FROZEN TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SLOVENIA?

Zamrznute tranzicije u odraslost mladih u Sloveniji?

ABSTRACT This article reviews key-indicators of youth transitions in Slovenia over the last decades and highlights some of the inherent tensions. Against the background of the metaphor of ‘frozen transitions’, which tries to grasp some of the contradictions between the speed of societal change and the stagnating development of youth towards independence, the article describes and reflects the development of youth transitions in the three domains of employment, housing and parenthood. The basis is a selection of indicators available in international data sets and surveys that allow to trace the change at least over the last two decades after the breakdown of Yugoslavia. Our findings indicate that transitions in Slovenia are frozen in all three domains, which challenges the usefulness of the conventional life course framework for studying post-communist contexts.

KEY WORDS young people, transitions, Slovenia

APSTRAKT Kroz pregled ključnih pokazatelja tranzicija u odraslost mladih u Sloveniji tokom poslednje decenije, u tekstu se osvetljavaju neke njihove inherentne napetosti. U skladu sa metaforom “zamrznutih tranzicija”, koja pokušava da shvati neke kontradiktornosti između brzine društvenih promena i napredovanja mladih ka nezavisnosti koje stagnira, u tekstu se opisuju i raspravljaju tranzicije u tri domena: zaposlenosti, stanovanja i roditeljstva. Emprijsku osnovu analize čini izbor pokazatelja koji su dostupni iz međunarodnih baza podataka i anketa, koji omogućavaju da se istraže promene tokom dve decenije koje su sledile nakon sloma Jugoslavije. Naši nalazi ukazuju da su tranzicije mladih u Sloveniji zamrznute u sva tri domena, što predstavlja izazov za primenu uobičajenog okvira životnog toka na proučavanje post-komunističkih konteksta.

KLJUČNE REČI mladi, tranzicije, Slovenija

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Introduction

Youth transitions constitute a well-established field of youth research in Western Europe for at least two reasons. First, (youth) transitions inform about the effects of institutional life course arrangements and refer to the overall make-up of a society, including cultural preferences for using these institutional arrangements. Second and in relation to this, the study of youth transitions and status passages allows to investigate the interplay of structure and agency in the process of growing up in different societies (Heinz, 1996). For these reasons, youth transition research is also a very useful approach to studying social change. Namely, processes of social change and societal transformation have important implications for life courses and life transitions: they redefine links between education and employment; between childhood, youth and parenthood; between economic and residential dependence and independence, etc.

In the field of youth transition studies, there is a broad agreement that youth transitions have changed over the last decades in all European countries. The transition patterns established during and after the few “golden” decades of post-war economic growth and full employment in Europe are eroding (Roberts, 2009). The transitions have become prolonged, less predictable in their timing and sequencing, and more uncertain and diversified than in the recent past (e.g. Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Wallace & Kovacheva, 1998; EGRIS, 2001; IARD, 2001; Ule & Kuhar, 2003; Leccardi 2005; du Bois-Reymond & Chisholm, 2006).

Yet, the scope of change in terms of destandardisation of transitions and life courses is still a matter of empirical clarification. Are the EU-wide introduction of a BA-MA-PhD system and the higher level of expectancy regarding the timing of transitions compatible with the rhetoric of destandardisation? In any case, metaphors of ‘zigzagging’ or ‘yo-yoing’ (EGRIS 2001) compete with more conservative positions defending the persistence of actual patterns of youth transitions or at least the inertia of their change (e.g. Elchardus & Smits 2006; Vickerstaff 2003; Mayer, Grunow & Nitsche, 2010).

The post-socialist context is especially useful for reflecting and evaluating available approaches to youth transitions as well as for developing them further. The neo-liberal emphasis on the role of the market goes hand in hand with the growing importance of personal initiative, self-reliance and the feeling of responsibility for one’s own life. It opens up new options which, however, come at the cost of novel risks. Young people in these countries in particular are faced with a loss of stability and opportunities, and confronted with risks that were unknown to the generation of their parents. Most of the institutional changes related to the process of socio-economic transformation from planned to market economy occurred within a relatively short period of time during the 1990s. Also, the change from relatively smooth transitions from education to work and to an independent life under state
socialism, towards conditions of unpredictability characterising the life of “deconstructed youth” after 1989 (Wallace & Kovacheva, 1998; Ule, Rener, Geržina et al., 1998) was extraordinary.

