

Working Paper

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**From Old to New Structures:
A Long-term Comparison of the Transition
to Adulthood in West and East Germany**

08/2004

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Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Transition to adulthood: macro-conditions and life-course events	4
3	Institutional and macro-social changes in West and East Germany	8
4	Data, measures, and analytic strategy	11
5	Empirical results: long-term trends in the transition to adulthood	13
6	Summary and conclusion	21
7	References	23

Abstract

This paper looks at the consequences of political, institutional and market changes for life-course patterns in East and West Germany. It summarizes major institutional changes and developments on the macro level and discusses possible relationships to crucial events which mark the transition to adulthood: leaving education and training, entering the labor market, leaving home and forming unions and families. Empirical analyses draw upon detailed individual-level life-course data from the German Life History Study. The dataset includes birth cohorts between 1919 and 1971 for both East and West Germany and hence covers the historical period for the relevant events between the mid-1930s and the late 1990s.

To appear in:

Macmillan, Ross (Ed.): *The Structure of the Life Course: Standardized? Individualized? Differentiated?* *Advances in Life Course Research* 2004. New York: Elsevier.

1 Introduction

Life courses in modern societies are not merely a result of individual experiences. They are also shaped by macro-economic conditions and institutional systems located at the local, the nation-state, and even global level. Germany may be a particularly interesting case in this respect. During the 20th century, both long-term gradual change and radical disruptions can be observed, including two World Wars, division into two states following capitalist and socialist models of society, and eventual re-unification. This development has been accompanied by phases of steady economic growth as well as enduring labor-market problems. What are the consequences of political, institutional and market changes for life-course patterns? Can clear long-term trends be identified?

A fruitful way to analyze the changing structure of life courses is to look at the timing and the order of relevant events for a number of successive cohorts. This paper concentrates on crucial early events which mark the transition to adulthood: completing education and training, entering the labor market, leaving home and forming unions and families. The aim of the paper is two-fold: first, to clarify theoretical relationships between macro-social change and individual life-courses, and second, to give an account of long-term developments in the phase of transition to adulthood in East and West Germany. The focus here is not only on incidence and timing of single events but also on interdependencies between them. Empirical analyses draw upon detailed individual-level life-history data for a series of birth cohorts beginning around 1920 and covering the period between (approximately) the mid-1930s and the late 1990s.

2 Transition to adulthood: macro-conditions and life-course events

In a role-oriented perspective, the relatively stable status of a full member of society is attained during the phase of the transition to adulthood. This process has two major dimensions. Economic independence is reached by acquiring qualifications and entering gainful employment; emotional and social independence is primarily reached by leaving home and forming own families. During the transition period itself, however, social status is rather indeterminate (Eisenstadt 1964). Hence, when analyzing societies, it is not only important to know how many people finally make successful transitions, but also how extended and complex transitions are. Following a functionalist perspective, social exclusion may include some members of society not making transitions in particular spheres of life who are thus denied

access to the role of full members of society. This interpretation particularly applies if the lack of transition is involuntary. More generally, research on the transition to adulthood has the potential to learn more about general trends in society. In the first instance, we can investigate the distinctiveness of age roles. In another instance, the transition to adulthood may be fertile ground to test hypotheses of the 'individualization' of life courses as a number of important life events tend to happen within a relatively short period of time. Finally, it may tell something about links between different spheres of life within a society

It is therefore no wonder that transition to adulthood has become an important research topic in sociology (for an overview, see Shanahan 2000). While various ways to study the phenomenon have been proposed, a particularly pragmatic approach involves statistical analysis of the sequence of a whole number of seminal events which mark this transition (Modell 1989; Billari 2001). This includes leaving education, entering the labor market, leaving the parental home, forming (marital) unions and becoming a parent. Averages and other aggregate indicators allow comparisons on the collective level.¹

There is an extensive literature on determinants and historical changes of events which mark the transition to adulthood and the causal processes which drive them, like in the case of leaving the parental home (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1993; White 1994), marriage (Oppenheimer 1988; Cooney and Hogan 1991) and fertility (van de Kaa 2001), to name just a few examples. While some focus on particular events in the process of transition to adulthood separately, this paper is concerned with links between these events. Such relations have been studied between education and marriage or parenthood (Blossfeld and Huinink 1991; Marini 1984), school and work (Kerckhoff 2003), and between leaving home and educational attainment (White and Lacy 1997). Interdependent life-course patterns can, however, be rather complex compositions of a number of events, so that relationships between just two events are the norm.

