

**Maria Zielińska\***  
**Robert Wróbel\*\***

## **SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS OF “EMERGING ADULTHOOD” IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL CHANGES IN POLAND COMPARED TO EUROPE**

### **Introduction**

The article aims to identify and describe phenomena associated with an extremely important phase of the individual's life: transition to adulthood. The authors focus on presenting statistical data and demographic phenomena and comment on them with references to the sociological theories developed by Jeffrey Arnett, Ronald Inglehart, Ulrich Beck, as well as psychological theories developed by Anna Brzezińska, John Silva, and James Marcia. Early adulthood, between the ages of 20 and 30/35, is the time of acquiring and implementing social competences in three basic areas: (1) professional activity, (2) establishing social relations, including taking up civic activities, (3) starting a family and establishing intimate relationships. This applies to the majority of the population at this age.

Since the beginning of this millennium, sociologists, psychologists, educators and above all demographers in Western Europe have pointed to the following demographic phenomena: longer education period; young people entering the labour market, getting married, having the first child, and leaving home at a later age (adult children move back to their parents' homes more frequently).

From the cultural perspective, there is a change in the dominant behaviour patterns in this regard; from the sociological perspective, adopting social roles related to adulthood is postponed, the moratorium becomes longer, and markers of adulthood change. From the psychological perspective, there is a change in the subjective perception of oneself as an adult by the

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\***Maria Zielińska** – Ph.D. in sociology, Associate Professor, University of Zielona Góra; research interests: interested in adolescents and young adults in the context of life course, generational identity, borderland sociology, as well as the methodology of sociology; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2708-2774>; e-mail: [M.Zielinska@is.uz.zgora.pl](mailto:M.Zielinska@is.uz.zgora.pl)

\*\***Robert Wróbel** – MA in history, Statistical Office in Zielona Góra, Regional Research Centre of Lubuskie Region; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5831-2224>; e-mail: [R.Wrobel@stat.gov.pl](mailto:R.Wrobel@stat.gov.pl)

individual. This refers to awareness, attitudes and identity. The traditional indicators of adulthood are transformed into criteria individually arising as a result of the narrative and reconstruction of an independent adult and mature individual (Silva 2012; Illouz 2008; Rieff 1987). In the biological sense, the markers of adulthood seem to be unchanged.

It is assumed that *“the essence of being an adult does not involve (...) reaching a certain biological age, but undertaking obligations in certain areas of activity and continuing their implementation despite physical, social or psychological obstacles. The potential of adulthood (...) is not so much in the ability to face challenges but in constructing a realistic vision of the future, setting ambitious though achievable goals, and taking responsibility for the effects of autonomous choices”* (Brzezińska, Appelt, Ziółkowska 2016).

In this context, two questions, which the authors attempt to answer in the article, seem to be justified: (1) Why do changes that involve extending the phase of entering adulthood occur? and (2) What are the possible consequences of the indicated phenomena for individual biographies and for social development? The authors want to emphasise that the article should be treated as an invitation to a wider debate and thus an introduction to the issue of entering adulthood in the society of the 2010s.

### **Markers of adulthood in the light of demographic data in Poland and Europe**

Growing up is usually understood as the ability to function independently in society in the economic, legal, psychological, biological and cultural sense. This definition includes the responsibility for oneself and others. In many cultures, the transition from adolescence to adulthood was connected with the rites of passage. They were frequently different for boys and for girls. In the history of societies in different cultures, in different epochs, adulthood was associated with reaching a certain age. Nowadays, the markers of adulthood are clearly shifted in time (they appear at a later age), and are subject to changes which seem to be irreversible (see: Brzezińska et al. 2011; Brzezińska 2016; Brzezińska, Syska 2016; Sińczuch 2002; Czerska 2005).

Regardless of the changes taking place, adulthood is associated with leaving parents' home, taking paid employment, starting a partnership, starting a family (having children). Therefore, one of the measures of the lack of young people's independence (and not meeting the criteria of adulthood) can be the scale of “nesting”, i.e. the percentage of young people in the total population of the same age, living with at least one parent, and the average age of leaving the parental home. The other indicator of the lack of independence is: not starting work after having completed education and

being financially supported by parents.