In an earlier comparative review of descriptive data of youth transitions in ex-Yugoslav countries, we find that transition patterns changed considerably after the critical year of 1990 and that there are immense variations between the countries. In order to make sense of these indicators we suggested the use of the metaphor frozen transitions for synthesizing the contradiction between the obvious speed of societal change in terms of both institutional transformation and the density of experiences within a few years (i.e. system collapse, nation-building, wars and chaos, economic crisis), on the one hand, and a stagnating development of youth towards independence and self-sustainability, on the other (Kuhar & Reiter forthcoming).

Transitions in former Yugoslav countries can be described as ‘frozen’ by referring to aspects of education, housing and dependence on parents, marriage, family formation, society as a whole. Prolonged lingering in the waiting room of education postpones the confrontation with unemployment or poor-quality jobs. Housing is scarce and moving out is not an option, and parents have to fill the welfare gap resulting from the dismantling of the previously universal welfare state. Reprivatisation and intensification of family networks as a reaction to hardship turn families of origin into ‘cosy refrigerators’ preserving, domesticating and immobilising their offspring. With the exception of Slovenia, family forms are not proliferating but rather reflect the conservation of conventional solutions (Kuhar & Reiter 2010). The trend towards decreasing fertility rate that already started before 1990 is continuing, and it could mean that transitions in family formation are slowing down further – there is a risk that the current ‘cultures of postponement’ (Reiter, 2009) are complemented by the cultures of childlessness.

Following Levi-Strauss (1968: 270), we talk of frozen youth transitions in the context of ex-Yugoslav countries as ‘cold’ (i.e. static, mechanical) transformation societies where changes in the institutional make up require immediate responses on the level of individual action within very limited opportunity structures. Youth transitions in the context of ‘hot transformations’ would accelerate and catapult young people into otherwise unavailable, favourable positions. Perhaps this was the case during the early years of other post-socialist countries in Europe where, for a short time period, opportunities opened up for one or two cohorts of young people. Due to the wars that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia, this was different for young people growing up in this area. Here, freezing of many societal aspects can be interpreted as a necessary reaction of conservation.

In this article we use this framework to review the development of youth transitions after 1990 in Slovenia. The special status that the country already had before the collapse of Yugoslavia has also been maintained afterwards: Slovenia was not affected by ethnic violence and war; it joined the European Union in its first
round of eastern enlargement; and with its economic development taking over some of the old member countries, it was the first of the former communist countries to become part of the Euro zone. Aspects of ‘modern youth’ and ‘western’ trends in life styles, values, life courses and family arrangements were already common in Slovenian society during communism, as the first pan-Yugoslav study in 1986 showed (Vrcan, Aleksić, Dunderović et al., 1986; Ule, 1988). For young people of Slovenia, the changes that followed the transition were expected and involved little stress. Therefore, Slovenia has often been labelled as a ‘special case’. Nevertheless, ever since the early 1990s, the period of youth continued to be extended, and the patterns of transition to adulthood proliferated in comparison with the mid-1980s generation in Slovenia (Ule & Miheljak, 1995; Ule, Rener, Miheljak et al., 1996; Ule & Kuhar, 2003).

The aim of our article is to take a closer look at this ‘special case’ of Slovenia and at the contradictions inherent in transitions of Slovenian youth. Against the background of the metaphorical discussion of frozen transitions, the main questions are: How did youth transitions to adulthood in Slovenia develop since the transformation to capitalism? Were they accelerated or slowed down? And in which way and to what extent can youth transitions to employment, housing and parenthood in Slovenia be characterized as ‘frozen’? The following three parts provide a descriptive account of how youth transitions in these three domains changed in Slovenia over the last decades. We discuss indicators that refer analytically to an institutional freeze regarding opportunity structures or to forms of mental freeze regarding values and aspirations. Empirically, the text is based on the only available comparative data, i.e.: the statistical indicators from international datasets (e.g. COE, Eurostat, OECD, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, UNESCO, UNICEF) and some public opinion surveys (Slovenian Public Opinion Survey 1980, the European Values Survey (EVS) 1999 and EVS 2008, Eurobarometer 2006, European Social Survey 2006; national samples of 18-34-olds). In our concluding remarks we explore possible consequences of our findings from the descriptive analysis for the social integration of young people in a life course perspective.

