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DOUBLE TRANSITION: UNIVERSITY-TO-WORK ABROAD AND ADULTHOOD

Introduction

School-to-work transition is not only a single act. It is a life phase, a stage of the life cycle (Hillmert 2002, cf. Grabowska-Lusińska 2014). It is a time for looking for one's own career, sequences of events and social and economic status in the labour market (Brzinsky-Fay 2007). Nowadays people combine education with their first experiences in the labour market more often, what making transition research and analysis more difficult than before (Sarnowska et al. 2016). After the EU enlargement, many Poles chose to have first jobs abroad as an option for a transition to adulthood. More than 60 per cent of post-accession emigrants were below the age of 30 (Fihel, Kaczmarczyk 2009, Fihel 2011). School-to-work transition, including transition to a foreign labour market, is strongly connected to entering into adulthood. Migration can be treated as a *rite de passage* into adulthood, a school of life (Eade 2007) and cutting an umbilical cord with the parental home.

People are products of their past socialization. However socialization process never stops. It is a life-long reflexive process (Archer 2015). During migratory experience people learn how to operate in new environments which are based on accumulated past resources and dispositions (Nowicka 2015). They can know more and learn more than they can tell (Polanyi 1966).

The main aim of this article is to understand what is the role of migration in transiting to adulthood through university-to-work abroad transition. This means that we will be exploring a kind of double transition at the same time to: a foreign, unfamiliar, unknown environment and to adulthood. Erel (2015) claims that a migratory experience helps to actively develop biographical transitions of people within the context of external conditions.

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This article is organized as follows: the first part explains the theories and concepts used. The next part describes the context of the migration flow of highly educated youngsters from Poland after the EU enlargement in May 2004. Then the methodological approach will be discussed, covering the first wave of a qualitative longitudinal study (QLS). The final part is focused on the presentation of emerging findings from the first wave of this study.

Theoretical inspirations

Entering the foreign labour market as well as entering into adulthood abroad is a type of *rite de passage* (Eade 2007, cf. Grabowska-Lusińska 2014), when young people need to leave previous schemes and receive the new ones (Arnett 2001). However, they were socialised by their previous education experiences, family, peer groups. Even though young Polish people have not had any specific experience in the labour market, they constructed their own perceptions of social world (including world of work) based on their friends' and/or relatives' judgements. All of their experiences from their past, patterns of behaviour, observations of the others, their role models, effects of primary and secondary socialization creates a kind of 'social DNA code' which is used throughout the life course. The main course of socialization is described as a two-steps process – primary and secondary. The first one is connected with family environment, the second one starts during contact with institutions (kindergarten, primary and secondary schools, university, workplace) (Tillmann 2012). Archer (2015) proposed to see socialization as ongoing process which never stops.

Transition to adulthood is a specific life phase and relates in the literature to 'big five' life course markers: first job, starting a union (usually a marriage), having first child, leaving parental home and starting own household (Arnett 1998, Rindfuss 1991). Which of these factors signifies the attainment to adulthood in a geographically mobile society? What about migration as one of a criterion of transition to adulthood abroad with a first job there? How does it happen abroad? The literature is divided in analysing significance of all markers mentioned above. In anthropological studies (especially of traditional societies) marriage is highlighted as the key marker (Schlegel, Barry 1991) because it is about getting new obligations and role transitions. Psychological studies suggested the importance of personality traits connected with accepting responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions and financial independence (Arnett 1997, 1998) which brings individualisation and agency (Grabowska 2016a). Another factor relates to establishing oneself in relation to parents as an equal adult (Arnett 1997).

It is also about compliance with social norm such as for instance ‘no drunk driving’. All studies on markers to adulthood to date do not mention or even omit the role of migration in transiting to adulthood. This paper specifically focuses on the role of first job abroad as an event marking transition to adulthood. Through migration young people might obtain both financial independence, leave parental home and embark on the work career, in transiting to adulthood.

