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New, precarious adulthood: kidults in the ‘crowded nest’

Abstract

In the period of young adulthood, i.e., between ages 18–20 and 30–35, the coupling of the duties, goals, and ambitions connected with various life activities takes place, these being in education, participation in the labour market, self-supporting a household, starting a family, becoming a parent, and active participation in the social life. The social and cultural as well as economic changes that are occurring nowadays affect the course of family life as well as the stages of individual development. One of these stages refers to a young adult leaving the family home. However, it is more and more often the case that this moment gets deferred. Research conducted by sociologists and demographers in the recent years shows that the growing share of young people in industrialised countries choose to live with their parents in spite of their adult age. The increase in young adults staying in the family home in the recent years has led to the term ‘nesters’ being coined for them, while the effect of their bond with their guardians being stretched in time is now referred to as the ‘crowded nest’ or ‘cluttered nest’. This article offers an insight into one of the components of the process of reaching adulthood, namely leaving parental home. The qualitative study (carried out in 2012 and 2013) combines statistical analyses and personal interviews; its results are based on 42 interviews with women and men aged between 27 and 38 who live with their parents in Warsaw, Poland. This interview-based analysis focuses on demonstrating the process of nesting of young adults and the interviewed persons’ perception of this behaviour.

Keywords: nesters, adulthood, young adults, kidults, transition to adulthood, generation

Introduction

Globalisation, consumerism, and media culture all cause the universalisation of problems and questions related to adulthood. The process of reaching adulthood is changing fundamentally when compared with previous generations (White, Wyn & Robards, 2017). Today's world is full of risks and uncertainty, and as such requires young adults to be particularly open and reflexive as well as to have an active attitude with regard to planning and creating their own, individualised 'choice biography' that is subordinate to the 'tyranny of success' (Beck, 2002). Reaching adulthood is a stage of adjusting to the environment and to its rules. It is also a period of life course individualisation, which manifests through constructs created reflexively by the interviewed person with the purpose of self-defining one's own identity. Trying to take responsibility for their life choices, young people fail to recognise the explicitness of the scope and the way of fulfilling developmental tasks. Strong claims have been made with regard to individual life courses being de-institutionalised or de-standardised nowadays (Lash & Urry, 1987; Heelas, Lash, Scott & Morris, 1996). Most sociologists and many life-course social scientists consider the term 'life course' to be more flexible than other prevalent terms that are often used by traditional psychologists and biologists, such as 'life-span development' or 'life cycle'. 'Life course' and 'life courses' are the preferred terms here as life is no longer about clear, linear, chronological trajectories that replicate themselves with each generation in a circular manner. In modern societies, young people are often faced with endless choices with regard to their identities and lifestyles (Green, 2017). The life course perspective is a commonly used conceptual approach within studies on adulthood (Elder, 1977; 1994; Giele & Elder, 1998). The representatives of this approach (research perspective) capture human life as a "sequence of socially defined events and roles (...) that do not necessarily proceed in a given sequence but that constitute the sum total of the person's actual experience over time" (Giele & Elder, 1998, p. 22).

Neither youth nor adulthood refers to anything solid, real or natural; rather these are problematised processes that are endowed with numerous social meanings (Talbert & Lesko, 2012). Reaching adulthood – understood in terms of full participation in the social life – constitutes the result of decisions and actions taken in various spheres. Adulthood is a social category that is constructed through particular policies, institutions, and legal regulations, as well as by young people themselves as they take different decisions and adopt life strategies (Grotowska-Leder, Rek-Woźniak & Kudlińska, 2016). A transition into adulthood has been subjected by

postponement and extension, which take place in accordance with individual preferences and abilities within the moratorium (Erikson, 1997; Arnett, 2004).

The article concerns one of the behaviours that create the so-called 'transition to adulthood', i.e., kidults leaving the family nest. The transition to adulthood entails other behaviours as well, namely completing formal education, entering the labour market and taking the first job, developing a relationship, or becoming a parent. Demographers capture these behaviours in terms of given events occurring and having a time sequence (see Billari, 2004; Liefbroer & Toulemon, 2010; Billari & Liefbroer, 2010; Iacovou & Skew, 2010; Kotowska, 2012). Changes in patterns of the transition to adulthood are defined by the distribution in time and sequences of these events. They illustrate the specific stage of the life course. At the same time, more and more attention is paid to the length of time between those demographic events and their recursive character, as well as the economic and socio-cultural context of the occurrence of given patterns of transition to adulthood (see Aassve, Billari & Piccarella, 2007; Elzinga & Liefbroer, 2007; Billari & Liefbroer, 2010; Vitali, 2010; Robette, 2010).

In general, demographers refer to the event-based-concept approach, where of utmost significance are: leaving the family home, developing a relationship (cohabitation, marriage), or giving birth to the first child. Completing education, getting the first job, leaving the family home and managing a self-supporting household, entering into a marriage, or having a baby/becoming a parent – nowadays all these events seem to occur later and later in life, which results in the process of becoming an adult being stretched over the period between ages 18 and 29 (Arnett, 2000). In the source literature, these indicative behaviours are called the 'Big Five' and considered to be the social determinants/components of adulthood (Settersten, 2011). Within this classic approach, reaching adulthood entails fulfilling the five above-mentioned conditions. However, it is difficult to determine whether attaining adulthood translates into undertaking all these tasks, or perhaps only one behaviour that is fundamental to a given stage. A partial elimination of the traditionally functioning procedures and rituals with regard to the transition into adulthood has occurred. Limitations – coming from the labour market predominantly – resulted in the traditional indicators of adulthood becoming difficult to obtain for many young people. This leads to the decisions about entering into a marriage and becoming a parent being taken later and later in the life course. The economic situation while entering the labour market directly translates into changing family-related behaviours.

