

Normative and non-normative paths of reaching adulthood by young Poles at the stage of transition from modern to postmodern society¹

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Abstract

In recent decades, young adults have become a subject of significant interest in sociological research, because there is observed the phenomenon of delaying the process of entering adulthood. This is a result of the spread of higher education, economic modernization and the accompanying transformation of the labor market, the individualization of life and the increasing dynamics of social life. The aim of the paper is to identify contemporary pathways of achieving adulthood by young Poles. The theoretical framework for analysis is a selection of concepts for reaching adulthood. We defined achieving adulthood as a process whose closure in objective terms is to meet social expectations related to fulfilling the key social adult roles: completing education, having a permanent job, starting a household and family, and in subjective terms is to achieve the identity of an adult. The empirical basis for the analyses is the results of the project *Public policies for completed adulthood. The case of Poland*, which was conducted in 2015-2020 and granted by The National Centre of Knowledge (NCN, UMO-2014/2015/B/HS5/03284). One of the main task of the project's research programme was reconstruction of the paths of transition into adulthood by 30-year-olds young Poles. Based on an analysis of data from 60 in-depth interviews (IDI)

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there were identified four paths of reaching adulthood by them: 1. complete adulthood, 2. career-oriented adulthood, 3. unstable adulthood, and 4. unanchored adulthood and corresponding to four types of young adults: complete adults, professionally progressive singles, struggling with adulthood, and permanent experimenters.

Keywords: adulthood, achieving adulthood, the paths of transition into adulthood, young adults

Introduction

In recent decades, young adults have become a subject of significant interest in sociological research. As a result of several processes: the spread of higher education, economic modernization and the accompanying transformation of the labor market and the individualization of life and the increasing dynamics of social life, young people are shifting their own decisions over time. The lengthening of the process of entering adulthood, although disturbing, is gaining increasing public acceptance, and the paths to adulthood are diversifying and biographing.

The aim of the paper is to identify contemporary pathways of achieving adulthood by young Poles. Achieving adulthood is understood as a process whose closure in subjective terms is to achieve the identity of an adult, and in objective terms - to meet social expectations related to fulfilling the key social roles of an adult: completing education, having a permanent job, starting a household and family. The empirical basis for the analyses is the results of the project *Public policies for completed adulthood. The case of Poland*, which was conducted in 2015-2020 and granted by The National Centre of Knowledge (NCN)².

Theoretical contexts

Adulthood has long been treated intuitively and unproblematically (Glanc 2011), and its criteria have been regarded as unambiguous. The

2 The reconstruction of the paths of reaching adulthood by young Poles was one of the three main tasks that make up the project's research programme. The other two ones included: 1. social policy actions and models towards/aimed at young adults described in Polish and foreign academic literature and in legal acts and strategies formulated by Polish central and local authorities; 2. concepts of adulthood formulated both by Polish social policy institutions and by young adults.

definitions and characteristics of adulthood began to be discussed at the stage of the formation of post-modern society, the stage of violent changes in the sphere of values, social relations, life choices, and the possibility of their implementation. Today, in addition to the static concept of understanding adulthood as the social state of man, achieved by him at some point in his life, a dynamic view of categories has become more important. In a dynamic perspective, adulthood is considered a process of mental development or a socio-cultural process that constantly „becomes“, which means that is subjected to change (Malewski 1991).

Adulthood is an interdisciplinary phenomenon. As a stage of human life, it is „operationalized“ by changes in appearance and functioning as a biological organism (first, menstruation in girls, voice mutation, and rapid growth in boys) and legal regulations of adulthood determining access to privileges in terms of civil rights (i.e. working under an employment contract, voting in elections, legal use of certain stimulants, obtaining a driver's license, the expiry of parental responsibility over a child, marriage). Cultural rituals of becoming an adult are still functioning (transition ceremonies such as the mitzvah bar in Jewish culture or the sacrament of Confirmation in Christian culture).

The postmodern relativity and ambivalence of adulthood is less concerned with its biological and legal but more with cultural and demographic-social aspects. The determinants (markers) of adulthood are widely discussed (c.f. Hogan, Roberts 2004; Reitzle, 2006; Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Pollock 2008 as cited in Brzezińska and Others 2011).

