

The blurred structures of adulthood: transformation of social relationships and «extension of youth» in Romania

This article aims at presenting the particular transition into adulthood observed in Romania. Our reference will be the definition of the entrance “objective” into adulthood established by Galland (1993) and we will present the “extension of youth” that is taking place. In order to do so, we will study the situation and behaviour of the young in relation to school and the labour market, factors marking their transition into independence, the way these structural transformations in Romanian economy are modelling the process of cohabiting between young people and their parents and the contributing factors, as well as the modifications in the creation of a couple observed in Romania since 1990.

Key words: Young people, Romania, adulthood, individualisation, schooling, professional insertion, family.

Introduction

If we can study youth as the *age of life*, this is, the state that leads us to study the opinions of young people and their way of life, we can also analyse it as a *process* leading to adulthood (Vincens, 1997; Brannen and Nilsen, 2002). This last focus, which will be prioritised in this article, consists in the analysis of the list of features characterising adults and the factors that extend or shorten the period during which an individual is still «at a young age». In accordance with this focus, the entrance into adulthood is presented as a form of transition that, according to Galland (1993), is carried out following two main axes: the educational-professional axis and the familiar-matrimonial axis. Four “objectives” can be identified along these two axes to define adulthood: completing studies, beginning a professional life, leaving home and cohabiting with a partner. These limits or thresholds are characterised by 1) a strong synchronism, especially typical in traditional or collectivist modernised societies 2) trends to relate or disconnect, especially common in modern societies or those in the way to modernisation. From this point of view, the transit to adulthood is marked by specificities and national traditions, although we cannot, unlike “globalists” do, assign these differences to the “national spirit”. Persistence of specificities and traditions in this transition to adulthood can be explained especially in the framework of methodological individualism, as it basically comes from what the young use from the past and the present situations (which are obviously different in every country) to define their strategies and to access adult life. Although this framework for transition is defined by the structures and social norms of every country, young people are the ones to choose the paths towards participation in the institutional system, in order to assume roles in their life as adults. The permanence of traditions or social changes takes place through representation and individual designs.

In Romania, after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, the social atmosphere where the young people evolved changed and the transformations that have marked social life have modified the configuration of the entrance process into adulthood. During the dictatorship that made of Romania a modernised society, although following a traditional and patriarchal static path (Magyari-Vincze, 2004), the end of studies, the beginning of professional life, leaving home and having a partner used to happen at the same time. Young people developed in a regulated and institutionalised manner in every stage, from primary school until they found a job. The trend was to close as fast as possible the stage of youth through marriage, which also awarded the right to have a home. This way, one went from family dependence to adult life; that is to say, to a situation of economic, residential and affective independence without hardly any transition. The important part was marked by the ritual of the great step of marriage.

The problems to access adulthood today appear under a different light. The autonomy threshold in the terms defined by Galland no longer coincide and the frontiers between the young and adult phases are blurred. Certain intermediate spaces are created in between these thresholds and the democratization that began in 1990 has led to a process of social “individualisation” amongst young Romanians (Machado Pais, 2000) that has led to a great variety of moments and modalities in the transition into adulthood. The tendency to relate and disconnect thresholds to enter adult life mark the Romanian society today, which presents some specificities that distinguish it and at the same time make it similar to other European societies.

The purpose of my article is to present the particular form of transition into adulthood in Romania. Taking as a reference the “objective” definition of entrance in adulthood established by Galland, I will explain the process of “youth extension” in Romania. (1) In order to do so, I will present several aspects of this transition along the two previously-mentioned axes (educational-professional and familiar-matrimonial) analysing the processes of education and professional insertion, leaving home and beginning life with partners. More specifically, I will study the situation and behaviours of the young in relation to their schooling and the labour market that mark their step into independence and the way they model the structural transformations of Romanian economy, the phenomenon of cohabiting between the young and their parents and the contributing factors, as well as the modifications in having a partner that have appeared in Romania since 1990. These analyses are based on statistical data resulting from other studies and on other qualitative empirical data collected amongst young Romanians. (2)

(1)
The theoretical model suggested by Galland and adopted as a reference in this text is more of an orientation for analysis than a way to provide an explanation of the “extension of youth”. Its heuristic function is drawn from the importance awarded to objective relations in the establishment of the individual behaviours shown by the young.