In 2016 in the European Union, the percentage of people aged 20-29 co-residing with their parents was 55.2 (against 54.5% in 2010), and differences between individual countries were observed. The percentage was significantly higher in Southern Europe as well as in Central and Eastern European countries (see Figure 1). In 2016, the highest percentage of young people residing with parents was recorded in Croatia, Slovakia, Malta, Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal (between 75.0% and 83.1%). People aged 20-29 were much less likely to reside with their parents in Northern and Western Europe. The lowest “nesting” rate was recorded in Denmark (13.7%), Finland (18.2%) and Sweden (23.0%). Less than 50% of young people aged 20-29 resided with their parents in Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Estonia, Germany and Austria. In 2016 in Poland, 71.0% of people in this age group co-resided with their parents and it was much above the average in the EU (by 15.8 percentage points).

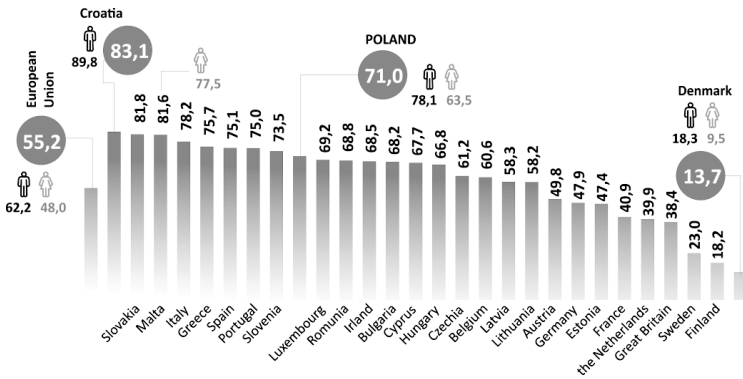


Figure 1. Percentage of people aged 20-29 residing with their parents in 2016. “Nesting” index in selected countries.

Source: own work based on Eurostat database  
<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

It is worth noting that in comparison with 2006, the share of people aged 20-29 co-residing with their parents decreased only in five countries, i.e. in Slovenia (by 6.8 percentage points), in Austria (by 4.4 percentage points), Estonia (3.9 percentage points) and insignificantly in Finland and Lithuania. In the other countries, the “nesting” index increased, with Luxembourg and Belgium showing the largest increase (by respectively 14.0 and 11.4 percentage points). The analysed data show that the process of becoming independent from parents is different in each country, which is also

reflected in the analysis of the average age of leaving home by young people (see Figure 2). In 2016, the average age of leaving home by a resident of the European Union was 26.1 years. Among the EU countries, the inhabitants of the Scandinavian countries, i.e., Sweden, Denmark and Finland, were the youngest when becoming independent (between 20.7 and 21.9 years old), while the inhabitants of Croatia, Malta, Slovakia and Italy were the oldest (between 31.8 and 30.1 years old). In all EU countries, women left home earlier than men. In Poland in 2016, young people left home around the age of 28. Between 2006 and 2016, the average age of people leaving home increased in 14 countries, with the highest increase in Malta, Slovakia and Ireland (by over 1 year), and it declined significantly in Lithuania by over 3 years and in Luxembourg, Estonia and Slovenia by over 1 year.

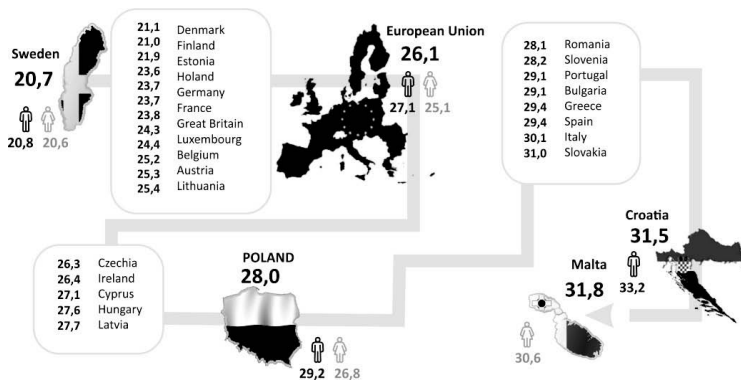


Figure 2. Average age of people leaving home in Poland and in the EU countries.