Young people, free to move, especially after the EU enlargement, seek fresh impressions and adventures to learn more about the social world. Migration in transition to adulthood can be about hard work, saving money but also about enjoying new lifestyle, the chance of living in a cosmopolitan environment, and the freedom to go for exotic holidays; all of which people are able to afford, even on the basic salaries received abroad (Eade 2007, Favell 2008, Trevena 2013). Time spent abroad can be also used as time for travelling and for building a career (Conradson, Latham 2005). These opportunities offer the freedom to work, study, travel and live abroad (Favell 2008), as well as bring tensions and struggles (Ni Laoire 2000, cf. Grabowska-Lusińska 2014). Usually, for young PL migrants, working abroad is not a gap year (White 2010, Grabowska-Lusińska 2014), it is a time of hard work. In the public discourse of youth and migration there is a lament that young graduates must leave Poland due to local labour market constraints connected to skill mismatches but also unemployment and low wages (White 2010). The situation in fact involves three levels: youngsters who must but also have a will to go abroad; those who have a choice and also will to go abroad and those who cannot imagine their future without international mobility and have strong will to go. Migration, especially after acceding to the EU, involves voluntary behaviours but above all individual will to go. How the time spent on migration is used for transition to adulthood is a different matter.

Migration creates many new situations which a young person needs to face. Going abroad, they bring with them yesterday’s man (Grabowska-Lusińska 2012, Grabowska 2016a, 2016b) and yesterday’s society they internalised – for instance Polish society with Polish social structures, rules, system of education – which is the basis to survive in the new environment.

Migration of highly educated young Poles after the EU enlargement

People between 25 and 34 are the highest educated generation in Poland. Political and economic changes resulted in the educational boom in the 1990s in Poland, which is the cause of the dramatic increase in the number

of highly educated people. For the general population (between 2002 and 2011), there was an increase in the highly educated group from 9 per cent in 2002 to 17 per cent in 2011. In the group of people aged between 25 and 34 there is an increase from 18 to 35 per cent. It means that one third graduated university and have a university degree (Census 2011).

The interest of this paper revolves around post-accession migrants aged 25 to 29, who notably constituted more than 53 per cent of the overall flow. In the post accession period, United Kingdom was the most popular destination country for young Poles of this age (Census 2011). The mean age of Polish post-accession migrants in the United Kingdom was 25 comparing with 30 in Ireland and 46 in the USA (Grabowska-Lusińska 2014). To a certain degree, migrants reflect general population they come from.

Based on Census (2011), women migrated more likely than men in age group 20-34. Nearly 70 per cent of migrants aged 20-24 were single, similarly to the 50 per cent of age group 25-29 and around 35 per cent aged 30-34. Comparing this finding with the general population, migrants aged 30-34 chose a single status more likely than people aged 30-34 in general population. Younger population of migrants (age 20-29) was less likely to be single than people in the same age group in the general population.

In Census survey it was difficult to identify the level of education of nearly 77 per cent of migrants aged 20-34. Based on the identified group, migrants aged 20-24 and 25-29 were slightly worse educated than the people in the same rank age in the general population, which might be connected with postponing education as a result of migration. People aged 30-34 with migratory experience attained higher level of education than the general population in the same age rank.

In the general population in 2013, nearly 78 per cent of Polish men and 62 per cent of Polish women till 29 still nested in their parental home. It is assumed here that international migration might determine leaving parental home and starting an independent household (Eurostat 2013).

Based on Polish Panel Survey POLPAN 2013, all higher educated respondents (younger than 34) with migratory experience took abroad manual work. On the one hand, migrants do not use their university education and human capital on the foreign labour market. On the other hand, many young people in Poland cannot expect long-term employment contract from their current employers. More than half of young people with university degree work in odd jobs (Kiersztyn 2015).