While the basic idea of role transitions can be regarded as universal, it can also be expected that there is considerable variation in their actual forms between societies. This applies to both changes over time and inter-national differences. *Changes over time* reflect long-term developments during the 20th century in the transition to adulthood have been discussed mainly from a perspective of modernization and under headings like 'institutionalization' (Kohli 1985) and 'individualization' (Beck 1992) of life courses. Results from earlier research on the United

¹ An alternative approach looks at patterns of time-use at different stages of the life course (Gauthier and Furstenberg 2002).

States include increasing standardization in the sense of age grading of events for birth cohorts between 1910 and 1930 (Modell 1989), but also a growing de-standardization since the late 1960s (Buchmann 1989; Shanahan 2000).

Inter-national differences index variation in the order and timing of life course events, and ultimately the general structure of the life course across nation states. It is only recently that studies have investigated to what extent such trends are universal or nation-specific (Corijn and Klijzing 2001; Blossfeld *et al*, in press). The argument of specific trends follows the idea that systems of welfare and labor-market institutions are distinct and lead to path-dependency in outcomes (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999; Mayer 1997; Hall and Soskice 2001). Results of comparative studies, however, raise the question of explanation. In particular, in what way do nation-based institutional systems, which act as specific 'life-course regimes', determine whether and when the relevant life-course events are experienced and how they are interrelated with each other?

In this paper the main interest is on such systematic inter-national and historical differences in the transition to adulthood. Terms like '(de)institutionalization' in the discussion about historical developments highlight the importance of social rules for shaping the patterns of transition to adulthood. Our discussion will follow a model that distinguishes analytically between three kinds of macro-level conditions. The first are *direct rules*. An important sub-group of social rules can be regarded as event-related, and the transition to adulthood is probably a part of the life course where a whole number of important rules apply (Parsons 1942, Modell *et al* 1976). Such rules reference both incidence and timing of events and can be informal (like 'everyone should have children until age X'), legal norms (e.g., minimum ages for marriage) or conventions (e.g., age-graded promotions). These rules may also refer to sequences and interrelations between events, as in the case of norms like 'don't have children before marriage'.

A second set of macro-level conditions involves *indirect rules and life-course regimes*. Important as direct rules may be, their number is limited, and according to theories of modernization, and in particular individualization theory, they lose part of their relevance over time (Beck 1992). Transition events are, however, also influenced by a whole number of other rules, notably those associated with state institutions and their regulations (cf. Mayer and Müller 1986), which have consequences far beyond the issues to which they are primarily concerned. For example, formal requirements of qualification may set de-facto age limits; compulsory military service may lead to delayed entries to training and employment for men; social positions may imply particular

life-course patterns and forms of household organization; etc. It is these rather 'latent' consequences which form probably the major part of national life-course regimes shaping individual life courses.

Finally, individual behavior does not only follow collective rules but is also a function of available resources, opportunities and constraints. This illuminates the importance of *market* conditions. These conditions may also change over time. For example, it has been argued that volatility of (labor) market conditions has increased over the past few decades, leading to increasing insecurity for choices associated with the transition to adulthood (Blossfeld *et al*, in press; Kurz *et al* 2001; Tölke and Diewald 2003).

It should be noted that our distinction between these three forms of macro-level conditions is analytical and not a distinction between various fields of social action like, for example, partnership formation or the labor market. In both examples, there are various macro-level conditions setting constraints for individual behavior. Individuals are confronted with explicit age norms as well as institutional regulations, which impact on life courses more indirectly, and market fluctuations. Moreover, historical changes may be restricted to one or two of these aspects: for example, basic rules may remain constant while participation rates change. It should be further noted that the three types of determinants are not additive, but stand rather in a hierarchical relation. *If* explicit rules are salient, then indirect rules are less likely to be effective, and accepted norms of behavior have a direct and standardizing effect regardless of specific individual situations and opportunities. It is just when they lose importance that individual cost-benefit calculations based on resources, preferences and constraints come into play. From the point of view of the individual actor, this could be called a subjective 're-framing' (Esser 2002) of situations.

In addition to that, all three groups of macro-level factors, but especially institutions and socio-economic conditions, interact with each other. Institutions may not only influence individual costs and benefits (e.g., by means of different forms of taxation) which form the basis of individual calculations. They may also determine to what degree market principles apply or do not apply in fields like distribution of jobs, houses etc. This interaction can be interpreted as different degrees of '(de-)commodification' (Esping-Andersen 1990).

In the beginning of this section, two major dimensions in the transition to adulthood were identified: on the one hand, economic independence through qualification and labor-market integration and, on the other hand, emotional and social independence through household and

family formation. Under the assumption that direct norms of transitions lose relative importance across cohorts, it is likely that institutions and market conditions corresponding to these processes become more important. This highlights the theoretical importance of considering the impact of the educational system, the labor market, the housing market and, finally, the provision of childcare and household-related services. In order to understand historical developments in the transition to adulthood, it is crucial to follow changes in these institutional systems.