(2)
In autumn 2005 I created three *focus groups*, each one of them formed by 10 young people aged 20-30, and chosen according to the “snowball” method in three Romanian communities (Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca and Bistrita) in order to gather information about the adult situation as a representative phenomenon.

More extensive studies

After the fall of communism, the phenomenon of schooling has experienced in Romania a period of contradictory development. Between 1992 and 2002 (years of successive census), we can observe, on one hand, the slight reduction in the level of secondary schooling and, on the other, a strong increase in the level of higher and university studies. This way, the level of attendance to secondary schools amongst young people aged 15-19 was reduced from 92.5% in 1992 to 83.3% in 2002 (table 1). This evolution

indicates that some families 1) are not able to afford the schooling of their children due to the increase in prices, which contrasts the situation during the communist regime, when secondary schools were almost free or 2) they award less importance to education as a means to reach social and financial success as they only see unemployment as a result, or they follow those people with no training (athletes, businessmen, salespeople, etc.) whose success is broadcasted on TV. (3)

These slight descents in the levels of schooling are compensated, however, by a significant increase in the levels of higher and university training. Between 1992 and 2002, the number of diploma-holders increased by 41.7%. In comparison with 1992, the percentage of young people aged 20-24 taking higher education increased by 2.3% (from 0.3% to 2.6%) and the number of young people taking university studies doubled from 1.2% to 4.1%. In the 25-29 range increases were 3.2% and 4.5%, respectively (next table).

Table 1. **Structure of the Romanian population according to their level of education, 1992 and 2002** (in %).

Age groups	Level of instruction							
	university		higher		secondary		primary	
	1992	2002	1992	2002	1992	2002	1992	2002
Total	5,5	7,7	2,1	3,2	67,8	69,8	19,7	14,9
15-19	-	-	-	-	92,5	83,5	6,0	13,2
20-24	1,2	4,1	0,3	2,6	95,2	84,2	1,9	6,0
25-29	8,2	12,7	0,6	3,8	87,4	77,9	2,3	3,6
30-34	9,7	10,0	1,3	2,4	83,9	83,8	3,7	2,4
35-39	9,8	10,5	4,1	2,0	79,4	83,2	5,3	2,7
40-44	9,7	10,6	6,4	2,4	73,0	81,2	9,5	4,1
45-49	8,1	10,6	5,0	5,4	59,2	76,6	25,8	5,8
50-54	5,6	10,4	3,9	7,6	51,6	70,0	34,8	10,1
55-59	4,5	8,7	2,3	6,0	44,7	56,0	40,9	26,3
60-64	4,6	6,1	1,2	4,7	45,3	48,7	40,5	34,7
65 et +	7,0	4,6	1,2	1,7	59,8	39,3	51,8	40,4

Source: Romanian National Statistics Institute.

This situation is due to the “fee” system established by the communist regime, which limited number of students who could take higher education, as well as to the appearance of private education which, especially at university levels, experienced a huge expansion after communism. In Romania there are currently 56 state universities and other private institutions, where the enrolment figures have increased up to 28% in 2000 and 10.6% in 1990. We can also notice that the gross schooling rate (4) in the level of higher education went from 21% in 1998 to 35% in 2003 (UNESCO, 2005) and amongst young people aged 18 to 35, the proportion of students went from 11% in 1993 to 21% in 2003 (Roharik, 2004). As a general trend we see here an extension of the schooling levels that covers all social classes (Neagu, 2004).

