

# The Transition to Adulthood in Spain in a Comparative Perspective: The Incidence of Structural Factors

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## Abstract

This article sets out to describe and comparatively identify the possible economic, institutional and cultural factors that take part in the process of transition to adulthood, with particular emphasis on factors that explain why young people in Spain leave the parental home late in life. To do this, a number of indicators have been selected and made up using data from different international statistical sources.

The results obtained suggest that in the welfare regimes of Southern Europe, and particularly in Spain, factors such as scarce emancipation policies, the cross-generational solidarity, the home-ownership culture, young people's economic situation and job insecurity, together with the inflexibility and the costly housing market have all created a culture of parental dependence as a strategy for accumulating capital and for coping with risks in a precarious environment exemplified by the social exclusion and poverty. The analysis has highlighted gender differences in the process of transition to adulthood. The combined analysis of all these factors has enabled a more in-depth understanding of the possible causes of the delay in the process of leaving the parental home experienced by the Spanish young people in a comparative perspective.

## Keywords

transitions, adulthood, leaving home, welfare regime, family, Spain, Europe

## Introduction

In recent years, numerous studies on the ambivalent nature of the transition to adulthood and the relevance of leaving the parental home have appeared, indicating a new process of emerging transition that differs substantially from the past. In particular,

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the EGRIS Studies (2001) highlighted the 'yo-yo-ization' of youth transitions (Biggart and Walther, 2006). New sociology on youth suggests that transitions to adult life have become more complex and diversified due to processes of globalization and individualization. In this context, the fact of leaving the parental home takes a new meaning for the sociology, since the forms and processes of acquiring independence and autonomy are not exclusively associated with the fact of leaving the family home but with a plurality of interdependent processes. For European youth, the time lapses between residential transitions (from the parental home to a home of one's own), professional transitions (from school to work) and relationship transitions (forming a couple and family), makes entering adulthood a more vague and problematic issue (Galland, 1991). Transitions no longer occur in a sequential or homogeneous manner, but have become quite diverse for the different groups of youth in Europe. These transitions appear to be directly related to the degree of independence or residential and economic autonomy that can be acquired by young people. Early home-leaving or early child-bearing are associated with early independence or semi-independence in Northern European countries. By contrast, the very late transitions observed in Southern European countries imply delayed independence and may also be burdensome for parents.

Some researchers believe these changes may signify a new phase in the lives of young people, in which they experience greater freedom from the various social and institutional determinants associated with transitions to employment and the forming of a couple and a family. New theories suggest an additional stage of 'emerging adulthood' that begins after adolescence, in which individualism and agency take on greater importance than the structural determinants that marked young people's transitional stages in the past (Arnett, 2000, 2004). In 'emerging adulthood' (EA), the structural dimension of the social relations built by young people as they transition to adulthood becomes secondary. In fact, gender, social class, ethnic group and even labour and housing market structure, as well as social policies, are all somewhat secondary factors in explaining the transition to adulthood.

However, though some Western sociologists and psychologists find the emerging adulthood concept useful for explaining the ambivalence of young Europeans in their transition to adulthood, comparative empirical studies show somewhat different tendencies in much of Southern Europe (Micheli and Rosina, 2010). In Spain, for example, leaving the parental home tends to coincide with the transition from education to the labour market and the formation of a family, particularly in women. Various empirical studies have associated late home-leaving with high unemployment, job insecurity, housing market conditions and the institutional context of social policies (Aasvve et al., 2006; Gentile, 2006; Moreno, 2008). In addition, familism<sup>1</sup> is implicit in the Spanish cultural framework: compared to other young Europeans, neither young Spaniards nor their parents place a high value on autonomy and independence from family.

To sum up, the main objective of this article is to provide a comparative, cross-national analysis with special reference to Spain. In the article, I seek to establish the extent to which structural determinants affect individual strategies for leaving the

parental home, an important stage in acquiring autonomy. Thus, this article does not examine how young people conceptualize their transition to adulthood from a subjective or psychological point of view.