Source: own work based on Eurostat database

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

The condition of the young generation is also reflected in the NEET (*not in Employment, Education or Training*) phenomenon<sup>1</sup>, which refers to young people being outside any education, employment or training (see Figure 3). In the European Union in 2016, the NEET rate for people aged 25-29 was 18.8%, and it was slightly higher (by 0.8%) than that recorded in 2006. The social passivity of young people was the highest in Greece

<sup>1</sup>NEETs are young people who – for various reasons – are not in education, employment or training. A fundamental feature of this group is the lack of involvement in two basic spheres of social life, i.e. education and employment. NEETs are young people who are unemployed as well as those who dropped out of school, do not seek jobs, remain – sometimes by choice and sometimes out of necessity – dependent on parents, or are engaged in socially unacceptable activities.

and Italy, where the percentage of people aged 25-29 not in employment, education or training was above 30% in 2016. A relatively large scale of this phenomenon was also observed in Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Spain, as well as in Slovakia and Cyprus (between 28.3% and 20.8%).

The phenomenon of social inactivity was the least common among young residents of Sweden, Malta and the Netherlands, where the rate did not exceed 10%. A relatively low percentage of youth classified in the NEET category was also observed in Denmark, Austria and Germany, where it did not exceed 13.0%. **In Poland, the social passivity rate of people aged 25-29 in 2016 was 18.9%, i.e. close to the average for the European Union.** Between 2006 and 2016, the NEET rate increased in seventeen EU countries, with the highest increase in Greece (by 12.3%), Spain (by 9.9%), Italy (by 9.4%) and Cyprus (by 7.0%). On the other hand, social passivity dropped in Malta, Germany, Poland and Czechia (between 10.9% to 3.7%).

In the majority of EU countries, social passivity is much more common among young women than men. In 2016 in the EU in general, the percentage of NEET women was 23.8% and of NEET men 14.0%.

When describing the NEET phenomenon, it should be emphasized that young people included in this category constitute a heterogeneous group. On the one hand, there are relatively well-educated young people who, for various reasons, cannot find a job, but there are also those who have low qualifications, or dropped out of school. However, the common factor for all NEET groups is the lack of motivation to continue formal education and lack of professional activity. The NEET categories include young people who remain – sometimes by choice and sometimes out of necessity – dependent on their parents or who engage in socially unacceptable activities.

Statistical data show that young people become independent, leave home and start their own households later. The delayed entry into adulthood affects also the decision to start a family and have children. Decisions to get married are postponed, so people are older at first marriage (see Figure 4).

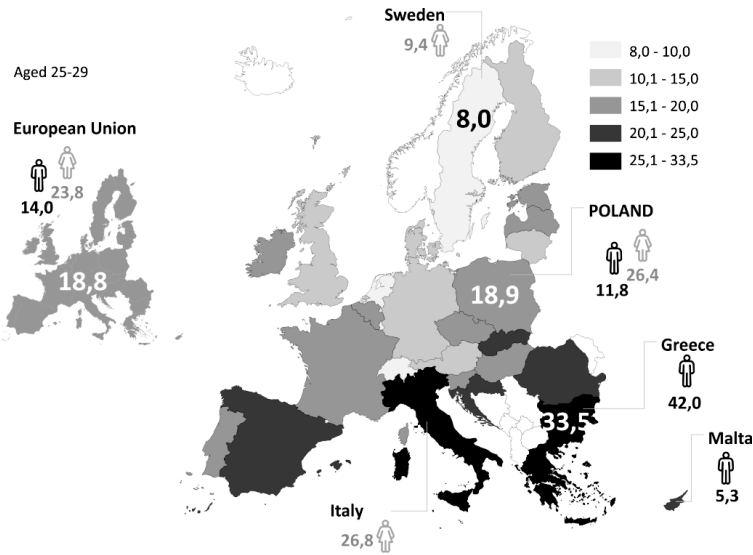


Figure 3. Social passivity (NEET) of young people in 2016 in Poland and Europe.