3 Institutional and macro-social changes in West and East Germany

Institutional developments in Germany have been the result of major political discontinuities during the 20th century. With regard to cohorts born after 1920, there are three important historical periods. The first is World War II and the immediate post-war period (1939-1948) characterized by problems of violence, shortage and a high level of insecurity. A second key period involves *institutionalization* when two German states, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), exist as representatives of opposed political systems (1949-1989) and specific institutional infrastructures are built up. A third key period involved *transformation*. This followed the German Unification and beyond (1990-1999) when West German institutions were transferred to East Germany within a short period of time, the East German economy underwent a massive restructuring and the welfare state suffered from increasing financial pressure. The following paragraphs give a very short summary of developments in the major areas of state institutions and markets (see also Mayer and Hillmert 2003).

Educational system: After World War II, the GDR built up a standardized school system, whereas in the West a differentiated system was re-established in each federal state (cf. Cortina *et al* 2003). Education and training were characterized by traditional institutions of a tripartite school system and a dual system of vocational training. Educational expansion on the secondary and tertiary level started relatively late in West Germany but overtook the GDR in the early 1970s when further increases in the number of university students was stopped by political decision. Educational expansion was of particular benefit to young women. They passed young men in their share of general education and increased their mean level of occupational qualifications considerably. In the decades after World War II, it became the norm for both

genders in both German states to attain a vocational or academic degree after leaving general schooling.

Labor market: Following World War II, the FRG followed the model of a market economy, albeit highly regulated in many respects, whereas the GDR had a planned economy where paid employment was both guaranteed and regarded as a duty for both men and women. Particularly for men, differences in chances of employment between systems was likely minimal during the period of post-war economic growth ('economic miracle'). Labor markets in the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by increasing numbers of jobs. Here, women strongly increased their (full-time) labor market participation, especially in East Germany. Education, training and labor markets were closely matched and coordinated on the basis of formal qualifications (Hillmert 2002). With recurrent economic difficulties beginning in the early 1970s, high levels of unemployment became a persistent characteristic of the West German labor market, making access to both vocational training and employment more difficult, leading to economic insecurity for individuals and increasing the risks for biographical decisions and long-term commitments. This was even much more the case after the breakdown of communism in the East and the following period of economic crisis.

Housing: After shortages in the immediate post-war period, both states invested in programs for the provision of public housing. In the FRG, most of the available housing was allocated according to market principles. The more regulated system in the GDR made housing an issue more closely connected to the political agenda, giving official privilege to particular groups like (single) parents with children (Bendit *et al* 1999). However, in both systems there were recurrent periods or regions where demand for (affordable) housing exceeded the supply.

Childcare: It was part of the political program in the GDR to facilitate the participation of mothers in gainful employment. Therefore, a comprehensive system of inexpensive childcare was established. In West Germany, gender-based policies favored men as 'breadwinners' and as a result public childcare was established relatively late and only to a minor extent, especially for children below kindergarten age. Up to the present, there have been differences in the degree of provision between West and East Germany (Frerich and Frey 1993; Hank *et al* 2001).

In addition to these institutional developments, the example of fertility indicates how individual behavior has also been associated with changes in values. The baby boom of the 1960s can be interpreted as an expression of optimistic expectations based on high rates of economic growth, especially in West Germany. There, traditional family values prevailed at least until the mid-1970s. Then, the women's and the students' movements began to question not only these traditional values but the binding character of biographical norms in general. Life arrangements, which until then had been rather experimental forms, became a kind of normative new standards, like in the case of non-marital unions as intermediate biographical stages before marriage.

Against this backdrop of major institutional changes and developments in both parts of Germany, possible consequences for the transition behavior of young men and women can be considered. Assuming that there has been a general long-term decline in the salience of norms, specifically a reduction in the binding character of event-related norms including a decline in gender differences, the relationships to state institutions and market conditions have gained relevance across cohorts.

After a period of establishing institutions of the welfare state, institutionalized life-course regimes in both East and West Germany can be expected to have been relatively stable until the late 1980s (in East Germany) or the late 1990s (in West Germany). In addition, however, market conditions have obviously become increasingly important for transitions to adulthood, gradually since the 1970s in the West and rather dramatically (after unification 1990) in the East.

