

STUDIES

THE SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY OF POST-ADOLESCENCE

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Abstract: There are countless references to the development of a new phase of life between childhood and adulthood (referred to as post-adolescence) in the technical literature of sociology. Different theoretical models have been developed in sociology to interpret post-adolescence. After the discussion of these models, a new model is introduced in this contribution. The forms and “timing” determining how and when young people leave their parents’ house is regarded as the most important constitutive characteristic of the post-adolescent phase in this model. It is thereby assumed that this detachment from the parents’ house is dependent upon surrounding macro-structural social conditions.

In this model, the following detachment dimensions are regarded as significant: legal dimension, household dimension, economic-financial dimension, social dimension, emotional dimension. The analysis of the process of detachment based upon these dimensions reveals that postponed partial detachment, successive detachment, and reversible detachment are all constitutive elements of post-adolescence. The fact that young people who have reached legal adulthood remain in many respects dependent upon their parents, remains an important facet of post-adolescence. The analysis also reveals that post-adolescence cannot be clearly defined based upon the criteria of age, with regard to “youth” or “adulthood”. It is therefore an empirical question who and how many members of a specific age category of young adults (i.e. 20–25 years or 30 year olds) find themselves in the post-adolescent phase according to the theoretically proven criteria.

Keywords: family, youth, post-adolescence, life-cycles

Over the last decade we have found a growing number of references made in the sociological literature to a newly coined term, post-adolescence, and its characteristic features. Post-adolescence denotes a new phase in life between youth and adulthood.

Sociologists have various theoretical models at their disposal in their attempt to analyse the post-adolescent phase. After discussing the various perspectives we shall present in this paper a unique theoretical framework, whose prerequisite and point of

departure is the examination of the detachment of young people from the family of orientation. This process is strongly influenced by social-structural conditions. In our presentation of the model the following dimensions will have a special emphasis:

- detachment in the legal sense,
- detachment from the parental home,
- detachment in the material-financial sense,
- detachment resulting in independent decisions,
- subjective detachment.

The detachment process will be analysed in various dimensions: we shall examine the delayed, the partial, the gradual and the reversible detachment. Generally speaking, young adults in the post-adolescent phase are not yet entirely independent of their parents. On the basis of our theoretical analysis, we can also state that the post-adolescent phase cannot be defined in terms of an age category, as it signifies a special social status. Thus, it remains an empirical question to explore how many young people aged between 20 and 25, or 30 belong to this phase of life.

POST-ADOLESCENCE – THE EVOLUTION OF A NEW PHASE OF LIFE

The sociological literature examines life under 30 fundamentally from the aspect of restructuring youth. In industrialised societies youth is treated as a uniform, homogeneous life phase, which begins with puberty and ends with the coming of age. In contrast to this, we can state that certain behaviour patterns characteristic of adulthood have been observable in the behaviour of young people since about the 1970s, and the gap between sexual maturity and social-financial independence has been widening. This fact is, however, interpreted in different ways in the literature. Some experts (Olk 1984) interpret these changes as the end to the existence of youth as a socially independent, to some extent homogeneous life phase, while others see a constantly expanding transition phase between youth and adulthood. Others, however, look upon these changes as the lengthening of youth (Rosenmayr 1976: 240). The restructuring of the life phase under thirty acquires special importance here as the above changes have resulted in the emergence of a new, independent life phase, which we call post-adolescence.

The concept of post-adolescence was first introduced in the scientific discourse by Keniston (1968–1989). He claims that a gradual separation of sexual maturity and maturity in the social sense, the start of a career can be observed in modern societies. As a result, a new life phase is evolving, in which the dimensions of becoming an adult occur gradually, partly transferred in time. This behaviour pattern differs in different respects from the observed behaviour of both young people and of adults. Young people in their post-adolescence meet most psychological criteria of adulthood but not the sociological ones. They do not possess the qualities fundamentally defining adulthood and are not integrated into the institutional structure of society (Keniston 1968: 260). The behaviour and life style of these young people are characterised by an orientation towards the present and the lack of inclination to settle down and to strive for security. This phase can be described as one of openness and the refusal of bureaucratic control. The personality of these young people is shaped in a process of

identifying with their peers. Gillis describes the newly emerging life phase as “adulthood without an economic basis” (Gillis 1980: 206; Schäfers 1989: 12).