Source: own work based on Eurostat database,  
<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

At the beginning of the 1990s, in fifteen EU countries, the median age of men at first marriage did not exceed 28 years. Only in Sweden and Denmark, on average, men decided to enter into a formal relationship after turning 30. In 2015, only in Lithuania and Poland the average age of the groom was slightly under 30 (in Lithuania 28.9, and in Poland 29.3). The highest median age of newly-married men was recorded in Sweden (36.2 years) as well as in Spain, Luxembourg, Denmark and Italy (in these countries it exceeded 34 years).

Within 25 years, the median age of men at first marriage in all EU countries increased, with the greatest increase in Hungary, Czechia, Spain and Luxembourg (by more than 7 years) (see: Czerska, 2007, Kiley 2007).

Women in the EU get married much earlier than men, on average they are about 2.4 years younger than men at first marriage. In 2015 women in Romania, Poland, Bulgaria and Lithuania were the youngest (aged between 26.8 and 27.5), and women in Sweden, Spain and Luxembourg were the oldest in Europe when they got married (aged 33.6 to 32.1).

In 14 countries, women got married on average at the age of 30 or over. During the analysed period of 25 years in all EU countries, the age of men and women at first marriage increased, with the highest increase among women in Hungary, Czechia and Spain by over 7 years.

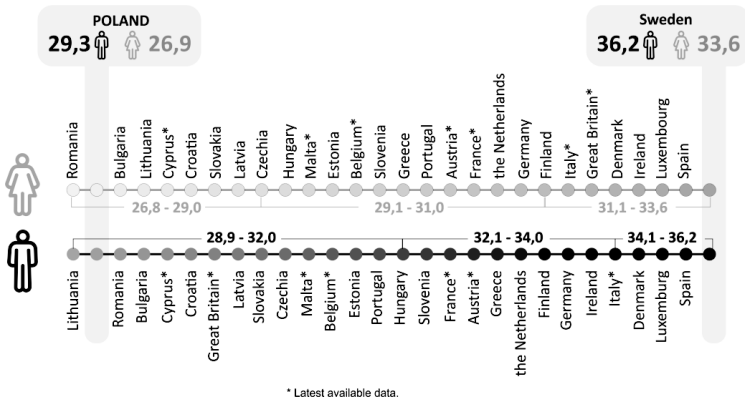


Figure 4. Average age at first marriage in Poland and in Europe in 2015.

Source: own work based on Eurostat database, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

Later marriages are connected with delaying the decision to have the first child (see Figure 5). In 28 EU countries, the median age of women giving birth and giving birth to the first child is systematically growing (see Mynarska 2011). During the analysed period of 15 years, the median age at first birth increased in 27 EU countries, with the highest increase in Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania and Czechia by over 3 years. Only in Great Britain, the age of women giving birth to the first child decreased slightly (by 0.4 year).

In 2015, women in the EU were on average just under 29 when they gave birth to their first children. The youngest mothers giving birth to their first child lived in Bulgaria (26.0 years) and Romania (slightly above 26 years), and the oldest mothers at first birth were in Italy, Spain, Greece and Luxembourg (over 30 years).

The analyses of selected demographic indicators, which illustrate the transition of young people to adulthood, indicate that to a large extent the phenomena describing them are related to a specific country.

Young people living in the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe co-reside with their parents much more frequently than those from Northern and Western Europe. This is probably related to the economic situation, which is also confirmed by the spatial distribution of the NEET index, but it may also result from tradition and culture.

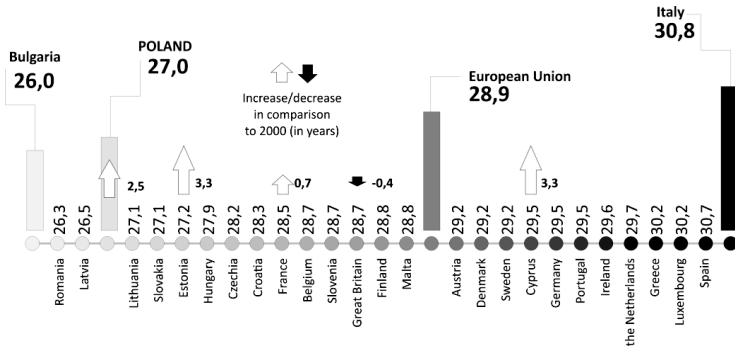


Figure 5. Average age of women at first birth in Poland and in Europe in 2015.

