

YOUNG ADULTS' LIFE CYCLE CHANGE AND IDENTITY SEEKING IN HUNGARY

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This study about Hungarian young adults aims to present their living conditions, life cycle change (from adolescence to adulthood) in the context of socio-history. The interest in young adulthood in Hungary in the international literature has just started to evolve that is obviously arising from the specific matrix of the youth era, the socialist political system changes and their aftermath (e.g. expansion of education, employment opportunities). The study aims to gather the research results in Hungary, that help introduce and understand the situation of young people in Central and Eastern Europe. It seems that Hungarian sociology is at the forefront of sociological research of the youth that meets European trends but the interpretation of results (psychological, pedagogical) has not been finished yet.

Keywords: new youth, young adulthood, life-cycle change, identity formation

In the middle of the 20th century individual life cycle (Erikson, 1950) was formulated, later family life cycles were written down. For re-thinking of these life-cycles it is necessary to see the context in which these young people live today.

In the beginning of the previous century the Swedish reform-pedagogue, Ellen Key predicted that the 20th century was going to be the children's century but instead of that it was rather the century of world wars and mass. The new century, which has just started, is seeking for a new marker, although a little bit unsteadily. The second half of the 20th century indicated that the social historic scientific way of thinking was on a constant change. It undoubtedly affected the transition of modern and postmodern periods, as well as the sociological, demographic and psychic changes. Among other things the youth did not remain untouched either in this changing world, just think about the hippie movements in the 1960s, or for instance about the role of young adults in the political changes. Due to the changes that have started it is conceivable that the main characters of the 21st century will not be the children or the mass itself but the growing-up youth. Earlier, certain significant periods of the human history or a paradigm shift in the way of thinking were attached to a certain youngster's or a group of youngsters' name. (In Hungary it relates to e.g. the youth of the War of Independence of 1848-49 or 1956.) However, from the beginning of the second half of the last century social changes indicated an ambivalent image; in one hand, the youth was becoming more and more independent and decisive (the youth appeared in the role of decision-making and they also became decisive in public life). On the other hand, the youth, especially the individual, is less

and less capable to evolve an independent, self-sufficient, matured adult life for themselves. Although changes in youth had already started from the 1960s, and occurred more and more significantly in western societies, the phenomenon was only monitored by sociologists (Keniston, 1968; Somlai, 2002; Vaskovics, 2000; Rácz, 2009). Psychologists (Arnett, 2004) have started showing interest in the changes affected the youth on social levels relatively late. This interest rather occurred overseas.

Although the dawn of a new era of the youth as a phenomenon is especially important from sociological viewpoints, the psychological and pedagogical aspects of the subject are not negligible either. In the last century one of the most important topics in developmental psychology was adolescence getting into focus. It revealed the most significant problem areas within development, focusing identity formation as a dominant area of personal development (Erikson, 1991). However, that kind of interest has slightly changed by today and more and more work is dealing with the features of the youth (Arnett, 2000; Cohen et al., 2003) - the changes of individual and family life cycles -, at the same time the Hungarian aspects are not revealed in details by any researches, except the youth sociological researches (Somlai, 2002). There were only some skin-deep experiments in the matter of psychological interpretation (e.g. Puskás-Vajda, 2007), nevertheless thorough, comprehensive study has not been made yet. This study is trying to outline the changes of the Hungarian youth and their psychological aspects as well as to draw up research lines for psychology and pedagogy.

The “new youth” in Hungary

From the second half of the 20th century more sociological literature has already dealt with the turning up of the “new youth” (especially from Keniston:1968) and Hungarian aspects were also examined (Vaskovics, 2000; Somlai, 2002). The interest was especially intense at the end of the 20th century. Whereas in the international literature changes had already attracted the attention in the 1970s and science reacted on it (for instance by the exploration of the phenomenon of post-adolescence), in Hungary the opening process to the subject was probably due to the political changes not to scientific interest. Nevertheless, it was understandable, since the regime change (the fall of the communist regime) brought an immense breakthrough even in connection with changes in youth (e.g. the expansion of education that is still taking place).