This article's considerations focus on one of the social markers of adulthood, i.e., kidults leaving the family home, although this is closely related to the other events and behaviours that the 'Big Five' involves. All of them are subject to the same changes that influence the process of nesting: extending the period of education, entering the labour

market later and receiving income that is sufficient for creating one's own household (difficulties with taking on the first job, instability of employment), postponing the development of a relationship and the family as well as, consequently, becoming an adult. Postponement is the principal feature of these events and behaviours. Changes in social norms and life aspirations – including expectations with regard to consumerist standards – as well as changes in relationships within family structures all have enormous significance in the process described herein. In the era of individualisation – accompanied by labour market uncertainty and job instability – a great reluctance towards taking on commitments is visible. In the public sphere, young adults are presented as 'reaching adulthood', 'prolonging their youth', 'not being fully adult' (since they have not fulfilled all the markers of adulthood), or even 'kidults' (since they fail to leave the family home). Those researchers who are looking for the criteria of 'new adulthood' tend to wonder whether an extended transition to adulthood is required and whether young adults are simply irresponsible 'kidults', or whether they are structurally and socio-economically constrained in their choices instead. Through his analyses of psycho-social and sociological literature, advertising, and the Anglo-American culture, Keith Hayward (2013) coined the concept of 'life stage dissolution', which is associated with the bidirectionality of both 'adulthood' and 'infantilisation'. Nesters are included in the group of 'kidults', i.e., those who have fully matured in the physical and legal terms, but remain mentally or financially dependent on their parents, thus still being children. In Japan (*hikikomori* or *parasaito shinguru*) and China (*diaosi*), there is a growing group of men that are considered to be outcasts – a group of 'lonely parasites' that fail to leave their parents' home (Zimbardo & Coulombe, 2015). In Germany, in turn, the term *nesthockern* means as much as 'illegal residents of a nest'. In the Polish context, one can speak of 'mummy's boys' (*maminsynki*), 'living off parents forever' (*żyć na garnuszkę rodziców*), and – in the recent years – 'nesters' (*gniazdownicy*), the latter one being rooted in the zoological nomenclature (nesters are those species of animals whose offspring are unable to live independently at birth, thus requiring the parents' care, which is why they will stay in the nest for some time). In Italy, Greece, and Portugal, the model of prolonged co-residing with one's parents is an accepted norm. Young adults (20–30 years old) who are called the 'Big Babies' (*Bamboccioni*) tend to reject the idea of permanent or full-time jobs, and continue to be financially dependent on their parents, who provide them with a place to live as well as all amenities. In the United Kingdom, in turn, such people are called 'NEETs' (i.e., 'not in education, employment, or training') or 'KIPPERS' (i.e., 'kids in parents' pockets', meaning 'eroding' retirement savings). In France, the so-called 'Tanguy syndrome' is mentioned in this context; the term is taken from the name of a French film character, a young man who is stuck in boyhood

and who sues his parents so that he retains the right to stay in their home. In the United States common terms for young adults who are moving back into their family homes and co-residing with their parents again include a 'previously launched adult', an 'incompletely launched adult', and 'boomerang kids' (Schnaiberg & Goldenberg, 1989). These are people who have previously moved out in order to take up studies, but were economically forced to come back under the parents' roof after graduation. Already in the 1980s, American sociologists directed attention to the 'cluttered nest syndrome', which is associated with the emotions experienced within the family with regard to either the unexpected return of the kidult or the prolonged and persistent stay in spite of the passing years (Forsyth & Eddington, 1989). The situation of the 'crowded nest' is also known in European countries. In the past, it was difficult for parents to fill the void after their child had left the nest; today, however, they tend to reach out to a psychologist and ask for advice as to how to organise their shared life and what to do for their children so that they could finally leave the nest (Konstam, 2013; Burns, 2019). It turns out that both 'nesters' and 'boomerang kids' represent common and frequent tendencies rather than a temporary phenomenon.

The lifestyle connected with delaying the moment of entering into a marriage combined with co-residing with the family of origin has become popular with Europeans. Not taking up permanent employment as well as continuing education result in many young people being financially supported by their parents for long years. The social acceptance of this postponement – or moratorium – is most often connected with the particular situation of a given young person, i.e., it is considered to be a norm when the young adult continues education and remains consistent in it. Then, reaching adulthood can be understood as translating into getting a job. Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand research confirms that it is the period when parents are a major source of financial support to kidults (Andres & Wyn, 2010; White et al., 2017). Similarly, parents provide their adult children with care and material goods in European countries, too. Irrespective of whether young people live with parents or whether they have already moved out, they reside in an intermediate stage between independence and dependence with regard to various spheres of life (Lahelma & Gordon, 2008). Researchers argue that young people in Europe now live in simultaneous but conflicting realities between dependence and independence, which results in them feeling as if they were both adult and nonadult at the same time (Du-Bois-Reymond & Stauber, 2016). The mentioned authors called this the 'yo-yo-isation' of the post-traditional life. In turn, Swen Mørch and Helle Anderson (2006) claim that contemporary Scandinavian families more and more often operate alongside friendship networks so that support and advice can be provided and received in a cooperative rather than hierarchical way. The authors suggest that traditional

family structures that are based on one-directional 'transaction' from parents towards children have been replaced with more fluxional relationships between generations, where "the rules and the roles are changeable" (Mørch & Anderson, 2006, 80).

According to the researchers of the phenomenon, the necessity arises to re-investigate the criteria/symptoms of 'new adulthood' as well as the need to redefine the categories that are used for exploring the contemporary stages of the transition into this phase of the life course (Hartmann & Swartz, 2006). New ways of describing and defining adulthood will make it possible to reveal a new face of young people's biographies, where phases of life do not necessarily follow one another in a linear way, but rather they can overlap and interpermeate along with the values and lifestyles that are ascribed to various stages of life-course trajectories. Selected research results presented in this article as well as the results of the sociological qualitative study based on semi-structured individual interviews with nesters in Poland will broaden the knowledge of young adults and the process of transitioning into adulthood in the contemporary social reality. In the era of socio-cultural, economic, and technological transformations – which affect the pace and the quality of the human condition – a necessity arises to investigate the ways in which young people tend to define adulthood, what tasks and difficulties they discern in this period, as well as what mental and social properties constitute their self-image as an adult. As it has already been mentioned, this article pays special attention to particularly one of the components of the transition to adulthood (or – in other words – becoming an adult person), namely leaving the family home.

