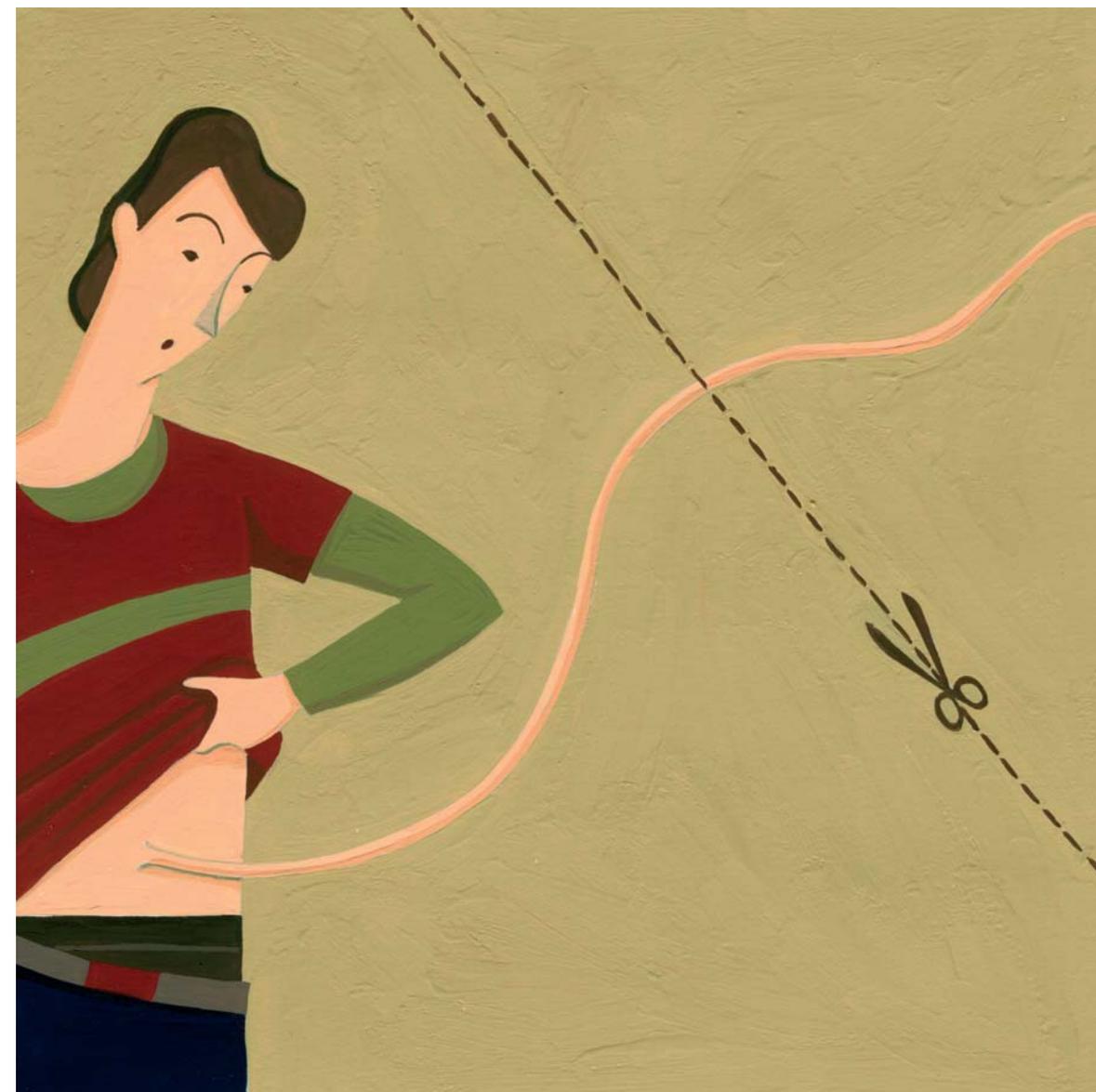


The main goal of this issue is to show what the young are like in each country. It is not only about learning how youth is spent but also about knowing when it ends. How do young Europeans acquire autonomy and what transitions do they undergo until they reach adulthood? When does youth end? Which are the suitable indicators, depending on the country, to achieve better understanding of this period of our lives? What is the definition of an adult? Quite often when we study the youth of different European countries and the transition into adulthood we use a framework for analysis that is suitable for one country (such as obtaining a stable job, marriage, leaving home) and is also used to study what happens in other countries. Working on these issues internally in each country - whether quantitatively or qualitatively - will allow us to know which are the interesting indicators to achieve a better understanding of young people's sociological reality and whether or not they take a step into adulthood. We will look at countries from the south of Europe such as Italy, Spain and Portugal, others from the north, like Sweden, Denmark and the United Kingdom, from the central area, such as Germany and France, and from the east, like Romania. We will study the similarities and differences between these countries through a comparative analysis.