Before deriving hypotheses about the development of life-course patterns, it is important to recognize that structural changes can affect cohorts differently, giving preferences to either intra-cohort mobility or changes across cohorts (Ryder 1965). Welfare arrangements and labor-market regulations in Germany are likely to have an important consequence in this regard (cf. DiPrete *et al* 1999). Historical changes will not so much affect the mid-career phase but mainly events in the early life course such as labor market entry and family formation and events in the later life course like retirement. This may lead to observable differences across cohorts particularly with regard to the transition to adulthood.

Building upon the above arguments, the guiding theses for long-term historical trends in transition patterns can be grouped into three dichotomies: 1) acceleration versus postponement of transition events; 2) individualization versus standardization of transition patterns; and 3) divergence vs. convergence of transition patterns in the two parts of Germany. With respect to

acceleration versus postponement, three periods can be distinguished. First, war and post-war insecurities likely lead to delayed transitions and heterogeneous transition patterns (1940s). Second, transitions to adulthood in times of economic prosperity and developing welfare institutions (1950s and 1960s) should happen relatively early. In a third period of the 1970s to the 1990s, important events are shifted along the life course due to longer educational careers, labor market turbulence and other perceived insecurities. This likely began in West Germany well before unification.

In terms of individualization versus standardization, again, a rather U-shaped development can be expected. After the immediate post-war period, transition patterns should be relatively standardized as a consequence of emerging institutional life-course regimes. From the 1970s onwards, however, volatile market conditions should increase inter-individual variation and a decline in interdependencies between the different events. This development is enforced by German unification, particularly in the case of the East Germany which experiences both a rapid institutional transformation and an economic crisis.

Finally, divergence between the life-course regimes in East and West Germany before 1989 should lead to increasingly different consequences for individual transition patterns. Therefore, a non-monotonic development of the transition behavior of young adults in East and West Germany since World War II can be expected. First, we expect divergence while the two German states exist. Second, we expect increased convergence for the transition behavior of young adults in East and West Germany after unification.

4 Data, measures, and analytic strategy

Empirical analyses draw upon detailed individual-level life-course data (11.280 cases) from the *German Life History Study* (Brückner and Mayer 1998; Hillmert 2003; Matthes 2003). This project consists of a series of retrospective cohort studies which have been conducted at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development since the mid-1980s. The complete dataset (see Table 1) contains monthly life-course information for selected East and West German cohorts born between 1919 and 1971. There is a rather close relationship between cohort and historical period: taking into account the typical ages of transition, this means that the period between the mid-1930s and the late 1990s is covered. For each data collection, separate samples were drawn. For the East German samples, people were classified according to their place of residence in 1990. Most of the studies included persons of German nationality only, and in order

to allow for better inter-cohort comparisons in the following analyses, only persons of German nationality were included for all of the cohorts.

Table 1: The German Life History Study: birth cohorts and corresponding historical periods

Birth cohort	Data collection in...	n(Men)	n(Women)	Transition to adulthood (approx.) during historical period...	Important historical events/periods
1919-21 (West)	1985-88	559	853	1930/40s	World War II (1939-1945)
1929-31 West	1981-83	347	361	1940/50s	Immediate Post-war period
1929-31 East	1991-92	290	302		
1939-41 West	1981-83	375	355	1950/60s	Two German states: FRG and GDR (1949-1990)
1939-41 East	1991-92	294	292		
1949-51 West	1981-83	364	369	1960/70s	
1951-53 East	1991-92	291	287	1960/70s	
1954-56 West	1989	522	485	1970s	
1959-61 West	1989	512	489	1970/80s	
1959-61 East	1991-92	266	306		
1964 West	1998-99	716	700	1980s	
1971 West	1998-99	716	619	1980/90s	German unification (FRG) and beyond (1990-)
1971 East	1996-98	322	288		

In this paper, the following crucial biographical events are selected in order to describe the transition to adulthood: a) leaving education and attaining the first vocational or academic degree; b) entering the labor market for the first time; c) leaving the parental home and forming an own household for the first time; d) forming (marital) unions for the first time; and e) becoming a parent for the first time. These singular events are significant biographical markers. For the purposes of analysis, they are defined as non-repeatable. This does not mean that they cannot be repeated in the transition to adulthood and it should be recognized that analyses of standardization and de-standardization on the basis of non-repeatable events are likely to even underestimate the degree of complexity of life courses at this stage of life.

In the following section, there are three major types of empirical analysis. First, historical trends in the *timing* of single events are measured by an inter-cohort comparison of median ages at which these events were experienced. To account for censored observations which exist particularly in cohorts where the 'observation window' between birth and interview was relatively short, all longitudinal analyses have been set up as event-history analyses (cf. Blossfeld and Rohwer 2002). The analyses of single events use as non-parametric Kaplan-Meier estimates.