In the German version of this theory the concept of post-adolescence is of prime importance, in which the widening gap between psycho-sexual and financial independence is considered a structural precondition of this life phase. Young people in this phase typically go through a process of becoming socially, morally, intellectually, politically and sexually independent, while still remaining financially dependent (Zinnecker 1982). The causes of this may lie in the longer education and training period, diminishing job opportunities and unemployment – the social-structural changes that have occurred in the course of modernisation. The post-adolescent phase is – according to this theoretical position – at the same time the new life style of the modern age. This phase can be considered an independent life phase if its components cannot be rendered to the life style of adults either by consensus or conflict. This phase has its own characteristic features, which are formed by young people within their own social group.

This new phase, which is thus characterised by the delayed acceptance of the rights and obligations of adulthood, – predominantly because of the longer training period and delayed career start –, squeezes in between the age of maturity and adulthood as a life phase on its own right (Zinnecker 1982: 100; Behnken and Zinnecker 1992; Schröder 1995). This view, although plausible and supported by empirical evidence, is still not generally accepted in the literature. References are made to the fact that the financial dependence of young people is not a fundamentally new phenomenon and, thus, is not the product of the modern age. It has also been pointed out that salaries typical of this age group have changed very little over the last 20–30 years, thus, there is no economic reason for the restructuring, especially from the aspect of lengthening the period of youth (Baethge, Schomburg and Voskamp 1983; Baethge 1989). Undoubtedly, this phase is not the prototype of our modern age, however, the process of social modernisation has greatly contributed to the recognition of its characteristic features, and to the broadening and the institutionalisation of the concept.

I. Pre-industrial societies



II. Industrialised societies



III. Post-industrial societies

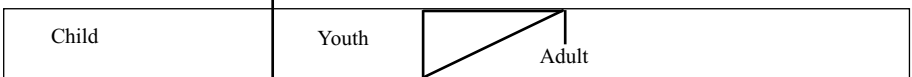


Figure 1. A historical comparison of the life phase under 30
 (The triangle shows the group of young adults in their post-adolescent life phase)

It is common knowledge that there was no clear dividing line between childhood and adulthood in pre-industrial societies. Children were looked upon as “little adults” in the society and were obliged to do adult work according to their intellectual or physical capabilities, e.g., to work in the fields or around the home (Ariès 1988).

Youth was first recognised as an independent life phase between childhood and adulthood with its own societal expectations in industrialised societies (Eisenstadt 1960; Tenbruck 1962).

The post-adolescent phase, as a socially relevant phenomenon, first evolved in post-industrial societies, and its spread and expansion in time can be viewed as an important sign of societal modernisation. Individual people experience this phase, which may be short or long, in different ways. Discussions revolving around the post-adolescent phase conclude that this delayed and partial separation is essential for the scientific research on this phase, but its effects cannot easily be measured empirically.

Hurrelmann (1994) lists the development criteria which are characteristic of childhood, young adulthood and adulthood. He does not acknowledge young adulthood as an independent life phase, since these young adults belong to youth both in terms of their social status and their behaviour. We beg to differ. According to our theory, young people in their post-adolescent phase can be significantly characterised by the fact that in certain respects they belong to the youth, in other respects, though, they already belong to adults. This is a social-structural inconsistency in the societal competence of our time, which, in turn, has serious repercussions on individual life courses. This aspect will be reviewed in detail below.

DIMENSIONS OF THE DETACHMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE PARENTAL HOME

Moving away from the family home is an important status change in young people’s lives on the road to adulthood. Moving out of the parental home is one of the significant steps in the process of growing up. The unique theoretical characteristics can be found in the sociological literature as distinct from those of adulthood (Mannheim 1978 [1928]; Eisenstadt 1960; Neidhart 1970; Tenbruck 1962). The scientific literature, however, often borrows the term “non-minor” from legal terminology and equates it with adulthood, which, nevertheless, does not appropriately reflect its nature as a process, a fact that is emphasised in sociology.

The transition from childhood to adulthood is dealt with in detail in the psychological literature, which argues that this process is accomplished with the full development of one’s intellectual and social capabilities, the individual sense of responsibility and the stabilisation of one’s norms and value system (Oerter 1985; Hurrelmann 1994). In this respect, the adult status can be defined in terms of human qualities, out of which independence and self-determination are of prime importance.

