

Transitions in youth Trajectories and discontinuities

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In advanced societies, youth constitutes a stage in life that is socially marked by particular structural conditions and specific cultural behaviour. The profound changes that are taking place in these societies, both in the economic and political arenas, as well as in terms of family relationships, inevitably end up by interfering in the way the young generations live their daily lives, play their roles in the transition into adulthood and equate the future. The study of the conditions and lifestyles, the positions and dispositions, the space and time, the pathways and projects, values and social practices that characterise the youth have formed an area of interesting research and debate in Portuguese sociology. The multiple purpose of this research has been to analyse relevant phenomena of today's society, to examine the trends for the society of tomorrow and propose policies for their fulfilment. Indeed, the research conducted on young people sheds light on foreseen social changes and helps to understand the characteristics of the contemporary world. The behaviour and attitudes of the younger generations act as a barometer that could anticipate what future societal configurations could be.

The present chapter analyses how young people live their lives in contemporary Portugal based on several national and European studies in which this team has taken part.¹ This chapter also presents the main results of some other sociological research that has been conducted in this sphere in our country.

1 Orientações dos Jovens Portugueses sobre o Emprego e a Família (Orientation of Portuguese Youth on Employment and Family); Gender, parenthood and the changing European workplace: young adults negotiating the work-family boundary (Transitions), 2003-2005; Os Jovens e o Mercado de Trabalho: caracterização, estrangulamentos à integração efectiva na vida activa e a eficácia das políticas (Young People and the Labour Market: characterisation, constraints to the actual integration in active life and policy effectiveness), 2004-2005; Trajectórias escolares e profissionais de jovens com baixas qualificações (Educational and professional pathways of poorly qualified youths), 2007.

Youth: from social category to ideology

While “youth” is unequivocally present in the problems associated to the characterisation and study of advanced societies, impregnating the meanings endowed on countless individual actions and many social phenomena, its immediate conversion into a social category is also contested and its very volatile shape and analytical fragilities should be recognised. The status, the significance and the heuristic value of the concept are therefore not consensual within the scope of sociology and have given rise to heated debates.

Youth as a social category is conspicuously absent from traditional societies. In socio-historical terms, the emergence of this new social status can be identified in the 20th century. This is particularly so in the context of modern cities where spaces are created to extend the educational trajectory for the acquisition of formal skills and qualifications; the subsequent delay in entering the labour market means that young people are economically dependent on their families or the state² for increasingly longer periods of time as they keep out of the productive sphere but, on the other hand, they do develop very significant autonomies in terms of social networks, cultural identities, lifestyles and life projects. New forms of cultural urban expression which at times are not socially integrated have gradually started to flourish in this space; this gives rise to tensions with dominant powers which sometimes become violent. It is not only the generator of new dynamics and movements, of numerous freedoms and accomplishments, but is also filled with anxieties, repressions and exclusions.

Particularly at times of profound social change, sharing this common status and specific socialisation experiences leads to singularities in relation to historical consciousness, skills and projects (Pais, 1999a) that is reinforced by (and reinforcing) affinity and identification processes. A paradigmatic example is the special relationship young people have with technology. TV, internet and mobile phones today are interweaved into the daily lives of young people and brings a whole new scope to the opportunities, social networks, life styles, means of communication and identity construction mechanisms because it allows a significant separation in terms of the co-presence situations and the involvement in global relationships and even communities (Cardoso *et al.*, 2005). A different relationship with sexuality and the body can be another of these emerging phenomena, which has already attracted the attention of some researchers in the field (Cabral and Pais, 2003; Ferreira, 2007).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the idea spread in sociology and in society as a whole that youth was a group or even a social movement with strong internal

2 As in many different European countries, where young people can benefit from different forms of state support, namely scholarships or long-term loans, for the acquisition of academic qualifications and attainment of individual autonomy conditions.

solidarity and significant disruptive potential in cultural and political terms (Bebiano, 2002); this idea was fed by several emancipation theories as well as by moral panic. The existence of a generation with new lifestyles and values, ways of socialising, forms of political intervention and some self-awareness that was not only drifting away from the dominant culture but also frequently opposed it thus creating the profile of a counter-culture, was the focus of attention and debates among sociologists worldwide.³ A cultural universe was formed that consisted of new libertarian and experimentalist practices, non-linear life projects, critical of industrial societies, new aesthetic arrangements in particular in the field of music, a new occupation of space and time (such as the night), the use of new drugs, amongst other things which was thought to be relatively homogeneous and opposed to established powers.

To some extent, this approach is present in the groundbreaking study by Sedas Nunes (1968) on Portuguese university students at a time when the contradictions of the New State were becoming increasingly more manifest and student protests were hotting up. Later, the public interest in a transforming power and the social problems associated to younger age groups, particularly in a fast changing society like that of Portugal, led in the 1980s and 1990s to the development of several quantitative characterisations of the “youth condition” (Cruz, 1984), youth in Portugal (the ongoing work between the *Instituto de Ciências Sociais* (Institute of Social Sciences) and the *Instituto Português da Juventude* (Portuguese Institute for Youth) is of particular note here (AA.VV., 1988; Pais and Cabral, 1998; Figueiredo, Silva and Ferreira, 1999; etc.) and in specific areas such as Loures municipality (Almeida *et al.*, 1996).

