

Introduction – In Transition to Adulthood

Olivier Galland*

The journal *Economie et Statistique/Economics and Statistics* has been a pioneer in France in the publication of studies on the transition to adulthood, with of two special issues, one in 1995 and the other in 2000, which presented the work based on two surveys backed up by Insee's Labour Force Survey. First, the *Enquête "Jeunes"* in 1992, an original survey targeting young people aged 18 to 29 and designed in partnership with researchers from different backgrounds, that included a retrospective calendar in which the respondents were asked to report year by year their school, work, family and living situation since the year they turned 16 (for an overview of the survey, see Monique Meron, 1995). The processing of these extremely rich data led to the publication, in 1995, of issue 283-284 of the journal. The project was repeated in 1997 with the *Enquête "Jeunes et carrières"* (to study young people and their professional careers), which took a slightly different format but essentially retained the same method; the work based on this survey again led to a special issue of the journal (number 337-338) in 2000.

The 1995 issue heralded a new approach to youth in terms of statistical, sociological and demographic studies. Youth had previously been largely analysed from a point of view that could be said – and this is by no means meant in the pejorative sense – 'culturalist'. Edgar Morin, who famously discovered youth culture in the 1960s, kicked off this tradition of research, which confirmed the emergence in society of a new social group – young people – that was distinguished by cultural behaviours very different from those of previous generations and that claimed the right to adopt those behaviours freely in a society that remained highly authoritarian and gerontocratic. Nevertheless, this understanding of youth had been criticised by Pierre Bourdieu and researchers close to him, such as Jean-Claude Chamboredon (1966), as over-simplifying an age group that was in fact deeply divided by factors such as social origin in particular. The approach looking at entry into adulthood was one way of responding to this critique of over-simplification, since it was based on an objective measurement of transitions, their duration, their organisation, and the combinations that they could give rise to within different social groups defined in particular by their origin and their gender (and a combination of the two).

This issue therefore carries on a well-established tradition of youth studies, while enriching it considerably with new contributions and addressing topics that have been rather neglected in previous issues: the question of the respective roles of family assistance and direct or indirect public transfers in young people's paths to independence and the complex issue of measuring young people's standards of living by looking at all of the resources at their disposal, whether monetary or in kind (via cohabitation with parents, for example).

This question of young people's income – or rather resources – is at the heart of this new issue, which is largely based on the *Enquête nationale sur les ressources des jeunes* (ENRJ, a new survey on young adults' resources) carried out in 2014 by DREES and Insee. Through this theme of financial resources, the issue of inequalities among young people

Reminder: The opinions and analyses in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect their institution's or Insee's views.

* GEMASS Cnrs, and Sorbonne University (olivier.galland@cns.fr)

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is also broached in several articles. Unlike the 1995 and 2000 special issues, both focused on the objective analysis of the routes taken, this issue also focuses on the influence of subjective factors linked to the quality of family relationships – on the routes taken and the choices made by young people, and on the terms and conditions under which financial assistance is received from parents.

The articles that most closely follow the thread of the previous issues mentioned above are those by Nicolas Robette (which opens this issue) and Audrey Rose Menard and Vincent Vergnat. **Nicolas Robette**, who analyses the biographical routes taken by young adults, their development and how they differ according to gender and social origin, confirms some of the findings of previous studies, such as the desynchronisation of professional and family thresholds. Using optimal matching techniques to identify trajectory typologies, he also shows that a significant proportion of the biographical routes taken by women remains highly specific, characterised by inactivity, an early departure from the parental home and a relatively large number of children. The convergence of male and female routes, if it takes place at all, is far from complete.

But how do the decisions that will largely shape the rest of these young people's lives, such as the decision as to whether to stop or further pursue their education, to leave their parents' home or to find a job, come about? **Audrey Rose Menard and Vincent Vergnat** set out to study these three highly correlated decisions. One of the most striking results of their statistical analysis is the reversal of the trend of leaving the family home at an early age, depending on social background, when compared with a model depicting past generations, as described by Antoine Prost (1987) and concerned the working class youth during the interwar years, a model that probably extended into the 1950s and beyond. Indeed, Antoine Prost showed that after completing their military service, young men quickly left their parents to find work and then get married. Conversely, in bourgeois circles, a model based on "dilettantism" could see youth extended rather late. Audrey Rose Menard and Vincent Vergnat show that today the opposite is true: young people from working-class backgrounds find it more difficult to leave their parents than those from more affluent backgrounds. On the other hand, the latter enter employment at a later stage. These social differences in the transition to adulthood are most likely the result of difficulties in job and income stabilisation and the high cost of independent housing for those of the less affluent background and the pursuit of higher education away from the family home and financial assistance from parents for the more privileged.

The article by **Adélaïde Favrat, Vincent Lignon and Muriel Pucci** also focuses on the transition to adulthood, but it addresses the issue from the perspective of public policies and their effect on youth income according to the arrangements by which people leave home and various transfer scenarios. The authors classify the French model of providing support to young people as "familialist", but it could be more of a mixed model, somewhere between the socialised model of the Scandinavian countries and the purely familialist model seen in the Mediterranean countries. The figures in the article also show that, from the age of 21, more than half of the monthly amount of support received by young people comes in the form of direct support and that this is still the case for 82% of support received at the age of 24. In particular, it is well known that a large number of students living in individual accommodation benefit from housing assistance (allocated without any means testing of parents); indeed, this is the case for 55% of them (according to the survey conducted by the French Observatory of Student Life in 2016). This also contributes to allowing these students to experience an initial form of residential autonomy while continuing their studies and, with higher education becoming more accessible to the masses, explains why they are now leaving their parental homes at an earlier age. The authors look at the possibility of the defamilialisation of support provided to young people, a hypothesis that has long been evoked in public debate – since the report by Jean-Baptiste de Foucauld and Nicole Roth to the Prime Minister in 2002 – but for which there was never any follow-up (most likely due to the costs involved). The scenarios tested in this article show that the effects are not unequivocal and that there are both winners and losers. It should be added that in countries that implement universal youth support, the notion

of autonomy that accompanies it is not simply a right, it is also an order with associated obligations (in terms of pursuing and successfully completing studies, for example). This is more than just a technical measure – it is a cultural model.

