life conditions either leap from pre-modern constellations into post-modern fragmented ones, or are a mixture of both. Taking into consideration that "flexibilisation" of youth transitions in those countries brings the potential for pluralization and individualization of life-styles, rather than their true individualized diversification, we argue for an alternative conceptualization of youth transitions that would take into account specific social context and cultural pattern features.

26 The situation in Slovenia differs in terms that young people who stay in parental home for prolonged period of time earn themselves, which makes that they are not completely financially dependent on their parents.

SMISELNOST IN POMEN DRUŽINSKIH PREHODOV ZA MLADE. PRIMER SRBIJE V PRIMERJALNI PERSPEKTIVI

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POVZETEK

V prispevku se osredotočamo na smiselnost in pomen, ki se pripisuje družinskim prehodom: osamosvojitvi od primarne družine, partnerskim odnosom, sklenitvi zakonske zveze in starševstvu v prehodu v odraslost mladih v Srbiji. Po razpravi o teoretičnih vprašanjih, povezanih z družinskimi prehodi tekom življenja in vidikih teze o individualizaciji se posvetimo razlagi tako kvantitativnih kot kvalitativnih podatkov povezanih s prakso ter normativnim modelom prehoda v odraslost med mladimi v Srbiji. Pri obravnavi središčnega položaja družinskih prehodov na normativni in praktični ravni uporabljamo kvantitativne podatke, ki so rezultat raziskave iz leta 2003, opravljene na nacionalnem reprezentativnem vzorcu 3180 mladih od 17 do 35 let. Podatki kažejo na veliko smiselnost in poseben pomen, ki jo ima oblikovanje družine pri prehodu v odraslost. Kvalitativni podatki, pridobljeni v 20 študijah primera iz tretjega vala vzdolžne kvalitativne študije, predmet katere so bili otroci in njihove družine v Beogradu in ki se je izvajala med letoma 1993 in 2000, dokazujejo smiselnost družinskih prehodov v normativnih modelih odraslosti mladih. V razpravi raziskujemo središnji položaj družinskih prehodov na primerljivi ravni znotraj balkanskega prostora. V trendih oblikovanja družin obstaja protislovje med njihovimi demografskimi in idejnimi ter relacijskimi ravnimi v tem prostoru. Obstaja tudi bistvena razlika med smiselnostjo družinskih prehodov, ki je skupna značilnost, in njihovim pomenom, ki je raznolik. Sklepamo, da različni družbeni konteksti, strukturni in kulturni dejavniki, ki vplivajo na oblikovanje družine, zahtevajo alternativno konceptualizacijo prehoda mladih v odraslost.

Ključne besede: družinski prehodi, mladi, Srbija, Balkan, neodvisnost, normativni modeli, prehod v starševstvo

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