Entering Adulthood. In Search of Specificity of the Post-communist Countries[1]

Krystyna Szafraniec*
Institute of Sociology, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland

Abstract: The subject of analysis in this article is, on the one hand, the category of youth (as a phase of life and as a social group), increasingly discursive and less transparent nowadays, and – on the other hand – some social areas revealing the largest cumulation of young people's life problems, such as education, entering a labour market and issues related to becoming self-reliant and personal life arrangements. The specific of the post-communist countries is that all of the above presenting a quite different, non-standard face of the youth, which may be excessively prolonged in entering adulthood, more complex (hybrid), more difficult to bear, systemically bereft and politically riskier. The issue analysed in this article is part of a broader diagnosis of the young generation in countries undergoing the political transformation in Eastern Europe and Asia. The empirical base used in this project were existing sources collected in national and international surveys and studies. The paper presents – first – some (psychological, sociological and political) arguments for a broader definition of youth, and then focuses on showing the three main areas requiring support, which are in analyzed countries: education, transition from school to employment and establishing the new independent family life.

Keywords: *the youth; entering adulthood; education; labour market; privacy arrangements.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *tineret; începutul maturizării; educație; piața muncii; viață privată.*

Today in many countries, young people are a critical element of social structure. However, it is hard to identify manifestations of defiance or negation in their life situation and the impossibility of the realisation of aims imposed by the culture. What is required is, thus, close observation of their life situation and problems.

We are interested in the young citizens from the post-communist countries; the representatives of the first generation whose intellectual adolescence occurred in the new political system which is, in a sense, their common generational experience and distinguishes them from the elders. Since the end of the eighties, the countries behind the "iron curtain" began to open up to the world, entailing that, since then, young Poles, Romanians, Chinese or Russians have been growing up in the borderland of different societies and cultural worlds. Their being 'between' creates a new quality and complicates different matters.

This article is part of an international research project examining nine post-communist countries of Europe and Asia[2]. Treating the post-communist countries as a specific space of common political core, we do not forget that they have taken various transformative paths and have different problems to solve. Transformation is understood – generally – as a shift from a less to a more liberal system. This shift may concern the whole system (economy, political institutions, ideology) or only certain areas (e.g., economic principles). These changes may take place with the participation of many social players (state, civil society), or under

* Institute of Sociology, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland.
E-mail: krystyna.szafraniec@umk.pl.

control of the state. As the result, we have a model of complete, wide-ranging civic transformation – covering all the spheres of life (economy, politics, culture) and engaging a broad spectrum of equal players; a model of limited statist transformation – implemented from the state's level and only concerning the economic sphere; and the model of wide-ranging statist transformation – allowing for changes in many spheres, including a political system's change with a state as a leading player. The first model, focused on a vision of democratic capitalism, is represented by post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. There are five of those in the project – Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia and Germany (German Eastern lands). The second, opposing model of limited transformation with a leading role of the party-state and the vision of the so-called national market economy is implemented by Asian post-communist countries, represented by China and Vietnam in the project. The third model is a path taken by Russia.

The list of these countries also offers other significant interpretative features. The countries differ not only in the chosen strategy of reforms but also in historical background, cultural (religious) tradition and level of economic development. Among the European countries – mostly implementing a similar model of transformation – there are those which was not included in the former Soviet `Bloc` and those which were a part of the Soviet Union; those of different lenghts of EU membership; rebuilding their system with the use of "socialist debris" (Staniszkis, 1991; Mach, 1998) and through external transformation – "import of a ready-made state" (example of former GDR transformation) (Offe, 1991). The fact that they all force the idea of a market economy and enter into global relationships makes the situation of the young generation similar, and at the same time makes it subjectively and objectively more risky.

The youth, i.e. who?

The majority of studies distinguish young people in terms of their age range which conventionally has been reserved for it. Formerly, this categorisation overlaps with phases of life or social roles (for the youth, the time related to secondary education was reserved). Today, this criterion has become insufficient and, as a consequence, the field of features encapsulated as 'the youth' consists not only of people of the age of 15-19 or 20-24 years, but also (more and more often) 25-29 years. Later generations have remained for a longer period of time in the education system, but this is not the only reason.

The criteria dividing the youth from adults are not clear because the changes (economic, social, cultural) taking place in the contemporary world are redefining social roles, disturbing regular rhythms of life and changing the norms of development. They find their expression in the phenomena specified as pluralisation and hybridisation of the age categories (Neugarten, 1987). There are more elements which are proving to be more and more explicitly erosive of former, ascribed phases of life, social, psychological and cultural characteristics. Youth and adulthood are pulling away not only from the age categories, they are also pulling away from social roles and lifestyles which are characteristic for them and even from psychological and developmental features.

In classic theories, young people were situated at a very particular period of life between childhood and adulthood, and referred to those persons who did not reached their self-reliance in the life yet. Yet, some time ago, the end of this phase of life was related to such special events and life situations as taking a job, entering into marriage, starting a family, or establishing a self-reliant household. Adulthood was recognisable after the achievement of complete life stabilisation

which was usually (even in the industrial societies) possible more-or-less at the age of 20.

Transition from the phase of youth (which means the status of a dependent person who is not taken seriously and who cannot decide about themselves) to adulthood (which meant the status of a full member of a society who is able to decide about their lives independently) used to occur relatively early. In a contemporary reality, this transition is neither certain nor simple. Today, young people remain in the roles of pupils/students from the age of 25, while they get married about the age of 30 (or do not marry at all) and have a baby. Similarly, having an independent residence is a situation which occurs even later and more rarely. This is the case because, to a large extent it is the key to adulthood, i.e. autonomy (employment) has become, due to structural conditionings, the commodity in short supply and uncertain.