**Transitions to employment**

In the perspective of life course sociology, youth is linked to adulthood by transitions in various domains (Leisering, 2003). The transition from school to work is one of these linking mechanisms that reflect the quality of the connection between the two most important systems of modern societal reproduction - i.e. education and the labour market. The transition profile of a country is essentially contingent upon political priorities reflected in institutional arrangements. The extension of education has become a global phenomenon. Yet the increase of young people in further and higher education cannot be fully explained from within the education system alone.
and with reference to a growing awareness among young people of the significance of educational capital. The lack of meaningful employment and the erosion of a solid base for an educated youth labour force is an equally important explanation of the phenomenon. Young people try to reduce some of the systemic uncertainty by continuing with education; this behaviour rather points to fewer options in the labour market than to better ones in education (Côté, 2007).

Slovenia is no exception to the phenomena of prolongation of youth transitions to employment and of difficult labour market entries. On the policy side, a relatively high share of the GDP is spent on education: although declining since 2001, it still exceeds the average of the European Union. In 2007, the funds reserved for education amounted to 5.17% of the GDP (a decrease of 0.61% compared to 2000). The largest part of this amount was allocated to compulsory elementary education, and a much smaller one to secondary and tertiary education. The share intended for secondary education is below the European average, while it is above the European average regarding tertiary education. Nevertheless, especially due to the high number of secondary level students, public expenditure per student is still below the European average. The student-teacher ratio at the tertiary level is still among the least favourable in the EU. In addition, compared with other European countries, Slovenia intends a relatively large portion of public funds for household transfers which include grants, subsidies for food, transport, accommodation, textbooks etc. Although this share is still above European average, it has declined sharply (-5.4%) since 2000, and in 2007 it amounted to 8.1% (UMAR, 2009).

The political commitment to education expressed in these indicators corresponds to the high number of young people enrolled at all educational levels. Nowadays almost all students continue education after compulsory schooling and it is even possible to speak about a ‘massification’ of tertiary education in Slovenia. The number of young people aged 15 to 19 enrolled in secondary schools in Slovenia is among the highest in Europe. The rates were already high in the first years following the transition - e.g., 80.5% of 15-18-old population enrolled in 1993 (UNICEF, 2007). In the meantime, further education is among the standard experiences of growing up and it reached 91% in 2008. This is higher than the EU-19 average of 83%, and higher than the OECD average of 80%. In 2008 as many as 85% of students aged 18-19 completed their secondary education (78% of males and 93% of females). This percentage is one of the highest in Europe exceeding both the EU-19 average of 83% and the OECD average of 80% (OECD, 2010).

Participation in higher education increased significantly in the period after transition (Table 1). This is the first indicator of the fact that instead of completing the transition to employment, many young people seem to be ‘frozen’ in their accustomed environment: employment is not sufficiently available and education, which is free of charge, is a familiar and socially recognized alternative. Education is also connected to many indirect advantages such as: social insurance, inexpensive
and available places in student dormitories, cheap coupons for meals, possibilities of working at a very low tax rate (i.e. the so called student work, see below). Finally, on average, every fifth student is granted a scholarship and every third the state’s financial assistance (Eurostudent, 2010).

Table 1 Gross enrolment ratio, ISCED 5 and 6 (tertiary education) – 1981-2009

| Year | 81 | 85 | 90 | 95 | 96 | 97 | 98 | 99 | 00 | 01 | 02 | 03 | 04 | 05 | 06 | 07 | 08 | 09 |
|------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Ratio| 19,1| 19,3| 24,4| 29,7| 32,6| 35,9| 45,3 | 52,3 | 55,4 | 60,8 | 66,7 | 69,3 | 72,7 | 79,6 | 83,0 | 85,0 | 86,0 | 86,9 |

Source: UNESCO (2011). Total enrolment of the five-year age group following the secondary school leaving.

However, Bevc (2001) demonstrates that many university students never complete their studies. She analysed the cohort of students enrolled full-time in higher education in 1991/92 and found that, until the end of 1999, only 54% finished their studies. This share was as low as 32% among those who pay for their studies, because they were unable to enrol full-time studies in the first round. By the end of 1999, 44% of this cohort refrained from their study, 6% were still studying. Furthermore, Slovene students who do finish their studies have the longest average duration of study of 6.9 years (Eurostudent, 2010). Dropping out of higher education is rather widespread: the completion rate at the tertiary education level was only 65% in 2008, compared to 70% for the EU19 countries and 69% for the OECD countries (OECD, 2010).