From a sociological perspective adult status is a more complex concept than adulthood in the legal sense of the word, where it is defined as reaching the age of maturity. Although upon reaching the full age, young people are entitled to all the rights of adults, this does not mean at all that these young people actually live and

behave as adult people do. Many young adults do not have an independent source of income, thus their purchasing power, for one, is limited. The same applies to residence and housing. Consequently, it is necessary to differentiate between the stages of becoming an adult, the different dimensions and the scope of action available to adults, and to measure adulthood against the individual dimensions of detachment. In addition to the dimensions of detachment we can also differentiate between the various forms of detachments, such as detachment in the legal sense, detachment from the family of orientation, detachment in the material-financial sense, detachment resulting in independent decision-making and subjective separation.

From a sociological perspective growing up is accomplished when the individual has the right to make independent decisions in a position preserved for adults (Schäfers 1989; Hurrelmann 1994). The principal domains of adulthood are considered to be the world of work and professions (professional role vs. financially independent individual), partnership and family (especially the role of a mother or father), the domain of culture (the educated citizen), and politics (the role of the politically active citizen). The process of growing up can only be considered as completed when a socially acceptable degree of autonomy and independence has been attained in all the above mentioned domains (a summary of this can be found in Hurrelmann 1994).

There are various classification methods for separating the period of youth from adulthood (Junge 1995). Hurrelmann defines the most important domains of adulthood relying on the following distinctive features and roles:

- financial independence,
- the founding of a family, the caring for children,
- cultural and economic participation,
- political participation.

Leaving behind one's youth can be seen as accomplished if independence and a sense of responsibility characteristic of adults are prevalent in all the above domains or exist at least to an acceptable extent (work and professional life, family role, cultural and economic role and politically active citizenship).

“The first step towards adulthood is usually taken when young people leave school and move into their first paid jobs. The second significant step is related to the private sphere, it involves moving away from home, the forming of stable partnerships and the starting of a family. In addition to the above criteria a special role is assigned in the process of growing up to political autonomy, i.e. active and passive franchise, to the opportunity to participate in cultural and political life, and the opportunity to make autonomous economic decisions, and the role of the citizen” (Hurrelmann 1994: 46).

We have so far reviewed the detachment from the family home and the significant steps in becoming independent, but have not touched upon independence in the legal sense, thus the legal dimension of adult status has yet to be explored.

Can the founding of a family be considered to be the most important criterion for becoming an adult? In our view we must not disregard the fact that there is an ever increasing time-lag between moving away from home and, with it, the setting up of an independent household and starting a family. Adult status is better characterised by

running an independent household in a responsible manner. Moreover, some young adults do not at all have an intention of starting a family. The question arises, then, in connection with the traditional sense of the concept whether family formation is to be seen as the criterion for growing up. And although family formation is an important milestone in one's life, the decision whether or not to start a family is left to the individual. Alternative family patterns, i.e., remaining single, cohabiting and childfree marriages have by now gained social acceptance.

The following dimensions can be differentiated in the process of separation from the parental home (Vaskovics 1997 b, c):

Detachment in the legal sense: Detachment in the legal sense follows with the attainment of the unlimited right to carry out business transactions, which we understand as the legal validity of business deals concluded by the given individual. The precondition for a legal action is the reaching of the age of maturity. With that, parental guardianship and care come to an end, and the right to participate in politics is granted.

Detachment from the parental home: Moving away from the parental home and the setting up of a household independent of one's parents.

Detachment in the material-financial sense: The establishment of financial independence and self-sufficiency by holding down a job and drawing an income from one's occupation. This is when the individual in question is capable of looking after him- or herself in terms of personal finance, i.e., has the financial means necessary to earn an income above subsistence level.

Detachment resulting in independent decisions: This is achieved when the individual is entitled to carry out actions without parental control: The attainment of the unlimited right to carry out business transactions, independent choice of a career, of a partner, as well as family formation. The independent choice of the place of residence and apartment, independent responsible participation in economic, cultural and political life.

Subjective detachment (Selbstwahrnehmung): Young people of legal age often do not perceive themselves as adults, even though they have attained independence in terms of the objective criteria, i.e., they run an independent household and are financially independent. On the other hand, the reverse of this situation is also possible: the individual may feel and act like an adult upon reaching maturity. There is variation across countries in this respect deriving from the different social-structural and cultural conditions, as a result of which the category of young adults is placed somewhere between the ages of 16 and 25 (Meulemann 1992).

THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF POST-ADOLESCENCE

A differentiated theoretical model that describes the aspects of growing up is necessary in order to determine to what extent young people of legal age still belong to youth and to what extent they have become adults. Transition from youth into post-adolescence will be defined for the purposes of our research. We shall investigate if an individual can be seen as a youth or an adult according to/on the basis of the

various forms of detachment we consider important. We differentiate between the dimensions of detachment in the legal sense, detachment from the family home, detachment in the financial sense, detachment resulting in independent decisions and subjective detachment (*Selbstwahrnehmung*). We investigate when and according to what criteria an individual can be considered an adult. A detailed and precise definition of adult age and adult status cannot be presented within the confines of this paper, although it must be noted that a lack of their definition is one of the shortcomings of social sciences research.

The criteria for adulthood are summarised in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Dimensions of detachment and of growing up

Detachment dimensions	Dependence (child, youth)	Independence
Detachment in the legal sense	Minors Limited right to conduct business deals	Maturity Unlimited rights to conduct business deals, legal accountability
Detachment from family home	Household shared with parents	Own household, own apartment
Material-financial detachment	Financial dependence	Financial independence
Detachment resulting in independent decisions	Decision-making with parental control	Self-determination, self-control especially in choice of partner
Subjective detachment (<i>Selbstwahrnehmung</i>)	Youth	Adults

Individuals of full age, who live in their own apartments, run an independent household, are financially independent, make important life decisions and accept themselves as adults can be considered as having grown up. If all these criteria apply, we can assume that the given individual meets the criteria of adulthood.

Growing up is a process, which, depending on the individual, may last for a shorter or longer period of time. We assume that few people meet of all these criteria for adulthood upon reaching 18. To put it another way, more and more young people remain dependent upon their parents even after reaching the age of maturity for some time.

The situation of young people in the post-adolescent phase is often characterised by material-financial dependence, even if they lead an autonomous way of life, and run an independent household of their own.

According to Kennington's views (1968) on the post-adolescent phase of life young people in this phase also differ from adults in their value orientation (orientation towards the present, openness). This theory has not yet been proven empirically.

Richter's propositions (1994), which are also based on the above-mentioned theory, do not present sufficient evidence either. The above differences between youth, young people and adults are not clear-cut (SINUS 1984) in the post-materialist orientation of Inglehart (1977), and are not significant from the aspect of the post-adolescent phase (at least, this has not yet been proven empirically). On the other hand, it can also be observed that the post-adolescent group as such is not a homogeneous one, and individual differences can be found.

Attempts at proving the emergence and existence of the post-adolescent phase of life have failed on two levels so far: on the one hand, they have not succeeded in creating theoretically consistent explanations, and, on the other hand, the hypotheses have not been supported by empirical evidence. It has turned out to be a false assumption that the lower and upper age limits of the post-adolescent phase can clearly be defined, and that clear dividing lines can be drawn between youth and post-adolescence and between post-adolescence and adulthood. Moreover, the hypothesis that this life phase as an age category can be defined in social-structural terms has not been proven either.

With regards to the first hypothesis, we have to take account of the empirical fact that there are young people aged 19, 20 or 21 who, despite their young age, satisfy all detachment criteria and can be considered adults without any limitations. On the other hand, however, there are young people aged 29, 30 or even over 30 who have not reached an adult status in certain respects. The category of post-adolescent young people is always made up of adults and of young adults regardless of the fact whether this category is placed pragmatically between the ages 18 to 25, or 25 to 30. Both in its members' psychological and social development and in their way of life, this category is too heterogeneous to be able to distinguish a group of youth and one of adults as unique socio-cultural groups. According to the theoretical hypotheses the post-adolescent phase cannot be defined as an age category. On the contrary, we have to assume that there is a socially-structurally definable post-adolescent phase of life (and, possibly, its characteristic life style and behaviour patterns), which is, in turn, is represented in different proportions amongst the various groups of young adults of legal age. A further empirical question arises from this fact, namely, with what frequency the characteristic features of post-adolescence occur in the various cohorts/age groups. The post-adolescent phase of life is to be viewed as a group squeezed into the age group of youth.