The result of looking at the social and cultural implications of youth (holding the youth on the margin of the real life for too long) is to produce a psychological profile of youth which extends to the period of adulthood – later reaching social, emotional, moral maturity. The essence of this phenomenon is the so-called "quarter life crisis" – a crisis of postponed adolescence, a lesson from an early youth which has not been learnt and the phenomenon which is more and more often observed amongst 20-year-olds, especially amongst young students (Robbins and Wilner, 2001, 4). The adolescence crisis, experienced in the second decade of life, usually ends with obtaining the foundations of one's own ME (Erikson, 1998, 551-538). Today, the most crucial questions, such as "Who should I be?", are answered with a difficulty in the third decade of life. Decisional impasse, fear of the future and sense of isolation are dominating feelings experienced in the face of a confrontation with 'the real world' which takes place significantly later, and significantly more often has the taste of defeat (Arnett, 2007, 4).

The young, after long years of being held in the education system, strive to find a job with a great difficulty. They face an uncertain future and the sense that, because of the relentless passing time, no mistake can be made. This causes fear and makes them reluctant to undertake binding life decisions. These circumstances also induce them to build the life strategies having a *moratory* (postponing and fleeing) character – into provisional and temporary solutions, including prolonged parents' care (Marcia, 1966).

Owing to these circumstances, the concept of youth has become complicated; it has broadened its meaning and changed its sense. It now includes both the "classic" youth (the persons who are learning) and the young adults who, as a result of structural conditioning/systemic blockades, are starting their adult life with a certain level of delay. Publicists and researchers present various terms illustrating this state of affairs. We no longer have *kids, adolescents* contrasted or compared to *adults*; we have *kidults* and *adultescents* as mixed, border categories. However, without starting an interesting analysis of the phenomenon, and only to signalise the important linguistic problem, I am going to use the simple term "*the young*" in the following study. It combines various phases/variations of youth and by indicating the context which is responsible for described changes, we avoid the risk of excessively simplified defining the youth/the young.

As a consequence of such an extended meaning of the concept of the youth, we are standing before a difficult choice. Which areas where young people are positioned would require the most immediate interference and actions at the level of the state or supranational organisations responsible for a social well-being? What should be involved in (and to what problems should respond) social policy towards the youth?

The list of neglect in reference to the post-communist countries is long. These are

visible not only in more frequent criticisms of education and in the lack of appropriate health care or housing, but also in the constant threat of unemployment, in weakening motivation to start a family, increases in social inequalities, risky behaviour, or conflicts with the law. For many years, the problem of the youth has not been present in the public discourse about the past; even if it is present, then it is being trivialised, or hysterically overplayed. For the media, youth is also a target for advertising designed to satisfy their needs. In contrast, school has completely lost its pedagogical functions and which is hated by the youth. For politics, the problem of the youth is present only as an element of a pre-election game, it then successfully vanishes to give way to more important matters (the necessity of militarisation, quarrels about the past, about promises and influence).

In the modern economy, there is no place for a lot of today's youth. Dwindling and ever more dehumanised labour markets provide no chances for the future; capitalism itself in its present form has nothing special to offer to young people. Higher education, formerly education to join the elites, has lost its cultural mission and has transformed into the producer of ready packages of skills to meet the needs of the labour market (Giroux, 2003).The area which requires social policies is very extensive. It has been unambiguously proven by the report about the young prepared by an international team of researchers, which analyses the situation of young people in the post-communist countries studied here.

Main areas of tension requiring support

I have selected three questions to address from a long list of problematic issues. First of all, education, the area traditionally associated with youth; secondly, the transition from education to a labour market; thirdly, the set of problems related to entering adulthood (starting a family, conflict of private and professional roles, especially severe in case of young women). A broad spectrum of problems appears in all those areas requiring thoughtful, coherent public policies which, as such, do not currently exist in Poland (and other post-communist countries)[3]. These areas, crucial for the problem on question, are currently subject to interim and uncoordinated actions.

Education

Education was in post-communist countries one of the first subsystems that has been subject to changes. Higher education, which once was a difficult to access value, has in our times become the value aspired to by bigger part of youth. Investments in education are those the most obvious, both for the youth and their parents, and also for the experts in social development. After political changes, especially in the `90s, the education system, which for many post-war decades was being conserved in the corset of socialist limits and rules, has opened up to new needs and challenges. Under this new pressure, changes in education began before the systemic reforms were even undertaken.

The first and their most expressive manifestation was – in Central and Eastern Europe – the derogation of limits of admission to studies and enactment of the law establishing the education market. Another step, being of no less importance, was to reduce the proportion of vocational education in general education. As the result of social pressure, vocational schools, perceived to prepare students poorly for the needs of the new labour market, hence, socially degrading, started to vanish. In their place, secondary schools were being created which were intended to pave the way of students to the

higher education institutions and higher social positions for the largest number.

Dissemination of secondary education has undoubtedly brought post-communist countries (especially Poland) closer to a group of modern countries, but the scale of the change has caused new problems to appear. Changes in the valuation of vocational education and general education has caused a drastic reduction of the proportion of the students attending basic vocational schools (of up to 13%) (GUS, 2014, 60). The result has been a noticeable shortage of qualified people to occupy simple but much demanded professions on the labour market. Simultaneously, a larger stream of people who choose secondary schools have caused a different group of young people to aspire to higher studies – people coming from families with a low cultural capital, average graduates of average secondary schools and young people with non-crystallised interests.