In spite of the high non-completion rate, the yearly inflow into the labour market of graduates from tertiary education exceeds the number of available workplaces by approximately two times. The yearly inflow of people with secondary education is already one and a half times higher than the number of available workplaces (Kramberger, 2007: 98). For highly educated young people, accepting employment in unqualified jobs means that both knowledge and competences acquired through the long education process are wasted. For the society, this mismatch between education and employment means that many individual and social investments in education (including the funding of the tertiary education system) are lost.

Like in many other European countries, the Slovenian labour market is characterized by increasing flexibilization. The comprehensive economic reform proposed by liberal economists, employers, and governmental agencies, has been implemented in Slovenia in a more moderate way than in other countries with a socialist past (Barr, 2005). Due to a compromise reached by trade unions, workers on a permanent contract still enjoy high protection and the provisions regulating fixed-term employment have been expanded. Yet these amendments imply an even
greater flexibilization of workers in non-standard employment arrangements, which affects most of young people. The social security system, however, has not been adapted to these changes (Ignjatović & Trbanc, 2009).

One of the consequences of reforms is a policy-driven polarization of the generations: while older people generally work on a permanent contract and enjoy high protection, young people carry the burden of the negative consequences of increasing flexibilization. This polarization of the Slovenian labour market is reflected in the area of fixed-term employment. Eurostat (2010b) data indicate that the share of temporary jobs has increased among young people (aged 15 to 24) in employment: it rose from 52.9% in 2002 to 66.6% in 2009 (in 2008 it was even 69.8%). This share is among the highest in Europe: the EU27 average in 2009 was 40.2%. The percentage of young people with part-time jobs also increased, and in the third quarter of 2010 it amounted to 38.0%. In 2004, when Slovenia became EU member, this share already exceeded the EU27 average and was among the higher ones in Europe. By contrast, the percentage of adult workers in part-time employment is among the lowest in the EU27.

An important segment of the Slovenian labour market is student employment, involving primarily the group of working young people aged 15 to 24. The average duration of student employment considerably exceeded the legal limits related to temporary and occasional employment. The data indicate that students aged 15 to 24, work around 9 months on average (8.8 months in the second quarter of 2008). The average is even higher in the older age group of 25 to 29 year-olds: around 10 months (10.3 months in the second quarter of 2008). Put differently, young people working on student contracts in 2009 worked slightly more than 24 hours a week. This corresponds to a regular half-time job that is done in addition to studying. Since 2000, the share of employed students among the total number of persons in employment in Slovenia increased by four times, and in the second quarter of 2008 it amounted to 3.7% (SURS, Labour Force Survey, 1993–2009). Student employment therefore changed from an opportunity to earn some pocket money into a form of regular but low-paid employment. In principle, it burdens the labour market, although, in the short run, it appears to have advantages for the state (lower costs of funding studies), employers (lower labour costs) and students themselves (funding of studies, financial independence and a better standard of living).

Finally, the EU-wide phenomenon that youth unemployment is two or three times higher than the overall unemployment rate, applies also to Slovenia: for example, before the financial crisis, in 2008, the youth unemployment rate (age 15-24) was 2.2 times higher than the overall unemployment rate (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2010). Table 2 indicates that youth unemployment gradually decreased during the post-socialist period. Yet it should be emphasized that this decline was to a large extent caused by an increasing number of young people enrolled in tertiary education (that were no longer counted among the labour
force). Eurostat (2010b) data show that the unemployment rate in the age group 25-29 was 13.1% in 2010, while in the age group 30-34 it was 7.1%.

| Year | Unemployment Rate |
|------|-------------------|
| 93   | 24.0              |
| 94   | 22.9              |
| 95   | 18.9              |
| 96   | 19.2              |
| 97   | 17.5              |
| 98   | 18.1              |
| 99   | 17.9              |
| 00   | 16.4              |
| 01   | 15.4              |
| 02   | 15.2              |
| 03   | 14.7              |
| 04   | 15.4              |
| 05   | 13.4              |
| 06   | 14.0              |
| 07   | 8.7               |
| 08   | 9.5               |
| 09   | 12.2              |
| 10   | 13.1              |

Source: UNICEF (2011).

Table 2 also indicates an increase in youth unemployment since the beginning of the financial crisis. The highest annual growth of the unemployment rate among young people was recorded at the peak of the crisis. Between 2007 and 2010 the unemployment rate (15-24) rose by more than 50% from 8.7% to 13.1%. This represents the highest increase within the 20-year period of the regular monitoring of unemployment trends in Slovenia. Altogether, youth unemployment in Slovenia was still comparatively low considering that the EU average was 18.3% in 2009.