In the classic, objective approach to adulthood, they represent demographic and social criteria, called in the source literature the „*Big Five*“ (Settersten 2011 as cited in Wiszejko-Wierzbicka, Kwiatkowska 2018, 148). These include performing social roles normatively assigned to adults: completing education, taking up a first professional job, leaving the family home, living independently and running one's own household, and building a lasting intimate relationship, including getting married and having children (cf. Bendit 2006, Havighurst 1972). In a dynamic approach, adulthood is not only regarded as an objective category within the meaning of socially important roles, but also becomes a subjective phenomenon, i.e., the role of an autonomous individual in the creation and construction of one's own adulthood is highlighted. Being an adult means: a willingness to take responsibility for yourself

and others but also a sense of freedom of choice and independence in decision-making process, which leads to a sense of being an adult.

Psychological markers mean a reformulation of traditional adulthood indicators into a narrative of the reconstruction of an independent adult and mature self (Silva 2012). In subjective terms, being an adult is confirmed by the individual when he or she is self-defining him or herself as an independent person, responsible for him or herself and for the loved ones and for the choices he or she makes (cf. Brzezińska, Syska ed. 2016; Arnett 2004) (more broadly on this topic Kudlińska-Chruścicka 2019). In post-modern society, the stage of adulthood is characterized by variability, exploration, self-conviction, and often solitude (cf. Dubas 2001, 2004, Glanc 2011).

The processes that defined the postmodern stage of development like: the dissemination of education, demographic changes, transformations in the labour market, the growing demand for highly qualified specialists, the increase in competitiveness, have opened up many opportunities for young people to choose their own path for developing and projecting their lives (biographies). However, they have to act in conditions of intensification of social risks and increasing uncertainty (often with precarious life scenario). In Poland, an additional factor that framed young people's choices was the accession to the EU, which „opened“ them up to Western patterns of life: a turn towards consumption and a greater freedom of life choice. These conditions fostered the self-made man attitude creation in the younger generation. It resulted in self-driven attitudes and in a growing popularity of alternative patterns of family life. Self-made men should be able to overcome not only “everyday” but also structural problems like unemployment and limited access to the labor market and to secure the rudiments of existence. In the modern society, a normatively defined, chronological and organized around a professional work life cycle was implemented. The first stage was education, then professional work, followed by economic self-reliance, marriage, and parenthood. Nevertheless, the modern model is being displaced by the post-modern model which introduce destandardization, deinstitutionalization, and dechronologization. Life paths in the transition from youth to adulthood are increasingly diverse, but also uncertain and unpredictable. They can be also described as a conglomerate of more traditional, normatively defined model of entering adulthood

to a new one in which the way of acting of basic social roles inexplicable and indefinable. Nowadays, reflectiveness becomes more important as well as the need to consciously control life. However, young adults should be prepared to open up to new situations and be more adaptive and flexible (Beck 2002; DuBois-Reymond, López Blasco 2003; Bauman 2006; Walther 2006; Giddens 2001; Zielińska 2018).

The stage of transition into adulthood, which is being today intensively explored by theorists and empiricists (m.in. J. Arnett, A. Giddens, U. Beck, M. Kohli, A. Walther, in Poland, A. Brzezińska, K. Szafraniec, I. Grabowska), can be characterized by: the increasing complexity, fragmentation and biographizing, and the assumption that the criteria for separation of adults from young people have become less clear. It is increasingly difficult to determine the specific moment when a person becomes an „adult“ and the age range for those experiencing such a transition has extended between the ages of 15 and 40 (Piotrowski 2013; Grotowska-Leder, Rek-Woźniak, Kudlińska 2016).

Transition to adulthood is structured by covering phases revealing the different situations experienced by young people: the stage of *adolescence*, which is characterized by living with parents and concentrating on learning; the stage of *post-adolescence* (Galland 1990; Cavalli, Galland 1995 for: Bendit 2006) in settings of professional experimentation in the organization of housing and partnerships; the stage of *early/emerging adulthood*, that is, a time of learning about possible directions of life activities, intensive exploration in the sphere of intimate relationships, shaping professional aspirations and awareness of the importance of a professional career in conditions of job insecurity, risk of unemployment and inflation of professional competences, resulting in a change in the workplace, housing conditions and partners. The closure of the process is *the completed adulthood* (Bendit 2006), characterized by making relatively sustainable decisions and accepting commitments on issues of partnership (cohabitation, staying in a lasting relationship, and formalizing it through marriage, motherhood) and professional career (involvement in a particular industry, choosing a company as a workplace).