All in all, Hungary does not vary significantly from welfare states but it is obvious, that the youth changed in the 20th century. In informal conversations it can be heard that “young people today are not like we used to be”. This attitudinal difference occurs behind the teacher’s desk as well, since among pedagogues (either in public or higher education) it is very often conceived that young people “have changed”, they are interested in other things, they are matured earlier (at least biologically). Despite these facts, they rather depend on their environment, especially on their parental home. Along the recognition of that real changes have to be seen. In one hand, these changes are carried by the changes in the history of ideas, the so-called postmodern era, including Hungarian young people, who are also affected (cf. time perception of the youth, see later). On the other hand, it has to be seen that socio-historical changes in welfare states, as well as in Hungary, brought new, qualitative changes in the perception of childhood (Aries), as well as in the relationship of parents-child and in the judgement

of transition period of childhood and adulthood. According to modernization, path of life has got more and more differentiated, certain life stages can be described independent quality features and changes. It is especially true for the period between childhood and adulthood. The sociologist Peter Somlai (2002) even considered, that it is necessary to put up a new, modified path of life model for the 21st century, as he thought that the period of adolescence is at least as long as the period of childhood, if not longer. "Decisions got wider space and individual ways of life can be formed more easily. However, there is lower security and future is at higher risk" (Somlai, 2002:5) (Obviously this one refers to the sociologist Ulrich Beck's (2003) „risk-society". At the end of the last century the premises of seeking the path of life model by sociology can go back to the processes that started in the 1960s, '70s, when besides student revolts the conception of sexual indecency - „Peace and love!" - and liberalism started to spread to a great extent in Europe as well as in the United States of America.). Meanwhile in modern societies, becoming an adult, being matured sexually and getting employed were more often taken place in different times. The change of the path of life, the change of studies and work, the change of social relations (especially in relationships) became a part of the socio-historical changes, as well as the delay of separation from the parental home and the existential insecurity, the change of self-organization.

Youth changes in Hungary are due to the regime change (the end of the 1980s) that created a completely new situation and also, speeded up the process (e.g. the expansion of higher education and changes in labour market started broadening the youth period and gave it special features). One of the main consequences of the above mentioned phenomenon was that youth period got delayed as well as the start of being employed. For instance, two thirds of young people typically do not continue their education after high-school graduation for a couple of years, they have some gap years, only after that they step out to the labour market. This process was strengthened by the consideration of manpower and education policy, since for most students getting into higher education became more attainable (today in Hungary there are 250,000 regular students in higher education). It is a well-known fact that that labour market provides more job opportunities for people with more qualifications and competence in more foreign languages. This way young people are provided more steady financial existence and they are much more motivated to continue their studies. Certainly it goes with all the changes in which these young people in their twenties live, they define themselves – as an autonomous person with independent identity - quite late. Most of them leave the parental home late, the start of founding a family and having children comes later too, so all in all, life cycles are changing. While youth changes were going on, at the second half of the 20th century demographic changes appeared in Hungary as well just like in western societies (e.g. the intention to get married decreased and at the same time the age of just-married people went higher, and the number of common-law marriages increased). A Hungarian youth sociological experiment among people aged 15-19 also confirms the fact that there is a decreasing tendency in the intention of getting married in an eight-year distance: the 13 % of the examined age group were married in 2008, while this rate was 22 % in 2000 (Youth 2008 quick report). There have been more and more one-parent family the rate of divorced and separated couples is also high. Most young people live in family households, in the role of the child. Earlier women gave up their career plans consciously (or because it was a must) because of founding a family or having a baby. Nowadays young people only found a family at the end of their twenties (and only 27% of them get married). It is

especially true about intellectual, white-collar people. According to statistics one thirds of women have their first babies only in the beginning of their thirties. (Those rate is more and more significant, who stay alone, in the roles of so-called pre-single or single.) Supposedly it bears a relation to the future prospects and also the late detachment. From psychological point of view it is clear that certain forms of behaviour appear in different periods in young people's life, and the "scissors" of maturity is getting open wider and wider: between sexual/biological maturity and psychical maturity or even between financial and social dependence.

Young adulthood as life stage?

In the last century one of the most important topics in developmental psychology was adolescence getting into focus and at the same time young adulthood was considered as the peak of development therefore developmental psychology did not really pay attention to this stage. That is why in developmental psychological overviews, textbooks adulthood (and part of that young adulthood) did not receive sufficient emphasis (cf. the generally used textbook in higher education - Cole & Cole, 2003). That is also indicated by psychological literature published in Hungarian where overviews cannot be found about adulthood (especially about young adulthood) much rather researches and theories dealing with infancy, early development and adolescence got into focus and were presented. It is also supported by the researches in applied psychology (e.g. in therapy) which does not really pay attention to the psychic changes of young adulthood either. Andragogical researches have started to discover this stage recently. It is probably not a coincidence that besides keeping the important emphasis in developmental psychology, lately the focus has shifted more and more to the stage of young adulthood after the stage of adolescence (cf. Arnett, 2004).