We have to assume that on an individual level the post-adolescent phase can be of various duration. On a general and collective level, however, this counts as a transitional phase leading onto the next life stage. Since this phase is shaped by social-structural factors, we have to bear in mind that individuals in their post-adolescent phase differ significantly from one another, and the number of years spent in this phase varies as well. We have to accept that this phase begins with the age of maturity, its end, however, cannot generally be defined. It ends with the attainment of independence along all dimensions of detachment. The causes can vary from society to society. In Germany this process is strongly influenced by the longer education and training period, the more and more frequently occurring pre-training, retraining, further training, the difficulties of finding a job, and job insecurity. For the above reasons, it is often impossible to reach full independence after reaching the age of maturity.

Individuals who have left behind all stages of detachment and are, accordingly, able to lead an independent life can be considered as having grown up. In sociological research into the adult status we have to differentiate between a subjective and an objective perspective.

The objective perspective: detachment is attained in the real sense (legal, material, social, moving away from family home).

Table 2. The composition of young adults according to their attained level of independence

Detachment dimensions	Attained level of independence			
	Dependent			Independent
	Constellations (Examples)			
Legal	+	+	+	+
Own household	-	+	+	+
Financial	-	-	-	+
Decision-making	-	-	+	+

- = Full independence is not yet attained, dependence prevails in certain domains
 + = Full independence has been attained

The subjective perspective: a given individual may perceive himself as an adult or as a youth.

Considering the fact that the concept of post-adolescence is assigned various meanings in the literature, we have to clarify in the following what we mean by the concepts of “post-adolescence” and “young adults”. The concept of young adults is only used with reference to the age of young people, in line with the shifts in meaning in the colloquial language. The concept thus denotes the age group between 18 and 30 (accordingly, we could call this age group “tweens”). We can find among these young adults individuals who have reached independence and an adult status in all detachment dimensions, who are socially and financially independent adults. We can, however, find among these young adults individuals who can only partially meet the criteria of adulthood, attaining independence only in certain dimensions. In the following we shall call these dependent young adults. The term “dependent” refers to the way of life of these young adults, and is meant to convey those social-structural obstacles which hinder all these young people in this phase in their attempt to come up to the expectations of the adult role.

The term post-adolescence is only used to denote the phase of life over which young people attain the independent adult status. As has been pointed out above, this phase can take longer or shorter, depending on the individual.

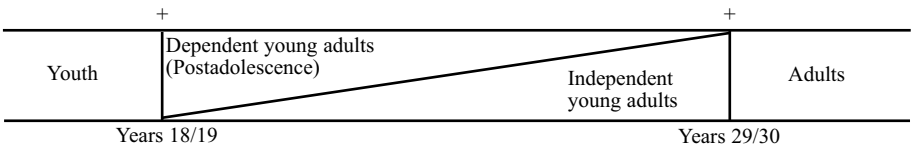


Figure 2. The expansion of the age group 19–30

The way of life of dependent young adults is predominantly characterised by their financial dependence. These individuals fit in with the classification of Rosenmayr (1988). One category of this classification runs as follows: “With the end of parental care financial dependence still prevails.” This type of dependent young adult is prevalent in the group of young people directly after reaching maturity (19-20). With

the increasing age more and more people reach the independent adult status and become independent adults according to our model (Vaskovics 1997a).

We assume that most dependent young adults have to fall back on parental support or receive sufficient transfer payments from the state. We also assume that the parents of these dependent young people render services more frequently and to a larger extent to their offspring than the parents of socially independent young people do. The question is whether the way of life and situation are affected by the parental transfer services and if so, to what extent. Our hypothesis is that financial dependence brings with it further dependencies and limitations, e.g., in the purchasing decisions, and decisions concerning housing and spare time. It is to be examined if parental support has a bearing on the way of life of dependent young adults, and if so, to what extent.

ALTERED BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

We maintain that the detachment of young people from the parental home has changed since the 1960s and 1970s. We characterise this change as follows:

Delayed detachment: When considering the detachment from parents, we can state that this process has recently been delayed or has started late. This means that as compared to the older generations detachment takes longer, it starts later in age and time. The reverse is true for detachment in the legal sense, since the age of maturity has been reduced from the age of 21 to 18 (Mayer and Wagner 1986; Schwarz 1989).

Partial detachment: We claim that the individual dimensions of detachment do not occur in synch, but they are delayed in time. We can talk of a partial detachment if there is only independence in certain domains and not along all dimensions. An example of this is when legal independence and detachment from the parental home have been attained, but there is still financial dependence between the young adult and the family of orientation.