However, the underlying openness and plurality of societies in advanced modernity, the acknowledgement of the enormous diversity of “youth cultures” — closely linked with the social conditions and contexts in which they develop — and the non-existence of a strong “generational awareness” have led many sociologists to devalue the concept of youth in the singular (Pais, 1993; Lopes, 1996). Within this framework, more emphasis has gone to studies on certain youth-related social practices, such as inter-rail (Santos, 1999), the use of the night (Sanchez and Martins, 1999), volunteer work (Santos, 2002), on certain youth “tribes” that stand out for their artistic and (sub)cultural forms (Santos *et al.*, 2003; Pais and Blass, 2004; Ferreira, 2007) or that share similar structural positions, e.g. “university students” (Machado, Costa and Almeida, 1989; Fernandes *et al.*, 2001; Almeida *et al.*, 2003), the “youth political elites” (Cruz, 1990) or the “offspring of immigrants” (Ferreira, 2003). The groundbreaking approaches of

3 Such political youth movements would have established an empirical subject for the main sociological studies that some authors associate to the institutionalisation stage of sociology in Portugal.

the studies conducted in Portugal and which are a reference for many should also be stressed here, e.g. those of Gilberto Velho on middle class youths in the southern area of Rio de Janeiro (1998).

The actual relationship of young people's identities with the conditions, experiences and projects in more institutional contexts such as school and work is again emphasised, as opposed to the irresistible desire of picturing young people immersed in leisure; rather than dissolving, nowadays this relationship seems to be more diffuse, complex and problematic and contributes to its internal diversification and extension, or even blocking, of the transition process into adulthood (Guerreiro and Abrantes, 2004).

Over the last decade, different sociological studies have revealed a growing vulnerability to the social exclusion dynamics among certain youth segments. This phenomenon tends to be associated to some of the more serious social problems of today's society, such as unemployment, abject poverty, isolation, marginal lifestyles, criminality, alcoholism or drug addiction (Ferreira, 1999; Garcia *et al.*, 2000; MTS, 2000; Pais, 1999b and 2001; Carvalho, 2003). In general, these studies point to the need for more incisive social policies and are sometimes integrated and reinterpreted in constant public debates, giving rise to intersecting reflective processes that are characteristic of advanced modernity.

Moreover, the concept of youth is becoming increasingly intertwined with the language and daily lives of modern societies, tied to symbolic-mediatic processes of global proportions. On one hand, certain more cosmopolitan and liberal cultural values and practices tend to disseminate (or persist) among more adult age groups that compare youth to one or several ideologies. On the other hand, powerful financial groups and "entertainment industries" dedicate themselves to constantly producing and imposing new aspects of a young lifestyle on consumers, each with their own icons and languages. As a result, youth cultures today appear without part of their disruptive potential which is the object of intense media coverage, globalisation, trade and even folklore, but as a product of sophisticated audiovisual machines; this penetrates strongly into the global collective imagination largely to stimulate the need for a wide range of other products. Hence, some authors have been issuing warnings about the dangers of the individualisation, "commodification" and privatisation of youth experiences (Furlong and Cartmel, 1998) or, in general terms, the definition of actors who are intensive consumers and are becoming increasingly excluded from the production spheres and citizenship (Harvey, 2001).

As a result of this core phenomenon, in which culture and commerce are profoundly intertwined, being or looking young has become a new dominant "life ideal", a new form of capital that can be acquired by means of a demanding consumption and "technologies of the self" and which is therefore a decisive participant in the individual mechanisms of self-reflection and identity (re)construction. In a complex game between biology and ideology, being seen

as “young” is a specific rarity nowadays which must in part be bought in the market and integrated on a daily basis by means of continuous (re)socialization. This process takes place in a context of deep social inequality, and even reinforces it because different types of economic, cultural and social capital are required that exclude anyone — including paradoxically some in the younger age groups — who does not own or cannot reconvert this capital.

In short, the concept of youth is far from dissipating but is becoming increasingly more polysemous. It plays a central and ambiguous role in the dynamics of modernity, either embodied in a specific age group though with extremely varying limits that tend to extend in time, or presented inter-subjectively as a life ideal. The interacting effects of this categorisation require continuous processes of double hermeneutics in social terms and, on a personal level, permanent dynamics between the biological and the social of identity (re)construction.

From non-linearity of transitions to adult life

While the youth category is challenged by various sociological reflections, the “transition to adult life” concept has been the subject of a number of studies that explore its dynamic, self-reflective and multidimensional profiles. Although this transition is already considered a classic subject of the anthropology of primitive societies (see for example Van Gennep, 1960), in fact, this process in modern societies tends to be prolonged and involve various dimensions and complexities. It is the stage not only of several opportunities but also of risks and particular vulnerabilities especially in the transition from the educational systems into the labour market (Mauritti, 2002; Pais, 2001; Guerreiro and Abrantes, 2004).