(3)

The masses of money gathered in few months by speculators that were almost uneducated, but clever, make many young people feel jealousy and admiration at the same time. Earning money in any way and showing it off – a typical feature of the accumulation of capital – is an essential element of the social ideal proposed to the young in Romania.

(4)

The gross schooling rate represents the number of students at a certain level of education, whatever their age is, expressed by the percentage of population of that age corresponding to that level of the educational system. In the case of higher training, the population studies grouped the last five years after leaving secondary school, which happens at the age of 18 in Romania.

This increasing extension of studies is directly connected with the institutional changes in the training offer and is also the result of the great value awarded to diplomas by the collective mentality. Diplomas are a sign of a higher category and the guarantee to obtain a better place in the labour market. This way, amongst young Romanians there is a social tendency to accumulate titles, which is strongly supported by the parents. Accumulation of diplomas and studies makes young people believe that the acquired knowledge “gives the right to...”, “guarantees priority of...”. However, it is necessary to observe that businesses do not acknowledge the value of qualifications and that the influence networks are more efficient to obtain a good job than the years of education certified by a

(5)
It is a *Study on the values of Romanians* done in 1993, where 1.103 people were interviewed, and the *Barometer of public opinion*, which interviewed 2.100 people. For a detailed analysis of these studies in connection with the different indicators of the autonomy of the young, see Roharik (2004).

(6)
This posture reflects the forever dominating element in Romanian society, the division of work by sex, which assigns the male the role of earning money.

(7)
The communist regime hid the unemployment rate so as not to confront the ideals of the Marxist ideology and the Constitution about the working rights. There was a huge overdimensioning of the number of employees in large industrial companies all over the country. According to the studies made by the OECD (1993), approximately 30% of the total working time corresponded to an "artificial" maintenance of the labour force. This phenomenon is also obviously connected to the economic crisis of the regime and its crash.

(8)
This comment is valid for the countries in central and Eastern Europe. According to data issued by the International Work Organisation, in 2000 the average unemployment rate amongst those people aged 15-24 was 30% in the 18 countries undergoing transition; that is to say, double the global employment rate. Over 40% of these young people had been unemployed for over a year. However, there are important variations within this geographical region, with approximately 7% unemployed people in the Czech Republic against 49% of the Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, 27% of the Russian Federation, 30% in Croatia and Poland, 32 % in Slovakia and 33% in Bulgaria.

diploma, which are often relegated to a category considered as a "time for enjoyment and fun", as one of the interviewees said. This situation has created a type of young figure that is "hooked to studies". This sort of person is illustrated by young people aged 18-30 who have "not left their studies, don't have a partner, don't have children, don't have a paid job and still live with their parents" (Roharik, 2004, 120). Between 1993 and 2003, the number of people associated to this group established from two studies around some representative samples of the Romanian population aged 15 onwards (5) increased from 16% to 25%.

In the scope of access to adulthood, this extensive schooling keeps young people away from professional activity for longer, thus extending the state of dependence from the parents, who, in Romania, have to pay for their children's studies. Continuing with studies keeps the ties of dependence with the family tight, especially of economic dependence. The family also extend the "category of childhood". In the case of most young students who have taken part in the debates held by the *focus groups*, belonging to the world of adults with the category of a student is confusing ("young and adult" at the same time or "neither young nor adult"). The privileged feature is mainly economic independence, according to those interviewed when identifying the category of an adult, but this situation is not a feature of those young people who continue studying. It is interesting to note that for many young people money is important, a defining feature of "a real adult", and this is more frequent in the case of males. (6) Even if they continue with their studies, the young people I interviewed do not seem to award any importance to knowledge. Pragmatically, they award a priority to the most useful aspects of the training offer, and so amongst the reasons why they choose a certain type of education and profession we have the financial aspect and the low unemployment rate associated to that profession. In particular, finances, banking, insurance, transport and certain sectors of industry such as tobacco and extractions guarantee the best salaries (around 300 euros a month as opposed to an average 180 euros in 2003).