Empirical evidence on nesting in Poland and other countries

Changes in family behaviours are at the bottom of demographic transformations that have been observed in Europe since the 1960s and called the second demographic transition (van de Kaa, 2004), which is leading to new demography of Europe. These changes are characterised by common trends that are visible in Poland, such as: postponement of both developing relationships and giving birth to the first child, decline in fertility, deinstitutionalisation of the family (which manifests through a decreased level of significance of marriage as an institution for the sake of its instrumental treatment as a contract facilitating the functioning of a couple, particularly one with children), and destabilisation of the family (which manifests through the increasing danger of relationship breakdown, also as a result of more and more frequent informal relationships as a form of starting a family).

When referring to the age when leaving family home in European countries, one can differentiate between three essential patterns: early leaving the family home, late leaving the family home, and a change in the sequence of events, namely starting one's own family in the parents' household, often described as 'partnering in a parental household' (Billari, 2004; Saraceno, Olagnero & Torrioni, 2005). Generally speaking, leaving the family home early occurs in the countries of Northern Europe, while leaving the family home late is typical of Southern Europe. The age of leaving the parental household in the rest of European countries is somewhere in between those two extreme groups, although young people in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe tend to leave family home later than young people in Western Europe. Moreover, the third pattern – starting one's own family before leaving the parental household – is typical of Central and Eastern Europe, where leaving one's family home relatively late co-occurs with a relatively early age of entering into first marriages, that being in spite of explicit postponing the decision about the first relationship (Saraceno, 2008; Kotowska, Matysiak, Pailhé, Solaz, Styrac & Vignoli, 2010; Billari & Liefbroer, 2010; Iacovou & Skew, 2010). The analyses of behaviours of women show that despite the changes in behaviours concerning leaving the family home – which can be illustrated by, e.g., the decline in leaving the parental household by women from cohorts 1950–1969 when compared with women born in the years 1930–1939 as well as when taking into account the reversal of this trend in the cohorts from the years 1970–1979 (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010) – the above-mentioned patterns of leaving the family home in individual countries do persist. Among the three demographic events that have been considered as the 'markers' of transition to adulthood, the age of leaving the parental household was undergoing the weakest changes with time, while the occurrence of the other events – i.e., creating first relationships and giving birth to the first child – has changed considerably, reflecting changes in the pattern of transitioning to adulthood. As Francesco C. Billari and Aart C. Liefbroer (2010) suggest, changes in behaviours in this phase of life course reflect transfigurations of the pattern of transitioning to adulthood, namely from that in the 1950s and 1960s – described as "early, contracted and simple" – to the new one, described as "late, protracted and complex". The latter of which is gradually spreading across Europe, reflecting changes concerning the family, particularly the postponement and the deinstitutionalisation and destabilisation of the family. The diversity of changes in time as well as differing extents of their intensity determine the differences in the tenor of these transfigurations. The common features of the pattern of transitioning to adulthood in Europe include the destandardisation and diversification of behaviours, the postponement of – and changes in – the sequence of events, as well as the loosening of links between them all (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010; Iacovou & Skew, 2010; Kotowska, 2012; Schwanitz, 2017).

After the year 1989, the economic and social transformations in Poland have contributed to family-related behaviours, including leaving the parental home. The phenomenon of deferring the separation from the family of origin – called ‘nesting’ – is becoming more and more popular. In general, before the year 1989 it was common for adults in Poland to stay with their parents even after they had entered into marriages. In the 1970s, 15% of women aged 21–47 and living in cities managed shared households with their parents/one parent; importantly, among women aged 21–34 the percentage was five times higher than among women aged 35–47 (Piotrowski, 1970). In the post-transformational reality of the 1990s, the pace of adolescents moving out did not increase; as demographers tend to emphasise, the population of elderly parents living with their children and supporting them is even rising (Szukalski, 2004). Many young people do not seem to cope with the illegibility of social norms as well as the cultural pressure to achieve success. Krystyna Szafraniec points to the syndrome of the ‘abandoned generation’ that is forced to rely on individual solutions and choices. On the one hand, it shapes self-reliance and individualism, but on the other hand, it entails the risk of hasty decisions followed by disappointments, especially in places “where the readiness to take up new challenges is not great, but the aspirations are high” (Szafraniec, 2012, p. 305). According to the data from Statistics Poland (GUS, 2018), 44% of Poles aged 25–34 (including those who are single) shared the roof with the older generation in 2013. It is eight percentage points more than in 2005. Currently, 38% of adult Poles claim that in their close family there is at least one adult person who has not entered into a marriage and thus still lives with the parents. Nesting is affected by changes in family – related behaviours, which are reflected in relevant demographic indicators: declining marriage rates, increasing mean age of the first marriage, decreasing first birth rates and increasing mean age of first birth.

The reports of the Centre for Public Opinion Research in 2005 and 2017 give attention to the percentage rise in the number of people who remain in the ‘family nest’ when aged 25–44 on the one hand, and the percentage drop in the share of younger people (aged 18–24) and older people (over 45 years old) in the same context. Among adults who are dependent on their parents with regard to housing, one-third were aged 25–34 (29% in 2005 and 34% in 2017). Both in 2005 and 2017, adults living with their parents did have a job and within 12 years this percentage increased from 33% to 57%. Among adults co-residing with their parents 66% did not have a partner, while 24% had a partner and remained in a stable non-formalised relationship, but did not live with the partner (CBOS, 2005; CBOS, 2017). The *Generations and Gender Survey in Poland* reveals that young generations (born between 1975 and 1979) tend to remain in education longer than their parents did, including the situation when they continue their education after they have started working. They also seem to form

families increasingly late nowadays. Also, men tend to leave the parental home later than women do (Kotowska, Matysiak & Mynarska, 2016).

The Polish public opinion research shows a growing number of kidults living with their parents and being continually financially supported by them. As to the reasons for this situation, nesters themselves mention economic factors, namely a lack of own accommodation (42%), a lack of money (16%), a lack of employment (8%), and lower costs of living (2%). Nearly 30% of young adults who are single and who have not left the 'family nest' continue to be completely financially dependent on their parents. Almost half of the group (47%) does not need material aid, as it has sufficient means of support to provide for themselves; and yet, they do not seek self-reliance with regard to housing. Every fourth adult living with the parents (23%) is partially financially dependent on them. Education (secondary or higher) and the obligations connected with it are the reason for the housing dependence of 42% of adults within the studied group. One-fourth of them delay starting an independent life because of comforts (24%) or laziness (2%), while another one-fourth do this because of emotional dependencies, feeling the bond, and the willingness to live with the parents (23%) (CBOS, 2017).

