“Starting a family is starting adulthood”
Young people’s subjective meaning of parenthood for the transition to adulthood: Findings from the Luxembourgish Youth Report 2015

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Starting points

- **Youth** as a transition phase between *childhood* and *adulthood*

- **Developmental tasks**: Independency, autonomy, identity, change of status/roles (Havighurst, 1972; Hurrelmann, 2012)

- **Parenthood**/starting a family as a transition marker to adulthood
A. What are the structural conditions in which the transition to parenthood takes place? *(Context)*

B. When does the transition to parenthood takes place? *(Timing)*

C. What are young people’s perspectives on adulthood/parenthood? *(Subjective view)*
Theoretical background
1) Transition to adulthood in the age of individualization and uncertainty

- Youth phase has **extended**, age limits hard to define (12…30+)
  - «post adolescence» (Galland, 2001); «emerging adulthood» (Arnett, 2000)

- **De-standardization** and **reversibility** of the transition to adulthood (Walther, 2006)

- Adult positions determined by ‘**negotiation**’ rather than simply following pre-defined paths (du-Bois Reymond, 2001)

- New **opportunities** as well as new **dilemmas** (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002)
2) Transition to parenthood: Current trends and discourses

- **Starting a family** for young people (still) an **important aim in life** (e.g. Shell Youth Study, 2015)

- **Postponement** of parenthood, decreasing fertility rates (Mills et al., 2011)

- **Disconnection** from marriage (Smock & Greenland, 2010)

- **Early parenthood** («teenage pregnancy»)

- **Reconciliation** of family and working life
Data
A. Structural conditions in Luxembourg
1) Demography and labour market

Demography
- Immigration rate very high, high population growth (since 1991: +40%)
- Fertility rate stable but on a rather low level (2014: 1.5)

Labour market
- Protective labour legislation, minimum wage
- Dynamic labour market
- Low level of unemployment, high youth unemployment rate
- Female activity rate rising but on average level (2014: 65.5%)
2) Housing and family supporting policy

Housing:
- **High** and **increasing housing costs**

Family supporting policy:
- **Leave entitlements** (e.g. maternity leave, parental leave)
- **Income support/subsides** (child-related cash transfer, tax exemptions)
- High invest in **child care services**
- From the **male-breadwinner** to the **dual-breadwinner** model
B. Timing of parenthood
1) Late timing of parenthood

Mean age of women at birth of first child (2014)

- Italy: 30.7
- Spain: 30.6
- Luxembourg: 30.2
- Greece: 30.0
- Germany: 29.4
- Sweden: 29.2
- Portugal: 28.8
- Denmark: 29.2
- European Union (28): 28.8
- United Kingdom: 28.6
- Belgium: 28.6
- France: 28.3
- Poland: 26.9
- Estonia: 26.6
- Latvia: 26.3
- Bulgaria: 25.8

Eurostat, 2014
2) Postponement of parenthood

Share of women with one or more child(ren) in Luxembourg, by age (1981-2011)

Census Luxembourg, 1981-2011
3) Parenthood disconnected from marriage

Share of newborns by mother’s marital status (1960-2013)
C. Subjective view on adulthood/parenthood
1) **Notion of adulthood: Autonomy and becoming independent**

- Transition markers play an important role (job entry, leaving parental home, starting a family)
- Young people associate the transition to adulthood with the development of autonomy and independency

«that’s different things, actually the sum of those, you can go to the polls, you decide by yourself what and where you go to have lunch, and all these things that are part of autonomy.» (Jean, m, 34 yrs)

«Yes, independency, that’s being an adult.» (Madeleine, f, 29 yrs)

«Living independently, yes. It means not depending on your parents.» (Tiago, m, 25 yrs)
2) «Emerging adulthood» as a status «in between»

Transition to adulthood as a (long) process

«That’s maybe a stage after you started working. I’d say when you are end of 20, that you become adult step by step.» (Nuno, m, 31 yrs)

…and the status «in between»

«Actually, I really don’t know [...] I still feel young. Young adult (laughing)... I have not arrived yet.» (Marco, m, 29 yrs)

«Even though on paper I’m an adult now, I don’t feel adult yet.» (Tun, m, 18 yrs)
3) Parenthood – a planned decision

− A well-considered choice that depends on meeting conditions

«And after that, buying a house, starting a family and just live a normal adult life» (Madeleine, f, 29 yrs)

«I don’t feel ready for it and I want to improve the conditions. For myself I can make ends meet, but I want to ensure that I can offer something to my children so that they are in a better situation than me.» (André, m, 26 yrs)
4) Parenthood – responsibility and maturity

- Parenthood associated with responsibility

«…being responsible because of work…the house and the child.» (Françoise, f, 30 yrs)

«Also a family and seriousness, and responsibility. Well, I have responsibilities already, but further responsibilities…for children.» (Lara, f, 22 yrs)

«Yes, I can be adult since I’m here and I have children. And I have a responsibility for them and all the decisions I take with my husband have consequences not only for us but also for others that’s growing up.» (Angela, f, 34 yrs)

…and maturity

«If I wouldn’t have had my children […], I wouldn’t have developed the maturity I have today.» (Maria, f, 27 yrs)
5) Parenthood – change of lifestyle and priorities

- A change of lifestyle

«At a certain age most of the time you think about going out, enjoy life […] Well, you change yourself without noticing it. You are also thinking about starting a family.» (Marc, m, 31 yrs)

- …and priorities

«For me, it’s since I have children, since they were born, than you must become adult […] You feel different you know that we have other priorities now than going out. We have to take care about our children, that nothing happens to them. (Patricia, f, 29 yrs)
Conclusion

- Gradual development of **autonomy** and **independency** from parents during the transition phase, characterized by insecurity and instability («not arrived yet»)

- Decision for parenthood is **well-considered** and depends on whether young people meet certain conditions (security, maturity, responsibility)

- Transition to adulthood is characterized by
  1. becoming **independent from the family** (phase of «emerging adulthood») and
  2. the decision for parenthood (phase of «starting adulthood») with **new responsibilities and commitments**

- Parenthood as the «final» transition marker to adulthood

- Further steps: gendered patterns, differences by social class
Thank you for your attention!
Havighurst, R. (1972). Developmental Tasks and Education. New York