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Between a Rock and a Hard Place - the Demography of the Transition to Adulthood during the Post-Socialist Transformation

Our study examines the transition patterns of adolescents to adulthood in post-socialist Hungary. Before the regime change, integration to the adult social system took place by a beaten track and was guided by well-known norms. The adolescents' ideas about traditional institutions and behavior of adulthood are based on family norms and school socialization. According to the phenomenological sociology of knowledge this image will get filled with experimental content by personal experiences that results in a considerable change in their image formed of the reality even in stationary conditions. In the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe the change of this internal image is even more dramatic.

The post-socialist transformation significantly modified this conventional way of starting adulthood. Now we can observe a "socializational deficit": adolescents learn the adult behavior from a society, which was socialized by the traditional adulthood-starting norms, but now this way is often unviable because of the rapid transformation. They can start to make their own living much later than they planned, their access to labor market is difficult, only a part of their marriage plans could be realized, and they can have children before or without marriage.

This empirical research paper examines to what extent are the adolescents' intentions coherent with the adulthood-starting model of the socializing actors (parents, teachers, carrier narrations) and the actual practice of these demographic milestone events (marriage, child-birth, employment).

The rebellion of adolescents, the critical opposition to the adults and to the values of adult society is natural, especially if it originates in poverty and an unsettled family situation. According to observations the rebellion of Hungarian adolescents doesn't concern the fundamental intentions related to adulthood.

During the transition to adulthood the environment plays a very significant role in the career plans of adolescents. In the post-socialist society the adult community is also compelled to face the fact that the adolescents' course of life doesn't follow the former norms, and the transition takes place from a predictable social environment to an uncertain one. This

process confuses the whole family, but this experience can't change the values of social actors who work by the traditional norms, it only eliminates the qualification of adolescents' career plans (behavior control).

We hypothesize that the conventional way to start adulthood is accepted by youth, but the realization of this model is limited in the contemporary post-socialist society. However, this "socializational deficit" does not have the same impact on adolescents. Their behavior reflects different strategies, like a very early family start or an extended participation in education, depending on socio-demographic characteristics of their families.

For our hypothesis testing we rely on official statistics and on our representative survey carried out among 14-19 year old students. We examine when adolescents, living in different social and economic circumstances, plan to finish their studies, choose a profession, become independent from their parents, get access to labor market, have sexual experiences, get married, have children, as the most important events of adulthood-starting. We extend our observation from the actual steps to adulthood to the sequence and also examine to what extent does it correlate with the norms and experience of their parents. The expected dates of these milestones of life are different among adolescents. We will test the two models of adulthood starting (early family founding and extended participation in education with lately family founding) and the realization of socializational deficit.

The extended dependence from the parents launches several explored demographic processes (later and rare marriage, lower fertility and delayed mobilization). While the late family foundation is a known demographic phenomenon, the early family foundation is studied rarely. We will examine how different demographic and sociological models explain more this transitional demographic "between a rock and a hard place" situation.