DOES SOCIAL ORIGIN SHAPE THE TRANSITON TO ADULTHOOD? A CROSS-NATIONAL EUROPEAN COMPARISON

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Introduction and research questions

In an era dominated by major societal transformations (e.g., modernization, educational expansion, the shift from particularistic to universalistic values, individualization) most Western and other European societies have experienced many changes in the life course (e.g. Shanahan, 2000; Corijn & Klijzing, 2001; Mayer, 2004; Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007; Vikat et al. 2007). One of the most significant areas of changes has occurred in the transition to adulthood, which refers to a process marked by major life events such as leaving the parental home, first job, first cohabitation, first marriage and first child. In many European countries, these changes are characterized by de-standardization. This is the deviation from the previous traditional timing and sequencing of life events which was *early*, *contracted* and *simple* to a new pattern of pathway of transition adulthood characterized as *late*, *protracted* and *complex* (Lesthaeghe, 1995, Billari & Liefbroer, 2010). There is, however, a lack of strong evidence for a convergence trend in Europe (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010).

Delayed transitions to adulthood involve not only the individuals themselves, but are also attributed to the roles of the parents. Therefore, a related topic central to this discussion, but largely only in the sociological literature, is the influence of social origins on the timing and sequencing of different life transitions in early adulthood. Currently, studies have focused on two main areas of research. Demographic studies have focused on analyzing all the events in the early adulthood trajectory. These studies have been more concerned with capturing general contextual factors, inspecting the emergence of a new specific pathway to adulthood, and the convergence of trends in Europe (Billari & Liefbroer,2010; Lesnard,2010; Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007) rather than on investigating factors related to earlier conditions behind complete trajectories. On the other hand, sociologists have extensively researched the important role that social origins play in the transition to different life events (Hogan, 1986; Marini, 1978, 1984; Blaauboer & Mulder, 2008; Wiik, 2008). With only a few exceptions (Furstenberg, 2008), however, their contribution generally provides a fragmented picture since they do not consider the entire early adulthood trajectory in their research. The life course perspective links these two bodies of literature, since it explores changes in people's lives over a longer stretch of time, across series of cohorts and life domains and takes into account individual factors together with the cultural context and institutional settings where human lives are embedded (Mayer, 2009).

The aim of this paper is to unravel the influences of social origins on the transition to adulthood, employing a life course perspective. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do the transition to adulthood trajectories look like and what are the typical sequential patterns of transition to adulthood in Europe?
2. Do individuals with certain social origin backgrounds follow a particular trajectory of transition to adulthood?
3. How does the impact of social origin on the transition to adulthood vary across cohorts, welfare regimes, gender and when accounting for education and occupation of the respondent?

To develop a theoretical explanation of how social origins shape the transition to adulthood, this study relies on parents' education and occupation, which at minimum encapsulate three types of resources: economic, cultural and social, through which social origin operates in the process of transition to adulthood and earlier life transitions.

Selected research hypotheses and brief theoretical background

Firstly, the differences in various types of resources derived from the education and occupation of the parents lead us to the first hypothesis:

H1. The lower the level of education and occupation of the parents, the higher the probability that their children will follow trajectories of transition to adulthood, characterized as early, fast and generally lacking an independence period.

Secondly, in the context of standardization of adulthood trajectories, it was argued that the life courses of individuals were to a greater extent disconnected from the influence of family and local context (Kohli, 1986) mainly due to institutionalization, welfare and other benefits coming from the state. We are interested to know how the effect of social origins on the transition to adulthood has changed over time, especially with the emergence of de-standardized pathways to adulthood. There are few studies that directly examine the impact of social origins on the *entire adulthood trajectory* over time. However, findings from related research suggest an increase or decrease in the effect of social origins across cohorts.

On the one hand, referring to occupational attainment, social stratification research provides considerable empirical evidence regarding the effect of social origins over time. From this literature, we learn that the societal changes brought by modernization produced a decrease in the effect of social origins in the status attainment process both in the United States (Blau & Duncan, 1967) and European countries (Breen, 2005; Ganzeboom et al., 1989). Although these studies stress the influence of the parents' education and occupation on their children's occupational attainment and not on the timing and sequencing of their adulthood events, it can be the case that this is also reflected in the effect that social origins play in shaping the trajectories of the transition to adulthood. An additional argument emphasizing a decrease in the importance of the family role as a provider of various types of instrumental support is reflected in the concept of "de-familiarization" (Lister, 1994; Saraceno 1996) which suggests that the life-long responsibility of the family for its members has been partly replaced by the welfare and different other public services. In this context, the postponement trend of the new generations can also be motivated by the need of young adults to gain independence from the family of origin before starting a family (Knijn et al, 2006). Thus, based on the current discussion we hypothesize:

H2a. The strength of the effect of social origins on the transition to adulthood trajectories has decreased across cohorts.