Second, while comparison of the timing of the various events gives some account of the standardization of the transition period, a more direct way to investigate this is to look at *sequences* of events. This is done by looking at the relative proportions of selected sequences. Finally, *interdependencies* between events on an individual level are analyzed using semi-parametric Cox models. These transition-rate models do not require to specify a baseline hazard rate. As the aim is not to find a complete list of micro-and macro-level determinants for the various events but to look at interdependencies between them, (only) transition events are used as time-varying predictors for the other events.

Operationalization involved a number of decisions. Concerning the event of entering employment, it is required to reach stable employment in the sense of 12 months minimum duration to be counted as successful. The assumption here is that short-term jobs are not and are not experienced as economic independence. With regard to marriage, it is obvious that cohabitation has become more and more a 'functionally equivalent' state (Bumpass *et al* 1991) for younger cohorts so that marriage and cohabitation form a joint category here. As attaining the first degree and entering employment are closely connected, (only) the latter as the main event of transition to economic independence enters the multivariate models. Of interest here are effects which are in close temporal connection with the respective events. Therefore, possible effects are constrained to a period of 3 years each. Finally, the assumption with regard to becoming a parent is that for most decisions, it is rather pregnancy than actual birth which influences life decisions or is a consequence of them. Hence, the time of conception (calculated as birth date minus 9 months) is included in the models.

5 Empirical results: long-term trends in the transition to adulthood

Trends for single transition events: The literature on transitions to adulthood in West Germany provides us with results like the prolongation of school-to-work transitions during the last few decades (Hillmert 1999), a decline in marriage and fertility since the 1960s and a long-term reduction in the age of leaving the parental home (Mayer and Schwarz 1989). On the other hand, East Germans have left home earlier, but patterns of predictors tend to converge after unification (Juang *et al* 1999). Also, the ages for marriage and becoming a parent were considerably lower in the GDR compared to West Germany (Huinink and Wagner 1995). After the 'Wende' (the breakdown of socialism), there was a phase of turbulence which led to a sharp

decline in fertility; at least for first births, there has obviously been a catch-up afterwards (Kreyenfeld 2003).

The following analyses allow both to compare directly between the various transition events and the two parts of Germany on the basis of a standardized dataset. They also make it possible to identify long-term developments as they are represented by differences across a number of birth cohorts. Median ages of the transition events are displayed in Figure 1 for men and Figure 2 for women.

For men in the FRG, the median age of the event leaving home shows a long-term decline. In contrast, the median age of marriage, in combination with cohabitation, has remained rather stable across cohorts. In further contrast, leaving education, gaining stable employment, and becoming a parent have been clearly postponed since the 1960s. This can be interpreted as a consequence of educational expansion, as well as the increasing labor-market insecurities that confronted the younger cohorts. Apart from having a first child which has become increasingly unlikely until at least age 30, all of the other events are still experienced by the majority of young people.

In contrast to the West, median ages for men in the GDR have been remarkably stable across cohorts. The exception, however, is the youngest cohort, born in 1971, who experienced the relevant events mostly in unified Germany during the 1990s. For them, first marriage or cohabitation tend to happen relatively late, long after leaving education and entering employment. Household formation, in contrast, occurs at a relatively young age for this cohort and resembles the situation in West Germany.

For West German women, the major trends for women were similar to those for men with educational completion and entering the labor market becoming universal and, together with leaving home, the first events in the sequence of transition to adulthood. As leaving home and family-related events such as marriage and parenthood happen at younger ages among women, age dispersion across the complete sequence of events is considerably lower.

In East Germany, it is noticeable that the median ages of transition events have become clustered closely together in the three youngest cohorts. Again, there is a trend of leaving home early.