Source: own work based on Eurostat database,  
<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

Although they co-reside with parents longer, young residents of Eastern Europe and some countries of Southern Europe decide to start a family and have children much earlier than the residents of Northern and Western Europe (except for the residents of Spain, Italy and Greece). Probably, this is affected by cultural conditions; however, it should be noted that the differences between individual EU countries have flattened over the past years.

### Transition to adulthood in the conditions of cultural change

The phenomena presented in the context of demographic data require a comment and, above all, an attempt to find their causes. Sociological theories, including the theories developed by Ronald Inglehart (1995, 2003), Jeffrey Arnett (1997, 2001, 2004, 2010), Ulrich Beck (2004, 2012), Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Scott Lash (2009, Anthony Giddens 2006, 2009) provide explanations for the above phenomena. According to these theories, along with the development of civilization, modernization, education and wealth, an *intergenerational value change* occurs, which gradually transforms cultural policy and norms, as well as moral norms. This results in a multitude of patterns and models of life – from the traditional, through mixed (recombined), to the modern ones. The quality of life and reflective efficacy became more important, and the traditional political, religious, moral, and social norms became less important. At the same time, basic values shifted from *materialism* to *post-materialism* (see Inglehart 1995, 2003, Inglehart, Baker 2000), which means that some values, such as independence, free will, possibilities of unlimited choice in different areas of life, individualism, as well as some social values, including ecology, the possibility of co-deciding



about the life of the community and a greater influence on the decisions of the authorities, became more important.

Thus, on the one hand, it was recognized that as a result of the development of civilization, the value system changed, but, on the other hand, there was a view that social development generated civilization threats, multiple risks (see Beck 2004, 2012), uncertainty, unpredictability and fluid reality (see Bauman 2006). This, in turn, resulted in parents supporting their children in decisions to stay in the family home, extend the period of education, postpone the decision to marry, pointing to conditions unfavourable to becoming independent.

However, recently, i.e. in the late 2010s, some phenomena have been observed that can disturb or even reverse the process of cultural change. These include the revival of nationalism, chauvinism, traditional values in their conservative forms (religion, traditional family patterns, certain moral principles), or popularity of right-wing parties (see: Zielińska 2010, Żuk 2014).

Therefore, one might expect changes in the transition to adulthood and a return to traditional models in this area. However, this is not the case. The trends observable since the 1980s in Western European countries have remained the same and include ever larger communities. This means that one should seek a different explanation for the changes taking place in the periodization of human life, not only for the elongation of the youth phase, the elongation of the phase of transition to adulthood, but also for the elongation of adulthood (later retirement, professional activity till a late age, maintaining a “young” lifestyle).

In the opinion of the authors of this article, cultural development, modernization and new technologies have given the possibility of a longer, carefree life, adulthood without responsibilities, and broader hedonism. New lifestyles have developed, and pleasure has become as important life goal as work or family (see Zielinska, Szaban 2016). It is not out of fear of risk, fear of responsibility, or lack of resources that young people prolonged their youth phase and did not enter adulthood. They prolonged it because they could and the society allowed them to do it. The social pressure to grow up quickly clearly decreased. This was favoured by the cult of youth, the emancipation of women, overall life extension, reaching old age in better health thanks to the development of medical sciences, etc.

Uncertainty, unpredictability and risk have been part of everyday life for several generations. Young people do not know a different reality. In the years 1990-2000, delaying the moment of leaving home could be explained by unemployment and the difficult situation of young people in the labour

market. However, with Poland joining the EU, not only did young people gain access to Western labour markets, but they also found jobs in the developing Polish market, earning ever higher salaries, sometimes much higher than those of their parents.

Having considered the above, nowadays there are two **basic** models of entering adulthood (with a multitude of other choices that are various combinations of the basic models).

**I – Traditional model** – it is based on the existing traditional social patterns, requiring women in Christian culture to get married around the age of 18-22, give birth to the first child, take on the role of a housewife, and take up a job if the family faces economic difficulties. The same model for men predicted leaving home (two decades ago it was to happen after compulsory military service), getting a job, marrying, starting a family.