From the beginning of the 1990s to 2012, the schooling rates at the top of the educational ladder have increased by 370%. Although we are experiencing extremely different trends now (the results of the demographic decline) in Poland, there is still strong faith in the power of a diploma, despite the fact that the mass consumption of higher education does not translate into professional careers. In conjunction with an excessive supply of education, not only devaluation but revaluation of diplomas has taken place (Collins, 1979). Their value, in conjunction with saturation of the market with graduates of higher schools, is falling. Simultaneously, according to the demands of the market, they have become a necessary condition to begin a professional career. Diplomas and qualifications are less and less sufficient even if more and more are required. This phenomenon is observed in each of the analyzed countries – regardless of the adopted model of transition or degree of dissemination of higher education.

Paradoxically, as an effect of educational expansion, the phenomenon of a massive advancement through education had been characteristic for many decades in socialist countries. However, it has now been replaced with the phenomenon of relative degradation – labour below qualifications, unstable or lacking. The reasons for these phenomena are complex. They are demographic, economic (capitalism and its logic of effectiveness, crises); political transition, a style of education reforming if not a social mentality. The issue is not only the subordination of education to technocratic aims (Bauman, 1998, 204-205), but unthoughtful decisions made by the youth itself. That is, they choose those studies which are easily available and are not in a habit of recognising of their own talents, convinced that studies serve only to obtain a diploma and enter a profession.

Here, pressure comes from different sides. Understanding the reasons why higher education institutions are becoming "the bastions of meritocracy" entails the absence of self-reflection of the pragmatism which is the basis for the new philosophy of higher education means adopting studies with a more practical use fora professional career which is measured with a position of a graduate on a labour market. This approach changes not only the model of functioning of a higher education institution, but also distorts the meaning of an academic education. Moreover, it results paradoxically in a lack of expected "practical added value" in the form of independent thinking and productive innovators for whom the real challenges are not so much new skills and technologies, but the question of which should be used and how (Rorty, 1999, 114-126).

Poland has been recognized for years as a country of educational success. International organisations and assemblies positively graded its education reforms and results, especially to the extent to which they have increased the availability to the youth of better and longer education (OECD, 2010a). Poland not only belongs to the group of countries with the highest dynamics of in-

crease of the schooling rates – both in average and higher level of education (it is above 90% and 48% correspondingly) – but also to those where the rates of early school leavers are the lowest (5.5%), or people who are not in employment, education or training (so-called NEET's – 12.2%) (OECD, 2010b, 298). Simultaneously, both in the opinions of international assemblies and Polish researchers, the quality of education and its internal and external functionality are not good. Even if Polish students of middle schools have been obtaining improving results within the PISA survey, Polish higher education institutions – like universities in other post-communist countries – are not present amongst the first five hundred higher education institutions placed at Shanghai Ranking. The critical voices of experts have highlighted a broad spectrum of issues requiring changes[4]. Firstly, the necessity of reforms to vocational education. Secondly, the necessity to reform higher education. Thirdly, the reorientation of education from a retrospective to prospective, and from technocratic to a more general approach, one which teaches the youth understanding of themselves and the world they live in. Contrary to reforming current practices of education oriented to changes in the education system, the reforms needed today concern, above all, an interior of a university and a school (programmes, methodical reforms, those which will change selection principles, those supporting the career counselling system and educational coaching, abandoned or mistakenly conducting civil, health and intercultural education).

Transition from education to employment

The transition from education to employment and securing a stable job is a crucial issue for young people. Its success not only has an influence on whether young people become free from the parental control (leave the family home, become financially independent), but also whether they realise their aspirations and life needs. In our times, this process has become complicated and extended in duration (in Europe, for the majority of the youth this period falls on the period between the age of 20-24 (European Commission, 2012, 162). Stable employment allows them to understand what is required to have the status of an adult and independent person. Now, they tend to achieve this later and often falls at the beginning of the fourth decade of life.

Transition to the labour market occurs according to different patterns – either through a long education (academic studies, often combined with parallel gaining professional experience) or through short education (not ending with obtainment of desired qualifications – the case of graduates of secondary schools, i.e. so-called early school leavers). Different types of problems are related to each pattern of transition. The first one generates the *overeducation* effect and the related phenomenon of *underemployment*, which is reaching more and more young people (models characteristic for Poland, Russia, Latvia). The second is related to a reversed phenomenon - the insufficient level of qualifications and education against the needs of the labour market (*undereducation*) which results in a never-ending balancing trick between provisional forms of employment, entering the black economy, lack of employment, or a presence in the NEET category (these patterns are characteristic for the Balkan countries, China and Vietnam).

As the phenomenon and the problem, transition from education to employment is increasing worldwide, which is proven by new specialist studies concerning this issue published by international organizations (ILO, 2015, 51-60). Despite this reality, the youth is becoming better and better educated and their number is consistently falling; yet, it is they who are the most critically hit by principles of post-modern market economy. Notwithstanding the context, unemploy-

ment, occupational activity and the employment rates are still much more favourable for adults than for the youth (ILO, 2010). Moreover, legal regulations and employers' preferences ensure that even those young people who have been already present at the labour market cannot rely on stable employment. According to calculations made on the EUROSTAT online database, temporary employment for 2014 in the 15-29 age group was 54% in Poland, 38% in Germany[5], 18.3% in Hungary, 8% in Bulgaria, 5.3% in Latvia, and 3.7% in Romania (the EU average was 32%). The first two countries (Poland and Germany) are characterised by a high level of temporary employment. However, in contrast with Poland, Germany is characterised by better occupational mobility and better certainty of being employed again (European Commission, 2010a, 151).