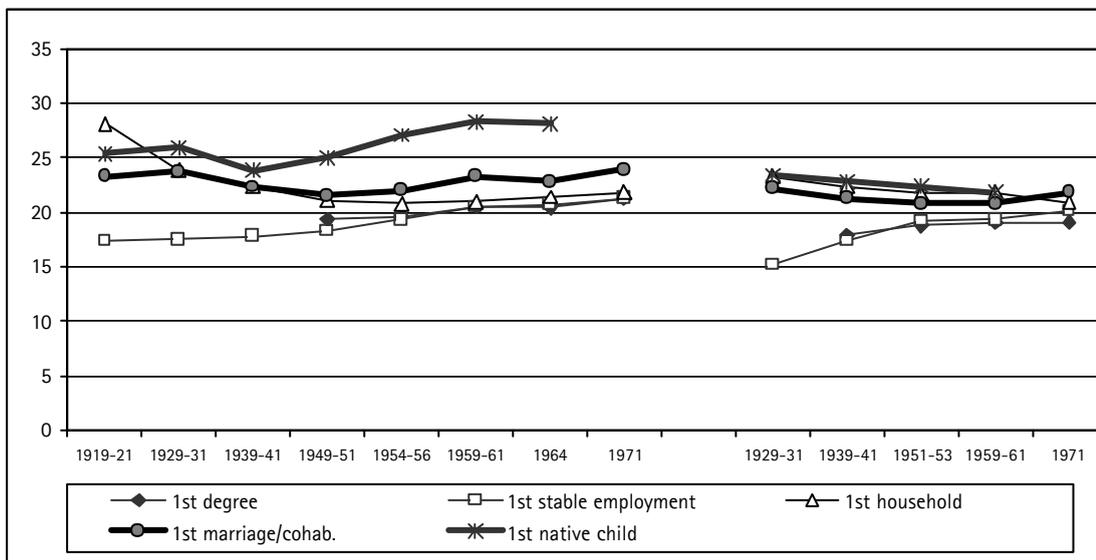
At least for West Germany, the results indicate a convergence in the transition behavior of men and women. This is primarily due to the fact that for both genders the whole set of events, at

least completing education, entering the labor market, and forming an own household, has become the standard experience.²

Figure 1: Median transition ages (in years), by cohort – Men
West Germany (left), East Germany (right)



Figure 2: Median transition ages (in years), by cohort – Women
West Germany (left), East Germany (right)



² Examination of age dispersion measured by inter-quartile distances and not displayed in this figure shows that the standardization of transition ages has, on average, been higher in East Germany. In the West, the minimum of dispersion was reached in the cohorts born around 1940, and for most events, dispersion increased moderately afterwards.

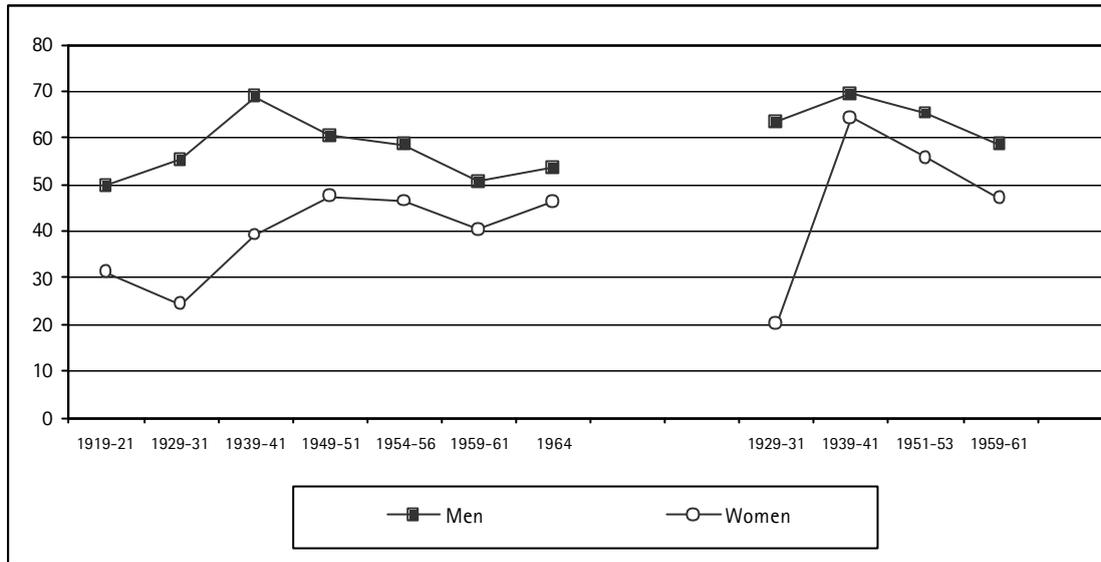
Sequences and (de-)standardization of transition patterns: The latter interpretation, based upon the analysis of single events, is confirmed when looking at sequences of events. These are displayed in Figure 3. This figure shows the proportion of men and women whose transition followed either of two orders: a) leaving education–entering (stable) employment–getting married or cohabiting–other events or b) leaving education–entering (stable) employment–forming an own household–other events. The proportion that this selection of sequences accounts for among all sequences is used as an indicator of the standardization – or concentration – of transition patterns. As this share varies across cohorts, changes of this proportion can be regarded as indicators of the standardization and de-standardization of transition patterns as processes; an increase indicates a trend towards standardization and a decrease refers to de-standardization. Although only relatively few *types* of sequences are covered by this definition, it applies to up to 70% of the empirical individual sequences in particular birth cohorts, indicating a high level of standardization there.