The beginning of professional life: between precariousness and flexibility

Since 1990, the Romanian labour market has experienced great re-structuring, which has led to a modification of the possibilities and employment perspectives. This re-structuring has created an unstable professional world where the uncertainty of transition has made many jobs precarious and has left many professions and knowledge obsolete. This has also led to a great dose of insecurity and risks for the professional evolution of the young. During the communist regime, we did not know of unemployment in western terms, (7) but during the period after its fall, the unsuitable macroeconomic policies and the institutional atmosphere, which does not promote the creation of private jobs, have made their contribution to the reduction of possibilities for young people to access the labour market. Especially due to their lack of experience, unemployment has affected terribly this sector of the population. (8) The unemployment rate amongst young Romanians aged 15 to 24 was 18.7% in 2003, much higher than for the population aged 15 or over, whose unemployment rate for the same year was 6.6%. In relation with the group

of unemployed registered in 2003, those aged 15-24 represented a proportion of 31.4%. Democratic transition has abandoned the young and has made them look for new orientations without any institutional support, to learn to overcome insecurity, to consider the situation as dependent on the market, on their efforts or on their family circumstances.

This evolution in the labour market has generated new paths for transition from youth to adulthood. Firstly, here we have a tendency to *delay even more the entrance in the labour market and a stable career after completing studies*. The stage of professional insertion for young Romanians is characterised today by receiving training that does not guarantee a job. Recruiting young people who have just finished their training has become more unlikely in state businesses, whose dimensions have been greatly reduced, whereas the private sector does not create enough new jobs either. This way, unemployment affects more and more those young people with studies. In 2003, for instance, 37% of the unemployed had a higher education and university diploma but had still not entered the labour market (PNATR, 2003). We have also stated that amongst the young diploma-holders there is an increasing phenomenon known as “return to the preceding state”. More precisely, “it is a sort of back to school process taking place several years after people have completed their studies and is done by those youngsters who have not managed to find a job and end up taking higher education (diplomas and PhDs)” (Roharik, 2004: 119). This situation explains why, in the framework of the *focus groups* I have created, most young people have mentioned getting a stable job and economic independence as the priority features of being an adult. “I won’t see myself as an adult until I start working, even if I have finished studying.” Being an adult means “having your own money, not depending on anybody and having a long-term job” (male, 26).

Secondly, we can see an *increasing maladjustment between the qualifications and the corresponding jobs*. The phenomenon we mentioned earlier about training in young people does not create more jobs or necessarily improves professional options, but rather contributes more to the phenomenon of the change of social position (9) that in 2002 affected 12.5% of employed young people aged 15-24 (Neagu 2004). The causes for this phenomenon are mainly due to the few number of professions included in the labour market and the rigidity of the educational system, which is isolated from the economic world and still enclosed in its own reproductive logics. Young Romanians experience this situation as a maladjustment between the instrumental conception of education as a productive investment and an unregulated market constrained by unforeseeable forces (especially the power of the influence and customer networks). This situation is reflected in its position in relation to education. 25% of the population aged 15-29 considered that school barely responds to the needs of the labour market (PNATR, 2003) and makes one of the interviewed in the *focus groups* declare that: “the aptitude to memorise dead knowledge developed by teachers amongst us does not have much to do with the capacity to join the labour market in its current situation”. However, for this young man, “being an adult means achieving my professional objectives because if I can’t work in the field I am trained for and my job position is below what I would like to do, then I won’t consider myself as a real adult” (male, 25). This young man’s adult identity is

(9)

The change of social position is defined as the situation for which a young person has a higher educational qualification in connection with the training required for the option taken. This phenomenon did not exist during the communist regime which, through strict control of the training-employment connection, gave each young person a job according to their level of training and qualifications.

articulated around a previously planned professional career that involves a work-training correspondence, even if this means postponing getting a job. Note that the results of the opinion surveys show that an increasing number of young Romanians is sensitive to professional success through the correspondence between work and training. In a national survey made in February 2001, 30% of young people aged 18-25 believed that working in the field one has trained for is a very important indicator of professional success. This proportion increased up to 34.4% in 2003 (The Gallup Organisation, 2004).