**II – Modern model** – it is based on the ideas of the emancipation of social roles, living alone (as singles), freedom of choice, pressure to pursue one's own dreams and plans, promotion of a free lifestyle. Individual cases of following this model were already noticeable in previous epochs. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the model in which young people live in informal relationships, have successful careers, earn high salaries, choose not to have children (*double income, no kids*) became more popular. Later, various forms and variants of this model appeared. Studies confirmed that this behaviour became established among young people, mostly residents of large cities, with higher education, coming from families with relatively high socio-cultural capital.

The presented models are connected with specific scenarios and motivations for choosing a specific model:

1. Prolonging the period of entering adulthood is a conscious strategy employed by young people. It is a consequence of refraining from taking the most important decisions in favour of experimenting, checking various options and paths. In this scenario, individuals have some capital, they have jobs (frequently very well paid), flats and other luxury goods. Prolonged youth is an element of a life project. This scenario is implemented with the support from their close ones and without a social pressure to implement traditional adult markers.
2. Extending the period of entering adulthood due to the factors that are independent of the individual. These are mainly economic and structural factors, i.e. limited access to resources or support networks. Adulthood is perceived as a risk related to the lack of financial means (for example, to buy a flat) and avoided for as long as possible. One can

speak here of the fear of adulthood. This is how Brzezińska describes this state: “One can point here to the lack of (financial, emotional and cognitive) support in the immediate environment, possible physical or health limitations and individual resources of the individual, resulting from the quality and timeliness of their emotional, cognitive and socio-moral development and the effect of this development in the form of various competences” (2016: 25).

3. Extending the period of entering adulthood due to external, i.e. socio-cultural, factors. This refers to the situation where young people do not follow the ‘traditional’ markers of adulthood because that is what society allows. The emancipation of women, cultural changes, facilities, and marketing to singles help them consciously decide to live alone. A comfortable life without commitments and responsibility for others is becoming an attractive life project.

### **Adult Youth – a consequence of cultural change and a new phase of life**

It has long been recognized that “*The issue of relations between the changes in individuals and in their socio-cultural environment, seen from the perspective of the passage of time, defines the basic areas of analyses in developmental psychology*” (Brzezińska, Appelt, Ziółkowska 2016: 15). Achievements in this field clearly show that the stages of human development in different eras of mankind have not been the same. It is possible, therefore, that some socio-cultural processes at the turn of the millennium led to the emergence and establishment of a new phase in the life of a human being, i.e. **adult youth**.

The life course concepts present in literature so far presuppose a certain universally binding social pattern associated with the periodization of human life, in which all phases preceding fully-fledged adulthood serve as preparation for it<sup>2</sup>.

The three-phase model of periodization (childhood, adulthood, old age) was sufficient to describe an individual’s life course in primitive, traditional, and even industrial societies. Early education, childhood socialisation, later education and secondary socialization, as well as all educational activities

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<sup>2</sup>One should mention Eric Erikson’s theory of inter-stage development, in which he distinguished eight stages of human development, resulting from the relation between the individual and the environment (Erikson 1997, 2004). Daniel Levinson distinguished four phases in the human life cycle: 1) pre-adulthood, 2) early adulthood, 3) middle adulthood, 4) late adulthood and three transitional periods between them (Levinson 1986).

were to prepare the individual for adult social roles. The liminal periods were extremely short, or they did not exist at all. In primitive societies, a very short period of youth ended with a rite of passage, after which the young person became a full member of society (girls who started to menstruate could become wives and mothers, whereas nowadays they are still considered children). Along with social development the rites of passage changed, the education phase and thus youth became longer, but the goal was still the same – to achieve the full rights of an adult person, as well as privileges and duties of an adult, which included starting a family, having children, supporting them, as well as civic duties.<sup>3</sup>

Changes occurring during the phase of early adulthood (between the ages of 20 and 35) and the **change in the significance** of this phase both for the life course and for social development have occurred slowly but systematically, through minor but quantitative changes taking place with increasing intensity within various areas of social life, leading to permanent qualitative changes that are already transforming social life.

These were (and still are) moral, cultural and social changes (which allowed individuals to choose various lifestyle variants), biomedical and technological progress, medical development which helps to stay healthy and look young for longer, special market offers for the emerging target, and social acceptance and greater approval for living a decade of full youth. The exiting culture of youth and the cult of youth reject aging and old age, treating them as a disease and weakness. Old age is *de mode* and *passé*.