Employment indicators suggest that unfriendly youth labour market conditions impede youth transitions to work. Remaining in education as long as possible is rational and helps to avoid employment-related difficulties. For young people, prospects in the general labour market remain uncertain even upon completing education. Flexibilization, increasing job uncertainty, declining social security of workers, and the growing polarization and segmentation of the labour market turn young Slovenes into a vulnerable group.

### Transitions to housing

The lack of income from employment forces young people into long-term material dependence on parental families. One of the consequences is prolonged coresidence with parents, which is an important second indicator of frozen transitions. Coresidence of young adults with parents in Slovenia is the second most prolonged in Europe (after the Slovak Republic) (Commission of the European Communities, 2009). As shown by the EVS 1999 and the EVS 2008 data (Table 3), up to two thirds of 18 to 34 year-olds lived with their parents in both periods, including those who also shared the same household with their partner/spouse and/or child/ren. The latter phenomenon of living in an extended multi-generational household accounts only for around 10% of the sample. The corresponding percentages from the year 1980 (Slovenian public opinion survey data in Table 3) indicate a considerable increase in this form of coresidence in the post-socialist period. With little more than one third of young adults from 18 to 34 living with parents in 2008, coresidence is, on average, less prevalent in the EU15. Also in the
other post-socialist member states of the European Union (EU postsoc) this percentage is much lower than in Slovenia. What are the reasons?

**Table 3 Percentage of young people living with their parents, 1980, 1999, 2008 (answers of 18 to 34 year-olds)**

|                          | Slovenia | EU 15 | EU postsoc |
|--------------------------|----------|-------|------------|
| Slovenian public opinion survey 1980 – with parents, including those with partner/spouse/child | 40.1%    |       |            |
| Slovenian public opinion survey 1980 – with parents only | 25.0%    |       |            |
| EVS 1999 – with parents, including those with partner/spouse/child | 64.6%    | 37.6% | 47.0%      |
| EVS 1999 – with parents only* | 56.8%*   | 36.1% | 38.0%      |
| EVS 2008 – with parents, including those with partner/spouse/child | 63.8%    | 34.0% | 51.8%      |
| EVS 2008 – with parents only | 53.6%    | 31.1% | 42.1%      |

* The percentage of those living with ‘parents only’ for 1999 data excludes only those who are married and/or live with child but not those living in cohabitation with partner in extended family households (since there is no data on partners cohabitation in the database).

Sources: Slovenian Public Opinion Survey and European Values Study.

First of all, the prolonged stay in the family of origin is a response to severe housing shortages (Mandič, 2010). After the breakdown of Yugoslavia, the socialist housing system collapsed. While public housing has formerly been privatized and acquired by the previous tenants, the construction and distribution of new dwelling places has been underdeveloped. With private housing booming, young people are among the victims of the resulting housing shortage: young adults in regular employment, and even those sharing costs with a partner, are nevertheless often unable to buy or rent a dwelling place. Instead, they have to rely on resources from their families of origin (e.g. inheritance, exchange, trade, etc.) to afford independent housing (ibid.).

However, the prolongation of young people’s coresidence with their parents cannot be interpreted only as a necessary economic strategy; it is also a cultural practice. In Slovenia, this practice is associated with exceptionally supportive and relatively high quality relationships between parents and young people (Ule & Kuhar, 2003; Rener et al., 2006), also in international comparison (Pokrajac, 2006). The majority of young Slovenians report that they are well provided with parental emotional and instrumental support. Even while living with parents, young people can enjoy quite a high level of personal freedom and independence. Less than one out of five young people do not feel good at home or wish for greater parental support (Rener et al., 2006). This is different, for instance, in Serbia where tensions are common despite otherwise very strong intra-family relations (Tomanović, 2002),
and where young people express dissatisfaction with paternalizing and infantilizing strategies of parents (Tomanović & Ignjatović, 2006).

The dependence of young adults on their family of origin, especially the prolonged coresidence, has ambiguous effects. On the one hand, they can stay in education for longer periods and can postpone confronting unemployment and poor-quality jobs. But on the other hand, families of origin preserve, domesticate, and immobilize the offspring.