Autonomy of the Young in Europe



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THE TOPIC | page 5

Introduction | page 5

1. The ageing of the young | page 9

Gil Calvo

2. Nightlife as the transition from youth to adulthood.

The case of Swedish young people | page 19

Magdalena Jarvin

3. From youth to adulthood in France and Spain | page 29

Sandra Gaviria

4. Adulthood sense: youth and social changes in Portugal today | page 41

Lia Pappámikail

5. Entering adult life. A European comparison | page 55

Cécile van de Velde

6. Study of the transition to adulthood for Italian young people: Between crossing the threshold in an orderly way and individualising biographical paths | page 67

Vincenzo Cicchelli y Maurizio Merico

7. The blurred structure of adulthood: transformation of social relationships and “extension of youth” in Romania | page 81

Mircea Vultur

8. German departures from the parental home: A new pathway towards independence? | page 93

Alessandra Rusconi

9. How to put an end or not to youth | page 107

François de Singly

MATERIALS | page 118**CONTRIBUTIONS** | page 126

THE TOPIC



Autonomy of the Young in Europe

THE TOPIC

In European societies, young people follow different processes, not only when it comes to entering adulthood, but also when they deal with personal realisation. Taking a close look at them will allow us to observe the mechanisms and types of behaviour shown by these people. The young wish at a certain point in their lives to become independent from their families. What changes is the way they do it, the process and the emotional and relational ties they make or break throughout life, as well as their relationship towards themselves and the process of individualisation. Youth as a period of life is becoming increasingly difficult to define, as it varies in time and space and is different in each country, where it can change in length, intensity and homogeneity. The young change, they are transformed and no longer follow linear paths. It is a time of life to experiment with independence, autonomy, family, friends and love.

The main goal of this issue is to show what the young are like in each country. It is not only about learning how youth is spent but also about knowing when it ends. How do young Europeans acquire autonomy and what transitions do they undergo until they reach adulthood? When does youth end? Which are the suitable indicators, depending on the country, to achieve better understanding of this period of our lives? What is the definition of an adult? Quite often when we study the youth of different European countries and the transition into adulthood we use a framework for analysis that is suitable for one country (such as obtaining a stable job, marriage, leaving home) and is also used to study what happens in other countries. Working on these issues internally in each country - whether quantitatively or qualitatively - will allow us to know which are the interesting indicators to achieve a better understanding of young people's sociological reality and whether or not they take a step into adulthood. We will look at countries from the south of Europe such as Italy, Spain and Portugal, others from the north, like Sweden, Denmark and the United Kingdom, from the central area, such as Germany and France, and from the east, like Romania. We will study the similarities and differences between these countries through a comparative analysis.

Several important aspects have arisen from all the contributions made. E. Gil Calvo shows how youth is no longer the period in the life cycle where individuals have to make crucial decisions. It has lost its strategic role in favour of adulthood, as now individuals are to make decisions all throughout their lives. F. de Singly explains how we can no longer study youth by considering adulthood as the finishing line reached by the young, as individuals are constantly building their personal identity in a continuous process.

From a qualitative analysis made in the article written by M. Jarvin we can see how the great autonomy awarded to Swedish young people makes them build for themselves their own definition of adult. S. Gaviria makes a qualitative analysis of how French and Spanish young people follow different personal construction processes.

Lia Pappámikail observes not only how the Portuguese young people access the symbols of adulthood such as marriage or work, but also how they define themselves as adults. C. Van den Velde also makes a mixture of a qualitative and quantitative methodology and creates a comparative study of Denmark, the United Kingdom, France and Spain, explaining that youth varies in each of these societies. They are different social and cultural constructions. V. Cicchelli and M. Merico analyse the long transition of Italian young people towards adulthood as partly the consequence of the absence of social policies. They prove how some Italian young people make an individualisation of their careers and not all follow linear paths. M. Vultur gives a context of the careers of Romanian young people, who have become increasingly less orderly and traditional, and are entering an increasingly long youth. A. Rusconi tells us about German young people and studies the factors affecting their choice in their way to leave home and their way to autonomy.

From this set of contributions we can draw some common elements such as the increasing process of individualisation in developed societies or the fact that the young people's careers seem to be more irregular and heterogeneous. We can see that the definition that the young give of being an adult does not always match the sociological indicators that are taken into consideration. Youth in Europe does not end radically and adulthood does not necessarily include the individual's identity for the rest of his/her life, as it does not mean the end of crucial decision making either.

Sandra Gaviria Sabbah