It was mentioned in the Introduction that according to a sociologist (Somlai, 2002) there is a necessity for a new path of life model since adolescence is nearly as long as childhood. The problem areas behind raising up the issue is that in welfare societies the end of adolescence has been more and more delayed and it got more and more indistinct when in adulthood exactly starts and under what conditions. This phenomenon was explained by the introduction of the idea of post-adolescence by sociology (which links that certain stage to the stage of adolescence even more), while psychology takes it into consideration as a part of adulthood (early adulthood, young adulthood). The formulation of the phenomenon of post-adolescence meant a paradigm shift in the discourse about the youth since this opinion also reflected, that those young people who have grown into the period after puberty, are not really adults, they are not independent member of society (Keniston 1968:260; cit: Vaskovics, 2000:20). It also meant "making the youth be under age", however, it was more and more noticeable, that young people, young adults had a more and more dominant role in society. It either considers this stage as a milestone between adolescence and adulthood (e.g. Frontier adulthood) or it introduces a completely new stage of life into scientific way of thinking (Emerging adulthood; Arnett, 2000). Youth and post-adolescence covers each other more or less in everyday vocabulary, but literature links the notion of youth rather to age and it indicates an age group (it includes people who have already reached adulthood and some of them have not) and it is more universal (usually they talk about young adults and post adolescents). In contrast to that post-adolescence not so attached to rigid

age limits, it is rather about reaching the adulthood (it is a “special status”, as it is defined by one of the sociologists, Vaskovics, 2000) and it occurs in industrial societies as the consequence of modernization. In the background of the appearance of the “new youth” social historic processes are taking place, and their consequences were seemed to be the reason of the disappearance of this socially independent, relatively homogeneous juvenile stage, while others are rather talking about the expansion of youth stage and not about its disappearance. These changes first appeared from the second part of the 20th century, from the 1970s (including the sexual revolution), but they are still going on nowadays (Millennium even accelerated the process). Basically we cannot say that schooling and the delay or the uncertainty of starting their career at the same time mean the same for all young people. The youth which contains postadolescents too as a category of the modern society - is non-uniform.. There are studies that seek to explore and understand the new division of the youth. Post-adolescence varies individually and it is closely related to the separation from the parental home. The cultural and social determination of post-adolescence states the fact that this stage cannot be defined as an “exact”, theoretical age stage, much rather it remains the subject of the empirical research.

This seeking of ways reflects the fact that the age group of 18-25 year-olds means a growing challenge for society therefore seeking ways is important to sociology, psychology and pedagogy by all means. There has been more scientific work about the psychological aspects of the human development (e.g. the work of Piaget, Erikson, Freud, Fowler etc.) but only few experts have felt important to present adulthood in details (it can be found e.g. in Erikson’s theory (1950, 1991) of personality development or in Fowler’s work about the development of faith, but not in Freud’s, Piaget’s work...etc.) Probably the first comprehensive work about adulthood is linked to Levinson’s name, who discusses the development of adulthood in details in his work published at the end of the 1970s.

Although there is no exclusive theory on this field, McCarter Research Institute and Jeffrey Arnett (2004) offer a comprehensive analysis, that is trying to outline a framework which meets today’s challenges. According to Arnett (2004) for today’s youth the path to reach adulthood is long enough to interpret it as a separate stage. This stage is called “emerging adulthood” by him. By the introduction of this new idea he stands up against the generally accepted terms and tries to set a course. According to his standpoint this stage does not mean living on in adolescence (post-adolescence) as it is very different, significantly varies from it. It typically has much looser parental control and it also has a greater range of individual discoveries. From other viewpoints it somehow differs from adulthood as well (so this way the denomination ‘young adulthood’ is not proper either), since the individual has not reached adulthood yet, they cannot be considered independent, neither financially, nor emotionally. It is difficult to find the proper label in Hungarian, and probably “young adulthood” needs to be supported, acknowledging Arnett’s (2004) theoretical concerns.

The general features of emerging adulthood (according to Arnett):

1. This is the time for discoveries of identity, trying out different opportunities (especially on the fields of love and work)
2. This is also the age of insecurity.
3. The most self-centered period of life.
4. The age, when the individual is in a transition period (not an adolescent any more, but not an adult yet)
5. This is the period of opportunities, with full of hopes when they have the chance to change their lives.

All in all, it can be seen that the main characteristics of young adulthood, emerging adulthood are not unique, but they mostly occur at this age.