In Russia, Vietnam and China, different provisional employment roles are filling up, and there is significantly more space for job offers for the youth. This largely defuses a problem with employment, but simultaneously reveals a scale of individual responsibility for creating new workplaces and preserving said workplaces. In Russia only 25% of the population remain in the area of informal employment, while among the youth this percentage is larger: 49.5% for those under 20, 35% for those in the 20-24 age group, and 21.9% for those in the 25-29 age group[6]. In China and Vietnam, most of the young people migrating from provinces to large cities must settle for informal employment, and are not connected with any social securities or financial guarantees[7] (ILO, 2005; Vietnam Development Forum, 2007, 88-102). Also of note here is the fact that, on a significantly larger scale than in Russia, temporary contracts have become common, thus indicating the specific character of the new local capitalism. In Russia, little more than 10% of the youth are employed on temporary contracts, while in Vietnam this figure easily exceeds 50% (ILO, 2015, 44).

The aforementioned statistics and characteristics have very conventional meaning. Boundaries between different forms of improvisational employment, grey economy and self-employment are especially fluid; indeed, this is impressive given that, in the face of ineffective legal regulations, these boundaries are practically beyond control. Employment for a definite period of time and self-employment (particularly entrepreneurship) in the EU member countries mean registered employment, the possibility to pay social insurance contributions, and a tax adequate to declared income[8] (European Commission, 2010b). In Russian and Asian countries, this works on slightly different, less clear principles. In China, self-employment is a description reserved for college graduates or those who have lost their job (become redundant) and cannot find a new one. These persons may conduct sole business or open a small enterprise and employ a few staff members. Nevertheless, when attempting to do this, they often encounter problems. For practical purposes (to decrease unemployment rates), these people are included in official statistics, and more specifically in the self-employed category. Having such status, they undertake different forms of employment – informal, unregistered, temporary, casual employment, family business, illegal, part-time employment, etc. (Xue, 2005). Self-employment in this context – formally identified as a separate category – becomes, in most cases, a part of informal and unregistered employment. A young boy (or girl) can set up his or her own Internet shop, work as a tutor or caregiver, and simultaneously advertise him or herself as a photographer. As a self-employed person, he or she represents a pure example of informal and unregistered employment.

Young self-employed people who conduct their own economic activity constitute more than half (51.4%) of China's 25 and under age group, significantly more than is the case for adults. Being self-employed and con-

ducting one's own economic activity is very popular among the Chinese youth. Indeed, approximately 15% of the country's self-employed youth are in their position because of failure to find a salaried job, and thus have chosen to become passive self-employed. Moreover, around one fourth to one third of the self-employed population have chosen such an occupation of their own accord. They start their own business because of the greater independence, flexible work hours, and the higher level of income. A similar situation is found in Vietnam, where the number of small enterprises has increased drastically[9], although none of these companies are interested in employing young people.

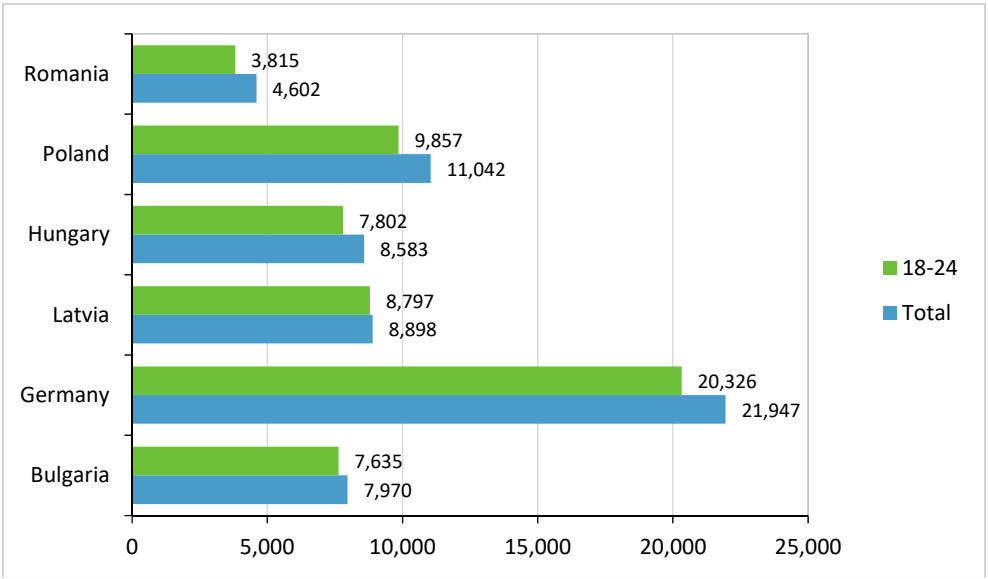
In European post-communist countries, self-employment in analogical age group does not exceed a few percent (4.5% in Bulgaria, 4% and 3.5% in Latvia and Hungary respectively, and 6% in Poland). Romania is an exception, with 12% of young people in the 25 and under age group declaring self-employment[10]. Small entrepreneurship, which so often appears in youth's declarations as an attractive form of employment, is undertaken equally seldom in European countries[11]. In Russia, 12% of the occupationally active populace run their own small business – 0.6% of young people in the 20 and under age group, 3.7% of the older age group (20-24 years), 4.6% of the 25-29 age group[12]. In Latvia, only 1% of young people below the age of 25 are entrepreneurs (Hāka, 2013), while in Poland this figure is 6%, in Bulgaria 4%, and in Romania 1.5%. Such low entrepreneurship proportions are a result of the significant expansion of Western capital and a lack of one's own material resources. However, these low proportions are also due to this generation's lack of competence when it comes to taking a risk; indeed, these people were brought up in an "instant" culture, which does not place emphasis on learning rules related to conducting business.

