The Diversity of Pathways to Adulthood: a holistic approach

Some issues on transition to adulthood are often neglected by traditional atomistic approach using markers/events (Shanahan, 2000):

- markers are getting more difficult to bound clearly (leaving parental home, first stable job…), more frequently reversible or sometimes never occur (marriage, stable job…)
- the trajectories of young adults are becoming more diverse (individualization)
- familial and occupational spheres are closely linked
- aggregated results partially hide the heterogeneity of individual pathways

⇒ Necessity for a holistic approach (Billari, 2001), using trajectories as units of analysis (<trajectory as a whole>)

METHOD

Sequence analysis

1. Individual trajectories are built as sequences of states, integrating residential, familial and occupational situations
2. Grouped together according to their degree of similarity by Optimal Matching Analysis (OMA)
3. Hierarchical Clustering Analysis (HCA)

Typology of trajectories

Optimal Matching Analysis (OMA)

Introduced in social sciences by Andrew Abbott in the 80’s

Principle: measuring dissimilarity between pairs of sequences by calculating the cost of the transformation of one sequence into the other

3 basic operations: Insertion; Deletion; Substitution

Each operation is assigned a cost

The distance between two sequences is equal to the minimal cost needed to transform one sequence into the other

DATA

Families and employers survey, France, INED-INSEE, 2004-2005

Annual calendar retracing 4 distinct trajectories:
- Residential: ever lived in a self-paid accommodation; never
- Conjugal: single, never cohabitant; married, separated
- Parental: 0; 1; 2 or more children
- Occupational: student; salaried student; national service; unemployed; part-time worker, short spells, plant mobile, other

⇒ One multi-dimensional trajectory, integrating the four dimensions

Population selected: individual older than 20 (born between 1964 and 1969)

2758 women and 2486 men histories between 18 and 35

† Differentiation* of pathways to adulthood, by sex and cohort

Women’s 5-cluster typology

- Traditional Full-time homemakers
- Working Married Children
- Unmarried Union Frequent separated spells Late childbirthing
- Late leaving from parental home Long studies No union No child
- Traditions, Moderns, Working singles

roughly similar types with different proportions:
Traditionals, Moderns, Working singles

distinct types:
Homemakers (women), Slow starters (men)

Men’s 5-cluster typology

- Unmarried late union Frequent separated spells Late childbirthing
- Very late leaving from parental home Long studies and chaotic career Late marriage and frequent separated spells Late childbirthing
- Married 1 child
- Several traditions 
- Married 2 children or more

† Differentiation (Brückner, Mayer, 2005) is measured by a turbulence index (Elzinga, 2006), taking into account the number of transitions, the number of distinct states and the variation in duration of events

Differentiation* of pathways to adulthood is increasing, for both sexes
Women’s pathways to adulthood are more differentiated than men’s

Sequential approach and typologies give a new insight into pathways to adulthood and their evolution:

- Differentiation of pathways is increasing
- Distinct patterns of pathways come to light, with differences between women and men
- Traditional pathways (marriage, children, work) are being replaced by modern ones (unmarried unions, late childbirthing, work)

Nicolas ROBETTE
INED, France

PAA, April 2008