The passage into adulthood is therefore presented as a socially established trajectory, based on fields of specific opportunities and shaped by life histories and projects which, though individual, still reflect a series of social dynamics. Between structure and action, individuals are confronted by an unprecedented diversity of choices and freedoms as well as obstacles, limitations and constraints which can generate frustrations and de-structuring. On closer analysis, this transition is found to consist of an identity restructuring process that includes the wide ranging transformations taking place in the multiple spheres that form people’s lives.

The transition to adult life is therefore built on different transitions, namely: leaving school, getting a job, moving out of parents’ home, starting cohabitation and having children. Generally, this five-stage process, usually in this order, tends to be considered as the complete and linear ideal-typical transition to adult life in which this transition should be followed by additional modifications of values and lifestyles, for example in assuming certain responsibilities that overlap a predominantly hedonist view of the world.

However, the data gathered suggest that this profile of the transition to adult life varies according to the individuals and social contexts they inhabit. In other words, it is found that (1) each of the above mentioned stages is experienced differently according to the individuals' structural conditions and agencies, and can occur at different times of life; (2) the interdependence relationships and the sequence between the different stages also vary greatly and are marked by the youths' structural positions and by the cultural dispositions. There is therefore a permanent tension in the transition process to adult life between patterns of linearity and complexity, individual action and social structures (Guerreiro, Abrantes and Pereira, 2004).

On the other hand, the notions of biographic linearity and continuity are found in the young people's discourse and their life projects, in particular amongst the most qualified segments of the population. However, when faced with the empirical reality, a myriad of possible transition paths into adulthood can be seen which occurs in many cases in a non linear way. Empirical evidence, such as the extension of the educational cycles to lifelong learning, early school drop-out, the precariousness and increasing flexibility of the labour market, the diversification of the forms of conjugality or the decrease in the fertility rate suggest a diversity of trajectories. These phenomena must therefore be examined more carefully for a full understanding of the different patterns of transition to adult life.

It should also be taken into account that while this multiplicity of trajectories is a trait of modernity present in different European societies, the Portuguese case has its own specificities resulting from profound historical mutations in recent decades and the simultaneous overlap of layers of modernity and tradition in a context marked by weak State intervention with regard support for the transition to adult life (Brannen *et al.*, 2002).

A two-stage model: the right age

The transition to adult life is organised around the socially constructed notion of the existence of a deep-seated dividing line that separates youth from adulthood, called a two-stage transition, which is particularly emblematic of this generation (Lewis *et al.*, 1999; Guerreiro and Abrantes, 2004).

This form of organisation of the individual biography stands out in particular in the process of entering conjugality and parenthood. On one hand, youth is seen as a hedonist time for experimentation, right for having one or more loving relationships with varying degrees of seriousness and other experimental relationships that can have different social classifications. Between passing acquaintances, friendships and loving relationships, a triangle of easily transposed relational continuities is built. On the other hand, adulthood is seen as a stage in life that requires responsibility, "settling down" and starting one's own family. There is an underlying notion of a "psychological

barrier" that divides the age for amusement and experimentation from the age to assume family and social responsibilities. Marriage is therefore a key rite of passage that determines the end of a certain lifestyle. So it is celebrated with a bachelor/hen party, a ritual that establishes the end of a fundamentally hedonist cycle. Though this trend is observed throughout Europe, it is particularly striking in countries like Portugal where young people usually postpone leaving their parents' home until the start of conjugality.

This dichotomist conception which is widespread at the level of common sense tends to be reproduced by many of the youths interviewed, at least in terms of life plans. Many postpone their plans for conjugality and parenthood due to professional, academic or lifestyle reasons, but most tend to make plans for the time in the future when they will finally settle down. The irresistible desire to make the most of youth as a lifestyle and ideology is followed by the interiorised notion of the moment when life will be changed in a more or less distant future; this is momentarily placed "on hold" (Guerreiro and Abrantes, 2004; Guerreiro *et al.*, 2005), until opportunities or circumstances appear that allow a few steps to be taken towards the transition to adult life. This transition takes place in a process, increasingly characterised as neither linear nor irreversible, rather than at one particular moment.

From the perspective of an identity analysis, this two-stage model provides important clues. The model reveals the integrated notion of biographic continuity and the reflective project of a "self" that is capable of visualising him/herself in the future and, to a certain extent, of colonising him/herself, but that more or less consciously postpones the moment of identity reconstruction (Hockney and James, 1999). At the same time, the notion of "the right age" reveals a social construction often reinforced and controlled in the inter-peer relationship, of identity categories that tend to appear in identity "kits" that group what should or should not be done at a given moment.