These and many other changes have led, in the authors' opinion, to the permanent transformation of the periodization of human life, and the phase that the authors call **adult youth**<sup>4</sup>, characterized by the NARAAP (no adult responsibility, all adult privileges) principle, requires theoretical consideration and should be treated separately.

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<sup>3</sup>Life course concepts have attempted to periodize the stages of adulthood indicating the chronological periods: *early adulthood transition* – at the age between 17 to 22, *entering the adult world* (ages 22 to 28) (Levinson 1986), and the fully-fledged adulthood (28-35 years). It has been pointed out that entering the adult world means building a new structure rather than changing it. The basics of adult life, initiated in the previous phase, are further tested, redefined and consolidated on the basis of markers of adulthood. In this period, it becomes a priority to involve the newly created structure in a cooperative arrangement between the values of the “Self” and the adult community. The final stage is the setting down of adulthood, after which the individual enters middle age.

<sup>4</sup>The term “emerging adulthood” for this phase of life seems inappropriate in this context. Therefore, the authors suggest calling it *adult youth*. It is necessary to indicate the designata of this concept, to enumerate features specific for this phase of life, which clearly distinguish it from the earlier (early youth – 18-22 years) and the following (adulthood – 30/35 years) phases, but this should be discussed in another article.

It should be recognized that young people aged 22-30/35 are not in the transition to adulthood. They are already adults; they have full civil, electoral and reproductive rights, they are educated and ready to take full-time, paid jobs. In this sense, they have all the competence of adult members of society. Postponing certain roles (especially parenting) does not necessarily result from the desire to prolong the youth phase, laziness or choosing the easy way, but it can be an expression of maturity and willingness to make the right decisions with predictable consequences. It does not have to arise from the fear of responsibility, but it is its manifestation.

Owing to the new phase of life, young people who do not have family responsibilities, do not raise children, do not have to support family members or to pay a mortgage can spend more time searching for their own ways of life. This does not mean that they live without stress or worry. They must make important life decisions regarding employment, education, and place of residence, but their lives between the ages of 22-35 are radically different from their parents' lives and even the lives of their older friends.

If next generations “adopt” projects of life in which one decade of life (more or less between the ages of 20-30 years) is spent on experiencing youth with all the privileges of adulthood, but without the majority of obligations traditionally associated with it, this will affect many areas of social life, generating new ways of thinking about one's own life. This, in turn, will cause changes in social and family policy, changes in the labour market, services market, etc.

## **Summary**

Demographic data clearly show that young people tend to leave home, get married, start families later; they also stay in education longer. However, this does not change the fact that these choices are made by adult people who are usually financially independent, who have accumulated numerous material goods, and live in monogamous relationships, with the full freedom of spatial movement. Young adults postpone taking the roles traditionally attributed to adulthood because they can. Society has given its consent for it. Young adults are given a chance to live longer in the youth phase (it is the period of about 10 years) than their predecessors in human history. It is youth with all the privileges of adulthood, but without many commitments attributed to this phase. Early youth (late adolescence), which is more or less between the ages of 17-22, is a phase of relative financial, legal or emotional dependence on parents. Back in the 1970s, the next phase of life (ages 23-30) was for a vast majority of young people the time to start a family, leave parental home, start a job, live on their own and take full responsibility for

their life.

Ever more young people remain in the phase of youth for an extended period of time – even up to the age of 35, without taking on the responsibilities of the fully-fledged adulthood. J.J. Arnett introduced the concept of emerging adulthood to describe this phase of life, and his concept is most often used by psychologists, sociologists and educators in relation to adolescents, the course of life, the periodization of human life, etc. This concept suggests that emerging adulthood is a liminal phase of the rite of passage leading to the fully-fledged adulthood and is only an effect of the elongation of the youth phase. In the authors' opinion, this is a new phase of life: adult youth. It developed as a result of long-term social and cultural changes. Its emergence will create new patterns of the life course and new opportunities for social development. Just like the establishment of the youth phase was a consequence of social development, and then became one of the factors transforming primitive societies into modern ones (see Mead 1986), it is possible that the emergence of adult youth will become one of the factors leading to a new cultural change.