### **Extended Transition in Emerging Adulthood: The Role of Structure, Culture and Agency in Spain**

Jeffery Arnett (2000: 469) has proposed a new developmental phase in the life-course for ages 18–25, which he defines as a new lifestyle. Emerging adulthood (EA) is characterized by the postponement of commitments usually associated with adult life, such as entering an occupation, conjugal relationships and parenthood. The five main features of this phase include identity exploration, experimentation in love and work, instability, self-focus and a feeling in-between two phases (adolescence and adulthood). This prolongation of adolescence is a way of dealing with individualization and risk.

This theoretical approach is partially inspired by Beck's work on the individualization of the modern life-course, the growing role of individual agency in the shaping of youth transitions and the increasing trend towards risk in late-modern societies (Beck, 1992; Beck et al., 1994). However, their theorizing on this phase and the transition involved differs from Arnett's approach by emphasizing the context of changing social and institutional structures in late-modern Western societies. Bynner (2005) suggests that in the theoretical framework of Arnett, structural factors are seen more as environmental influences than shapers of roles, identities and practices. Notable contributions to this line can be observed in ideas such as 'structured individualization' (Furlong and Cartmell, 1997), 'individualised biography transitions' (Bendit et al., 2009; Walther, 2006) and 'diversity of transitions to adulthood' (Hendry and Kloep, 2010).

Bynner (2005) reminds us that the EA concept is not new in the social sciences<sup>2</sup> and sees Arnett's theoretical approach as more of a metaphor for youth transitions than a clearly observable and identifiable trend. The recent critique of EA by Côté and Bynner (2008) emphasizes educational and workplace exclusion processes that prevent young people in some socio-economic contexts from experiencing developmental processes presumed to be beneficial to all 'emerging adults'. They offer an alternative to Arnett's psychological, free-choice EA model that identifies the social and economic conditions responsible for the prolonged transition to adulthood.

This critique of the Arnett theory will be extended in the following analysis, in favour of the idea that the late transition of Spanish youth can be explained as the combined result of institutional, structural, economic and cultural factors. While EA is useful for describing some lifestyle features of Spanish youth, such as experimentation, it is insufficient for explaining the prolonged residence of Spanish youth with their parents, which has been observed since the 1980s, or the plurality of emancipatory paths. In the Spanish case, the late transition to adulthood is marked by economic factors such as a precarious labour market and economic panorama, difficulties in accessing the housing market, institutional factors such as limited social

and support policies for young people to become independent and cultural factors such as familism. Prior studies have also identified the importance of education and gender in the emancipatory paths of Spanish youth (Lopez, 2008; Moreno, 2008).

Comparative European research has shown the combined influence of the welfare regime on what some authors refer to as the *transition regime* (Leccardi and Ruspini, 2006; Walther, 2006) and of culture on the diverse trends observed in the transition to adulthood in various European countries. Van de Velde (2008) refers to the cultural impact of familism to explain the extended transition of young people in Spain, as compared to countries such as France, Denmark or the United Kingdom. The concept of familism has been widely used in scientific literature to explain a unique aspect of Southern European societies, especially Spain and Italy. It originated in Banfield's anthropological study of a region of Southern Europe, which defined familism as a form of intergenerational solidarity ('amoral familism') involving the pursuit of family interests at the expense of collective interests in the face of a precarious economic environment. Any analysis of the modern welfare-state should include an assessment of the importance of norms and legitimated practices for the establishment and maintenance of welfare regimes. A moral ethos based on notions of family and family responsibility contributes significantly to the formation and legitimization of welfare regimes.

Holdswortz (2004: 911) suggests that familism addresses the different ways in which family obligations are assumed by the State but overlooks the different ways in which family members themselves assume these obligations. This perspective has quite a bit in common with Esping Andersen's theory on the degree of defamilization in the various welfare regimes. In the European context, where the State has a very different role than in other countries and regions of the developed world, it is appropriate to consider how assumed cultural norms about intergenerational support are embedded in different welfare structures. Several authors have described how families negotiate this support and how it affects the practices of young people (Holdswortz 2004; Bendit et al., 2009). In parent-child negotiations, the familistic culture of Southern European countries encourages parental reinforcement of permanence in the home as a strategy for accumulating human capital (Bynner, 2008) and facing risks and insecurities (Moreno, 2008). In contrast, the role of the family in Northern European countries has been to encourage young people to leave home early (Holdswortz, 2004).