The prolonged entering into adulthood comprises two scenarios: 1. Postponed adulthood as a conscious strategy of young people that is a consequence of their refrain from making the most important life choices in favor of experimenting, checking different opportunities and

pathways. Adulthood is treated as a challenge and seems to be part of the project of one's own life. 2. Adulthood is delayed by nonindividual factors, mainly economic and structural factors, within the meaning of limited access to resources and support networks of material, intellectual, emotional, and social nature, resulting in a lack of competence for adulthood (Kudlińska-Chruścicka 2019: 38, cf. Brzezińska 2016: 24-26). The implementation of these two scenarios is structurally determined and is linked to the position of the individual in the social structure. Young middle and upper class representatives tend to focus on self-realization in early adulthood (Benson, Furstenberg 2007), while lower classes are quicker to follow the traditional path of entering adulthood (Silva, 2012: 508). Young people in the lower classes tend to equate adulthood mainly with objective markers – finding a job and starting a family, while young people with a higher socio-economic status, in particular from a larger city, are more likely to define adulthood as a multidimensional phenomenon, indicating both objective and subjective markers including psychological factors (cf. Plug, Zeijl, DuBois-Reymond 2003; Grotowska-Leder, Kudlińska 2018).

The methodological basis for analysis

The paths of transition into adulthood of the surveyed young adult Poles were analyzed using some of the qualitative data collected in the project that related to their work and family experience after completing their education. The research sample consisted of 60 people born in 1986, who grew during the period of systemic transformation in Poland in the 1990s and reached demographic maturity in the year of our country's accession to the EU³. Thus, among the purposefully selected interviewees, there were 30 inhabitants of a large city (Lodz). This large academic city is an example of a place with greater access to education, including higher education, and greater opportunities on the labor market. To contrast them with young adults with a less privileged positions, in the context of achieving adulthood through education and work (facing other structural conditions of achieving completed adulthood), another 16 residents of less urbanised areas of the Zduńska Wola county (*powiat*)

3 The project was carried out using a diverse methodological instrumentation: focused group interviews (FGI), in-depth quasi-biographical interviews (IDI), official documents and available statistics.

in the Lodz province and 14 foster-care leavers were also interviewed. Interviewees were in general accessed to the apply a snowballing technique that, especially in the case of interviewees from Zduńska Wola and foster care institutions, was supplemented by support from local institutions (job centres, social security institutions). As a consequence of the implemented procedure, the homogeneity as to the educational and job situation of particular groups of interviewees could be observed (higher education and better jobs in the case of inhabitants of Lodz, what reflects the general tendencies observed in the region). The sample consisted of thirty-seven (37) women and twenty-three (23) men. Regarding graduation, twenty-four respondents had achieved secondary level (finished high school, including high school for adults), twenty-three (23) tertiary level (finished studies), seven (7) vocational and six (6) primary level (finished elementary school). The quasi-biographical qualitative empirical material obtained by the recording technique was transcribed and analyzed using Nvivo software.

Paths of reaching adulthood by young Poles

The analyses of the collected in-depth interviews (IDI) were particularly focused on the implementation of professional and family roles as key determinants of adulthood. The analyses of the collected in-depth interviews (IDI) were focused in particular on the implementation of professional and family roles as key determinants of adulthood. The result of it was the identification of four path characteristics for 30-year-olds surveyed that lead to different stages of adulthood: 1. complete adulthood, 2. career-oriented adulthood, 3. unstable adulthood, and 4. unanchored adulthood and corresponding to four types of young adults: complete adults, professionally progressive singles, struggling with adulthood, and permanent experimenters.

The path of completed adulthood

Complete adults occupy a well-established position in the labor market and describe their work as satisfactory. They can be characterized by a stable position on the labor market. Most often, these persons were employees working on an indefinite or fixed-term contract. Their family status is also stable, they set up their household, and live in a permanent relationship (procreation family). Their relationship can be formal

(marriage) or informal (partnership) and they also have kids, usually one or two. They can be therefore described with a balanced model of professional and family role connections, as they are as focused on family life as they are on developing their careers.