The age of maturity, which in Poland is when one turns 18 years old, is not a moment that stops or weakens the parents' help towards the child. 59% of Poles who were asked about how long parents should provide for their children claimed that this kind of help was always needed, while 24% pointed to the moment of the child becoming independent – meaning getting a profession and a job – as the moment that exempts the parents from helping the child (CBOS, 1998). Even among young adults aged 18–35 and having a full-time employment contract, as many as 39% still live with their parents. This can be due to the fact that they either have insufficient income to live independently, or are fearful of 'adult' costs of living and the possible consequences connected with covering them. Among those working based on fee-for-tasks agreements or specific-task contracts, the percentage of adults co-residing with their parents is even higher, namely 62%. In this case, the lack of security and continuity of work seems to be decisive (Millward Brown, 2014). The results of the survey carried out by the CBOS in 2017 allow one to assume that comfort, feeling the bond with the parents, and the emotional dependencies connected with it are nowadays more and more often mentioned as the reasons for delaying the moment of moving out of the family home. Continuing education is the reason for housing dependency that is more frequent with women than with men, as is also the case with one's own disease and the lack of self-reliance. On the other hand, emotional dependency on the parents, the necessity to help them, and not having one's own family are all reasons that are more often ascribed to men. The reasons for remaining

in the ‘family nest’ differ depending on the age, too. In the group of people aged 18–24, continued education is mentioned most frequently as the reason for the housing dependency. However, the reasons for adults aged 25–34 living with their parents seem to be distinct. Within this age bracket, the most often mentioned reason is the lack of own place – on the one hand, and good housing conditions in the family home – on the other. Among people who are single and already turned 35 years old, remaining in the family home is predominantly caused by comfort and the lack of own lodging (CBOS, 2017).

The tradition of multigenerational families and houses results in countrymen living with their parents much more often (69%) than city residents do, which is connected – among other things – with inheriting the homestead. Moreover, houses in rural areas are bigger than urban units. Therefore, living with one’s own parents in the countryside can be a natural choice, although also in big cities the percentage of young adults co-residing with their parents is still high, being 27% in cities above 500 thousand inhabitants and 38% in cities between 100 and 499 thousand inhabitants (Millward Brown, 2014).

The report *Poland in the European Union 2018* by GUS presents data on the so-called ‘nesting index’, i.e., the percentage of people aged 25–34 (the data concerned all the European countries) and living with their parents. In 2016, the EU average was 16.6%. The lowest value indicators were identified in the Scandinavian countries, where they do not exceed 10%. The nesting index is higher (10–24.9%) in Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Austria, and Estonia, reaching over 25% in Ireland, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Lithuania, and Latvia. Portugal, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria all seem to be placed at a similar level to Poland, namely 40–49.9% (GUS, 2018).

Eurostat has been assessing for a long time the share of young residents of individual countries of the Old Continent who still live with their parents. It turns out that in the European Union 29% of people aged 25–34 still live with their parents (35% men and 22% women; the data was gathered in 2017). According to Eurostat, the share of Poles co-residing with their parents amounts to 44.7% of the population of people aged 25–34 (44% are men and 30% are women). In Europe, only six countries have a higher index: Portugal, Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, Slovakia, and Croatia. The average age of leaving the family home in Poland (28–29 years) was higher than the European Union average (26 years). The residents of Italy, Slovakia, and Malta remain in the ‘family nest’ the longest. It turns out that the Swedes are the quickest in moving out of the family home (before turning 19 years old), while the inhabitants of Luxembourg, Denmark, and Finland do this before turning 23 years old. On the other hand, and as already mentioned, the inhabitants of Croatia, Slovakia, Malta, and Italy move

out of the family home last (after turning 30 years old). In all the countries of the European Union, women decide to leave the family home much sooner than men do. In Poland, the average age of men leaving the family home amounts to 28.9 years old, while it is 26.5 years old in the case of women (Eurostat, 2019).

Despite the fact that most adult Americans aged 25–34 do not declare the willingness to share housing with their parents, the number of households consisting of at least two generations is still growing in the U.S. (Newman, 2012). According to the data from the 2000 U.S. Census, in 1970 12.5 million young adults aged 18–34 lived in the family home, whereas in 2000 this number amounted to 17.8 million (Farris, 2016). The latest analyses of the Pew Research Centre indicate that for the first time since the year 1880 co-residing with parents has become the most frequent solution adopted by young Americans aged 18–34. Nearly one-third of the researched persons within this age group co-reside with their parents, while slightly fewer live with their spouse or partner. The remainder of the young people from this age group live with other relatives, in dormitories, in shared apartments for rent, etc. What is more, 19% of the interviewed persons aged 25–35 have not left the family home, which is the highest percentage in history, too. Between 2000 and 2014, the percentage of young adults aged 18–34 and co-residing with their parents increased from 23% to 32.1%. Similarly to Europeans, Americans now tend to enter into marriages later, while there are more and more people who are single and choose to live with their parents (Fry, 2016). This effect of the 'postponement syndrome' (Livi-Bacci, 2001) is typical of Western societies and refers to deferring the legalisation of a relationship as well as proactive tasks.

Nesting in the perception of kidults living with parents in Poland: a research approach

The research passage presented in this article is part of a more detailed empirical investigation into the process of reaching adulthood as perceived by young people living with their parents (Bieńko, Kwak & Rosochacka-Gmitrzak, 2017). The following analysis offers merely a glimpse into the process of reaching adulthood.

The study was conducted between 2012 and 2013. The sample selection was purposely made by means of the snowball sampling strategy. The group secured as a result of the non-probability sampling is diversified with regard to age and gender. Respondents were characterised by the postponement of the developmental tasks realisation, such as completing education or taking on a job, while also remaining in their family home. The sample comprised 23 women and 19 men aged 27–38, referred

to as young adults. The interviewed persons live in Warsaw with both or one of their parents. They do not have any marital experience or children of their own. Though some of them are in a relationship with a partner, they do not co-habit with them.