On the other hand, referring to the literature related to the new emergent pathways to adulthood characterized by younger cohorts in Europe (Billari et al., 2010), it might be that the prolonged period of transition to adulthood implies a longer period support from the parents. This might be equivalent with an increase in the importance of social origins across cohorts. The prolonged economic dependence of youth has been signalled in social science under the name of *post-adolescence*, which is seen by some scholars (Buchmann, 1989) as a new type of transition to adulthood described as a state of semi-independence. More specifically, youth can gain independence in various dimensions of life, such as living away from parents or having a partner, but still being financially dependent on their parents (Corijn et al. 2001). Also, Liefbroer (2011), shows that the importance of parental socio-economic status has increased across cohorts in The Netherlands. It might be the case that the trend of de-standardization observed in the pathways to adulthood of younger cohorts is associated with greater parental support and this implicitly translates into a greater importance of social origins in comparison with previous generation who followed more standard pathways to adulthood. This leads us to an opposite hypothesis:

H2b. The strength of the effect of social origins on the transition to adulthood trajectories has increased across cohorts.

As previous studies have shown, (i.e., German Life History Study, Mayer, 2007) welfare regimes can also shape individuals' life courses. It is unclear, however, how the impact of social origins on the transition to adulthood varies by welfare regimes. Does a supportive welfare providing services to its citizens such as more *equal access to education* (so gifted children can pursue higher education regardless of their parents' resources), *unemployment benefits for youth* (so they can enjoy independence in the absence of a job regardless their parents' resources) or *good family service* (so the lack of work-family policies will not inhibit their fertility intentions or affect their entry into the labour market) have the power to diminish the influence of social origins on the transition to adulthood trajectories? Is the effect of social origins more prominent in the case of less supportive welfare regimes? In order to answer these questions, based on similarities with regards to certain important institutional settings, we group the European countries into five types of welfare regimes, adding to the already common typology Liberal, Conservative and Social-Democratic (Esping-Andersen, 1990), the Southern and Post-Socialist categories, hypothesising:

H3.In more supportive welfare regimes, such as the Socio-Democratic welfare regime, there is a smaller effect of social origins on the adulthood trajectories of offspring in comparison with less supportive regimes, such as Liberal welfare regime.

Data and Methods

This study relies on data from the third wave of the European Social Survey (ESS), a large scale survey conducted in 25 European Countries in 2006/07 (Fitzgerald & Widdop, 2008).20 different European countries are analyzed in this study, accounting for each of the welfare regimes: Liberal (United Kingdom and Ireland) Conservative (Germany, France, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland), Social-Democratic (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, The Netherlands), Southern (Portugal and Spain) and Post-Socialist (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia). The total sample of 43,000 respondents was reduced to those aged 35 and over, for whom it was very likely to have completed adulthood trajectories. Therefore, the final sample used in the analysis included the 20 European countries for a total of 25,199 respondents including both men and women. Four cohort groups were considered: Early industrial, Fordist pre-1968, Fordist post 1968 and Post Fordist. We chose an observation window which starts at age 15 and ends at age 35 this being associated with the age interval when the events marking the transition to adulthood occur (Rindfuss, 1991).

Making use of sequence analysis, typologies of trajectories based on optimal matching techniques will be generated. This study goes beyond description of the trajectories and it employs a multinomial logistic regression to explain the factors behind these trajectories. Focusing on social origins, we will predict the probability of an individual to follow a particular type of trajectory. The adulthood trajectories were built based on five key variables measuring age when the respondent experienced the following events:(a) *first job*, (b) *first leaving the parental home*,(c) *first living with a spouse/partner*, (d) *first marriage*, and, (e) *first child*. Considering multiple combinations of the five variables, a 14-state model (Table 1) was generated for the construction of the transition to adulthood trajectory.

No.	*State*	*Code*
1	No life event	N
2	Leaving parental home	S
3	Job	J
4	Job+ Leaving parental home	JS
5	Job+ Leaving parental home +Partner/Spouse Living	JSP
6	Leaving parental home +Partner/Spouse Living + Marriage	SPM
7	Partner/Spouse Living+ Marriage + Child	JSPM
8	Job+ Leaving parental home +Partner/Spouse Living + Marriage	JSPC
9	Job+ Leaving parental home +Partner/Spouse Living + Child	JSPC
10	Job+ Leaving parental home +Marriage + Child	JSMC
11	Leaving parental home +Partner/Spouse Living + Marriage + Child	SPMC
12	Job + Partner/Spouse Living + Marriage + Child	JPMC
13	Job+ Leaving parental home +Partner/Spouse Living + Marriage + Child	JSPMC
14	Other	Other

Table 1 States of transition to adulthood

Results

Six clusters of transition to adulthood trajectories (Figure 1) were produced: 'Never leaving parental home & no/late family life' (12.8%), 'Long independence & no/late family life' (6.8%), 'From parents' home to full family life but no job ever' (13.2%), 'Independence while living with a partner but no marriage' (11.4%), 'Disciplined &Smooth transition to full family life'-standard group (19.7%) and 'Early workers & very early and fast full family life' (36%).