Nevertheless, where non-typical forms of employment are not widespread, it is either the case that unemployment rates are high (like in Bulgaria[13]) or informal employment and the grey economy become an alternative for youth (as in Asian countries, in Russia, or in Hungary and Latvia, where more than 25% of total employed youth are employed in the grey economy). Notwithstanding the local colouration (Germany – East and West – is an exception), fixed-term employment constitutes the main job opportunity for the youth. This proves, on the one hand, that there is a lack of work safety and sense of life stability among young people (who usually embark upon accidental, chaotic careers, have low wages, and restricted possibilities of professional development). Simultaneously, on the other hand, the same improvisational forms of incomplete employment make it possible to acquire professional experience and easily enter the labour market, which has become hard to reach, especially for the youth.

Although the dominating forms of employment are part-time employment, casual employment and self-employment, the working hours of young people are not less than the hours worked by those with more years of service. In European countries, people work, on average, 40 hours per week, although there are countries where this average is higher (like in Bulgaria) and where this average is lower (like in Latvia). In Russia, the average working week is 44 hours for all citizens aged under 30[14], while in East Germany it is 41 hours, and in West Germany 40 hours)[15]. Asian countries definitely have a less advantageous standard – in China the average working week for people in the 15-29 age group is 48 hours, including one third working longer than 50 hours per week[16].

Young employees in all countries explicitly more often agree to work unfavourable patterns and hours – shift work, working in the evenings, on weekends, etc. (in Europe, conditions favour, by 10% on average, employees with more years of service) (European Commission, 2012,174). Their

incomes are unsatisfactory not only by their own standards, but also from the perspective of maintenance costs. A high level of dissatisfaction is concerning, especially for the youth in European countries (Fig. 1). In Latvia, the youth are demanding remuneration in the region of €1,500 per month; the monthly wage currently being offered is €320 – five to six times lower than in countries in the Western European Union. In Germany, full-time employed persons in the 20-25 age group earn, on average, a monthly gross income of €2120 in Western lands and €1685 in Eastern lands[17]. In Bulgaria, 56% of young people earn €300[18]. A similar situation is observed in Romania (where the average monthly income for youth in the 15-29 age group is €325 (Umbreș et al., 2014)) while in Russia the situation is slightly better (with an average monthly salary of €470)[19]. Facing a significantly better situation are young Poles; indeed, when starting their first job they earn €650 (median), and after a few years reach €900. Nevertheless, their remunerations are still low and rank 2nd and 3rd on average (Sedlak, 2016).



Source: Own study on the basis of: EUROSTAT (the source: SILC) [ilc_di03].

Figure 1: Average equivalent net income in selected post-communist European countries – the young against the general public (2014)

In China and Vietnam, young people have very low demands concerning remuneration (young unemployed Chinese searching for a job are satisfied with an income of around ¥783, which equates to almost €70, and their incomes are inconceivably low from a European perspective (Table 1). Only part of them (mainly employed in state workplaces) can count on social allowances and (usually very low) insurances.

Table 1: Monthly remuneration for the young Chinese in the 15-29 age group

	Young people in total	**City**	**Village**
X < 600 Y	30%	24.27%	41.00%
600-1500 Y	approx. 60%	60.67%	52.58%
x > 1500 Y	above 10%	14.86%	6.42%

Source: China Youth Employment Report, 2005, p. 34.

The situation can be explained by referring to different factors, such as lack of professional experience and taking mostly only ordinary positions, macroeconomic context, but also low quality human capital. While the main stream of working youth has secondary education, their professional qualifications are appraised very critically. The problem of the balance between a quality of work force and requirements for workplaces is becoming increasingly serious. Only in Vietnam did the number of unqualified workers increase last time, from 61% to 78%. The same tendency, although on a significantly smaller scale, has been observed in the Balkan countries, where simultaneously youth with higher education have problems finding a job, mostly because of qualification mismatches. In Russia, the proportion of young people in the unskilled labour market as a whole is low. Only among the youngest – in the under 20 age group – is this figure significant, and amounts to 24.3% (FSSS, data for 2015). Undoubtedly, this category of the young in each country will be a serious challenge to social policies and politicians.

Although temporary employment facilitating the transition from education to the world of work is a contemporary reality, they are simultaneously increasing the risk of uncertain start into the adult life. Young people taking casual activities show a tendency to live with parents more often, delaying the moment of reaching independence or starting their own family. Challenges that they face are not encouraging. Those who are present in the labour market are facing competition from the increasing number of those searching for employment, while the number of job offers is decreasing. The demographic factor reveals itself to be particularly important in Asian countries. In China, the amount of manpower is the largest it has ever been (people in the 15-64 age group constitute 71% of the entire population), with half of this manpower made up of young people below the age of 35.100 million of the Chinese living in large cities and an additional 100 million living in rural areas put pressure on the labour market every year. The state faces significant challenges when it comes to taking into consideration ethnic differences, as well as those concerning professional qualifications, and the system of values. Similar problems (although not on such a scale) are occurring in Vietnam[20]. As a result of demographic imbalance, the expectation that young people should take care of their older parents is increasing; in Europe this is due to the existing legal system, while in China and Vietnam it is linked to custom law. Indeed, the danger of pathology increases. Moreover, and again in countries where work deficits are very high, and remunerations very low, a dangerously large portion of young people are involved in criminal activities (in China 70%), exhibit risky behaviour and aggression, or xenophobic attitudes. In the face of struggles and failures, also popularised is a belief that life success depends mainly on fate rather than on hard work, and this is very likely to result in demanding attitudes.

Private life: marriage, family

The changes to which these areas are subjected are the result of the same processes influencing jobs, education or free time These changes are, on the one hand, global and local transformations of an economic character. However, on the other hand, they are the pressure of global and local cultural models. The source literature names them as *deinstitutionalisation and destabilisation processes* leading to diversification of the forms of family life and changes in customs (Giddens 1991, 260). As a result of these processes, fertility endures at a level which is far below the simple substitution of generations.