Leitner (2003) identifies varieties of familism and uses a comparative perspective to describe the function of the family in child and elder-care. She suggests the use of public policies as indicators for familism. Thus, the extent to which the caring function of the family is promoted determines whether a welfare regime is considered familistic or defamilizing. Her findings indicate that Spain is characterized by weak family-support policies that result in strong familism, so that family is the main private provider of care services for infants, youth and elderly persons. This would help explain the high percentage of unemployed youth living with parents.

Ultimately, the limited nature of youth welfare policies in conjunction with the economic and labour market insecurities that affect Spanish youth help create a

culture of intergenerational solidarity that compensates for the lack of services and provides social well-being. This state-family dependence may also have contributed to a normative cultural pattern of familism in the social and collective imaginary of Spanish parents and youth that would explain the late transition of Spanish young people. This expands on the emerging adulthood interpretation offered by Arnett, who used the situation in North America as the basis for his work.

Van de Velde (2008) explains the permanence of young adults in the parental home by describing familism as a form of 'group membership'. Youth are defined not so much by their independence as by the material and affective links of interdependence that are negotiated and constantly renewed in the home. In this light, Spanish youth choose to define their individuality within the framework of family membership, which is characterized by reciprocity and solidarity between parents and children. According to Van de Velde (2008), compared to French, Danish and British youth, Spaniards in similar age groups and social categories are much more likely to prolong their stay in the parental home.

Based on this theoretical approach, familism is referred to in the present work as a form of negotiated solidarity between parents and children for remaining in the parental home. From this a cultural norm of belonging, autonomy and dependence has emerged over the last three decades in Spain, in response to a precarious economic and institutional environment in which youth feel unprotected and vulnerable in comparison with their European counterparts.

Education is closely linked to familism and is a key factor in explaining the transitional tendencies of Spanish youth. Research highlights the fact that youth with higher education are more likely to live independently in certain countries such as France. However, this does not apply to Mediterranean countries, where young people clearly stay at home longer due to a more lengthy educational process (Bendit et al., 2009). In Spain, this phenomenon is related to familism: given the lack of public institutional support that would encourage independent living while studying, children and parents negotiate a dependency arrangement while the children study, as a form of encouraging their educational achievement in favourable conditions. Gender is also a structural determinant in the differences related to transition processes. Empirical research shows a common pattern in all European countries, but particularly in Spain: young women tend to leave the family home earlier than young men. Studies carried out in some European countries have shown that women leave the parental home earlier than men to form a couple and a family, even if they do not have a stable job. Men delay their residential independence and associate it with job stability, which will at some point allow them to become heads of family (Robette, 2010; Vitali, 2010). This phenomenon is especially pronounced in the Spanish case.

In sum, the objective of this comparative study will be to interpret and analyze the data available on the late transition of Spanish youth to adulthood within a complex framework of structural, institutional, economic and cultural determinants that differ among countries.

## **Interpretative Keys to Autonomy and the Domestic Emancipation of Spanish Youth: A Comparative Perspective**

The desire and choice to stay in or leave the parental home involves a complex constellation of factors and processes that affect transitions. Some of these transitions are reversible: young people may leave home and move back again after losing a job or ending a short-lived relationship. Numerous structural factors such as the labour market, social class or institutional setting also come into play, making it difficult to analyze transition processes comparatively from a single theoretical or methodological perspective. In the Spanish case, a series of structural factors converge to favour the extension of youth dependence on the family beyond the general lifestyle patterns indicated in EA theory. These factors primarily include the precarious economic condition of the labour market, youth policies, the economic situation of youth and cultural variables related to the maintenance of family patterns. According to Holdsworth and Morgan (2005), Moreno (2003) and Sgritta (2001), the concepts of 'autonomy' and 'independence'<sup>3</sup> vary in meaning from one national context to another. Studies carried out in the UK countries show that increasing numbers of young people are remaining with their parents for a longer period of time (Côté and Bynner, 2008; Bynner, 2005). This is not perceived as a natural state of affairs in the north, but for Spanish youth it is a culturally integrated behaviour that fits naturally with their lifestyle. Both Van de Velde (2008) and Holdsworth (2004) highlighted how in Spain and Italy the prolonged stay in the parental home can undermine the desire to become independent. The Family and Transitions in Europe (FATE project) has revealed that some young people in Spain choose to stay with their parents in order to maintain their standard of living, even at the expense of their independence. The family develops norms for negotiating the rules of intergenerational behaviour that are defined to some degree by the social, economic, cultural and institutional environment. In an economic and labour environment such as that of Spain, with difficult transitions from education to work, weak state assistance for becoming independent, a precarious labour market and the lack of affordable housing, prolonged cohabitation in the parental home has become a cultural custom. Parent-child negotiations have created a family solidarity pattern and rules of inter-generational behaviour that provide autonomy for youth within the family context, in exchange for dependence on the family. Sgritta (2001) states that, 'instead of becoming emancipated from the family, young people become emancipated within the family'. Studies carried out by Bendit et al. (2009) and Holdsworth (2004) have shown that the construction of autonomy within the parental home in Spain and Italy in response to deficient youth policies within the welfare regimes has become a central issue in the process of transition to adulthood. Holdsworth (2004: 913) argues for placing greater emphasis on how families negotiate responsibilities within the different welfare regimes and how these negotiations deal with different expectations of family solidarity or autonomy.