Gradual detachment: Detachment from the family home is generally treated in the literature as a concrete event in one's life course, e.g., the status change is signalled by obtaining qualifications and upon starting a career. We maintain that the adult status is only tied to a specific point in time in the legal sense (reaching 18). In all other aspects, detachment is a process, which can take shorter or longer. This process is exemplified by the establishment of financial independence through taking up a job and drawing in income. In the beginning parents provide pocket money, which is followed by incomes earned from seasonal and part-time employment, and finally, earnings from a full-time employment complete the process.

Reversible detachment: We do not share the widely held view that detachment from the parental home is a linear, ever progressing process. An almost entirely completed detachment can shatter in certain domains, e.g., financial dependence can be re-established as a result of unemployment. The traditional forms of establishing an adult status are becoming reversible to a large degree (moving away from home, the completion of education and vocational training, own job, own household) (Pais 1996). This may be caused by a number of things, e.g., the end of schooling or

separation from a partner. With the return to the family home, detachment from home is also reversed. Breaks and recourses may occur in the detachment process, a reason why Pais calls this a “yo-yo generation”.

The altered behavioural patterns during the detachment from home – which are in fact in a causal relation with societal development – have a direct bearing on the parent–child transfer relationships. The number of young people above 18 still in parental or state care is on the rise. As a result, new expectations concerning parental conduct are arising, which most parents cannot or do not want to evade. The subject of our research is in what respect these intergenerational expectations occur and what reactions they trigger from parents and their offspring alike. We also need to clarify which group of young people reaches adult status only after a long period of time, and whether or not these young people have to rely on parental or state support. Are these young people of adult age receiving financial support, and if so, from whom and in what form?

THE INTERCONNECTIONS OF POST-ADOLESCENCE AND FAMILY TRANSFER RELATIONSHIPS

Transfer services are defined as mutual assistance and support, which help the person in need to meet his or her objectives by providing them with resources. This can take various forms, e.g., psycho-social, household, financial help or work. If frequent and intensive, these transfer services can transform into stable transfer relationships, which in turn make up an important dimension of the generational and family structure.

Our primary focus here is those transfer services which are rendered by family members of different generations to one another, with special regard to services rendered by parents to their grown-up children. When studying family transfer services we also have to take into consideration the services provided by grown-up children to their elderly parents. The development stage of the family determines which family member offers what services to whom: at the growth stage services rendered by parents to their children are dominant, whereas later when the parents' health is declining, the children offer more help than the parents. From the perspective of our subject we focus here on those transfer services that are provided by the parents to their children. We shall consider the form, intensity and duration of those services that are rendered by parents to the young, especially their adult offspring (aged 19–29). Financial assistance or work and household help can turn into family intergenerational material and non-material transfer relationships with a certain degree of intensity and frequency.

The family development stage examined here is the children's detachment phase from their parents. We hypothesise that transfer services within the family continue to play a significant role even after the grown-up children detach themselves from their family home. Our other hypothesis is that the character and extension of material and non-material transfer relationships form an important dimension of the detachment process from home, although this has not attracted much attention as yet.

We further hypothesise that intergenerational transfer services and transfer relationships within the family are dependent upon various socio-structural elements, with special regard to the following: qualification, occupation, pay structure, state transfer services, the home-building industry (Vaskovics 1993a, b). These intergenerational transfer relationships within the family have of course to be considered in relation to the socially determined generational relationships and the socio-structural elements of the examined community. We can discover in these intergenerational relationships relatively stable structures (patterns, types), even if these change over time and are in line with the structural elements of society. We should presuppose that the width, length and individual construction of these life phases and thus their personal consequences on young adults depend on the structural elements of society and vary along these.

The detachment of young people from home is a process that can be accomplished in various dimensions, at different rate and at various time points. The qualities of growing up, e.g., handling money, sexual relationships and autonomy in the choice of a partner, occur in many young people's lives way before reaching the age of maturity. On the other hand, these young people remain financially dependent on their parents even after coming of age. The evolution of this new, unique phase of life (post-adolescence) has resulted from the progress of the modernisation process.

The establishment of financial independence is one of the most important dimensions of detachment and of becoming an adult, this, however, can only be explained with reference to parental transfer services both before and after maturity and before and after moving away from home. The issue of an independent household and apartment as a form of the detachment from the family home is similar to the above point. Both these are generally completed slowly and gradually. Socio-structural conditions play an important part, especially where young people cannot afford to live separately (for example, in Hungary), and are often forced to live with their parents for a long time even after they get married and have children.