Anthony Giddens claims that there are no more important and spectacular changes than those which occur within a marriage, family, personal life and emotional relation-

ships. In his opinion, a global revolution in lifestyles is taking place before our eyes in the sphere of privacy and intimacy; its global character means that there is no possibility not to participate in the changes which are being brought by modernity. These changes are, according to Giddens, like a hurricane which sooner or later reaches everywhere, and when touches local deals, it does not leave them as they were previously. It is characteristic for them to reach some place, whose nature depends on how intensive and rough their process is (Giddens 1992, 687-699).

This is the case with most of the post-communist countries. The young generation today is the first to experience these processes. Changes with regard to cultural models of sexuality, high valuation of freedom and individuality in connection with an uncertain future, structural/system limits in reaching status of an adult person produce choice between self-reliance in a life (which is guaranteed by finding a job and involvement in a professional career) and starting a family (deemed as a condition of happy life) is the basic dilemma for a young human. The choice – very difficult when someone follows the culturally endorsed *work-life-balance* principle – falls upon self-reliance in life and (more often) on testing alternative forms of family life or living alone, even in countries where traditional solutions are still popular or are dominating.

Young people become self-reliant later and leave their family home even later. This theory is noted in all studies describing the situation of the youth. The countries that are subject of our interest, are not an exception to this rule, although there are a few peculiarities. Above all, the range of the phenomenon is larger, its dynamics are different, and so to are the reasons and social effects. In European post-communist countries, more than a half of the population in the 18-34 age group live with their parents, and more than one third of them are persons belonging to the 25-34 age group. The state of prolonged youth is longer here (an average age for men is 28-31, and for women is 25-28). Moreover, in some countries it is still being prolonged[21]. Indeed, this is the case in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria (EU Youth Report, 2016, 207-208). The age at which young people leave the family home is minimally decreasing only in Poland (and insignificantly in Germany). Bulgarians leave it the latest (just before the age of 30) with Romanians (above the age of 28) and the Poles right behind them. In Germany, young people go out on their own 4-5 years earlier. This indicates the distance which lies between most post-communist countries and Germany, where the general economic situation has been more favourable and has created better conditions for the youth when they decide to start their life, although the large rental sector in most regions of Germany – does not offer affordable housing available for young people.

The main reason for a longer stay at one's parents' home is (in the case of younger classes) a prolonged education period. More often than not, the older youth (in the 25+ age group) cannot afford to move out of their parents' home (more than half in European countries declare this) or they have problems with access to cheap apartments (30%). "Peter Pan-type" (comfort and fear of taking responsibility for their own lives) is ranked in only 3rd place, and particularly concerns countries like Bulgaria and Germany.

A fairly different situation can be found in Asian countries, and especially Vietnam, where the tradition of living together in large and multigenerational families remains strong. In these countries, however, adult children's desire to leave the family home and live separately is understood by older people – they see it as their children distancing themselves from tradition and embracing new Western trends. In any case, there is a limitation in terms of adult children actually being able to do this – it is only possible for

modern-minded young people with a stable job and high income. The others – even if they are married – live with their parents, who feel obliged to look after their (adult) children and grandchildren, taking care of them and providing financial support due to their occupational and financial instability, but mostly due to the deeply rooted traditional culture in Vietnam[22].

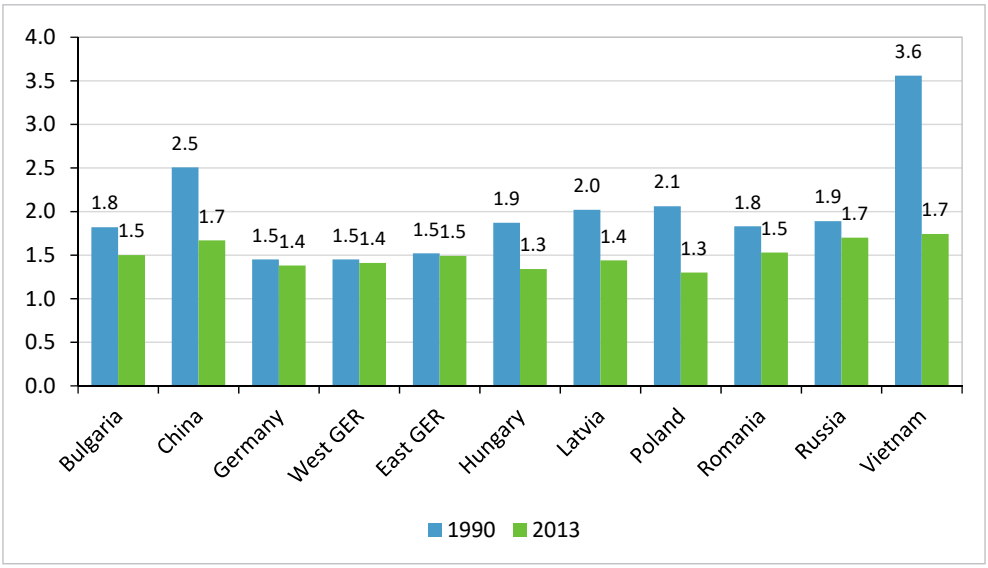
Young Chinese also stay in strong emotional relationships with their parents and benefit from their support, although they do not keep their traditions like the Vietnamese. They migrate in great numbers (alone or together with their families, if they have them) deciding to live independently, often as second-class citizens[23]. Nevertheless, in China, the time spent by children in the family home is also very long. Chinese parents feel obliged to care for their children until they find a job and start their own families. This occurs more often at the age of 30, and thus the proportion of young adults living with their parents is more than 75% (for people in the 21-29 age group) and 45.5% for those who are slightly older (the 30-35 age group)[24].