Transitions to parenthood

The delay of marriage and the postponement of parenthood represent the third and fourth indicator of the phenomenon of frozen transitions. Less and less people get married in general in Slovenia (Table 4). The post-socialist transformation appears to have somewhat slowed down the decline in marriages in Slovenia, and the major changes towards fewer marriages already happened before. Compared to other European countries, Slovenia is among the countries with the lowest marriage rates - with an average crude marriage rate of 4.87 for the EU27 in 2007 (Eurostat database, 2010a). The share of married people is especially low among Slovenian youths: in 1999, 28% of the population at the age of 18 to 34 were married (EVS 1999 calculation), in 2008 this percentage was only 12.5% (EVS 2008 calculation).

Correspondingly, the share of extra-marital births is increasing (Table 4). During the sixties and seventies, less than 10% of children were born outside marriage. Like in Western countries, during this period the ideology of the marriage-based nuclear family was prevalent in Slovenia. Yet it began to lose importance in the mid-70s, and the share of extra-marital births increased steeply ever since. For the first time in 2007 more than half of the babies were born outside marriage (50.8). According to the latest data from 2009 the share of children born out of wedlock was 53.8 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2010). In the EU, children born out of wedlock account for slightly less than one third of all births, yet differences between countries are considerable (Eurostat database, 2010b).

The high share of extra-marital births points to the high level of cohabitation that is not only a form of pre-marital partnership in Slovenia but extends into the family life. Cohabitation is legally equated with marriage since 1977 (“Law on conjugal union and family relationships”). And already in 1947, the ex-Yugoslav “Basic law on relationship between parents and children” introduced that legitimate children and children born out of wedlock are treated equally in relation towards parents. According to the European Value Survey of 2008 practically all married young adults between 18 and 34 used to live in premarital cohabitation.

Furthermore, among the declining number of women that decide to marry the average age at the first marriage is steadily increasing (Table 4). Throughout the 1970s, the average age at first marriage remained approximately the same, but began
to increase in the 1980s, and continued to increase through the nineties. In 2009 the average age of women at first marriage was 28.3; and the average age of men at first marriage was 30.7 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2010).

### Table 4 – Family formation indicators, 1960-2009

|                        | 1960 | 1965 | 1970 | 1975 | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 | 2009 |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Crude marriage rate (per 1000 population) | 8.8  | 9.2  | 8.3  | 8.5  | 6.5  | 5.4  | 4.3  | 4.1  | 3.6  | 2.9  | 3.2  |
| Extra-marital births (per 100 births)     | 9.1  | 9.2  | 8.5  | 9.9  | 13.1 | 19.1 | 24.5 | 29.8 | 37.1 | 46.7 | 53.8 |
| Mean age of women at the first marriage (below the age of 50) | 23.1 | 22.5 | 22.5 | 22.8 | 23.7 | 25.1 | 26.7 | 28.2 | 28.3 |
| Mean age of women at the first birth       | 24.8 | 24.2 | 23.7 | 23.0 | 22.9 | 23.1 | 23.7 | 24.9 | 26.5 | 27.8 | 28.5 |
| Total fertility rate                       | 2.18 | 2.46 | 2.12 | 2.17 | 2.10 | 1.71 | 1.46 | 1.29 | 1.26 | 1.26 | 1.53 |

Source: CoE (2005). 2005 and 2009: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2010).

Giving birth to the first child is postponed well into the mid-20s and beyond. The *mean age of women at the first birth* changed in the years after 1990 more rapidly than before (Table 4). Comparative data for the year 2008 show that in Slovenia the average age of women at first birth was 28.4; men were on average three years older. This is slightly above the average in the EU for this year (28.2 years) (Eurostat 2010a).

From 1960 to 2000 fertility rate declined below replacement level (Table 4). The most significant part of decline took place during the last 10 years before the collapse of socialism. The lowest fertility rates were registered in 1999 and in 2003 (1.20). However, during the most recent years we witnessed an increase in the fertility rate: in 2009 the fertility rate was 1.53 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2010). This increase is mostly due to delayed childbearing and the so-called tempo effect that indicates an increase in the fertility rate in the cohort of women who delayed the decision to have children well into their late thirties and are now approaching the end of their fertility period. Compared to other European countries where this phenomenon is similar – the average for EU25 in 2008 was 1.62 (Eurostat database, 2010c) – Slovenia is still among the countries with lower fertility rates.