Numerous studies have also shown that differences among European countries as regards leaving the parental home and establishing a new one are linked

to welfare regimes and family support (Leccardi and Ruspini, 2006; Vogel, 2002; Walther, 2006). The classic typologies of welfare regimes classify countries in terms of family policies, gender policies and the way in which markets, families and states interact to produce well-being (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Thus, the significance of autonomy and family dependence for young people in the process of domestic emancipation depends on national economic and institutional contexts. Using the Gallie and Paugman (2000) adaptation of Esping Andersen's (1990) model of comparative welfare regimes, the 'up2youth' project developed the concept of 'transition regimes'<sup>4</sup>, which refers to clusters of countries sharing similar socio-economic structures, institutions and cultural patterns. This project suggests that transition regimes influence domestic transitions, because young people make housing transitions based on their economic/work situation and expectations about independence. The *extended dependence model*, a type of sub-protective welfare regime, applies to Southern European countries and is characterized by the absence of public support for young people (Bendit et al., 2009).

For this analysis, I will use the 'transition regime model' to examine the impact of welfare regimes on youth transitions, looking at the labour situation, youth policies, the housing market, poverty indicators and cultural norms of dependency versus autonomy (familism) as key factors for explaining the differences in the process of achieving residence autonomy across Europe.

### *Labour and Housing Market Conditions*

There are numerous empirical studies that analyze the impact of family financial circumstances and the labour market on the emancipation process of young people (Aasvve et al., 2001; Bell et al., 2007). One line of research emphasizes the decisive effect of labour market conditions on the lifestyle of young people, while other authors have emphasized family as a way of accumulating human capital (López, 2008) and as a safety mechanism against the risks of unemployment (Card and Lemieux, 2000; Becker et al., 2005; Jurado, 2001). Card and Lemieux (2000) found that in Canada the likelihood of children living with their parents increases when employment conditions worsen. Similarly, Becker et al. (2005) ascertained that co-residence is linked with job insecurity and Fogli (2004) found co-residence with parents to be an ideal solution for young people when faced with unfavourable economic or job situations. Jurado (2001) argues that not leaving the parental home under precarious economic conditions might even be a social norm in Spain.

The housing market and cultural aspects of property ownership also affect young people's possibilities of becoming independent, and are related to differences in transition regimes. Martins and Villanueva (2006) found that limited access to bank loans partially explains why young people remain in the parental home. They demonstrated that the shortcomings of the financial market in Europe could explain up to 20 per cent of the variation regarding when young Europeans establish their own home. They especially emphasize the importance of gaining access to a home as a requirement for becoming independent. The same conclusion resulted from the

studies of Martínez and Castillo (2002) in Spain and Giannelli and Monfardini (2003) in Italy. Mulder (2006) established a typology of *home ownership regimes* based on variations in mortgage access and rental markets to explain the different emancipation rates in Europe.<sup>5</sup> There is a great deal of empirical evidence on how young people postpone leaving the parental home—and therefore forming a family—until they own a home, especially in countries such as the United Kingdom and Spain, where the culture of home ownership assumes that families must own their home (Kurz and Blossfeld, 2004; Mulder, 2006). Home ownership is characteristic of Southern European countries and is closely linked to the welfare regime (Castles and Ferrera, 1996; Kemeny, 1981). Poggio (2008) argues that there is a certain link between the importance given by the family to home ownership and the familist nature of the social protection system in Southern Europe. The transfer of property from one generation to the next is one way in which families can accumulate capital and inheritance. This intergenerational solidarity (as a characteristic of familism) is a private investment to make up for shortcomings in youth policies in Southern European countries (Moreno, 2008).