The institution of marriage and family continues to have a highly exposed declarative value and is approved by the majority of the youth. However, in point of fact, the acts of both marriage and having children are becoming less significant. Falls in the number of people entering marriage are noted in almost all post-communist countries (OECD Family Database, data for 2012). Russia and Latvia are the only countries among those analysed which have seen an increase in the number of marriages. The discussed Asian countries are also starting to witness a fall in the attractiveness of the institution of marriage, although the range and characteristics of this process are different. Tradition means that people still marry, but ongoing individualism, the pursuit of a better quality of life, and problems concerning the achievement of self-reliance mean that marriage is taking place later and later, and is not the only way in which two people can signal that they are together. Indeed, consensual relationships are being practiced increasingly often. However, contrary to European countries, these relationships are not an alternative to marriage, the latter of which still dominates.

Cultural patterns of femininity and their roles have been changing. Despite the fact that socialism has given women powers of emancipation and gender equality, family life has long been based on models of femininity imposed by tradition. Since the beginning of the transformation of the political system, this post-traditional family model (burdening women with two responsibilities – employment and the home) has been evolving into a modern family (based on the idea of partnership and co-responsibility); however, this model does not provide comfortable conditions for development. Rapid withdrawal by the state from its role as employer and distributor of social services has given rise to an increased responsibility laid on the family for its own material situation; moreover, changes in the labour market have increased the risk and uncertainty of employment. Young women can now rely less on a peaceful combination of professional and family duties, and suffer as a result. Collaterally – as a consequence of the post-communist countries opening up to global influences – the importance of individualism and the need of autonomy for the entity are increasing. The importance of education as a life success factor is increasing beyond expectation, with women partaking more in higher education than men. Investments made by these women are not only changing their professional careers and the importance of employment in their lives, but also have an influence on the processes of starting and developing a family.

All this is putting women in a situation where there is a conflict between personal, family and professional roles. As a result, ideal (expected) and real (observed) fertility

constitute two separate values – the first one is securing the process of natural generations substitution more than need, and the second one is dramatically endangering it. Not only is the distance between desired and actual number of children higher there, but the dynamics of changes are more rapid. Fertility rates are also lower – definitely below the biological generation substitution threshold (Fig. 2).



Source: own study on the basis of: World Bank and Statistisches Bundesamt.

Figure 2: Changes in the fertility rates in transition countries

To understand the dilemmas which young women have to face in post-communist countries, it is important to understand the contradictory pressures and requirements to which they are subjected. On the one hand, they are expected to be occupationally active (because of the family budget, macro-economic challenges, and the fact that many of them enjoy their career[25]), while on the other hand, they are pressured to deliver babies (not only because it is the obvious thing to do, but also because of demographic problems). Reconciliation of both these requirements in the context of the situation in the labour market is very difficult – it enforces the restriction of family functions and postpones procreation. Of particular note here are those countries where transformation processes have destroyed a system of former social securities, and a new one has not been created. Indeed, women in these countries who decide to have a baby either benefit (after maternity leave and parental leave) from a family support network or resign and abandon their career. Neither of these solutions is satisfactory for them. Those who decide to care for a baby and stay at home are effectively deactivating themselves and reducing their chances of being able to enter the labour market. Those who obtain a job are exposed to discomfort which stems from a double responsibility – at work and home. Indeed, this is why so-called cultural conflicts occur in certain countries on a broader scale (traditional approach to social roles of women and men) and why structural conflict also takes place (resulting from inadequacy of institutional solutions to women's careers). In principle, the more egalitarian and welfare traditions of the post-communist states, coupled with recent emancipation trends, could be counteracting traditional

patterns. In reality, however, they are not. In Balcans countries, household work is divided up according to sex much more than in other countries. Indeed, this could be seen as a systematic 'double burden' forcing women to work both inside and outside of the household – even if they are better educated and have full-time employment (Riebling, Stoilova and Hofäcker, 2016).

At this point it is important to discuss the relationships between family roles and the situation in the labour market, as well as the mismatching of other institutional solutions with women's duties (for example, the extent of formal care for the minor child, and working time organisation[26]). Indeed, these factors, even in the young generation, create the most anachronic and disadvantageous family models. The first is the traditional model (where the man is the main breadwinner in the family, and the woman cares for the house and the children) while the second is the combined model (with two breadwinners, but with a double burden for the woman: working and housekeeping). New realities and deficits often present too big a challenge for young pairs who cannot handle their new duties. They also become a factor which preserves inequalities between women and men, and between families where one or both of the parents contribute to the budget. Women, who in comparison with men enter the labour market later, if at all[27], are losing the basis of financial independence (now and in the future). In addition, these women are also unable to improve the family's financial situation. This is particularly interesting in today's environment, where people are pursuing a certain living standard, and the pressure of consumerism is deepening the division between families that can afford their life demands, and those that cannot.

Final reflections

Even at the end of the 20th century, the sociological youth analysis undertaken in a context of questions concerning social change has concentrated on teenagers or just a little bit older youth. Their rebellious tendencies but capacity for innovation typical to their age and their marginal position in a social structure are treated as a potential source of the social tensions and change. Today that role is not played by teenagers or students, but by the young people in an age group above 25 who not only reach the adulthood later, but are late in becoming independent and self-reliant in meeting serious structural obstacles. Their struggles with adulthood are clear: searching for a job, starting a family, attempts to realise their life aspirations are crashing with the realities of the political transformation. Moreover, these struggles are taking place in a difficult environment of local limitations and global influences, which are the new space for challenges that are far riskier than in the Western, developed countries.