For the purposes of the analysis, I assumed the interpretive paradigm, which postulates to understand the type of the interviewed persons' cognition. The researcher is interested in how an individual perceives and interprets experiences and situations which are dependent on personal meanings and convictions (Holstein & Gubrium, 2009). Taking into account that subjective views are accessible through a direct conversation, the most appropriate research perspective in this case is the qualitative approach. The study included 42 individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Galletta & Cros, 2018). Importantly, there was no initial thesis or hypothesis formulated in advance. That being said, for the purpose of this article the following questions were formulated:

1. How do the respondents perceive adulthood?
2. What are the main reasons for the extended nesting in the group under study?
3. Do the relationships between the respondents and their parents play a role or have significance in the process of their transitioning to adulthood?
4. Do the facts of initiating a stable relationship, becoming a parent, and managing an independent household constitute critical criteria of adulthood?

Considering all *ex ante* structurisations as detrimental and restricting the study perspective, the perspective of a 'naive' researcher has been taken not to impose any conceptual network onto the interviewees.

Individual characteristics of the nesters

The age of the respondents fluctuated between 27 and 38 years old. Twenty one people were below 30; fourteen people were between 30–34; seven people formed the oldest group, i.e., they were 35–38 years old. Men and women were of similar age; the average age for women was 29.8, while it was 31.3 for men. Thirty people had higher education, including two people at the undergraduate level, whereby one of them was in the midst of continuing education at the graduate level. The second biggest group consisted of people with secondary education (nine people). More women (33) than men (26) had higher education. Slightly more than half of the respondents were employed on an open-ended contract. On the other hand, fifteen had temporary contracts, namely fee-for-tasks agreements or specific-task contracts, which do not include full-time commitments and benefits going with them. Three people had their own business. Twenty two people declared their professional

experience to be between two and six years, whereby these included seventeen women and only five men.

There were no young people without employment or education. The individuals within the group are not typical 'NEETs' ('not in education, employment, or training'), who share either the lack of motivation for continuing formal education or the lack of interest in professional activity (Eurofound, 2012). Unlike 'NEETs', nesters, although they continue to be financially supported by their parents (be it by choice or out of necessity), do learn and/or work as well as plan or take up courses that would provide them with qualifications and let them accumulate cultural capital with regard to knowledge, competence, and experiences. The prolonged process of education leads to young adults gaining financial independence later and later in life.

Selected results of the qualitative study on nesting in Poland

The study results are presented below with direct references to the respondents' statements. The symbols in parentheses next to the quoted statements form that particular respondent's code, i.e., their gender followed by the index number according to the order of conducted interviews, and the respondent's age (after the slash).¹

Relevance of education and work

Statements of respondents confirm an increase in both the mobility of the generation of young adults and the chances to implement education or employment plans in Poland and abroad. *Within the upcoming year or two I would like to change my job, be it abroad or here, I would like to start doing something else* (F-12/27); *But if I were to change my job, I would like to work somewhere abroad* (F-28/28). They want to achieve success fast, which is, to a large extent, equated with the material status. The possibility of planning a career that – according to them – is one of the most significant areas of their life (including the personal sphere) is important to them. *God, I'm a workaholic, really, I hate this in myself (...)* (F-21/30); *(...) I don't know when I'm working and when I'm not working* (F-11/28). The phenomena which the researched persons need to face include the necessity for long-life education, temporal

¹ The interviewees' utterances will be quoted using italics. All the translations are mine; I have tried to retain the conversational and colloquial style of the statements, including the lack of grammatical correctness.

and spatial mobility, availability, the ability to function within flexible forms of work, the readiness to retrain and acquire new competence. *Studies, combined with work, it is something, something which is important that they could be accommodated* (F-23/32); *The success that I achieved is graduating from studies in Germany and my own business* (M-13/29).

The perception of adulthood

Among the interviewees, twenty one people claimed that they were adult, while the rest does not feel fully adult and they do not really have a name for their current status; they claim that they have already finished getting mature, but they have not reached adulthood yet. *No, I don't see myself as an adult person. (...) I feel as if I were 22, maybe 23 years old* (M-27/29); *I haven't grown up, because I don't have grown-up problems. I don't behave in an adult way* (F-16/30); *Well, I'm almost grown-up* (F-28/28); *I'm adult in 80% and in 20% I'm a child and it's good this way* (M-42/37). Nine persons do not consider themselves as adults, although this is something that they aspire to: *Not yet, I hope I'll be it [adult – M.B.] soon. Or never* (F-14/27); *There is a job with a salary, there is no house or flat, so I'm not adult yet, but mentally 'getting there'* (M-34/29).

Adulthood is perceived as a process, during which the target status is being achieved gradually. Although taking on commitments associated with adulthood offers security and stability, it also signifies – according to the interviewed persons – the end of independence, spontaneity, and creativity. Three interviewees' statements feature the question of the lack of mental and emotional readiness to assume responsibilities connected with adulthood. *(...) I don't feel mentally adult. (...) I wouldn't like to be adult* (F-10/28); *(...) I am closer to adulthood than further from it, and it's quite conscious, and in any case I think it is the national average* (M-36/33).

The respondents recognise diverse possibilities and variants regarding their life course, and they often choose individual paths of development, irrespective of the socio-cultural sequential narratives of adulthood. As its criteria, the respondents referred to the emotional attributes of adulthood, competence, and personality traits connected with independence, resourcefulness, self-reliance, and responsibility, all of them measured by subjective feelings. To a much lesser extent, they focused on social roles and legal and chronological as well as biological boundaries of adulthood. In the researched group of people aged 27–38, adulthood is not a completed process, but a continuous one instead.

Obstacles for leaving the parental household

In postmodern societies, young people tend to experience a specific kind of changes with regard to reaching adulthood. Despite accepting and even promoting a wide spectrum of individual differences in terms of the path of development, there is also the lack of an explicitly defined moment, way, or rule of going forward into the phase of adulthood. Events that until now have been considered the main determinants of adulthood, are now changeable and reversible. Among the respondents, both women and men defer adulthood and reject it; they claim that they do not have the possibility of fulfilling it in its traditional form. Most often, their statements feature three main causes of deferring adulthood. First, preparing for adulthood takes more and more time due to a long period of intensive cumulation of the resources (both material and in the form of social capital) required for the fulfilment of this process. Second, adulthood is perceived as difficult or even impossible to attain. Third, adulthood is a period of life which young people are in no hurry to reach.