It is important to emphasize that this trend towards lower fertility rate and postponed childbearing does not imply that young people do not want children. On the contrary, according to the EVS 1999 and EVS 2008, the vast majority considers two or three children to be ideal. Besides, in the Eurobarometer 2006 survey, more than half of 15 to 34-year-old Slovenian women indicate that they would give birth
for the first time ideally between the age of 25 and 29; around one tenth even before the age of 24; and only a good fifth mentioned the age above 30 as ideal for the first child-bearing. In other words, young women do want children and the frozen status of prolonged childlessness does not seem to be a voluntary phenomenon.

**Concluding remarks**

Our descriptive review of indicators does not point to an acceleration of youth transition. On the contrary, against our conceptual background, our findings suggest that youth transitions in Slovenia are frozen in all three domains considered here: transitions to employment are postponed due to bad labour market prospects that are compensated for with high levels of participation in further and higher education as well as extended studies. Transitions to independent housing are postponed because of a lack of affordable flats and prolonged education/delayed financial independence; it is compensated for with prolonged residence with parents. Finally, transitions to parenthood and marriage are postponed because of a lack of material security and changing cultural patterns.

The framework of life course sociology suggests that participation in economic and social reproduction (i.e. employment and family) is the most important criterion of full membership in society (Leisering, 2003). Variations of this basic principle of social integration that perhaps needs to be complemented by participation in the sphere of consumption are politically valid in all advanced countries. Yet according to our empirical findings, this step into full societal membership for Slovenian youth seems to be, depending on the perspective, delayed, postponed, hampered – frozen. The link between youth and adulthood, between dependence and independence does not follow the smooth linearity that the conventional life course model may outline. Further research into the henceforth market-based interplay of qualifications produced in education matching those required in the labour market is necessary to understand why this is so. The same applies to issues of housing and of child care facilities and family-friendly employment opportunities. Especially in the post-socialist countries youth transitions are neither linear nor emergent but "contingent and linked to complex interactions between individual decisions, opportunity structures, and social pathways with more or less institutionalized guidelines and regulations", as Heinz (2009: 4) put it. The post-socialist condition is a context where alternative notions of youth transitions, which challenge the current framework of life course theorizing, could be developed and specified. We can only underline this point here; further empirically informed conceptualization is necessary to see how this could be done.

In the life course perspective, successful social integration on the level of both individual and society is a matter of providing institutional arrangements that allow culturally changeable patterns of individualization to unfold in a way that is
favourable for society. But what if individualization cannot unfold due to the living circumstances that a society provides? Is it necessarily a problem? We want to leave the final word to young people. The European Social Survey 2006\textsuperscript{vii} investigates the importance of individual transitions for being considered mature. It finds that 15-34-old Slovenes do not consider traditional passages to adulthood (residential emancipation, regular employment, partnership, parenthood) to be particularly important markers of adulthood status. Namely, less than half of the sample think that in order to be considered as an adult, it is important to have a full-time job; only approximately one fourth think that it is important to have left the parental house in order to be considered as an adult, and around one fifth to live with a spouse and to become a parent, respectively. It remains to be seen whether the reasons for these non-traditional attitudes are the result of a genuine process of detraditionalisation or rather a form of cognitive adaptation to the actual circumstances. Nevertheless, relatively high importance of access to regular employment that is confirmed in these answers points to crowded transition channels as the most important aspect of frozenness: in Slovenia the bottleneck in quality employment is clogged by too many university graduates that end up overqualified for the jobs available in the labour market. The fact that this transition is most directly linked to financial independence could explain why the other transitions to parenthood, independent housing and partner cohabitation are perceived as less problematic.

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i During the last decade of collecting and screening statistical information for Slovenia, we observed many inconsistencies in the data, which are likely to persist.

ii We restricted ourselves to the age group of 18-34-olds in order to meet minimum sampling criteria for the target group.

iii The implications of the amended Employment and Insurance against Unemployment Act adopted in 2006 should also be mentioned. It enabled employers to offer job positions even two levels below the achieved level of education if a person has been registered with the Employment Service for more than 6 months.

iv The EVS 1999 sample of 18-34-olds in Slovenia included 352 respondents; the national sample of this age group for 2008 was 362.

v The Slovenian public opinion survey 1980 encompasses a sample of 703 18-34-olds which can be considered as a representative for this age group.

vi To be sure, the EU is of course heterogeneous regarding (also) the length of coresidence of parents and children.

vii The ESS 2006 sample of 15-34-olds in Slovenia included 413 respondents.