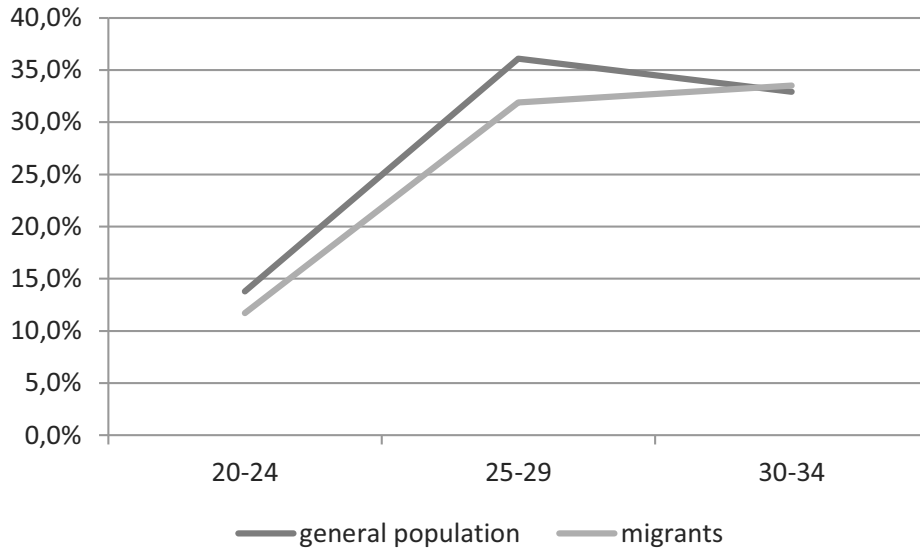


Figure 1. Share of young Poles with university degree in various age cohorts in general population and population of migrants.

Source: Own elaboration based on Census 2011.

Methodology

In the present study the conception of transition to adulthood, namely first job, was examined in a group of recent Polish university graduates who had their first jobs abroad. The participants were asked to evaluate their past socialisation and transition from university education to work abroad.

The study utilises the data from the first wave from the author's study conducted through a qualitative longitudinal study (QLS) approach noted by Neale (2012). We chose an individual in-depth semi-structure interview with biographical components which helped during the interview to follow up on the migrant's story. Thirty interviews had been conducted in the first wave of the qualitative longitudinal study (see Neale 2012), in the period of August 2014 till October 2015. People were snowball sampled. The main requirement to recruit an interviewee was an experience of work abroad without previous experience in the Polish labour market or having only some experience of domestic odd jobs (waiter/waitress, shop assistant). The important feature while recruiting people to study was the level of their education. It was decided to focus on persons with a university degree, obtained predominately in Poland. The country of emigration was irrelevant in this case as well as the period of time living abroad. However we were aware of

the influence of these factors on the process of transiting to adulthood. It was assumed that no more than two years could pass from the respondents' return to Poland. It was important to avoid the ambiguous effect of migration. In the first wave of the longitudinal study there were migrants who were abroad but strongly intended to return (for example they were looking for a job in Poland actively). We planned not to return, in this study, to the people who had intended to return to Poland but ultimately stayed abroad. Being aware of encountering difficulties in reaching such a narrowly-defined category of interviewees, we decided to return to all persons approached at the beginning of the study. The second wave of the QLS is still on-going.

Findings: Transiting into adulthood through international migration

Migration creates novel circumstances in which people have to cope with new reality while using available resources. They are not cut off from what they brought in their heads, behaviours and practices from the country of origin. During the research, four sequences got identified as a way of transiting to adulthood through migration: (1) capitalizing accumulated resources and dispositions; (2) crossing mental borders; (3) building relations with others; (4) building up labour market autonomy. These sequences do not occur separately but complement each other.

Capitalising accumulated resources and dispositions in a foreign environment

Transition to adulthood, which is specifically visible abroad, is also about capitalising accumulated resources and dispositions. Beside knowledge as such, people use all their abilities and competences in circumstances. This causes a development of their survival tools. These resources are also connected with patterns acquired in the socialization process by observing parents and other important role models, peer groups and people embedded into school system. In fact it is their habitus (Bourdieu 1986).

“So I tried somehow to translate it for myself, I became familiar with the situation. And in fact it is a question of upbringing (...) thanks to my dad, who wherever he goes, he can sort out anything. And everybody always sends him everywhere to sort out certain things. So I suppose I observed these skills when I was a child, as he talked with nurses, doctors in the hospital, everyone was putty in his hands. So it seems to me that, in such a natural way, I inherited these skills from him”. (Monika/28/Hungary)¹

¹(Name/Age/Country of destination)

“As I said earlier, I don’t have any problems talking with people. At the beginning the problem was the language barrier, but working with British people quickly helped bring down that barrier. I made quick progress. Later, I talked comfortably. Small talk”. (Adek/25/UK)

The role of family as a space for the first experiences and inspirations connected with international mobility is crucial. Parents sometimes have and sometimes do not have material and social resources to be able to send their children for international language course or international holiday camp.