Thirdly, we can also see in Romania the appearance of a phenomenon that had not existed during the communist regime called *part-time working and studying*, especially at university level. The flexible feature of the labour market allows an increasing number of students to work at weekends or summer holidays, which did not use to happen before. For those students interviewed about this aspect in the *focus groups*, as well as an opportunity to get some pocket money, getting a job while studying was a socially relevant decision. Young people access this way certain independence and start entering the adult world. This way they can reach a means of institutional and paternal emancipation that could hardly be reached by just staying at school. "I felt like I was somebody, an adult, the first time I saw in my hands my first salary after working during my second year at university" (male, 27). For this young man, working while studying has a symbolic value of independence. However, this independence is strongly connected to the instrumental aspect of work, concerning the material advantages in having a job. On one hand, this dimension has been the most popular one for the young people interviewed in the *focus groups*. The mentality has been clearly framed into an «Adam Smith» type of logic, that is to say, it clearly expresses its wish to "improve luck" through "an increase in fortune". A survey made by *The Gallup Organisation Romania* for the British Council in 2004 shows, on the other hand, that 84% of young Romanians considered that the salary is the first criteria to choose a job and only 30% awards importance to other expressive aspects of work such as the environment or relations with colleagues (The Gallup Organisation, 2004).

It is also important to note that in Romania, a country that went from "a socialism of underdevelopment" to a "capitalism of underdevelopment" where the standard of living only applies to 27% of the average in the European Union, many young people - especially from the middle classes and villages aged 25 to 35 - have been forced to emigrate, quite often illegally, to different western countries as a means to earn the money the need to have a decent life. Customising and nepotism in socio-professional relations and the incorrect application of the laws have created amongst these young people the feeling of frustration when it comes to "making a living" in Romania. To this regard, between 1990 and 2001, 1.6 million Romanians had left the country to work in the west and, according to data drawn from the survey made in 2003 by the Centre of Urban and Regional Sociology in Bucharest, 4% of Romanians declares having worked abroad and 9% have relatives working abroad (Capelle-Pogacean, 2003). The experience of «dincolo» («on the other side») work represents for these young people a ritual to move into adulthood, as an experience lasting several months or years abroad allows to reach certain goals faster, such as purchasing a house or having a partner. Leaving to another country to work

(especially to countries such as Spain, Italy or Ireland), engaging into a “migratory career” (Diminescu, 2004) is the origin amongst many young people of a social difference in relation to those who have stayed in the country. Those who have managed to reach the “western paradise”, especially through legal means, and have returned as richer people consider that this experience has been “the real step into adulthood”. “I have experienced during my time in the west my capacity to be a real man. After returning, I now feel like an adult”, says one of these young men who has narrated all the difficulties encountered during his “illegal work period” in the European Union from 1990 and 2002. As a Romanian citizen, he was a member of the “black list” of countries whose citizens needed a travel visa and a work permit.