In addition to the above issues, i.e., how the detachment process takes place or has taken place in different societies and how these pose an extra burden on families over the post-adolescent phase, other questions arise as well. The central question is whether detachment from the family home occurs sooner or later, how extended the post-adolescent phase is and what roles the intergenerational material and non-material transfer relationships – especially parental transfer services – play in this process, given the differences in social conditions. How have all these changed over the recent years, and how are they influenced by the level of qualifications, employment, insurance and housing conditions?

The issues under scrutiny span several fields of sociological research, and these have to be harmonised. In this context a central issue is the young people's detachment process which has been modified as a result of societal modernisation, i.e., the evolution of a new life phase, post-adolescence, which squeezes in between youth and adulthood (Kohli 1985; Buchmann 1989). In this context primarily the consequences of this process on young people are discussed in the literature, rather than the consequences on the parents' behaviour and living conditions. This aspect is dealt with by family sociology. Family sociology analyses the characteristic features

and the role of the family in the course of changing social conditions, as well as the intergenerational relationships within the family, a topic that is becoming more and more popular in the field.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have analysed the various dimensions of growing up; we have examined the delayed, the partial, the gradual and the reversible detachment forms. Generally speaking, we can state that young adults in their post-adolescent phase are not completely independent of their family of orientation. On the basis of the theoretical analysis, we can also conclude that the post-adolescent phase cannot be defined in terms of an age category, since this phase denotes a special position. It remains an empirical question exactly how many young adults aged 20–25 or 30 belong to this category.

We have reviewed the transfer services and their elements rendered by parents to their adult offspring from various perspectives:

- detachment from the parental home from the children's perspective, the evolution of the post-adolescent phase,
- the grown-up child–parent relationship from the parents' perspective,
- from the perspective of the family as a supportive community,
- from a social perspective, taking account of the macro-structural conditions of transfer-relationships within the family.

In this paper we have aimed to examine the constitutive circumstances and conditions of the post-adolescent phase from a theoretical point of view. We assume that as opposed to youth or adulthood, this phase as a unique stage in life only occurs in industrial societies as a result of modernisation. We have stressed repeatedly that we are dealing with a new phase of life here. The question arises, then, whether or not post-adolescence really is the prototype, the product of modernity.

There is empirical evidence that there are – if only sporadic – traces of a post-adolescent phase in pre-industrial societies according to the theoretically established criteria of our research. Examples were found among noblemen or wealthy craftsmen. Even amongst farmers, young men had to carry out adult obligations in spite of the fact that they were not considered adults, which can be seen as sporadic evidence of the existence of the post-adolescent phase in pre-industrial times. Nonetheless, the preconditions for pre-adolescence to become a general phenomenon were only created by industrialisation. There can be stratum-specific and non-specific differences amongst industrialised and post-industrial societies in regard to its spread and its duration, which are reflected in hard facts, but these differences do not affect or challenge the empirical validity of the presented models. On the contrary, these differences can be studied within a society, or even more so, across individual societies with the help of the analytical aspects laid down in this model. In German society for example, differences as to the duration of this phase are observable depending on social stratum, gender and place of residence, but these differences are no longer great, and the former differences have decreased. This has led us to

conclude that over time the post-adolescent phase has become a stable element of every adult person's biography, especially that of men. This is not necessarily true for the Hungarian society.

Apart from all this, we have to remember that regarding its form, time span and timing, the post-adolescent phase can take various forms depending on the number of children or the socio-economic situation of the family. Whether this really is the case, remains the subject of further research. In our surveys in Germany we have found that the post-adolescent phase is on average shorter in large families. This derives from the socio-economically underprivileged position of large families. Consequently, children are "urged to" – or "feel obliged to" establish their financial independence by taking up paid employment much sooner than for instance those young adults who do not have any siblings. We have not been able to find any correlation between the birth order of siblings and the length of the post-adolescent phase in our surveys in Germany, but we found a correlation between gender and the length of the post-adolescent phase: on average it is shorter for women than for men.

When studying the post-adolescent phase we have to differentiate between male and female life courses, a point not taken up in detail in this paper. Young adults are diverse with regard to their social class, region of residence and size of settlement as well. In this study we have attempted to analyse on a general level the precedents, the characteristic features and the structure of this phase of life without expanding on the above aspects.

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