“I have always been traveling a lot and my parents, for which I thank them, somehow never instilled any attachment to one place, to the country. I pretty soon began to travel by myself, they always let me, supported me, they weren’t overprotective. I knew English very well very early, so I could get along and communicate anywhere. It was, as if . . . I do not know, it was not surprising to me that you can go and live somewhere else. Because for me it is fairly normal”. (Oliwia/25/UK)

It is not that young people abroad learn something completely new. Before migration they obtained some competences and skills which allowed them to move. Migration helped to affirm their past abilities.

“Going there I was very aware of the high risks involved. But I also had the belief in myself that I could handle any unforeseen situation”. (Magda/27/UK)

Resources are also connected with university degree as well as faculty of education. University by definition should follow natural desire of exploring the world. This kind of necessity creates abilities for next steps. People sometimes are not able to describe their abilities or explain why they are able to do something or understand someone, which confirms the ‘tacit’ character of their knowledge and some competences they brought with them, acquired or enhanced.

“I do not know, I observe people a lot and I know when they’re talking about me, and when they were just talking between themselves about something there and they want me to hear about. I do not know, I just felt it”. (Magda/27/UK)

Crossing mental borders

Dispositions and resources are connected to habitus and what people knew and could do before migration as well as mental borders they had in their heads. It is also created by family, the local community and society as such. The system of education in Poland leaves very little space to build up self-confidence. In Poland educational system rather blocks self-expression and

self-confidence. There is no space to discuss and express a different opinion about the world. Transiting migrants bring inside them their internalised structure of education. While being abroad both perceived and felt language barriers at the beginning reinforced mental barriers. Polish people often start their conversation abroad with “I do apologize for my language skills”, even if their language competences are sufficient for communicating with others.

“I do not remember, at all, which village I asked about, but it was the first time I had used the language unconsciously, because I knew I had to help myself, because if I didn’t get on to that train, as they had already closed the station I would just... spend a lonely night on the streets in the rain. And it was that ‘first moment’ that I remember well. The rain, this man, the departing train. And my despair, that ‘motivate yourself, girl’, you have something to say”. (Monika/28/Hungary)

Language barriers, so visible in all accounts, are a reflection of some national and social complexes. Crossing language barriers means crossing other mental barriers and building self-confidence.

“Because I had already „babbled” so much in English, I felt confident, strong. Because, as it turned out, I could fight for myself, stand on my own two feet, I could win... And it’s really not about money, but about the rules that they have to obey, that you cannot abuse people”. (Maria/25/Hungary).

“I was surprised then, because this group in which I was, chose me for group leader. That gave me a bit of confidence with my English, if someone chose me, it might actually be good. And I made this presentation, we had coffee, I sold coffee. I liked it. And then there were 5 people and with those 5 were talks”. (Kaja/28/UK)

Language skills are important to interact within the host society and allow attaining a position in the host country. They also facilitate releasing other skills and competences hidden behind the self-constructed mental barriers. By improving language skills, people motivate themselves to learn more about host society and culture. It develops competences connected with learning attitudes.

Building relations with ‘other’ others

The individual character of migration causes the necessity to build up new relationships with ‘new’ others. Even though young Poles have not had a network of contacts abroad before migration, they needed to get help from others to deal with ‘new world’ after arrival. They simply needed to get to know new people, to rent a flat, to start work.

“I was so stressed that I was flying, that I walked up... stood in the queue

to check in, a girl walked up to ask a security guard, whether it was the check in to Manchester, and I said, Hi, I'm Magda, I'm flying to Manchester too (laughs). And till today we still have contact with each other. And she was going to a concrete job" (Magda/27/UK)

It is easier for migrants to exist and cope with everyday situations having friends who can understand and help if necessary.

"A lot of people bonded with those who are around them. I was lucky to have found two such good friends". (Wanda/29/Germany/Ireland)

In some cases, people who were not happy with their peers in Poland, started new relations with others on their own terms, complementing the earlier lack of social contact.

"In general, I socialized with people. Because as I said, I was brought up in a Jehovah's Witness environment, and this affects social development a lot. So when I went there, the more I wanted to socialize, to meet people". (Aneta/26/UK)

Having negative experiences with building and developing relations with people in Poland, young adults are always able to start from the begging by cutting off the past. It is as important 'for unhappy love stories' as for any other relationship (friends, neighbours, supervisors, colleagues).