However, and despite the reproduction at the representation level of this two-stage model, the transition trajectories to adult life are varied and are conjugated in different ways, which are increasingly being expressed not at specific moments but in reversible processes and trajectories. Mention is often made of the diversification of the forms of conjugality in contemporary society and the relative loss of the centrality of wedlock. Although this notion has been exacerbated at times, the co-existence of different alternative profiles of conjugality should be stressed that involve forms of cohabitation out of wedlock, cohabitation dissociated from conjugality, family rearrangements resulting from previous conjugal break-ups, as well as the constitution of homosexual couples. These have not only become more preponderant but are also more visible and accepted in contemporary society. The age at which the first experience of conjugality occurs also varies and is strongly conditioned by the social group under analysis. In some cases, it starts with a more informal period of experimenting life as a couple, perhaps with different

partners, and this tends to increasingly delay the age at which the conjugal bond is formalised. In the very short period since the dawn of the new millennium, the average age of first time marriages in Portuguese society has changed from 25.7 to 27.5 years for women and from 27.5 to 29.1 for men (INE, *Indicadores Sociais*, 2007).

As for parenthood, the fertility rate among younger age groups has declined significantly; however, the age at which mothers give birth for the first time has risen⁴ and often occurs once the other transitions to adulthood, namely the end of school life and professional insertion, have already taken place. The average age for the fertility rate has slid rapidly from 25-29 years in 2000 to 30-34 years. However, it is worth mentioning that the age of entry into parenthood is strongly conditioned by the young person's work situation. In general terms, the most qualified postpone parenthood for professional or academic reasons, considering stability at this level and as a couple a pre-requisite for parenthood. Less qualified young people tend to have children earlier and in a less stable context, revealing fewer planned strategies and expectations for building a more solid career by furthering their qualifications (Guerreiro *et al.*, 2007). Here, it should be noted that early marriages and parenthood among young people in more unfavourable circumstances persist in Portugal unlike those who have more advantageous socioeconomic conditions. Though the latter value the setting up of a family as a desirable future, they tend to prolong the period of experimental relationships and postpone significantly the age when they "settle down", get married and have children.

The two-stage model that separates youth from adulthood therefore reflects the relationship with employment, separating the educational trajectory from starting work. However, as can be seen in the next section, there are also many situations, positions and dispositions in this area.

Unfinished trajectories

The centrality and diversity of training and educational experiences is another unequivocal trait of today's youth, as opposed to that of previous generations. It is not by chance that many scholars in contemporary society have called it a "knowledge society" thereby revealing the central role it assumes in economic and cultural terms. While youth emerged largely from the expansion and the massification of the school trajectories, it should be noted that formal education or its absence has never had such a great influence on the trajectories, daily lives and projects of Portuguese youth as it does today.

4 The mothers' age for their first born has gone from an average of 26.5 in 2000 to 28.1 years of age, in 2006 (INE, 2007). There still is no official data published on the father's age.

Nowadays there are no coherent homogeneous trajectories restricted in time, but a huge array of educational experiences assured by the state and by the market and which take various forms (academic courses, professional courses, vocational training, workshops, post-graduations, industrial placements) and with a varying relationship with the labour market. People often return to education even after the start of their working life, due to a “desire to learn” and/or needs imposed by the precarious work situations — both of which are increasingly growing trends.

Seeking to make up for considerable backwardness in relation to other European societies, the secondary and higher education systems have been expanded over the past decades and there has been an exponential, albeit insufficient growth in the academic and professional qualifications of the younger generations (Almeida, Costa and Machado, 1994; Grácio, 1997; Sebastião, 1998; Figueiredo, Silva and Ferreira, 1999). As seen in the CIES research line (Almeida, Costa and Machado, 1988; Machado, Costa and Almeida, 1989; amongst others), the university experience is no longer the privilege of an elite and, despite a clearly asymmetric social recruitment base, it has enabled some segments of Portuguese society to build upward moving social trajectories, more heterogeneous social networks and new value structures.

Associated to this rise in schooling, we find that the literacy levels of young Portuguese people are higher than the older generations (Benavente *et al.*, 1996); they have more favourable socio-professional positions (Costa *et al.*, 2000), more regular reading habits (Lopes and Antunes, 2001), a closer relationship with science (Costa, Ávila and Mateus, 2002), greater awareness of environmental issues (AA. VV., 1988), greater penetration in the network society (Cardoso *et al.*, 2005), amongst other unequivocal indicators of modernity. Moreover, there is a greater predisposition and willingness to learn more, confirming the cumulative character of this phenomenon.

At the same time, the expansion and diversification of educational opportunities blurs the boundaries between being in or out of the educational system; it generates perpetually unfinished trajectories, embodied in the new expression “lifelong education”. The transformation of the economic structures has made specialisation processes, on-the-job training, sandwich courses, vocational conversion and ongoing updating and recycling to be increasingly seen as central and even decisive for the survival of companies as well as young employees. In a recent study (Guerreiro, Abrantes and Pereira, 2004), the omnipresence of training experiences and projects could be observed in the discourse of both directors and young professionals of different organisations at European level, even though there was some tension about the financial and labour overload that accompanies these learning experiences. The trend is thus for education to cease to be a stage in life coming just before the transition into adulthood and to become a permanent dimension of life in modern society though with varying intensities and modalities.