Their transition to complete adulthood was supported by families of origin. The respondents repeatedly mentioned the support given to them by close relatives, usually parents, but also grandparents, siblings, and other relatives. The great importance had the emotional support: acceptance of life choices made, strengthening subjectivity and self-esteem, and encouragement to study. However, the crucial form of help delivered to young adults on their path to complete adulthood was the material one. Some from this group got the flat (apartment) ready to move in (bought by the parents or inherited from grandparents), others were offered help to take out the mortgage, or the parents granted them non-refundable loans, most often used for the renovation of the apartment. The material assistance was also the transfer of the car. Parents also supported their children giving them money for the current needs related to the upbringing of the kids or simply parents taking care of the grandchildren.

The assisted transition to adulthood was particularly evident in young adults from a large city, whose family of origin had high material (housing, savings, financial stability) and cultural capital, which also provided children with culturally defined definitions of success. Parents of complete adults, as a rule, had higher education and stable (relatively good) material and housing situation.

A complete adult biography is relatively punctual and linear. The process of achieving adulthood was following the cultural established, normative social order: from education, then starting working, setting up the household, and the procreation family. The vast majority of them have higher education and usually, they started and finished their studies on time. Between the ages of 25 and 28, they moved out of the family home and started their own household. Their life partner had a similar social position as them and was usually met during the study. Around the age of 28, they became parents. Moving out of the family home and starting to run their own household usually involved taking a better job (it could have been both a change of job or an improvement in the financial conditions at the present workplace). The income earned from work is

intended to enable the timely repayment of the mortgage, as well as to increase the level of consumption (funds for foreign holidays and leisure).

They put the family first in the hierarchy of values, but they also think about their work and career continuity. Complete adults can be categorized as resourceful in life, setting themselves achievable goals and priorities (which they usually manage to accomplish). In their professional decisions, they were guided by the protection of material needs, but also by job satisfaction and a guarantee of time for the family. When formulating further career goals, they clearly state that they do not want to achieve them at the expense of family life. Some gave up on the offer of better-paid work, which involved separation from a partner and a child. Complete adults are the vast majority of employed workers who do not experience unemployment, although a few have recorded very short breaks (top 2-3 weeks), but without fear or risk of lack of employment.

Complete adults aspire to a high standard of living, but they want to achieve this goal through a harmony of family and professional goals. After the birth of the child, they began to search for a larger apartment, which was most often associated with taking out a mortgage. Such plans are also available to those complete adults who still have credit obligations regarding the current apartment. Nevertheless, their material situation, possession status, and the declared assistance of the family allow them to take such a step. They also happened to take additional, well-paid orders or even work „off the books“ to repair their home budget.

Some of the complete adults had migration experiences (mainly in the UK). They were coming back treating the bond with their family and place of residence as so strong that it did not allow them to migrate permanently. Today they are also accompanied by the thought of migration, but their stabilized life and professional situation make these plans less and less likely to be realized. 30-year-olds on the path to completed adulthood use different public and commercial instruments: take money transfer from “Family 500 plus” program⁴, benefit from tax

4 The Family 500+ programme is the government’s main family policy instrument to achieve three main objectives: improving the demographic situation, reducing poverty among the youngest, investing families in living conditions. The scheme entered into force on 1 April 2016 as a real state financial aid to families raising children. Under the Program, families with at least 2 children up to the age of 18, and after modification - from July 1, 2019 - also families with 1 child of this dependent age, are entitled to a benefit of PLN 500 PL every month for each child regardless of

credits (e.g., for married couples), mortgages and consumer loans, some of them pointed out their studies, which allowed them to acquire competencies that strengthened their position on the labor market.

Complete adults were in agreement that during entering adulthood they could count on the support of family members. They were not explicitly verbalizing the expectations of extensive material support or expanded public policies delivered by the state. They were explained in the interviews that the using of various programs within public and social policy was treated by complete adults as an admission of failure, a „demanding“ attitude, and a lack of life’s resourcefulness. In other words, complete adults do not fully see themselves as legitimate recipients of social programs. However, they have demands on properly constructed public policy solutions for young adults and mainly mentioned: assistance in daycare for children (flexible hours, leaving the child for one or two hours), differentiation of educational offers for children, support for access to credit (partial guarantees, partial payment of interest by the state), support for setting up and running a business (from information and education to simplification of procedures and loans and grants that you can use). Complete adults presented themselves as satisfied with their lives, from their position in the social structure and accepting their previous biography.