Financial dependency

The primary cause of the inability to become independent is the financial situation that is directly connected with the prolonged education and the dynamically changing labour market. As the interviewees declared, the chief obstacle for them to reach full adulthood is both housing dependency and financial dependency on their parents. *I can't be called an adult when I live with my parents and, in fact, I don't finance this flat (F-10/28); (...) I didn't build my own life, I live with my parents, I'm dependent on them in many respects (F-31/27); I haven't become completely independent yet. My parents are helping. (...) I couldn't support my family, even together with my partner (M-7/27).*

The interviewed persons are experiencing the prolonged moratorium out of necessity, as they claim, because they do not have sufficient financial resources to start a fully independent life. *I'm really, really, really considering moving out. I have a flat where I could live, but I don't want to move out and then come back after three months, because I'll see that I can't afford this, that's why I'm delaying all this (F-28/28); (...) if the financial situation improved, I want to move out as soon as possible (M-32/33); The finances that I have now don't allow me to buy a flat (F-15/28).*

For 38 respondents adulthood – equated with the requirement to have financial resources and social capital – is currently beyond their reach. They regard their own resources as well as that of their family of origin as insufficient considering the difficult conditions on the labour market (temporary agreements and contracts) and in the

housing economy (high prices of flats and rental, the difficulty in obtaining credit). Because of a difficult material standing, weariness about tenancy, and the problems with obtaining credit, these interviewees consciously choose to remain in the family home. Therefore, it is more of a cold calculation, which comes when young people and their parents start to realise what the costs of renting or buying a flat are. For many families, these are too high to take this step. Nesters prefer to redefine their relationships instead, postponing the moment of moving out. According to the researched women and men, solving the identity crisis is possible through extending moratorium greatly beyond the phase of adolescence. They are convinced that through prolonging their stay in the 'family nest', they can achieve better results in their future career or personal life. They interpret the period of the extended process of reaching adulthood as their conscious and rational adaptive strategy. *I live with my mum so I don't have to finance expenditure with regard to maintaining the flat (M-20/32).*

It can be claimed that the rhythm of life that comprises the passage into subsequent phases – and the fulfilling of developmental tasks connected with it – has been shifted in the researched group. Nesters defer developmental tasks and avoid binding decisions with regard to adulthood, and at the same time they proclaim that they are pursuing independence in life, meaning moving out of the 'family nest'. *I'd like to become independent, it would straighten my life, I'd have to sort myself out, be self-sufficient, manage finances so that there is enough (F-3/27); I'd like to definitely become independent, leave the home, buy a flat or a house as soon as possible – in a year or two (F-4/31); I'd like to sit on my own balcony in peace and drink coffee (F-14/27); Moving out of my parents' place is my goal. Such prosaic plans (M-34/29).*

On the one hand, deferring the moment of moving out indicates the inability, the lack of possibility, or unwillingness to take on roles which are appropriate for a mature person. On the other hand, nesting is a sensible strategy and an indication of adjusting to the current conditions without young adults taking a risk. *At the beginning I wanted to break free as quickly as it was possible, but it slowed me down that I totally couldn't afford living on my own, and I was over it (M-17/35); (...) I still live with them, so they let me put the money aside for my own purposes, a car, a flat (...) I'm saving the money that I would spend on rental (M-35/29).* The respondents are afraid of monthly financial commitments as well as the consequences of not honouring them, which is why they protract the decision to live independently. Co-residing with parents translates into lower costs; it is easier to maintain the household together. In order to attain 'perfect' adulthood with their own (not rented or shared) house, young people prefer to wait, prolonging their juvenescence until the goal can be reached. Thirteen studied kidults dream of moving out of their parents' place, but this would have to be into a previously purchased flat. (...) *I'd rather move out to my own flat*

or house, to buy it. I don't want to rent and spend money on rental (F-4/31); The plan is to save money and to buy a flat for cash (M-13/29). One advantage of prolonged nesting is the possibility of saving money for the future, although every third person in the researched group does not have any savings due to the lack of motivation or a sufficiently high salary.

The majority of the nesters have not reached financial independence yet, hence they are not leaving their parents, as they cannot afford to buy their own place. They treat their family home as a hotel, launderette, and a diner, with simultaneous intensive activity regarding work and spending leisure time outside their place of living. They belong to the generation of demanding consumers. The situation whereby they would have to become self-supporting would mean lowering their life standard. Most nesters want to maintain their consumerism at a particular level and using their parents' support, which is why they spend money that they earn on different things of their choosing, not on rental or credit repayment. In the researched group, nesting provides not only convenience, but also security that makes it possible for them to live their life to the full and experience it in an uninhibited way. The majority of women and men are convinced that nesting is a life (and mainly financial) necessity.

The crowded nest

The development of customary liberalism as well as the widening of the scope of the individual's rights all result in the weakening of – and a decline in – parental control over children's decisions with regard to reaching adulthood. According to Guy Standing (2014), precarions are not able to satisfy their needs on their own; therefore, it should not be surprising that parents provide for their kidults' living long after the legal age is reached. In the researched group, in most cases parents accept their kidults deferring commitments associated with adulthood. The nesters can count on their parents' emotional and financial support as well as their aiding activities that are of logistic, informational, culinary, or advisory character. They are not in danger of sharing the fate of the *bamboccioni* in Italy, where parents started to sue their children for overstay. Young adults are convinced that their needs are the most significant for their parents. Talking about their relationships with their parents, many of the researched persons emphasise that they can always count on the parents' help and support with regard to difficult life situations as well as, simply, everyday life. *I have a strong sense of being looked after by my parents (F-15/28); The topic of moving out, whenever it's brought up, I feel anxious, because I'm very attached to my parents (F-31/27); (...) I'm at home here, I like it and really, I don't think I'm strange because of it, because I do feel a bit like that actually. Is it abnormal that I live with my*

parents? *I'm not some kind of weirdo* (M-37/33). There is a 'functional solidarity', i.e., the extent of the direct economic exchange and financial support between parents and their children. Young people begin to see that the fact of reaching the legal age does not matter that much, whereas skills, experiences, and the network of family connections are the important elements.