A long stay with the parents

In 2002, in Romania 78% of young people aged 15-29 declared they still lived with their parents (PNATR, 2003), an intermediate situation between Italy (where 80% of young people aged 15-29 lived with their parents) and France (around 65%). This situation of the “extended family” is explained through the joint action of two combined factors. Firstly, it is a traditional feature of Romanian culture, as parents are assigned an important role in the protection of their children, even if they are adults already. Secondly, we can see the utilitarian or economic explanation that applies in the current situation in Romania, characterised by the horrendous absence of affordable homes for young people, which has become a real obstacle for their independence. The high cost of rentals, which surpasses many young people’s financial possibilities, and the absence of a financial system allowing to purchase a home hinder the access of young Romanians to the possibility of achieving residential independence. (10) Thus, the possibility of getting a loan did not exist before 2001, as banks believed it was too risky to offer this service to the population. Those people whose income was over the average salary had to save their money to add up for the required sum to purchase the home, whereas for the rest this was close to impossible. The Administration has taken part to solve the issue of the scarcity of homes by creating the *National Housing Agency*, an organisation that manages the construction of buildings for young people with some financial aid, and allows people to purchase a house through a loan with a 15-25-year mortgage. Nevertheless, even in these conditions, most young people find it impossible to pay off their mortgage. In addition to this, the number of homes available is low, so the criteria to assign them are mainly political and decided by the administrative agency. The media frequently talk about cases of fraud in the system to favour important members of the government or other state institutions, who take advantage of these offers. Customising, a common feature in traditional and communist systems, showed a great capacity of survival during the period for democratic transition and still plays an important role in Romanian society.

(10)

A survey made by the Ministry of youth and sports in Romania reveals that in 2001 94% of young people interviewed aged 18 to 29 considered that getting a home represented the biggest of problems.

Regarding leaving home, in Romania it happens in certain ways that can also be found in other European countries. For instance, it is what Buck and Scott, (1993) called *living away*, which means living away from home but preserving a relation with it. This is the case of students who live somewhere else during the week (a student hall or apartment) financed by the parents

and then return home at weekends. This type of de-cohabiting is also found amongst the young members of the upper classes (the “new rich people” who appeared from the ruins of communism), many of which have a home paid by their family.

In the case of those young people living with their parents, cohabiting is progressively adapted to the advances of Romanian society towards modernism. Thus, young people living with their parents who find it impossible to emancipate from their family negotiate some autonomy spaces in it. Cohabiting does not mean that they are subjected to certain traditional family rules characterised by the father’s authority and the control of their activities. They are young people who benefit from a great autonomy that is represented in the possibility to go out at night without any restrictions, not give parents any explanations about their friends, being with people from the opposite sex without parent control, etc.: a trend towards independence that is growing and is manifested when they are still at the family home. The family model is framed by great concern and a strict control of studies (financed mainly by the parents), but also by a not-so-strict control of the use of time, relationships and private life, which mainly contributes towards weakening the tendency to leave the family home. On the other hand, this trend is reinforced by the fact that young people with a paid job do not help towards the family budget. Thus, they can save most of their income and not pay for living expenses, so they can spend their money on the typical elements of juvenile culture; something their “independent” peers cannot do, as they must spend on other basic needs. We might say that the impulse towards autonomy is particularly slowed down by the practical advantages of living with the family. (11)

(11)

It is necessary to point out this framework, regardless of the structure of the labour market. High unemployment in Romania in young people can be explained by the tendency to protect children within the family and the possibility of young people to stay at home or go back and live at a very low cost. “As I live with my parents, I can stay unemployed. If I didn’t I would have to work to pay for all my needs” (29-year old man).

(12)

The fact that the family replaces some functions that should be covered by public services (compensate the functions in the labour market, for instance) leads young people to have a double morale. Obligations towards the institutions or public authorities are weaker than the ones related to the family. This situation leads to the existence of a high level of *social capital* in the families, but a relative level of poverty outside them.