In line with the existing literature on the effect of social origins on separate events in the transition to adulthood, (Rijken & Liefbroer; 2009, Wiik, 2008, Blaauboer & Mulder, 2010) the results (Figure 2) confirm that social origins shape the transition to adulthood regardless of the education and occupation of the individuals, although part of its effect is transmitted through social reproduction, or in other words, via children's status characteristics. Other preliminary results are:

- Having low educated parents and low status job parents compared to having highly educated parents and higher job status parents makes it significantly more likely to follow the "Early workers and early, fast full family life" and "Never leaving the parental home and late or no family life" typologies instead of standard trajectory.

- Individuals with a low educated mother in the Early industrial and Fordist pre-1968 cohorts are less likely to fall into "Never leaving the parental home and late or no family life" cluster compared to their counterparts from Post-Fordist cohort.

- Respondents with low educated mothers from Liberal regime -opposed to those from Social-Democratic regime- are more likely to follow "Early workers and early, fast full family life" trajectory compared to standard trajectory.

- Being female and having a low educated mother increases the relative risk to follow the trajectory, "From parents‟ home to full family life but no job".

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Figure 1. Results-Cluster Analysis

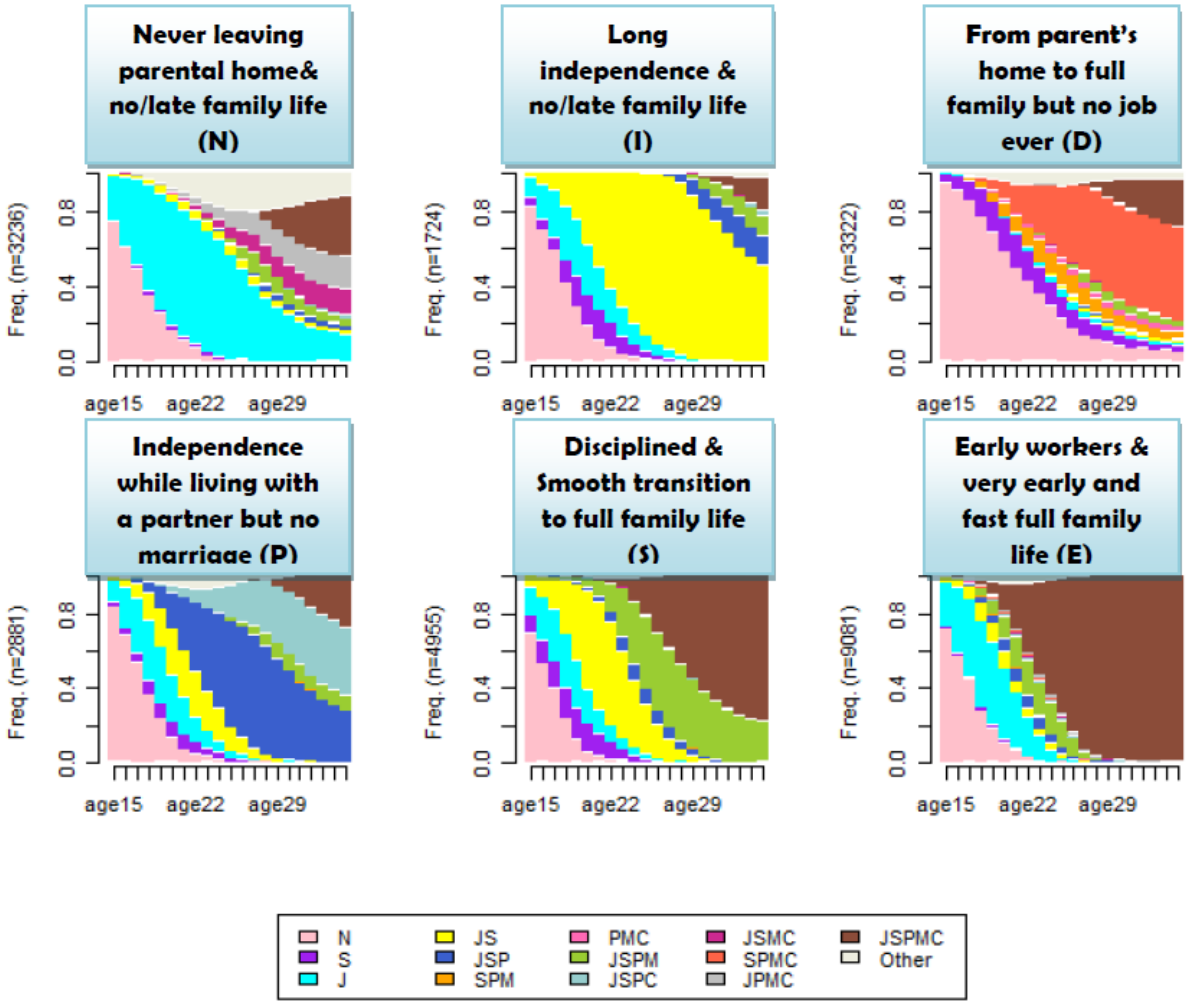

Figure 2. Results-Multinomial logistic regression analysis (without interaction terms)
Odd ratios plot corresponding to the regression estimates