While Portugal stood out for the lack of investment made by both companies and the state in professional training systems — particularly in the period of accelerated expansion of schooling when these systems had reached their maximum in most countries — it is fair to point out that vocational training was developed considerably in the 1990s partly as a result of European Union funding (Azevedo, 2000). Its importance is now acknowledged in the discourse and trajectory of many young people, albeit as a way of “escaping unemployment” in particular among those who were initially unsuccessful in more general and academic trajectories, but also identifying the path that can lead to social and professional valorisation (Guerreiro *et al.*, 2006).

On the other hand, the centrality of education is also reflected in the social exclusion processes associated to the massive persistence of problems such as the cumulative failure and early drop out of school among many young people in Portugal. According to 2006 data, 39.2% of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years have no more than the ninth grade and do not continue with any type of schooling; this compares with an average of 15.2% in the EU-27. Amongst young people between the ages of 20 and 24 years, 50.4% have no more than basic schooling, while the European average is 22% (Eurostat, 2006). More serious still, these figures are significantly higher in certain regions of the country, social classes and ethnic groups.

With regard to this, a number of sociological studies (Benavente *et al.*, 1994; Lopes, 1996; Garcia *et al.*, 2000) have been analysing the massive size of this problem which has still not been eradicated despite the positive evolution in recent decades. They have related it to both the specific dynamics of Portuguese society and its strict and selective educational system and noted that the multiple policies launched in these fields over the years by the different governments have obtained only partial results. In fact, Portugal has particularly high school failure and drop-out rates within the different educational cycles — from basic to higher education; this suggests that the social demand made by young people and their families has not always corresponded to an effective integration in a school system, in which bastions of anachronism continue to sustain innovation projects.

The interviews made to a wide number of young people confirm that a very significant number are still not integrated in the educational system, accumulate failures and punishments, find no meaning in school work and come up against difficulties in dealing with situations and circumstances that are ultimately a motive and justification to drop out of school and enter the labour market as soon as possible and without any type of qualification (Guerreiro and Abrantes, 2004; Guerreiro *et al.*, 2006; Guerreiro, Cantante and Barroso, 2007). In many cases, these phenomena of early schooling exclusion reproduce and reinforce exclusion processes from institutions and modern authorities, drastically reducing the scope of people’s opportunities and the development processes of certain regions and social groups.

The expansion of the educational process reflects, reinforces and legitimates the scenario of rapid change, non linear trajectories and profound social inequalities that characterise contemporary Portuguese youth as we have mentioned above. In other words, it enables a growing number of young people to access to a series of resources and opportunities that only exist in advanced modern societies. However, this is done in conditions that preserve or even reinforce serious processes of social exclusion that reach very considerable segments of the young population.

Precariousness and flexibility

Professional integration processes are currently marked by a parallel process of expansion in time. Finding a job increasingly corresponds not to a fixed moment in an individual's life trajectory, but to a more or less extended period. This goes from the first "odd jobs", which may even coexist for some with the full insertion in the educational system, to the obtaining of a first permanent employment contract that allows relatively stable labour integration, even if it is accepted that accessible jobs are becoming a "job for life" less and less. Between these two extremes there is a long continuum consisting of partial and temporary integrations in the employment system. The initial integration of young people in the labour market is therefore marked by precarious and insecure labour processes that occur increasingly as informal or semi-informal systems affecting almost all socio-qualification levels whatever their specificities.

In terms of the inclusion in the labour market, recent studies by CIES researchers (Guerreiro *et al.*, 2006; Guerreiro, Cantante and Barroso, 2007), using INE data (Statistics Portugal) (Census, 1991 and 2001; *Inquérito ao Emprego* [Employment Survey], 1998 to 2007), have shown that a little less than half of the young population (42%), aged between 15 and 24 years, continues to have professional work as their main means of subsistence; the figure for the northern part of the country was particularly high where there has been only a slight decrease in recent years. However, the professional activity of young generations in the 15 to 19 year old segment has decreased significantly (from 36% to 20%). DGEEP (Directorate General of Studies, Statistics and Planning) data reveal that almost all of the latter (about 90%) are employed full time; this confirms the lack of penetration of other forms of employment which do not give it flexible employment ties (Dornelas, 2006) in the Portuguese labour market as we shall see below. Moreover, it reveals that the dual insertion in education and profession life still has little expression.

The socio-professional groups to which these young people belong clearly show the profound heterogeneity of young people's conditions in contemporary Portugal. While the majority work in administrative work and services (31.6%) and unskilled work (30.2%), a very significant segment (25%)

have taken advantage of their educational and academic qualifications and already belong to the most advantaged group (directors and middle and senior managers). The considerable rise in intellectual and scientific professionals, particularly women, is set against the residual percentage of businesspersons (4.1%); this suggests a breach in the profile of the protagonist of the corporate and scientific-technological worlds, as well as the continuation among young generations of vertical and sectorial segmentations and the so called “glass ceiling” phenomenon, from a gender standpoint.