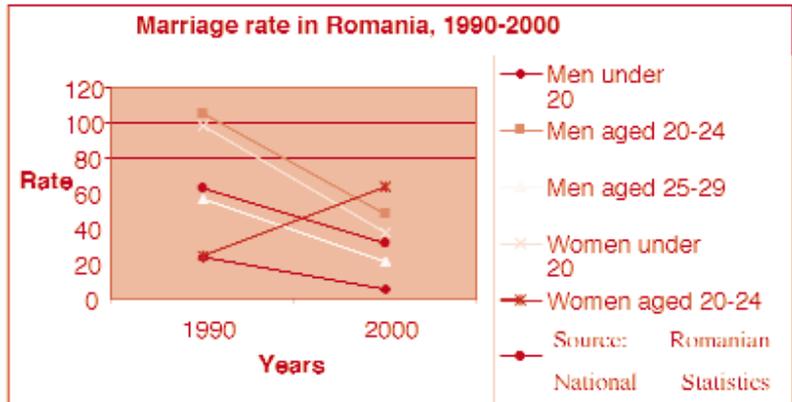
Cohabiting, and consequently, the importance awarded to the family, do not have much to do with the persistence of the traditional values, but rather with a logic to adapt to the situation. If young Romanians indeed are loyal and more attached to the community, this is often reduced to some interesting considerations. Thus, young people have told us about their feeling of belonging to a family and their principles, but do it not so much because of the influence of a tendency towards conformism and tradition, but rather because these principles have a functional value to them. They feel like members of a family and insist on this feeling, not due to an inertial mechanical feeling, but rather because the family values support their interests. This way they can stay with their parents for as long as they wish or they can also stay with them if unemployed. *Youngsters have the impression that the whole social problem finds its solution in the family framework and this belief increases the importance of the family.* Their ideals and beliefs legitimate the family and also support their interests. (12)

Many ways of living with a partner

The analysis of certain dimensions about life with a partner in the mentality of young Romanians allow us to state the importance of marriage as a way to access adulthood, especially in the case of girls. In Romania, girls have a well developed devotion to marriage and this explains why 21% of young Romanian girls get married before the age of 19 (the highest percentage in Europe). However, even if marriage is highly valued, the average age for the first marriage has gone between 1990 and 2000 from 25 to 27 in men and

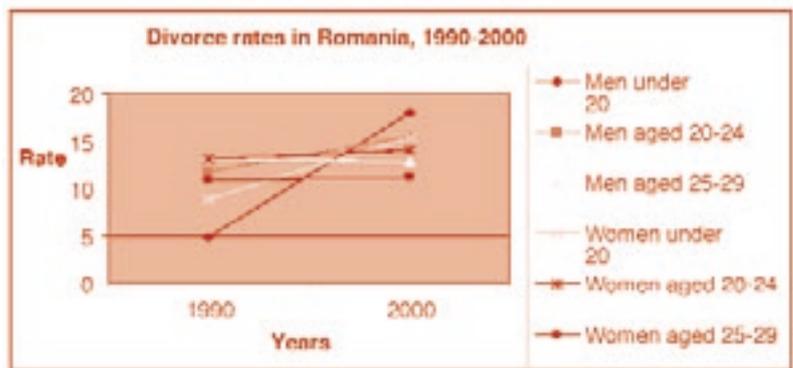
22 to 23.6 in women. At the same time, there are new ways of cohabiting, such as unmarried couples of single parents. In 2001, for instance, according to a survey made by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, 0.7% of young Romanians aged 15-24 lived with their couple but were not married. (13) On the same lines, between 1992 and 1998, the proportion of young single people aged 15-29 increased from 60% to 63.4%, whereas the proportion of married people went down from 37.7% to 34.9%. After the fall of communism there has been a reduction in the marriage rate (except in women aged 20 to 24), as the graph shows:

Figure 1:



Source: Romanian National Statistics Institute. Data collected by the author.

Figure 2:



Source: Romanian National Statistics Institute. Data collected by the author.

(13) This rate is far from the ones found in most western countries, where the percentage of young people living as unmarried couples surpasses 15%. At this regard, we could say that the position of young Romanians regarding cohabiting out of wedlock shows a “cognitive dissonance” between the values expressed and the respect to these values. Thus, most young people I have interviewed seem to approve of this type of life, but at the same time they say that marriage after a period of cohabiting will “easily be a failure”. “I prefer, says a young man, getting married without living together first. Cohabiting is good to get experience, but not to prepare marriage”. When asked “do you think that living together before marriage would be good because the members of the couple could judge each other before making an official commitment?”, most young people gave a negative answer.