Several of the articles within this special issue address the topic of inequality among young people. **Laura Castell and Sébastien Grobon** analyse inequalities in standards of living among young people by developing an innovative individualised standard of living indicator that is better suited to describing young people's actual resources than the traditional household-based indicator, which does not take account of intra-family support. **Claire Bonnard, Jean-François Giret and Yann Kossi** provide a comprehensive overview of the definitions, uses and limitations of the concept of NEETs and offer an original multidimensional analysis of the risks of social exclusion faced by such persons. Working within the theoretical framework of the philosophy of unequal opportunities, **Doriane Mignon and Florence Jusot** examine the respective roles that “circumstances” and “effort” play in the non-use of healthcare by young people.

All of these studies highlight the importance of social background as a source of inequalities among young people. However, the results presented in these various papers also show the crucial role played by access to employment, particularly in terms of inequalities in standards of living and the risk of exclusion. Of course, access to employment is itself linked to social background. However, once the effect of the latter has been accounted for, whether a person is employed, unemployed or inactive continues to play a decisive role. The study by Laura Castell and Sébastien Grobon shows, for example, that, all else being equal, the fact of being largely unemployed or inactive during the year studied (2014) resulted in the annual individualised standard of living that they calculated being reduced by 24%. By way of a comparison, having a father who is a blue-collar worker or an employee lowers the standard of living by 7%. The effect of employment largely depends on education and the different levels of qualifications and degrees attained. The effect of education is itself partly linked to social background, but only partly. Education has an effect of its own, as has been demonstrated by Peter Blau and Otis Duncan (1967), who were the first social mobility theorists. The child of a blue-collar worker is less likely to achieve good exam results at school than the child of an executive and is therefore less likely to earn a good wage, but if the child of a blue-collar worker obtains a BEP (vocational qualification) or BTS (higher technical certificate), they have a much better chance of gaining relatively quick access to employment and income than the child of a blue-collar worker who leaves school without any qualifications. This effect of labour market experience coupled with the effect of social background, is also highlighted by the NEET study, which also emphasises the crucial role that the absence of qualifications plays in the risk of social exclusion.

A final group of articles, those by Marie-Clémence Le Pape, Mickaël Portela and Élise Tenret, Christine Fournier, Marion Lambert and Isabelle Marion-Vernoux and Adrien Papuchon, addresses questions of a more subjective nature. The first two articles analyse how young people perceive their own quality of life, in terms of family relationships for the former and employment for the latter. This subjective approach is an important addition, since there are often large discrepancies between the supposedly objective measures of situations and the way in which the persons involved perceive them. These feelings therefore have a specific effect on behaviour that is not simply a subjective reflection of physical situations. **Marie-Clémence Le Pape, Mickaël Portela and Élise Tenret** show, for example, that the quality and intensity of relationships with parents has an effect, together with other controlled characteristics, on whether or not young people receive support from them, as well as on the amount of support that they receive. **Christine Fournier, Marion Lambert and Isabelle Marion-Vernoux** show how important it is to take account of the whole range of young people's career aspirations, which are quite heavily differentiated, if we want to understand the route they intend to take, even though, overall, young employees are generally satisfied with their professional situation (71%). Their classification of career aspirations into five groups is highly evocative. To highlight just one aspect of this, one of the groups established, which encompasses a significant

proportion of young employees (22%), is defined by the desire to strike an improved life-work balance. And, perhaps contrary to what might have been expected, women are only slightly over-represented within this group.

The last article in this very diverse series, by **Adrien Papuchon**, also deals with subjective issues – the way in which young people view the social role played by the State – but also draws some very welcome international comparisons (based on the ISSP surveys). This comparative analysis provides a wealth of valuable information, but there are two elements in particular that are worthy of note. The results show, on the one hand, that there has been a shift in young people in the liberal regimes – as defined by Esping-Andersen (mainly English-speaking countries) – towards a reduction in inequalities and an increase in State intervention aimed at supporting employment and the unemployed, especially for those who have been in education the longest. If this is confirmed, it represents a significant development. Adrien Papuchon demonstrates, on the other hand, that, contrary to popular opinion, generational differences have clearly diminished in Bismarckian and conservative countries.

This issue makes an important contribution to the knowledge of youth in all its social diversity and in all of its stages. A clear idea has emerged that youth is first and foremost a transitional phase and not a fixed and homogeneous social group and this series of articles provides a new illustration of this. This work should be further enriched in the future by systematically drawing as many international comparisons as possible, since it is clear that the institutional and cultural systems specific to each country or cultural area have a decisive effect on the way in which the transition to adulthood takes place. Finally, this issue, which has been in preparation for some time, is being published amidst an unprecedented health crisis. Although it seems that young people are not as badly affected in terms of their health, it is possible that their family lives have been impacted, along with their education and jobs. The crisis has amplified the fragility of certain situations (housing, “Saturday jobs”) and it could also disproportionately affect those who are about to enter the labour market. There is no doubt that many studies will focus on assessing the impact of this. □

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