The path of career-oriented adulthood

The second category of 30-years-olds is the professionally progressive singles, who are focused on professional success during the stage of entering adulthood. This group is dominated by the inhabitants of a big city. The resources they had at the entering of adulthood were the result of moderate family support (most often material help). In this group, the most important was the transmission of cultural capital. When describing family relationships, they drew attention to the consistent emphasis on values such as independence and responsibility for their actions and choices. These values enable early emancipation (setting up an own household) and entering the labor market (also through the family company). Professionally progressive singles judge their parents’

the per capita income of the family. As a result of the launch of the programme, the share of family policy expenditure in GDP has more than doubled, from 1.78% in 2015 to 4% in 2020.

life paths – stable but boring and low-paid job procreational mothers' decisions at a relatively young age – as unattractive and not worthy to follow. They were distancing themselves from these patterns and were recognizing them as both not allowing for free life and as well as self-development and professional career limiters.

Professionally progressive singles are characterized as self-centered and subjugating life to the development of their careers: the first paid work was undertaken in their teens, they decided to choose the field of study, the place of employment, until the decision to start their own company. They emphasize their agency and the fact that their social position is a result of their individual efforts (it is always achieved but not the inherited position). Their process of entering adulthood in metaphorical terms is a constant climbing. Some of them have migration experience but they treated it like testing themselves in a new situation. They did not think about living permanently in another country.

A distinctive feature of progressive professional singles is independence. When talking about their lives, they repeatedly emphasize its importance, as well as the need for pursuit and realization of constant development, the improvement of competence that can be well sold on the market, and the importance of further education. Their life activity is focused on building a professional biography and launching further projects related to their career: development of their own company, higher position in work. An important part of their biography is also the development of interests and passions.

The issues raised in their statements regarding the search for a life partner and the founding of the family are digressive. They allow the possible formation of a family and the birth of a child, but this would mark the turning point of their career, its „slowdown“ and entry into the phase of stagnation, as well as the need to limit passion and hobbies. The future procreation family was categorized as a limitation and even as the definitive end of their professional development. They did not problematize about building long-lasting intimate relationships with the revealed experiences at the stage of entering adulthood. When asked about the plans in this social life area, they seemed aware of the cultural expectations of starting a family and therefore they claimed that they were looking for a partner, but did not find the right one. For progressive singles, their friends and acquaintances are important, and the

relationships described with them make it possible to believe that at this stage of their lives they replace their family. Some claimed that their family was a team they had created in their company. They emphasized that they feel responsible for their employees, that they spend a lot of time with them.

At the age of thirty, at the time of the interview, they continued to invest in themselves: they began further studies, learned foreign languages, gained further certificates strengthening their position on the labor market. Their work brings them relatively high income and satisfaction. Their financial and housing situation is so stable that it even allows for risks associated with a change of job or an increase in investment in their own company. Constant activity in the labor market (both employed workers and business owners) and the state of possession allow them to plan their future, including their careers, without the risk of financial problems.

Professional progressive singles are prospective, they claim that their main goals and life achievements are ahead of them. In their opinions, already achieved, professional success confirms their resourcefulness, independence, and responsibility in the process of entering adulthood. They criticize public policy instruments in the form of financial transfers (e.g., the Family 500 plus program). They believe that people should be supported, but it should not be a simple redistribution of funds. They expect reinforcement for young adults through programs to facilitate their start in adulthood: advice on career choice (e.g., career tutoring) or business start-up assistance (e.g., easy access to grants and loans).

The path of unstable adulthood

The third type of experience of 30-year-olds on the road to adulthood was described as the „path of unstable adulthood“ and its implementers as „struggling with adulthood“. At the start of adulthood, they had much more modest resources than those belonging to the two types of young adults described above.