The axis of divisions between transformation systems characteristic for European states (with the pluralism of actors initiating change and the broad spectrum of systemic transformation), and those with a strong leading role in the state (Russia, China, Vietnam) is clear in the field of reaching adulthood. While in European post-communist countries the process, especially the transition from education to employment is delayed, gets complicated and is simultaneously prolonged (even more than in developed countries of Western Europe), in case of the youth in the Asian countries (and partially also in Russia) it is earlier, shorter and less complexed, but no less painful and no less politically risky.

Notes

[1] The article has been created within the project funded from NCN funds: *The youth in post-communist countries.* Innovative potential, new contexts, new problems and new challenges No UMO-2013/08/M/HS6/00430.

[2] 6 countries of the EU (Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, and, according to particular rules or conditions: Germany/ Eastern Lands), Russia, China, and Vietnam – K. Szfraniec et al., The Me Generation in a Post-Collectivist Space. Dilemmas in a Time of Transition. Peter Lang International Publishing House, Bern 2017 (in press).

[3] Various actions are being undertaken, usually resulting from the EU policies towards the youth; amongst them, especially educational projects (Erasmus, Eurodesk, etc.). However, the post-communist countries have generally no long-term, coherent plan for a social policy towards the youth.

[4] Report on the state of education. A society on the way to knowledge, 2010; Report on the state of education 2011. Continuation of transitions 2012; see also M. Szczepański, K. Szafraniec, A. Śliz (eds.) 2015.

[5] Fixed-term contracts are slightly more common among young East Germans compared to young West Germans.

[6] The high index of informal employment in the under 20 age group (49.5 %) is offset by a very low proportion of this group among all employed people (0.6%) and a low level of employment in this age group (5.9%). As such, of the 20-29 age group, who make up the greater part of employed youth, approximately one fifth are turning to non-standard work – practically with the same frequency as the total employed population – source: Rosstat, 2008, p. 93; FSSS, data for 2015.

[7] The government in China is now trying to provide certain kinds of social securities and financial guarantees to young people who have recently migrated, although these measures are far from sufficient.

[8] Particular European Union member states have, despite their many similarities, different approaches when it comes to the amounts of social insurance contributions and different tax rates, depending on the status of the employed person.

[9] But still it is almost one enterprise per 800 people.

[10] In the older age group, self-employment rates are correspondingly: 5.5%, 6%, 5%, 11%, and 12.5%. In Germany they are lower; indeed, for the younger population (in the 20-24 age group) the self-employment rate is 2%, while for older citizens (in the 25-29 age group) it is 5% (*EU Youth Report 2012*, p. 177).

[11] Declarations of interest were submitted by 40% of the youth, although only 6% actually carried it through. Owning a business is an idea referred to more by worse educated youth (with vocational and secondary education) than those who have a higher level of education (correspondingly 53%, 50% and 47%) – see: *EU Youth Report 2012*, pp. 177-178.

[12] *"Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey, RLMS-HSE", op. cit.*

[13] In Bulgaria 5.7% of employed people below the age of 25 work on a part-time basis, while 11.7% are employed on temporary contracts, and unemployment stands at 21.6% (EUROSTAT, data for 2015).

[14] *"Russia Longitudinal Monitoring survey, RLMS-HSE", op. cit.*

[15] For all employed persons (no age limitation): 38.5 hours in West Germany; 30.8 hours in East Germany – Socioeconomic Panel, own calculations for 2013.

[16] In the 15-29 age group, 53 hours on average – You Jun, Jiang Guangping, *China Youth Employment Report,* 2005, p. 34.

[17] Referring to all employed persons (including those with marginal work, e.g. when studying) – year 2010, aged 20-25: €1,384 in West Germany and €1,193 in East Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2013).

[18] The most disadvantageous remunerations affect those people with a higher education level: 20% of this group earn €200, and only 7% earn above €500 net.

[19] "Russia Longitudinal Monitoring survey, RLMS-HSE", op. cit.

[20] 1 million young people try to reach the labour market every year.

[21] In countries of North-Western Europe significantly less than half the young people below the age of 35 live with their parents and the average age at which young people leave their parents' home is significantly lower – for women 21-23, and for men 23-25; these numbers have remained stable since 2005.

[22] In rural areas, family bounds are even stronger – more than 80% of the young living in a province, even when migrating to industrialised regions in search for a job, hold on tightly to their native village and family home.

[23] On the grounds of still binding Hukou right, which despite its significant liberalisation segments, citizens of China due to their place of residence and background.

[24] Study on the generation relationship change of Chinese families MA Chao 2007.

[25] Rate of return of the investments in education is more explicit for women, which enhances their determination to be involved in the development of their career and weakens their motivation to start a family.

[26] In the Scandinavian countries, 50% of employees have working hours that are fully specified by a company, while in the Western countries (including Germany) this is the case for 60% of employees, and 80-90% of employees from countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Other proportions include employees who have the possibility to choose between a stable working hours schedule, working hours adaptation in certain limits, or fully by themselves. It means that flexible arrangements of working hours are fairly common practice in developed countries but very rarely practiced in countries whose political system is going through a transformation – *OECD Family Database 2010*, page 3. Available at http://www.oecd.org/els/family/LMF_2-4-Family-friendly-workplace-practices.pdf.

[27] Diminishing participation of young mothers in the workforce concerns even those countries where, during communist times, giving birth to children had no significant meaning (like in China or Vietnam). In China, in 1990, 91.4% of mothers of children in the 0-3 age group were employed, while this was the case for 92.1% of mothers of children in the 4-6 age group. In 2010, analogous employment rates were significantly lower and were correspondingly 59.8% and 75.2% (Zhang, 2016).

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