Standardization of sequences reached its maximum for men in the birth cohorts around 1940. Afterwards, it decreased steadily but did not fall below the level of the oldest cohorts born around 1920. A major reason for de-standardization is that an increasing number of young people formed their own household before entering the labor market. Probably, they were still dependent on external – which means, in particular, parental – resources. It should be noted that in the youngest cohort where the observation window is broad enough to apply this analysis (the 1964 West cohort), the decline in standardization has ended.

For women, standardization of transition patterns increased across the older cohorts born until around 1950, due to the rising proportions of women who complete vocational or academic education. It has however remained rather stable since, and there has been an overall convergence between the transition behavior of men and women. Developments in the GDR were different. Already in the birth cohorts around 1940, women's transition sequences reached a high level of standardization which was comparable to men's. This is, primarily, an expression of the high level of female labor-force participation. Still, over the following cohorts, the trends for men and women were parallel with a moderate decline in standardization.

Figure 3: Proportion of selected sequences in % of all sequences, by birth cohort

West Germany (left), East Germany (right)



Interdependencies between transition events: Finally, we look at interdependencies between transition events. The results from the multivariate event-history analyses for the major transition events are displayed in table 2 for West Germany and table 3 for East Germany. There are two kinds of indicators for interdependencies between transition events. The first is the patterns of effects that the time-varying covariates have, while the second is the goodness-of-fit measures for the transition-rate models. The first indicator looks qualitatively at the structure of specific relationships between the transition events, while the second is a global quantitative measure of interdependency.

In terms of general effect patterns, marriage and household formation are transitions that are much more determined by the other events than it is the case for becoming a parent. This is even seen in the older cohorts where having children was an almost universal experience. Marriage is the major predictor for household formation while household formation and becoming a parent are the major predictors for marriage. Becoming a parent in the younger cohorts who grew up in the 1960s or later is only influenced by marriage, whereas in the older cohorts, household formation was still closely connected with it. This may mean that leaving home has become a separate step in the transition to adulthood which is independent of family formation.

Equally important, there are some notable changes in effects over time. In the case of women, entering employment has become more important as a predictor for household formation and marriage. This can be interpreted as entering employment becoming an increasingly normal step in female life courses. At the same time, having a first child has lost its impact on household formation among women. An interesting exception is the youngest cohort (1971) in East Germany where becoming a (possibly single) parent significantly increases the probability of forming an own household soon. For men, significant effects of first employment on household union formation are visible for the cohorts born around 1950 to 1960, but are no longer seen among the youngest cohorts.

Finally, the magnitude of interdependencies is seen with respect to the size of the goodness of fit statistics. In West Germany, multivariate interdependence is greatest for the birth cohorts around 1940. For the birth cohorts around 1940 and 1960, there was a marked decline. This indicates that the phase of transition became 'looser' in the sense that making one step in the transition to adulthood such as leaving home had less and less impact on the likelihood of making another transition. Since the 1980s, however, this decline has obviously come to an end and appears to have reversed itself, a pattern which resembles the development of the de-standardization of sequences. In contrast, East Germany has seen a rather continuous decline in interdependence across the three oldest cohorts, which again has been followed by relative stability. There is also an important development regarding gender differences in interdependence. For the older birth cohorts until around 1940, men's transition events tended to be more interdependent than women's. Since then, this difference has disappeared, at least in West Germany.

Table 2: Interdependencies between transition events (coefficients and goodness-of-fit statistics of semi-parametric Cox models), by birth cohort

West Germany

Birth Cohort	1919-21	1929-31	1939-41	1949-51	1954-56	1959-61	1964	1971
First household								
Men								
1 st employment				+	+	+		
1 st marriage/cohab.	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
1 st child	-	+		+		++		
Pseudo-R ²	0.14	0.14	0.17	0.13	0.06	0.04	0.09	0.08
Women								
1 st employment						+		+
1 st marriage/cohab.	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
1 st child	-	+	+	+	+			
Pseudo-R ²	0.10	0.14	0.14	0.11	0.07	0.04	0.12	0.13
First marriage/ cohabitation								
Men								
1 st employment				+	+			
1 st household	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
1 st child	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Pseudo-R ²	0.21	0.17	0.21	0.13	0.08	0.07	0.09	0.11
Women								
1 st employment					+	+	+	++
1 st household	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
1 st child	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Pseudo-R ²	0.14	0.17	0.15	0.13	0.10	0.08	0.08	0.11
First child								
Men								
1 st employment								
1 st household	+	+						
1 st marriage/cohab.	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Pseudo-R ²	0.09	0.07	0.08	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.02	0.05
Women								
1 st employment								
1 st household	+	++						
1 st marriage/cohab.	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Pseudo-R ²	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02