### *Youth Policies and Cultural Factors*

Numerous comparative studies have typed the range of transitional lifestyles in youth according to the constraints, opportunities and institutional support available to them (Iacovou and Berthoud, 2001; Vogel, 2002). However, very few studies have investigated the possibility of a link between welfare policies and cultural models of emancipation resulting from reciprocal interaction between them. It is also possible to explain welfare differences as being caused by differences in family and cultural frameworks. According to De Singly (2005), youth-oriented policies are primordial in the Scandinavian context, since policies fostering youth independence have helped consolidate a model of transition to adult life based on a negotiated autonomy between youth and parents. Gallie and Paugman (2000) have described the typical Northern European transition model as an advanced autonomy model of independence between generations. They argue that this model involves a normative system in which autonomy from the parents is thought to be essential to self-realization in young adults. This does not imply a breakdown of affective ties. While children may remain financially dependent on their parents to some degree, separate residence is the norm.<sup>6</sup> Studies by Holdsworth and Morgan (2005) and Iacovou and Berthoud (2001) on the processes of achieving residential independence for young people in Europe partly concur with this view, but emphasize features that are peculiar to each country. However, for young Spaniards and Italians, the lack of an institutional framework of social support policies for youth has created a link of solidarity and dependence between young people and their parents. This familistic connection (Moreno, 2008; Santarelli and Cottone, 2009) forms the basis for the process of transition towards autonomy and independence. Regional and national divergences can only be correctly understood and interpreted within a historical perspective that includes the cultural differences underlying various lifestyles over time (Giuliano, 2007; Manacorda and Moretti, 2007; Micheli and Rosina, 2010; Reher, 1998).



Reher (1998) argues that Spain has historically relied upon the family as the essential institution for the well-being of its neediest members in times of economic difficulty.

Thus, the distribution of public resources in terms of benefits, interventions and groups eligible to receive support is another factor to consider when analyzing the resources available to young people transitioning towards residential autonomy. Iacovou and Berthoud (2001) did a comparative analysis of youth emancipation processes, with particular emphasis on social expenditure by the welfare regime. These studies allow researchers to see the differences between welfare regimes based on the association between social expenditure and youth emancipation processes. The results support the hypothesis that young people delay leaving home in countries with lower social expenditure. The authors observe that the Scandinavian state is present throughout the entire life-cycle of its citizens, providing support for individual autonomy as well as for families. Young people receive universal allowances regardless of their economic situation or the support they receive from their families. In the transitions typically found in Mediterranean welfare regimes, the limited impact of social policies has been partially replaced by the family creating a cultural context of family dependence, 'strong family ties' (Reher, 1998: 203–204) and intergenerational solidarity within the parental home, or familism (Flaquer, 2005; Moreno, 2008). Holdsworth (2004) argues that in models such as Spain where family support is very strong, there are fewer possibilities of negotiating the conditions of support. This familistic model of support favours the material well-being of young people over the independence, self-reliance and autonomy prominent in such countries as the United Kingdom and Norway.

The limited policies of economic support for youth are linked to the increasing poverty of young people in Spain (Aassve et al., 2007). It is well documented in literature that Nordic countries present the biggest change in youth poverty rates before and after emancipation, while Mediterranean countries show the smallest change. Parisi (2008) and Ayllón (2009) also demonstrated that for Spain, after controlling for observed factors among youth, the likelihood of being poor increases with the likelihood of leaving home. Inversely, Parisi (2008) also observes that the later youth leave the parental home the less likely they are to enter poverty after leaving. Mediterranean youth tend not to leave the home until they can guarantee themselves a sufficient standard of living. Thus, in literature, this factor has been treated as a constraint associated with the transition regime of Southern Europe. The increasing economic vulnerability and insecurity of Spanish youth has reinforced family solidarity as a strategy for avoiding poverty among young people.