Changed world, uncertain vision of the future

It has to be seen that the youth's time perception and vision of the future have also changed a lot (Brannen & Nilsen, 2002). Nowadays it is not all about for young adults to develop a steady, secure future in the beginning of their dependent life, many of them only think about a few years in the short term. A qualitative research (Rácz, 2009) made with Dutch youth by Du Bois-Reymond (2006) shows that this stage is not attractive to young people since they generally find adulthood boring and there is too much responsibility in it. They can hardly imagine that they have to work in throughout their lives, working in a full-time job until retirement seems to be intolerable for them. Mostly they consider adulthood just a life stage, which is not obligatory this way at all. A question is raised in his study, namely if adulthood is not that attractive, what consequences it can be for parents, pedagogues, employers and politicians.

The youth's orientation of time and the way they look into adulthood were dealt with by Brannen and Nilsen (2002). On the base of interviews made with British and Norwegian young adults aged 18-30, there were three models outlined in connection with the vision of the future. The first is the "*delay model*" which means that the youth rather live in the present and their plans are also focused on the extended present. In their opinion, their adulthood will be similar to their parents' lives. They presume they will settle down one day but not now. Most of them plan to get a job in the near future. Those young people who relates to the "*adaptation model*" look into the future as if it was a risk that needs to be counted on and kept under control. It can be a positive challenge for them as well. These young people take only one step at a time and they test whether they are prepared enough for the future step by step. They continuously sense the future as changeable which motivates them to adapt to changes. They are not afraid of trying out more jobs and they do not want to get stuck in boring workplaces. According to the future they are self-confident and they think it is only up to them what they make out of it. The third model is the "*model of predictability*" which is typically the traditional breadwinner approach. These young adults are proud of their chosen profession, which provides them an adequate level of living. They consider adulthood as the central stage of a carefully selected, pre-calculated standardized career which is based on a lifetime of work (Rácz, 2009:27; Brannen & Nilsen, 2002) There has been no testing in the perception of time in Hungary yet, but presumably it is present in almost the same way. However, a research team of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences examined what the Hungarian society would be like in 15 years. It turned out

of this rather sociological kind of examination that most of the Hungarian youth, especially the secondary school students consider the future in a very pessimistic way, while this image is a bit more realistic among university students.

Changed life cycles

We can say that the social change of era in a broader context, the post-modern age modifies the Erikson's (1950) individual life-cycle approach from psychological viewpoint. There are no obvious, well describable life cycles but they are intertwined especially in young adulthood. Some life-cycle characteristics carry over to the other life cycle and the later ones like intimacy and isolation can appear in earlier stages as well. Probably it is necessary to find another type of model. In the psychology of personal development Erikson (1950) wrote, that adolescence lasts from the beginning of puberty to the end of teens only after early adulthood begins up to the individual's 40 years of age. This conception was formulated in the middle of the 20th century when in industrial societies the time of getting married and stable employment was related to the age of approximately 20. Nowadays, however, this model is not adaptable. Propensity to marry is low marriages are born in the youth's late twenties. In the middle of their twenties they change jobs quickly or they spend a long time in higher education. The individual life-cycle perception has an impact on the changes of family life-cycles as well. There are more family rituals in Hungary that are linked to life cycle turning points. One of that turning points is the so-called high school graduation which means the end of high school as well as the beginning of adulthood. It is usually related to a family dinner and gift. This ritual is increasingly losing its importance, since it does not mean that it supposed to (since there is no "maturity" and there is no real "dependence", only the elective franchise at the elections, free alcohol consumption, and less parental and social control). The changing status and role of young adulthood in today's family cycles and societal situations went through a lot of changes (see above). The individual life-cycle of young adulthood involves at least two family life-cycles in parallel one of which is connected to the family of origin (separation from parents) and it is followed by the early life stages of the new family (stages 1-3). Depending on education the time and way of entering and exiting family system can vary. In young adulthood the separation from parents and the child's release take place in the family system, and the acceptance of multiple entries and exits is a great life lesson for the whole family. In the separation of the child of intellectuals it is a second-rank change that being educated can conduce to the better awareness of the role of being and adult in the development of the adult-type of relationship between the child and their parents. Nevertheless, low level of education supports earlier life cycle changes, separation and family foundation. It can mean greater independence and making more significant decisions. Nowadays in Hungary separation from the family of origin besets with difficulties since the start of independent living involves the physical separation and financial dependence as well. In the old times the form of a large family living together was well-known but at the moment it means an exigency (e.g. they live in their parents' flat or with their parents) and financial dependence. Today's early-stage payments do not create the possibility of either maintaining a rent or saving money (many young people run into debt because of independence). It is known that the relatively late occurrence of independence can differ from the general prosperity of the

country and social class, too. Economic and existential dependence that is particularly strong is Hungary, as well as being a student, both strengthen the child's role.