+/-: significant effects ($p < 0.05$)

++ / --: significant and large effects $> +/-0.7$ (i.e., odds ratio > 2)

Pseudo-R² (McFadden): $1 - \log L(\text{final model}) / \log L(\text{null model})$

Source: German Life History Study, own calculations

Table 3: Interdependencies between transition events (coefficients and goodness-of-fit statistics of semi-parametric Cox models), by birth cohort

East Germany

Birth Cohort	1929-31	1939-41	1951-53	1959-61	1971
First household					
Men					
1 st employment			+	+	
1 st marriage/cohab.	++	++	++	++	++
1 st child	+				
Pseudo-R ²	0.19	0.16	0.15	0.13	0.10
Women					
1 st employment	-			+	
1 st marriage/cohab.	++	++	++	++	++
1 st child					++
Pseudo-R ²	0.22	0.17	0.13	0.11	0.12
First marriage/ cohabitation					
Men					
1 st employment					
1 st household	++	++	++	++	++
1 st child	++	++	++	++	++
Pseudo-R ²	0.24	0.21	0.15	0.12	0.13
Women					
1 st employment					+
1 st household	++	++	++	++	++
1 st child	++	++	++	++	++
Pseudo-R ²	0.19	0.19	0.12	0.11	0.12
First child					
Men					
1 st employment					+
1 st household					
1 st marriage/cohab.	++	++	++	++	++
Pseudo-R ²	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.06	0.08
Women					
1 st employment	-			+	
1 st household				-	
1 st marriage/cohab.	++	++	++	++	+
Pseudo-R ²	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.01

+/-: significant effects ($p < 0.05$)

++ / --: significant and large effects $> +/-0.7$ (i.e., odds ratio > 2)

Pseudo-R² (McFadden): $1 - \log L(\text{final model}) / \log L(\text{null model})$

Source: German Life History Study, own calculations

6 Summary and conclusion

The analyses of this paper have investigated long-term changes in the transition to adulthood for young men and women in both parts of Germany. There are a number of important conclusions. In terms of changes in the timing of life course events, the issue of acceleration versus postponement, there is only one event which has, in the long run and on average, been experienced at younger ages in the younger cohorts than in the older cohorts. This is leaving the parental home. In West Germany particularly since the 1970s, other important transition events have been postponed, they have shifted along the life course due to longer educational careers, labor market turbulence and perceived insecurities. In the GDR, such market mechanisms were neutralized by the state to a larger extent and transitions to adulthood happened earlier in the life course, and remained stable across cohorts. There are a number of indications, however, that German unification has had a major impact on transition patterns in East Germany. This is most clearly seen in the youngest East German cohort in the sample, particularly with respect to the postponement of fertility.

In the long run, there have obviously been an increasing inter-individual variation and a decline in interdependencies between the different events. This echoes arguments about the increasing individualization of the life course. Though this trend is true for both parts of Germany, it has been more significant in West Germany. There is some plausibility for the assumption that this kind of individualization has often relied on 'external' resources provided not by the young people themselves, but by their parents. Still, various analyses indicate that the process of de-standardization has come to an end in the youngest cohorts and may actually have reversed.

Different life-course regimes in East and West Germany have also had distinctly different consequences for individual life courses with the consequence of revealing both divergence and convergence in life course patterns. Transitions to adulthood were, in terms of timing, much more standardized in the GDR than in the FRG, and there was more stability across cohorts. This led to an increasing divergence of transition patterns between the two German states. However, transition patterns seem to have converged after unification, although the observation window in these analyses may be rather short for definite conclusions.

Another trend is another kind of convergence, namely convergence in the transition behavior of young men and women since World War II. There are still considerable differences in ages at various transitions, but completing education by attaining a degree, entering the labor market,

and forming an own household – even if not associated with union-formation and parenthood – have become usual steps in the transition patterns of both young men and women.

Finally, I offer some theoretical conclusions. It is obvious that, with a relative lack of deterministic norms of behavior in modern societies, institutions have tremendous significance for shape and structure of the transition to adulthood. This is especially apparent in the divergent developments of life course patterns under the conditions of two different German states. On the other hand, institutional rules do not determine individual behavior. In particular, they cannot really explain the trend to postpone life-course transitions in the younger cohorts. Rather, (labor) market conditions have obviously had major consequences for the timing of and the inter-relation between transition events. There are, however, different links to institutions in West and East Germany. In the West, market conditions have gradually become more important over the last few decades while institutions have been relatively stable; in the East, they are clearly a result of massive institutional change after 1989.

7 References

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