Struggling with adulthood often comes from families with dysfunctional characteristics, experienced in divorce, alcoholism, and sometimes domestic violence. They become independent, because they move out of the family home quite early, but the reasons for these decisions are varied: more often it is the desire to live with a partner and “cutting

off” from family trauma, less often the conflict with parents, in a few cases bereavement and the need to live with a new caregiver. The material capital and cultural capital of their families of origin was low, so they could not count on support on the way to adulthood. Struggling with adulthood enter the labor market early, usually taking low-paid internships that do not guarantee the continuation of employment. They live in smaller towns and villages, generally in rented, municipal or social flats which the legal status is not fully regulated, and the title to the premises is unclear. Sometimes they live in premises which were lent them by friends or family. They have been living in permanent relationships for several years – informal or formalized – and are pursuing themselves in the role of parents.

Struggling with adulthood seek to protect and secure the living conditions of their procreation families in a situation of professional and housing instability. Their stabilized family situation seems to compensate for their uncertainty in terms of employment and housing. The life path of this group of respondents fits into a family model in which the main, but not always the only, breadwinner is a man, husband, father, and the activity of a woman, wife, and mother focuses on domestic and caring responsibilities. These 30-years-olds young adults can be therefore categorized as being on their way to complete adulthood. They are labile on the market, but with a tendency to stabilize.

Men’s professional activity is generally characterized by shorter breaks in employment and return to the labor market (like a sine wave), usually in the form of fixed-term employment. The interlocutors talked about the practice used by their employers - about formally hiring them part-time for the lowest salary, and the rest of the salary paid to them “off the books” („under the table“). Women, on the other hand, especially after having a child, relatively often stay at home and benefit from financial transfers offered by the state in the form of childcare benefits and allowances. Some of them register with the employment office as unemployed, and some of them have still worked „off the books“ (e.g., in a family business or carrying out renovation work). Struggling with adulthood are generally characterized by a precarious existence, permanent adaptation to changing living conditions, constant care for the maintenance of work, „tightening“ the household budget, and improving the standard of living of their families. Professional work is not a

key value when they are problematizing entering adulthood. Work is, above all, a source of income that gives their families a sense of stability. The exception is people who, by reason of their qualifications (technical competence, ability to operate specialized equipment, e.g., repair or construction) periodically find a well-paid occupation allowing for longer periods of material stabilization.

Struggling with adulthood can be characterized by life resourcefulness manifested primarily in the use of various programs and instruments under public policy, including family benefit „500 Plus“, rent subsidies, financial transfers per child, start-up grants, internship programs, and employment office support. They also try to improve their qualifications. They participate in training supplementing education, even if these are only sham activities, caused by the desire to benefit from a grant in the form of an education voucher for adults entering their studies. They usually finish their studies after the first semester, after which they decide on a different field of study.

When reporting on their biographies, they do not mention the public institutions as important supporters in the process of entering adulthood. These offices are usually referred to places where you need to „check off“ or „sign something“ to maintain health insurance and retain your right to benefits.

They treat the funds they receive as a permanent addition to the household budget, so they calculate whether and in what form they should take up work so as not to lose their entitlement to them. Such decisions also include some women receiving mother benefits. Some of them do not return to the labor market for this reason. Struggling with adulthood can be described by accepted routine instability. Their biographical experience is characterized by their temporary and continuous efforts to overcome the deficits in living standards. Nevertheless, they define their economic situation as relatively stable, do not feel threatened by long-term unemployment or social exclusion. However, they live „from paycheck to paycheck“ and their consumption structure is simplified, indicating a lower material status than in the two previous categories of young adults.

The path of unanchored adulthood

Fourth, the created category of 30-year-olds are “still experimenting”, and their transition to adulthood is the “unanchored adulthood”. Coming from families with low material and cultural capital, they did not have the resources to start in adulthood. They have not achieved normative stability in any of the key areas of life. They still live with their parents/parents or other close relatives (grandmother/grandfather, sister/brother) because their unstable and part-time employment does not guarantee an income for achieving material independence. They have not built a relatively long-lasting intimate relationship and they live alone without a partner.