It is worth noting that youth unemployment rates are double those for adults and grew significantly between 1998 and 2007 reaching 18.1% for young people aged between 15 and 24 years and 10.5% for 25 to 34 year olds (versus 11.6% and 7.1%, respectively, in 1998), with even higher percentages for girls. Nevertheless, few Portuguese youths say they receive unemployment benefit which is due to the instability of their precarious and spasmodic professional insertions that prevent them accessing this right. This data reflects the serious and growing insertion difficulties of the young generations in the labour market and the urgency of more incisive social policies in this sphere.

In terms of work contracts, a clear increase is seen in giving term contracts to the younger generations up to 34 years of age between 1998 and 2007 (from 19.5% to 28.1%); this is well above the averages for the overall population (12.1% and 16.7%, respectively). Different studies conducted on this matter suggest the emergence of a mutating labour market where “employment is no longer lifelong” and there tend to be semi-legal forms of hiring, as in the use of *recibos verdes* (freelance worker payment receipts), temporary work and unpaid internships to fill permanent positions. Moreover, it should be noted that the informal employment of young people in parallel economies, which has been object of qualitative study by Pais (2001), also acquires very significant proportions though precise calculation have yet to be made.

Even though the processes of precarious employment are transversal across several market segments, the data gathered indicates the continuation of significant differences. The public sector continues to enjoy specific benefits. However, a study conducted in CIES (Guerreiro, Abrantes and Pereira, 2004) already noted the increased instability of jobs in this sector; this is due to the so called “new public management”, better known as the “modernisation process of public administration”, which has resulted in freezing new permanent contracts for civil servants and the widespread use of individual employment contracts. On the other hand, it can be said that the most qualified population segments, that have difficulty in accessing employment in the first years, generally tend to build a progressive career, whereas the less qualified sectors circulate much more between disadvantageous jobs, without many opportunities for progression or even to stabilise the precarious state inherent to them.

This scenario of precarious and flexible employment and particularly the feelings of job insecurity condition other life projects of young people, notably that of parenthood, by putting the entitlement to parental leave and other benefits foreseen by law out of reach for many. Couples increasingly postpone the decision to have their first child (often the only one), in the knowledge that motherhood will impact women's consolidation of their professional careers. At the same time, mobilisation and the claiming of rights is most difficult in the more precarious sectors. At this level, there are profound asymmetries between (1) activity sectors (namely between public and private); (2) different qualification and hierarchical levels; (3) men and women. In each labour context, the individuals act in a different way, conditioned by the fields of alternatives in force and by their subjective sense of rights (Lewis, 1998) as workers.

Even though young people have appropriated and incorporated the discourse on the issue of precariousness which is usually understood negatively, they tend to build it into their own strategies, making use of a multiplicity of options and benefiting as far as possible from a situation which is in theory not favourable to them (Guerreiro *et al.*, 2006). So informal and precarious work situations are also often manipulated by the youngsters. This is seen particularly amongst those with higher qualification levels who associate the idea of flexibility to these processes as a model of going between jobs. However, yet again the idea of the two-stage model is seen here because many of them believe that a period of instability should be followed by another granting more stability, that is more compatible with starting a family and accomplishing other projects that have been postponed meanwhile.

The (re)construction of social networks

In recent years, the network metaphor has assumed an increasingly preponderant role in sociological production (Castells, 2000; Wellman, 1998). The network notion as a way of relating and structuring relations between individuals, groups and institutions provides a good way of clarifying interdependence dynamics and inter-influence. One of the main added-values of this concept has been the fact that it shows how individuals get into complex relationship networks, instead of being part of closed predefined groups. The analysis of networks therefore reveals the multiple and simultaneous insertion in different social spheres which are more or less articulated with each other.

On the other hand, the transition to adult life also tends to be a process of reconstructing social networks. While youth is usually thought of as the right theatre to establish extended social networks and different social styles (Costa, 2003), adult life is characterised by the insertion into new networks, namely related to work, and for the reconfiguration of family networks.

Hence, an examination of the transition to adult life from the standpoint of reconstructing social networks may offer interesting perspectives on the circulation between social spheres, which constitutes the foundation for the moments of change in an individual's biography.

Youth, in particular when conceived in more ideological terms, is immediately associated to friendship. By definition, being young seems to mean having a lot of friends with whom one enjoys a series of social, consumer and leisure activities connected particularly to this time of life, which simultaneously involves establishing specific places-times for interaction and the parallel production of values, codes of conduct and linguistic codes. In addition, school is an important theatre for the formation of close relationships. This is the phase of life most closely linked to the participation in cultural and social associations and movements involving a lot of socialising. However, it is important to point out that these different networks are cumulative and are asymmetrically distributed in the social arena, reproducing and highlighting very significant inequalities of resources and opportunities amongst young people. Hence, youth can also be characterised by experiences of isolation linked to the breaking of bonds and previous social integrations.