Building up labour market autonomy

While getting their first jobs abroad, the studied migrants participated in the process of building their labour market autonomy. They were growing up quickly to work due to employers' expectations and workplaces they arrived in. They started understanding what work is about: work rhythm, organization of work, content, practices, organizational culture (Grabowska, Jazwińska 2015, Grabowska et al. 2016). They especially appreciate workplaces where they can interact and communicate with others, especially of different ethnicity than theirs. Through communication with others, particularly in a foreign language, they are able to look at themselves from a distance. This might enhance the process of searching for self-confidence, self-awareness, self-reflection, self-direction, and enhancing their own of control. The autonomous way of acting is especially visible in the case of young migrants and their first jobs abroad as they leave the parental house and start acting independently abroad.

"I don't know, but it was the first time, when I felt really alive. I just needed to rest from the outside world to feel at the first time I live just for myself". (Magda/26/UK)

Migration naturally offers opportunities for an independent start (Szewczyk 2015). The process of transiting from university to work abroad starts

a process of defining one's work habitus: to what extent they are able to work regular hours, or irregular hours, on shifts, zero hours contracts; how much they aim for unlimited stable contracts; how much they are able to deal with unexpected situations in the workplace (Grabowska 2016a); how they cooperate with others; how much they observe environment around them; how they build up working relations with other. Although for many of the interviewees their behaviors in the labour market are more 'trial and error' way of acting (Szewczyk 2015), they perceive migration as a kind of compass in their labour market take off. Not all of them fully realized what they want to do in life and how to design their labour market trajectory, but at least they realized what they 'do not want to do' (Grabowska-Lusińska 2012).

"I was not afraid that I do not find work. Maybe because I was ready to wait for this (appropriate) work". (Magda/26/UK).

In many cases migration is predominantly the financial vehicle but when questioned it opens up new avenues for interpretation.

Concluding discussion

The role of international migration in transition to adulthood with special focus on university-to work transition seems to be worth researching further. Due to the fact that the article utilises the data from the first wave of QLS longitudinal study envisaged for this project, we have not been able yet to see the longitudinal life course perspective. The key point of this analysis relates to the fact that migration might be considered an emerging marker a transition to adulthood but in-depth studies are needed on this issue.

The analysis helped to uncover the sequences of transiting from university to the foreign labour market, which brings our focus also onto transitions to adulthood. Firstly, after arrival young Poles capitalize their resources and dispositions brought from home. Shortly after, they see that it is not enough to operate in a foreign labour market environment with a 'hump' from the origin country and their past lives. Secondly, stimulated by this reflection, they start to cross mental borders in their heads where foreign language competence is the key. Through mastering communication they were able to express themselves and they needed to think about how to make it- 'their transition to adulthood'. They knew that they had to cope with difficult situation in order to exist. Thirdly, they were building up new relationships with others met abroad. They needed to understand that some contacts were chosen by them due to circumstances they were in while some bonds they needed and wanted to build up consciously. Fourthly, the transition to the labour market helped them to some extent to build up a kind

of labour market autonomy with setting up future navigation of their work lives. With each step they may stop and go back and reflexively overthink their experiences. During migration this process of reflexivity is shaky and involves many ups and downs. Being aware of the whole process, people can use this kind of 'know how' obtained abroad in many social situations.

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**DOUBLE TRANSITION: UNIVERSITY-TO-WORK ABROAD
AND ADULTHOOD**

Keywords: school-to-work transition, transition into adulthood, youth mobility, soft skills.

This study seeks to understand what is the role of international migration in double transition: university-to-work-abroad and adulthood. The article assumes that school-to-work transition is not a single event, but a phase of the life cycle. There is a time of looking for ones' own career and life path. Migration is connected with the phase of growing up, the phase of maturing and cutting the umbilical cord with the parental home. This case study is about young Polish university graduates who took their first job(s) abroad and therefore transited somehow to adulthood. It was found out that this process where migration is involved is not flat and linear and is composed of four components (1) capitalizing in a foreign environment accumulated, up to migration, non-material resources; (2) crossing own mental borders; (3) building up relations with 'other' others; (4) building up labour market autonomy. This study utilises data from the first wave of qualitative longitudinal study (QLS). Thirty in-depth interviews were conducted with Polish university graduates age between 25 and 34.