Care needs of parents and their aversion towards the empty nest

The nesters are convinced that young adults co-residing with their parents is a common phenomenon among their peers. It turns out that both parents and children derive certain benefits and satisfaction from nesting. They share the costs of managing the parents' household and its functioning, in particular men. The nesters point to their parents' deteriorating health as the factor that holds them back with regard to moving out. In this context, the development of the relationship with the kidults is important. *I wanted to move out a long time ago, but then my mum fell seriously ill and I felt that she needed me* (F-12/27); *My mum would advise against this. Because how can she be left with my dad only, she's afraid of that. Because he'll be arguing. With us he keeps his temper. If we aren't there, he's more vulgar and he is psychologically abusive* (F-2/29). When approving of their adult offspring 'leaving the nest', parents need to deal with the 'empty nest' at the same time, and enter the phase of 'secondary engagement', i.e., their partnership from before their children were born. Parents' aversion to their adult children's independent, self-sufficient lives may have a considerable influence on the dynamics of them reaching adulthood. The respondents mention their parents' fear of emptiness that will fill home after they have left: 20 individuals claim that their parents have never suggested that they should move out of the family home, while 23 believe that the parents would be surprised at – or even worried about – the decision to leave. (...) *they would probably be shocked* (F-23/32); *I think that their jaws would drop* (M-27/29); *There would be awkwardness* (F-38/27); (...) *they would be worried* (M-34/29). In the respondents' view, it is especially mothers who would have difficulty with accepting the idea of their child moving out. *My mum would be stunned* (F-16/30); *My mum was worried, she even cried a little bit when she heard about me moving out* (M-32/33); (...) *my mum once said that she would be sad* (M-8/30); *My mum would despair* (F-22/27).

Among women and men, there is a conviction that deferring moving out of the family home for too long can eventually ruin the chance of separating from the family of origin. The statements feature the due date of moving out *before the magic thirties* (M-24/29): *I think that I will move out within two years* (F-28/28); *The thirties is the absolute boundary for me* (F-30/28); (...) *I would like to become 100% independent,*

so move out. (...) my deadline is the thirties (F-10/28); One day for sure. Maybe around the thirties... (M-35/29); I'm planning to move out, it was supposed to be before the thirties, but it won't work (F-16/30). Although the exploration of the researched group does not seem to confirm the conclusion that women leave the family home earlier and more frequently than men do, the women's statements feature a clear need to leave their family home. Moving out fast is motivated by the parents' well-being. *Because I guess it's better, not to prolong this whole situation. For me better and for the parents better* (F-4/31); *Yes, I have felt for a long time that I'm a little parasite, I don't want them to be stuck with me* (F-12/27); *I already have this feeling that it's time to simply be finished with this, to unburden my parents* (F-3/27).

The respondents' statements confirm some Polish social stereotypes, namely that a man living with his mum is considered to be a 'mummy's boy', while a woman – whom the gendered socialisation process shapes to build her own 'family nest' – has a greater potential in the field of becoming independent. In the group, there are frequent cases of men's financial independence of their parents, with the simultaneous feeling of psychological and social autonomy. (...) *I don't have the need for them to accept something in my life* (M-43/34); *I don't expect my parents' help* (M-32/33); (...) *I myself decide what I do* (M-25/29); (...) *I'm doing well on my own* (M-27/29); *I think that [I have – M.B.] a strong feeling of individualism. I like being responsible for myself. I don't like it when someone tells me what I should do* (M-8/30); *I'd prefer to have my own place, finally make decisions about everything myself, like a real man* (M-20/32).

Perceptions about starting one's own family

Predominantly, the respondents are anxious to move out of the family home not in order to set up a household with a spouse, but in order to live independently close to their education or work place and – working their way – search for a prospective partner or live with the current partner eventually. Eleven of them are considering a possibility of moving out and living with a partner: *I'd like to live with my girlfriend finally* (M-25/29); *Preferably I'd move out and go to my partner. Because then the bills are split fifty-fifty* (F-2/29). Both men and women adopt an individual approach to the questions about when an adult person should enter into a marriage as well as when – and in what shape – the structure of the family will be preserved. Deferred adulthood does not mean a stage of development; rather, it conceptualises a specific scope of a lifestyle. *I'm in my own turf and I'm good here. If I got involved with somebody, I think this space would easily accommodate us all* (F-41/35).

The interviewees are trying to prolong the phase of reaching adulthood, which is why they tend to postpone a lot of tasks that are associated with adulthood, such as

entering into a marriage, parenthood, providing for their own family, and maintaining the household. This deferring in time is supposed to result in a conscious selection of a life partner and the conscious decision to become a parent. In such a biographical narrative, prolonging adolescence is about conscious remaining without a partner until education has been completed and professional experience gained, which are matters that the interviewees consider as crucial for their success on the labour market and sustaining their inclusion. This, however, does not mean that young people generally reject marriage and parenthood as the criteria of adulthood. (...) *I'd like to have a nice child and a nice husband. (...) I'd like to have a church wedding, have a baby and for me it would be the greatest success* (F-11/28); *I'd like to marry and start a family. As we all know, time flies* (M-17/35); *I'd like to create a happy family, have children* (F-23/32). They are only pursuing personal fulfilment, attributing the role of a marital partner and a parent with a moratory character, i.e., one marked by postponement or sometimes even escape. *I kind of don't want and I kind of want children. As we know, it's terribly many problems* (M-7/27).

The period of moratorium is the time of prolonged searching for a partner through consecutive intimate relationships. It entails being bound for makeshift and temporary solutions in one's personal life (co-habiting, living alone) as well as separating sexual life from procreation and marriage. Short-term strategies of coupling – ones that are not connected with the plan to build a stable relationship – coexist with the dreams about a perfect lifelong relationship. Nearly every fourth of the nesters declare that they are not planning a marriage with their current partner. However, many of them claim that the problem lies in the lack of a suitable candidate, whom they are searching for all the time. *I'd like to finally meet a particular person and start a family* (F-26/30). More women than men declare that they would like to marry their current partner. *I'd like to have a normal relationship, that a man is beside me, and not leaves all the time* (F-2/29). The men, in turn, emphasise the necessity to defer the decision because of their quest for the optimal choice of a female partner. *I'd like to have a girlfriend. On these dating sites (...) I meet many different, but it... what is there to talk about [with them – M.B.]?* (M-32/33). They admit that marriage and family may hinder success on the labour market, which requires flexibility. Marriage and family life appears to them as a source of restrictions that entails the necessity to subordinate their individual pursuits and choices.