This recreational and/or participative dimension often seems to be put aside on becoming an adult, particularly after the full insertion in the labour market or entry into parenthood which imply the reorganisation of the daily routine. Some young people seem to suggest that integration in the labour market implies forming relationships that are professional rather than friendships and that having children significantly changes their social lives and brings young parents closer to others in the same situation, making them withdraw from some previously shared networks (Guerreiro *et al.*, 2006). However, this is not consensual and further studies, particularly in the often unjustly forgotten area of sociology of friendship (Santos, 1989), may supply more data on the different patterns of socialising that prevail over the course of a person's life. Some studies conducted meanwhile, also by CIES teams (Guerreiro, Mauritti and Henriques, 2007), reveal the differences between the way young people who are already autonomous from their respective families of origin construct socialising networks and solidarity in comparison with the young people that still live in their parents' home.

Therefore, the reconfiguration of the family habitat, leaving the parents' home which implies readjusting the relationship with the family of origin, and setting up one's own home and an individual family project, are also part of the transition process into adulthood. In Portugal, youths tend to leave their parents' home when they marry or begin cohabiting. The percentage of young people who leave home to live alone before getting married is only small when compared with the very high percentage in other European societies (Vasconcelos, 1998; Guerreiro, 2003). This phenomenon can be explained by economic

constraints, the lack of support structures and a singular reconstruction of the cultural patterns (Guerreiro and Abrantes, 2004).

The relationship with the family of origin is therefore one of the spheres in mutation in the passage to adult life. On one hand, the entry into adulthood is usually conceived as a process of becoming progressively independent from the parental home. However, the studies carried out with young parents reveal that the more support young working fathers/mothers receive from their parents, the better their lives are, thus demonstrating the importance of the family support networks during the first few years of parenthood (Vasconcelos, 2002; Wall, 2005). Hence, entry into adulthood is often accompanied by a new relationship of semi-dependence on the preceding generation and in the absence of alternatives provided by public policies and due to the current work regimes, may imply sharing everyday life and different strategies that foster the balance between work and private life based (also) on family support networks.

Stability projects, trajectories of uncertainty

Another pattern stands out in the above mentioned studies conducted on the young Portuguese at the turn of the century. Namely, there is a contradiction between growing desires or even demands for planning, security and well being in people's daily lives on one hand and trajectories and experiences increasingly marked by unpredictability, transition and non-linearity on the other. This contradiction is only in part solved by the so called "two-stage model", and leads to a series of obstacles and anxieties in the transition to adulthood.

In contrast to the post-modern urge for a nomadic and erratic lifestyle, research has clearly revealed the predominance of an eager desire among young people to control and plan their lives; this is quite distinct from the "urgency of the immediate" which marked the biographies and the cultural manners of the vast majority of the population until the 1970s. The emergent nomad and hedonist dispositions therefore seem to characterise a privileged minority of the population or to be confined to a transitional period before the responsibilities associated to adulthood are fully assumed.

Young people frequently cite the need for the "indispensable conditions" when questioned about their life paths. Increasingly hegemonic values of modernity such as material well-being, individual responsibility and independence, relational maturity or protected childhood are presented as prerequisites before certain decisive steps can be taken such as leaving the parents' home, getting married and, above all, having children. These decisions are therefore planned by the large majority of young people, but for many they remain on hold (for a long time), until the right conditions are met. There is a particularly marked concern about the decision to have children; previously dominated by

unpredictability, today the discourse tends to be reconfigured in terms of personal responsibility, family planning and protecting the child's well-being. Moreover, it is not unusual for young people to immediately categorise anyone who does not impose these requirements on themselves as being "reckless" which is a clear demonstration of the rapid change in the patterns of expectation and self-reflection in Portugal in recent decades (Cunha, 2000).

Obviously, this set of values is not distributed homogeneously across the young population and the objective opportunities to fulfil them even less so. While in certain groups and contexts it corresponds to the chance not to lose the quality of life already provided by one's family, in some spheres it reflects emerging expectations and opportunities for security and well-being; in yet others, however, it reveals distant and unattainable dreams given the harsh contingencies of daily life. Nevertheless, it is still common for people with fewer academic qualifications and who were unable to invest much in training to face heartbreaking problems when setting goals and plans for the future; at the same time they must accommodate themselves to a work ideal that provides few guarantees of the stability and material autonomy an adult needs to assume family and parental responsibilities, even if the very immediate consumerism of a young person still living with his/her family of origin can be satisfied (Guerreiro, Cantante and Barroso, 2007). Even so, for the theoretical frameworks that reify class-based contrasts between value scales, the empirical data seems to suggest that such expectations are found today in the large majority of the young population and are much closer than the real likelihood of converting them into life styles and practices.