The comparative analysis presented here looks at how the late emancipation of young people in Spain is related to an idea of autonomy and independence within a cultural, labour, economic and institutional web that reinforces the negotiated strategy between parents and children for autonomy within the paternal home. On the whole, more than being the result of a characteristic EA lifestyle, the late emancipation of young people in Spain is embedded in a transition regime model that includes different constellations of socio-economic structures, institutions and cultural patterns.

To summarize, the life-courses of young people are closely linked to structural factors. The various routes for staying with or leaving the family<sup>7</sup> reveal the complexity of the transition process from youth to adulthood and the relationship between structural determining factors and individual strategies for acquiring independence.

## Methodology

The main hypothesis of this study is that the late emancipation of youth in Spain is determined by a complex constellation of structural factors such as economic and labour market insecurity, weak youth policies, difficulties in access to housing, and a family culture that emphasizes family dependence over autonomy as a strategy for dealing with an unstable economic environment.

Of course, not all young people face the transition to adulthood in a homogeneous manner in terms of residential independence and autonomy. Individual factors such as education, gender or work situation all influence the strategies adopted by young adults in different European countries. In Spain, education postpones parental-home leaving, as young people take advantage of their accommodation in the parental home to pursue their education and increase their human capital, which would otherwise be far more difficult to achieve.

The empirical analysis in this article is presented in two parts. The first part contains a descriptive comparative analysis with secondary data from different European sources for the year 2005 (the last year for which this information is available). This provides aggregate comparative data, including a diversity of indicators from different sources. Given the difficulty in finding comparable data from one same source, data has been used from several statistical sources in order to increase the explanatory capacity of this study. The indicators used here make it possible to analyze more closely the structural factors that affect the tendency to remain in the parental home across different European countries. These indicators were based on an updated version of the descriptive data used by Chiuri and Del Boca (2008). They include co-residence age profiles by gender, household characteristics and labour market variables, along with a set of variables for housing, youth poverty and the welfare-state. In particular, annual youth social expenditures as a percentage of total public expenditure, computed on the basis of the OECD SOCX (2007)<sup>8</sup> were included. The housing indicators used in the analysis were owner occupation rate, average ratio of mortgage to property value residential mortgage loans<sup>9</sup> (home loan/value ratio). Key indicators for cultural and social values were taken from the World Values Survey, which has been collecting information regarding family attitudes since 1981. The indicator used for this study was the percentage of the sample between ages 15 and 35 who answered positively to the following question: Do you consider it especially important to emphasize independence as a value for youth and children in the family context? This indicator makes it possible to carry out a comparative analysis regarding the extent to which independence and autonomy are prominent cultural values among youth in various European countries in relation to familism tendencies in Spanish society.

The second part of the article provides a logistic regression analysis in order to examine individual determining factors (education, work situation, occupation, gender) that would explain the probability of young people aged 15–35 either remaining in or leaving the parental home in different European countries. The age group spanning up to age 35 was chosen because a significant percentage of youth leave the parental home after age 30 in Spain and Italy. The data used in the regression analysis are based on the 2006 European Labour Survey, which included persons between 15 and 64 years of age (16–64 for ES, United Kingdom and NO). The data were collected by participating countries and represent the residential population aged 15 and older in the 27 European countries (European Labour Survey 2006). For this analysis, a sample of young people aged 15–35 was selected for Spain, Italy, Portugal, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Austria and the United Kingdom. The other European countries (EU-15) were discarded due to insufficient numbers of cases. The total sample for all countries included in the sample is 24582 cases. Two measures were used as the dependent variables: youth aged 15–35 living in the parental home versus youth aged 15–35 who live in an independent household. The independent variables included in the model were:

- Age
- Sex
- Educational attainment level: Tertiary (H), upper secondary (M), less than upper secondary (L)
- Occupation: Managers, senior officials, professional occupations, administrative and secretarial positions, personal services, sales and customer relations occupations, skilled trade occupations, process, plant and machine operators, elementary occupations
- Employment situation: Employed, unemployed, inactive
- Type of work: Temporary contracts, fixed-term contracts

Familism was used transversally in the research; it was incorporated into the variable referring to the value youth ascribe to autonomy and also into the variables referring to the transition regime (youth policies developed by various administrations and the culture of property ownership). The extended transition to adulthood in Spain is found to be the result of a complex constellation of structural determinants: gender, education, the economic, labour and occupational situation of youth, and the limited extent of youth policies. These factors lead to familist strategies for facing the transition to autonomy and independence.