Co-residing with one's parents for an extended period of time or entering into marriages at a later stage of life are both processes that should not be considered merely from the perspective of prolonging childhood and a possible fear of independent, adult life. Young people, who tend to evaluate the surrounding reality through the prism of material values, are anxious to maximise their gaining and avoid unnecessary risks

in taking important life decisions. *Co-residing with parents is no shame. It is a shame to be so stupid as to take out a bank loan in Poland and be a slave almost till the end of life* (M-32/33). In any case, the respondents are convinced that 'fleeing the nest' is not always indicative of socialisation being successfully finished and adulthood reached, and of the openness to a new stage of adulthood in life. *Sometimes I feel like a teenage girl, except instead of school I go to work* (F-11/28).

Conclusion

The interviewed persons were born between the years 1974–1985. Therefore, they entered the labour market in the period of the transformation of the 1990s, which was characterised by the high unemployment rate that would not drop steadily until after the year 2003. Thus, they entered adulthood in the period of capitalism development and the faltering role of support from the state. They are the representatives of the precariat, unsure of their next day on the labour market. The period of radical political and economic transformations is not incoherent with how they are handling life. The young people who participated in the study describe the analysed practice of reaching adulthood in a similar way. According to them, the prolonged remaining in the 'family nest' is conditioned by the lack of the possibility of being self-sufficient and renting or buying a flat. They indicate the prolonged process of education and difficulties in finding a job allowing for financial independence as the reasons for their dependence on their parents.

The presented research by no means pretends to be representative; nonetheless, its results confirm the main conclusions of social research into nesting. The process of reaching adulthood not only depends on particular experiences of individuals, but it is also conditioned by the social norms and values, the education system, the labour market, and the social policy. Limited access to the labour market and its segmentation, job insecurity, and the lack of a housing policy that would be beneficial to young adults all seem to lead to a situation of their young generation deferring the moment of starting life on their own account. Co-residing with parents has become the natural and easiest way of maintaining the past lifestyle by the youth who have completed their education. Such a lifestyle makes it possible to use family resources, while fulfilling individual purposes at the same time. This was not possible in traditional families, which required the full subordination of individual interests of young people to the good of the family. As a result of the deepening emotional bond, the previously explicit distance between the generations of parents and their children is now fading.

The decision to become independent is being deferred for two reasons. The first one is about a difficult financial situation, while the second one refers to the young people's comfort and the declared overprotectiveness of their parents who fear the separation. The statements feature the argument that extended co-residing with parents is a manifestation of reason and resourcefulness. It is also often a matter of anxiety about independence. Within the family home, both women and men fulfil their need for stability, security, carelessness, and acceptance, while nullifying the risk of possible failures at the same time.

On the one hand, life on one's own account is about freedom and privacy; on the other, it entails financial obligations that one has to settle regularly. Inasmuch as one can merely help the parents pay the bills even though it is not necessary, living independently means that one must pay the rent, the bills, or the mortgage loan instalment on a monthly basis. Young people long for adulthood, but they fear the responsibility that it entails. If they cannot afford to buy a flat, they wait it out at the parents' place until they can. Due to high property prices and low earnings, this process can last a very long time, which is despite the fact that in Warsaw – where the interviewed persons live – it is relatively easier to find a job and receive a higher salary than in other localities.

Young people are experiencing – with all its consequences – the functioning in the risk society as described by Beck (2002). The 'tyranny of success' causes the consecutive stages of personal maturing to be extended in favour of a glittering career, high level of education, as well as a prestigious and highly-paid job. The dynamics of individuals assuming the roles of adult people in accordance with the cultural patterns of adulthood that define this role has undergone a considerable change. One can clearly observe the weakening influence of tradition on the one hand, and advancing individualism on the other. In the process of reaching adulthood, the significance of pressure and social control is declining in favour of the autonomous regulation of this process by the individual. The scope of adulthood has broadened greatly; it is difficult to speak of the 'linearity' of the human condition in the social dimension nowadays. Reaching adulthood is distinguished by less and less predictability with regard to the events that have until now constituted key transformations associated with this period of life. Currently, these changes do not occur so often and in line with a traditionally assumed and relatively stable sequence, namely leaving the family home and starting an independent life in a household managed on one's own account, beginning a long-standing relationship, and parenthood. The freedom of choice and the pressure on independent responsibility both confront the individual reaching adulthood with the necessity to individualise their life course and the process of shaping personal identity.

The possibility of autonomous deciding and choosing whether to assume the roles that are socially accepted as pertaining to adulthood is becoming increasingly significant. A multiplicity of contexts of adulthood, which illustrate the complexity of the contemporary world, sends a young adult into confusion with regard to the selection and logic of own behaviour. The young adults under study challenge the traditional determinants of adulthood, emphasising their inadequacy as well as their own inability – or unwillingness – to fulfil them. The majority of them are the supporters of the concept of subjectively-defined adulthood, according to which adulthood – as a component of the social identity of the individual – is the resultant of an autonomously chosen set of traits and predispositions. Individual choices, decisions, and needs are becoming more important than the socially adopted and binding traditional norms and determinants of reaching adulthood.

Adulthood is a phase of life that is shaped by socio-economic, cultural, and political and legal conditions, by which young people are surrounded. The willingness to leave the family home that the interviewees declare does not entail the deterioration of intergenerational relationships that enforce life independence on them. For a majority of young adults, deferring adulthood is a choice. They are aware of the necessity to bear the costs of the prolonged co-residing with their parents, meaning the relinquishment of total privacy as well as the parents' control and overprotectiveness. Kidults who co-reside with their parents feel that this is their haven and that they can always return to it, while simultaneously making attempts at reaching adulthood.

As the presented study shows, a young person navigates the multicultural world on his or her own, aiming at satisfying his/her needs. Adulthood as described by them becomes an authorial project, i.e., a personal set of expectations, perceptions, and attitudes that they have with regard to their own life, their own biography, their place in the society, and significant social relations. Optimally, 'giving it time' serves the purpose of understanding what is worth choosing and getting engaged into for the future. This is not tantamount to breaking the bond with the parents. Young people who feel fully satisfied with temporality give themselves time to become adults. For some of them, it is beneficial to be a nonadult for as long as possible.

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