In fact, there is a clear gap between the growing ambitions for security and the trends for mobility, instability and precariousness identified in the labour market. In accordance with a trend mentioned above, the labour market currently offers a succession of temporary work experiences, under-employment and unemployment to young people particularly, generating profoundly uncertain and unpredictable trajectories. In this case, the values they are required to have as an adaptation strategy are flexibility, creativity, initiative, continuous learning and a capacity for change. It is true that a segment of young workers faces unusual opportunities of economic and social promotion, but in general these involve heavy demands in terms of intense involvement, competition and pressure. In short, the deregulation of the labour market opens the field of possibilities but also the margins of risk, particularly in semi-peripheral, fragile and quite uncompetitive economies such as that of Portugal today.

This constitutes a contradiction between expectations and trajectories, aggravated by a still incipient welfare state in several spheres which leads to the prolonging of the transition process into adulthood and demonstrated by the sharp rise in the average age a young person leaves his/her parent's home, gets married and begins parenthood. Portugal was a country of early

marriage and parenthood until the 1970s, marked by a traditional and Catholic society, but in recent years marriage (4.61%) and divorce (2.2%.⁹) rates are coming close to the European averages (4.88%.⁹ and 2.0%.⁹ respectively, in EU-27) and the current birth rate is remarkably low (10.0%.⁹) even in relation to European averages (10.5%.⁹). Moreover, these averages also include the significant percentages of adolescent pregnancy and marriage; though in decline, this phenomenon is generally associated to segments of the Portuguese population that have not kept up with the improvements in economic well-being and fluxes of cultural transformation (Almeida, André and Lalanda, 2002).

Even though young generations are more open and willing to experiment e.g. leaving home and living with friends or with a conjugal partner, the truth is that the cultural tradition and above all economic security make the majority of young Portuguese people stay in their parents' home until a much later age, living in a "welfare family" system (Pais, 2001) which they only leave when getting married (Vasconcelos, 1998). Whether these new life-styles reflect more hedonist cultural dispositions or, on the contrary, growing demands for planning and well-being aggravated by uncertainty in the labour market, triggers a fertile debate among researchers.

Deregulation, cultural diversity and inequality of opportunities

In short, recent sociological studies have shown a rapid change in the life patterns, paths and plans of Portuguese youth within the framework of a society that is itself undergoing great transformation. However, they also reveal large differences and inequalities in young people's experiences and conditions that persist and have even strengthened in Portugal at the start of the 21st century, thus arousing the spectre of the "dual society" of which Sedas Nunes (1968) talked in the 1960s. The portrait painted is therefore of youth marked by enormous diversity of cultural forms and dispositions, as well as by the growing inequalities of trajectories and resources in a societal framework where advanced modern networks coexist with tradition and exclusion stimulated but also deregulated by the recent opening to the globalisation process in course.

With regard to this, subsequent studies largely confirm the diagnosis made by João Sedas Nunes (1998) a few years ago. Alongside a set of generational traits, such as the maintenance of the primacy of the family, the decline of religious practices and the discrediting and alienation of politics, he describes Portuguese youth as profoundly divided between a traditional segment that is characterised by the prevalence of relatively traditional ways of life and value systems that derive from unfavourable social origins and starting active life at an early age, and on the other hand a "modern" segment who generally prolong their student life and defined by more cosmopolitan lifestyles, greater

diversity of cultural practices and loving relationships, as well as more liberal value systems.

This general framework should not conceal but foster the exploration of the enormous heterogeneity of youth universes that meet, that fail to meet and that sometimes confront each other in the urban kaleidoscope. The disparity of conditions, practices, socialising styles and “forms of rationalising the experience” opens the way to enormous cultural wealth; however, it also generates new social integration problems particularly when associated to situations of domination and great asymmetries of opportunities and resources.

Some of these forms of young people’s expressions are widely legitimised and even valued by society today and open the doors to original forms of integration, of which the relationship with technology is just one. However, others continue to be considered marginal and illicit, generating and reflecting moral panic as well as discrimination and social exclusion processes in various spheres ranging from education to work, from family to public institutions; this can block or even de-structure the ever-complex trajectories of transition into adulthood (Guerreiro and Abrantes, 2004).

Our diagnosis of intense cultural diversity and enormous social inequality reflects and is strengthened by the way that many young immigrants who have recently arrived in the country, and an increasing number of their offspring, are integrated in cultural processes, economic systems and socialising networks that may, or not, emphasise their *ethnicity* (Machado, Matias and Leal, 2006).

It is hoped that the conclusion reached from these pages is that the different spheres of social life — education, family, work, leisure — have given rise to real pressures nowadays for some kind of deregulation of the “youth experiences”. Though a privileged few can convert these above all into unique opportunities for emancipation, they simply mean actual risks of exclusion for many others. These pressures for deregulation and exclusion are, in part, increased by global developments (Beck, 1992), but also reflect the particular way in which Portuguese society has been adapting and positioning itself in response; a striking example of this is the crystallisation and even increase in the enormous disparities in quality of life, income and educational qualifications. Youth is therefore a place for the encounter/*disencounter* of these trends and discontinuities. A building with more and more rooms but whose doors are closed to a large proportion of its inhabitants.

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