The process of the search for identity

In the case of post-adolescent youth it seems that the questions of search for identity in classical adolescence appear in young adulthood significantly which confirms the fact, that Erikson's (1950) categories should not be interpreted as separate categories but as a continuum (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). The sensibility, the difficulties of search for a partner and a profession, the fact that cultural values have become relative, these all also confirm the late search for identity. That is what taking more and more degrees is about, the more and more time that is spent in the higher education, as well as the lack of commitment is reflected in relationships (Du Bois-Reymond, 2006). It is clearly seen from the above that the more civilised the society is, the more difficult and the longer is to grow up (Vikár, 1980). However, the end of an early development of identity is not necessarily beneficial, the personality has less stamina with being more vulnerable. A more and more occurring term in the international Hungarian and literature – quarter-life crisis – refers that this period of time is a kind of period that is loaded with prolonged normative crisis. The expression “quarter-life crisis” refers to that critical period, when young people in the beginning of their adulthood get into insecurity, they do not really want to take the adulthood responsibility, they rather stay in the security of the family background. Presumably, however, the phenomenon can rather be called a stressful period and not a panic behaviour but there are further researches required. It seems that this phenomenon is especially typical in the case of educated, so called intellectual class, since the delays of decisions, external control, late organization of identity take place more often in that class (as profession searching is in connection with formation of identity). The crisis itself is not necessarily bad, it represents the opportunity for changes and certainly at the time of a personality crisis the person will be more accessible to the developing affects. However, the prolonged crises that are remained from the adolescence of young adulthood threatens the youth that the adolescent personality traits remain constant and the individual crises and conflicts remains at the level. Help and support from others are much less obvious during this period than in the previous years. The problems, way-searching and career development of higher education students in the beginning of the 21st century in Hungary among university students the most emphasized developmental crisis that emerged was relationship commitment, religious skepticism, efficiency crisis and the relationship with their parents. On the base of results efficiency crisis is the most significant among first-year students, but it is also typical, that the emotional detachment from parents, the crisis of a relationship or religious commitment seems to decrease by the time they become fifth-year students. On the field of career commitment the highest average of the crisis can be found among the fifth-year students. The reasons in the background are probably the external factors related to career choice (e.g. job opportunities). Among features it should be seen that after the adolescent period loaded with rebellion and crises the question of young adulthood – besides looking for career – to what extent young adults can develop lasting and close confidential relationships, either it is a friendship or it is a love affair. College and university years are also about the acquirement of intimacy,

many of them find their best friend or their spouse at this time. In many cases, there is an elder person (a teacher or a member of the family) who plays an important role in the start of the young adults' life. From a different viewpoint - based on student surveys - points out that adolescence and young adulthood are one of the most loneliest life stages of all, which is also confirmed by university peer helper services. The reason could be that at this age, the need for intimacy has already been occurred, but they could not manage to develop relationships that would satisfy that need. Another reason might be that the start of life for young people (participate in higher education, start career) goes hand in hand with the temporary transformation of social relations and necessarily with the feeling of loneliness. At the same time it creates such a crisis, which can be easily called start-life crisis and constructively builds the individual's personality. It is interesting to note that based on a Hungarian sociological research on young adulthood (Tóth, 2002) in Hungary every sixth man and every seventh woman have no proper peer relationship (they cannot discuss their problems with anyone). According to the research in the case of social support it is not the partner, friends or someone older who means the emotional support but the mother does (according to two-thirds of the respondents). Certainly it is a question whether the one-third of the sample did not mention their mother whom they can rely on because of either being an adult or bad mother-child relationship. Friends came in the second place (58%) and that was followed by the partner, if they had, and only 40% of them could rely on their father. There is an interesting tendency pointed out by Tóth that those people who only have primary school graduation are the least likely to meet their parents. [in the sample test, at the age of 22-27], and there is also the highest rate among them who do not keep in touch with their parents at all. The higher someone's level of education is, the more likely it is that they have a frequent contact with their parents" (Tóth, 2002:25). The premise of the development of a healthy adult personality is the loosening and the reevaluation of the close emotional relationship with parents. However, there are sources of conflicts during rebellion and detachment simultaneously, this may take a renewal of the family and for the family as well and a new set of values can be taken into the community of the family (e.g. a career as a principal value of the family is refused and the chosen emotional relations are put forward instead).

Summary

All in all, similar tendencies occur in Hungary than in the U.S. or Western European countries. The youth era, the socio-historical impact of the change of regime in Hungary also occurs in the generation of young adult age group. Young adulthood is a great challenge for researchers, and the detailed presentation of that age, the interpretation in both developmental psychology and personalistic psychology and their aspects in pedagogy have just started to evolve in Hungary.

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