Therefore, if in 1990 the marriage rate amongst men aged 20 to 24 was 105.4 marriages for every 1,000 people, in 2000 the figures reached only 47.4 marriages per every 1,000 people. During the same period, this rate was reduced amongst women aged 25 to 29 from 62.4% to 31.3%. We can only see an increase in the group of women aged 20 to 24, where this rate went up from 24.5% to 63.3%. This situation could be explained by the effect of the strategies applied by these young women, according to research made by Brinbaum and others (2003), to certain categories, as they seem to award more importance to living with their partners in order to leave home, unlike men, who first tend to get a job and then cohabit with their partners. In the framework of the *focus groups*, those women in their 20s were more inclined to designate marriage as the symbol of acquisition of adulthood, whereas for

most men the priority was first to get a job and economic independence to reach adulthood. Marriage according to males appears as a secondary indicator of adulthood and not as a main priority to “get on in life”.

The reduction in the number of marriages is accompanied by an increase in the number of divorces. Data extracted from graph 2 indicate a trend amongst young people to get divorced, when compared to the year 1990.

This phenomenon reflects the difficulties in the relations between young people who confront the economic crisis that is typical in a period of transition: insufficient income, unemployment, scarcity of housing... On the same lines, they are the result of the modifications in the behaviour of young people in the context of transition to liberal capitalism. This context offers young people new possibilities to choose options to favour the increase in individualism that becomes in many cases a form of solipsism (Vultur and Fecioru, 2004). This is joined to a greater effect of the redefinition of paperwork within the couple and the difficulty to find the right person in an uncertain and changing world without the axiological objectivity typical in societies regulated by State tradition. We can also see amongst the young a deeper transformation of the sense awarded to romantic relationships. The sentimental order in young people is based on collective values, but is also based, and in an increasing manner, on an individual aspiration to build one's own identity. For instance, fidelity “while love lasts” replaced little by little fidelity “imposed by marriage”. The hopes of the members of the couple evolve. What they look for in a relationship is the exchange of the conditions of their personal plenitude: beyond rules, they want honesty, authenticity and solidarity in freedom. The family-reference dictating the norms leaves a place for a family-refuge where one does not suffer, but rather finds company and support.

Conclusion

The presentation of some constitutive elements in the process to “access adulthood” amongst young Romanians leads us to represent the hypothesis of an “extension of youth”, whose common feature is the disconnection from the threshold of acquisition of economic, residential or affective independence. The time for education, the entrance into active life, leaving home and having a partner seem to be more variable in Romania today than in previous generations, whose destiny was constrained by the social forms of regulation of a traditional and collectivist style. The position and succession in time of education, active life and family relations have become less foreseeable and stricter for young Romanians. The emerging capitalism has a strong influence on decisions made throughout life, such as leaving school, studying the chosen degree, having a family, etc. We are witnessing in this country the emergence of a “new adult” that combines different fields in life and for whom the pragmatic election and the adaptation to situations are more important than prediction as an element of security in an uncertain future. The random and fragile success of liberal democracy in Romania will be indices for these “new adults” who, as they claim for their right to act and become richer in both material and symbolic ways, they are placed in situations that involve applying innovative actions and several strategies for these situations. The ways of communist reproduction according to which the forms of interaction are transmitted generation to generation have lost their meaning today and the path of young people today is no longer

structured by objective and permanent regulations, but is rather subjected by objective and permanent regulations and to the increasing importance of *individualisation, rationalisation and contingency*. This situation refers to the nature of transformations in Romania today, as well as to the contradiction and the multiple centring of the market system. These young people are constituted around central axes in current transformations and are, both in Romania and the central and Eastern European area, the vectors for the introduction of social links that are to consolidate the democratic regime and the market economy in this part of Europe.

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