Young adults still experimenting began to work as teenagers. In their narration, they took work primarily to earn money for their own „cravings“, so the short periods of employment with little income were enough. Their transition to adulthood is characterized by fragmentation in each of the three key areas of life: professional, material independence, and intimate relationships. They reproduce the pattern of yo-yo transition (Wather 2006). They move out of the family home (to a new partner; because they can handle the cost of living), and after a while they return to their parents (sometimes due to the necessary care of the parent). The same scenario was repeated in subsequent attempts to run one’s own household. Moreover, many times they entered and left the labour market, experimenting professionally, because they took jobs in various professions and places, such as: sellers, warehouse workers in shops in gastronomy, wholesalers, on the construction site, mostly low-paid professions. In general, there were short periods of professional activity, and in some cases they were working only until they earned enough money for one or two months spending. Sometimes they go back to their previous jobs.

Yo-yo transition also characterizes their intimate relationships. They entered into a close relationship, which after a while fell apart, and they returned to being single. The main reason which was responsible for breaking the relationship was the housing problems (lack of conditions for shared living) and financial issues (the subjects said they did not want to be treated as someone else’s/partner dependant). Biographies of still experimenting are characterized by alinearity and lack of punctuality. They interrupt education (sometimes they continue it later in

adult schools), move out of the family home without conditions for independent maintenance and running a household, build intimate relationships, without having a stable position in the labor market. The unanchored adulthood can be observed also in situations like: decision to reliving on parents, resigning from a job or severance contact with a partner. They are trying to rationalize these kinds of life decisions pointing out problems at work caused by co-workers or employers, the need to reduce expenses, or to be willing to have no obligations to others.

The experimenters are critical regarding opinions of the institutional state support system. They consider that the forms of assistance they have received (transfers and financial benefits, training, and courses at the labor office) are inadequate and insufficient to change their living conditions.

Conclusion

Transition into adulthood is a process that has objective and subjective aspects understood as the realization of normatively defined social roles and having the competence and identity of an adult. In the traditional normative model, its linear and traditional pattern includes: graduation – financial independence – stable work – starting a family. Moreover, the socially accepted path to adulthood also determines the desired rhythm and punctuality, i.e., starting new social roles (the process of role taking) should occur in the right time and in the right order. Despite its differences in defining adulthood, its key professional roles, economic and family autonomy (including procreative) are part of completed adulthood. Whereas, responsibility for one's own choices and realization and autonomy and subjectivity are its determinants in psychological terms.

The four types of young adults and pathways, which they follow on the way to adulthood reveal a diversity of experiences. Moreover, they confirm both the transformation patterns of adulthood as well as stages of the process of entering adulthood. Two of the distinguished paths: complete adulthood and unstable adulthood substantiate the pattern of this process shaped in modern society. These two paths differ in the material conditions for the implementation of the normative formula determined by the families of origin, which in the long term frames the opportunities for access to the resources of the post-modern society:

employment in the second instead of the first segment of the labor market, which means low wages and the risk of temporary job losses, and living in lower-standard premises and precarious legal status. The latter – struggling with adulthood – trying to fulfill the basic roles of an adult, manifests efforts to improve housing conditions and to increase the household budget to ensure the needs and persuasiveness of the family. It should be added that this type of adulthood constructing is relatively common among those young Poles who are characterized by a relatively worse material situation, but there are adults in mental terms.

Another two distinguished paths of transition to adulthood – career-focused adulthood and unanchored adulthood – do not frame the normative pattern of adulthood. The path to adulthood of progressive singles is unclosed due to matrimonial and parental decisions. However, the gradual transformation of cultural patterns towards the increasing importance of individual choices and autonomy allows to perceive career-oriented adulthood as a confirmation of the acquisition of adult competence in psychological terms and as an increasingly accepted model of adulthood. The described relationships with friends of professionally progressive singles prove that for many people around them the status achieved by them is attractive and desirable. Despite the lack of family and offspring, this type of biography becomes an increasingly perpetuating and accepted model for the realization of this stage of life and socially legitimized scenario for the role of a young adult in contemporary society. On the other hand, the transition from unanchored to any of the normatively defined areas of adult activity during the period of demographic adulthood is not a normative path. It does not meet the key conditions and expectations related to the social requirements of the status of adults. However, the number of young adults still living with their parents is relatively high in Poland. In 2018 in Poland they make up 43% of men and 29% of women aged 25-34 (Generation of nesters in Poland, US Warsaw 2020), and that is why nesters (as they are categorized) became increasingly common social categories. Increasing acceptance for both types of young adults, career-oriented and unanchored, are clear signs of a transformation towards post-modern pattern of life organization at the stage of becoming an adult.

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