Markers of adulthood, such as finishing education, leaving home, taking paid jobs and obtaining financial independence, being in a permanent relationship/getting married, starting a family have not changed. They may appear in the AY phase, but not necessarily. They become diversified and recombined. Parenthood and formal marriage are frequently postponed. Ever more young married couples do not see children in their plans for future at all.

Having more time to make important life decisions, to experiment with social roles, to experience dilemmas of adulthood without bearing lasting consequences will certainly affect the next phase of life, i.e. the fully-fledged adulthood.

The Millennial generation, as people born at the turn of the millennium are often called, are currently entering the phase of early adulthood. The media describe them as hedonist-minded, irresponsible, emotionally immature, avoiding duties towards society, without far-reaching life plans, focused on “here and now”, on consumption, easy life, existential and spiritual minimalism (see Nast 2017, Trześniewski, Donnellan 2010, Twenge 2006, Strauss W et al. 2000). Due to these characteristics, they are called the “enough” generation. Research does not confirm these features. These are generations that are different from the previous ones, taking advantage of the opportunity that the adult society gave them.

The authors are convinced that the behaviour of the Millennial generation is functional. Also, it is a response to the profound socio-cultural

changes as well as to the changes in civilization and technology that have been accumulating for the last three or four decades and have led to permanent changes in social biographies and fundamental changes in individual life phases. These changes will in the long run lead to the emergence of new types of societies that will be incomparable to those existing so far. The primary causes of these transformations (uncertainty, unpredictability, multiplicity of risks) are connected with modernization, cultural change and, as a consequence, a change in values, along with the growing social consent for behaviour that does not fit within the traditional model. They lead to a big diversity and plurality of life concepts, life courses and, ultimately, lifestyles.

Nowadays, the individual decides about being a self-defining adult, about identifying themselves as an independent person, being responsible for themselves and their close ones, and for the choices they make (see Brzezińska, Syska ed. 2016, Arnett 2004).

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Maria Zielińska  
Robert Wróbel

**SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS OF “EMERGING ADULTHOOD”  
IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL CHANGES IN POLAND  
COMPARED TO EUROPE**

**Keywords:** emerging adulthood, transition to adulthood, markers of adulthood, youth, cultural and social change.

The article aims to identify and describe phenomena associated with the important phase of the individual's life, i.e. transition to adulthood. The authors of the article attempt to determine the causes and consequences of changes taking place in this period of life. Based on the Eurostat database (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>) that illustrates the phenomena of “nesting”, entering the labour market, and starting a family (marriage, giving birth to the first child), significant transformations of the models of young people's life are presented in the context of traditional markers of adulthood. The article refers to sociological concepts of youth, cultural and social changes. In particular, the concepts developed by Jeffrey Arnett, Ronald Inglehart and Ulrich Beek are useful for explaining the recorded trends.

Maria Zielińska  
Robert Wróbel

**SPOŁECZNO-DEMOGRAFICZNE ASPEKTY “STAJĄCEJ SIĘ  
DOROSŁOŚCI” W KONTEKŚCIE ZMIAN KULTUROWYCH  
W POLSCE NA TLE EUROPY**

**Słowa kluczowe:** stająca się dorosłość, przechodzenie do dorosłości, markery dorosłości, młodzież, zmiana kulturowa i społeczna.

Podstawowym celem artykułu jest wskazanie i opisanie zjawisk związanych z ważną fazą życia jednostki, tj. wchodzeniem w dorosłość (*transition to adulthood*). Autorzy artykułu podejmują próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie o przyczyny i konsekwencje zmian zachodzących w tym okresie życia. W oparciu o dane statystyczne bazy Eurostatu (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>) obrazujące takie zjawiska jak: “gniazdownictwo”, wchodzenie na rynek pracy, zakładanie rodziny (małżeństwo, urodzenie pierwszego dziecka) przedstawione zostaną istotne przeobrażenia modeli życia młodych ludzi w kontekście tradycyjnych markerów dorosłości. W artykule wykorzystane zostaną socjologiczne koncepcje dotyczące młodzieży, zmian kulturowych i społecznych przede wszystkim Jeffreya Arnetta, Ronalda Ingleharta, Ulricha Becka do wyjaśnienia odnotowanych trendów.