### **Transitions to Adulthood in Spain: A Combination of Factors**

The economic globalization process undergirds the European convergence process for certain economic and financial indicators. However, major differences can be observed among European countries with respect to family trends and the transition process from youth to adulthood. Many studies have identified the delay of young

Spaniards and Italians in leaving the parental home, but very few studies have carried out an empirical analysis of the factors responsible for this delay.

Table 1 shows that in Southern European countries, more than 60 per cent of young people aged 15–30 lived with their parents in 2005 (64.3 per cent in Spain), compared to just over 20 per cent in Northern European countries such as Finland and Sweden. Decisions about leaving the parental home are to a certain extent limited by cultural variables (family solidarity), economic variables (job situation, housing market), institutional variables (youth policies) and individual variables (social class, education, etc.). Gender plays a major role in explaining these processes: women leave the parental home before their male counterparts in all European countries.

**Table 1.** Percentage of Young People Living with their Parents by Age and Gender, 2005

	Young people Living with their Parents 15–29 (%),	Young people Living with their Parents 30–35 (%)	Young Men Living with their Parents 15–29 (%)	Young Women Living with their Parents 15–29 (%)
Germany	51	7.2	56.7	46.2
U.S.	35	6.5	42.1	29.2
Spain	64.3	15.2	71.3	56.9
Finland	15.6	1.3	19.5	12.3
Italy	73.2	21.1	77.2	68.5
Sweden	22.3	4	16.1	27.7

**Source:** World Values Survey 2005, Official Data File 2008.

With regard to traditional family arrangements associated with delayed emancipation in Southern European countries, it is particularly noteworthy that in Southern Europe, a very low percentage of young people live in one-person households and cohabitation arrangements compared to Northern European countries. There are notable gender differences in all the countries for which data is available, which indirectly suggest that women leave the parental home to form a family before and more often than men. Table 2 shows a higher percentage of males aged 25–29 living alone than females, while the percentage of women living with a partner and children is higher in the Spanish case. In Italy and Spain, women get married and leave the parental home before men and thus become independent in what is perceived as the ‘right way’ (Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005). The lower percentage of cohabiting couples points to the perpetuation of traditional stereotypes in family organization strategies of young people in Southern European countries. According to Domínguez et al. (2007), the process of secularisation and acceptance of new forms of family composition is widespread amongst young Spaniards, but their favourable attitudes towards cohabitation have not translated into actual behaviour. Previous studies have explained this by arguing that young Spaniards do not choose cohabitation in order to avoid possible conflict with their parents. These same studies have shown that young women who have lived independently for at least one year are less likely to be influenced by parental pressure regarding how they live with their partners (Domínguez et al., 2007).

**Table 2. Household Status of Young People not Living in the Parental Home (%), 2005**

	One Person Households (15-29) Both Sexes (%)	One Person Households (15-29) Female (%)	One Person Households (15-29) Male (%)	Cohabiting Couples 15-29 (All Couples %)	Couple with/without Children of Young Men not Living in Parental Home (% in Age Group 25-29) <sup>1</sup>	Couple with/without Children of Young Woman not Living in Parental Home (% in Age Group 25-29) <sup>1</sup>
Germany	16.97			11.6	54	65
Denmark		14	20.3	24.4	65	74
Spain	2.98	1.4	5.7	4.3	68	79
Finland	18.37	15.4	22	23.9	62	62
France	15.65	12.2	20.7	20.7	72	78
Ireland	9.88	8.1	11.7	14.1		
Italy	6.18	4.4	8.9	4.5	42	82
Netherlands	21.31	18.8	24.1	18.3	69	78
Portugal				6.9*	64	85
United Kingdom	7.39	5.9	9.3		69	
Sweden	21.76	18.4	24.1	26.8		67

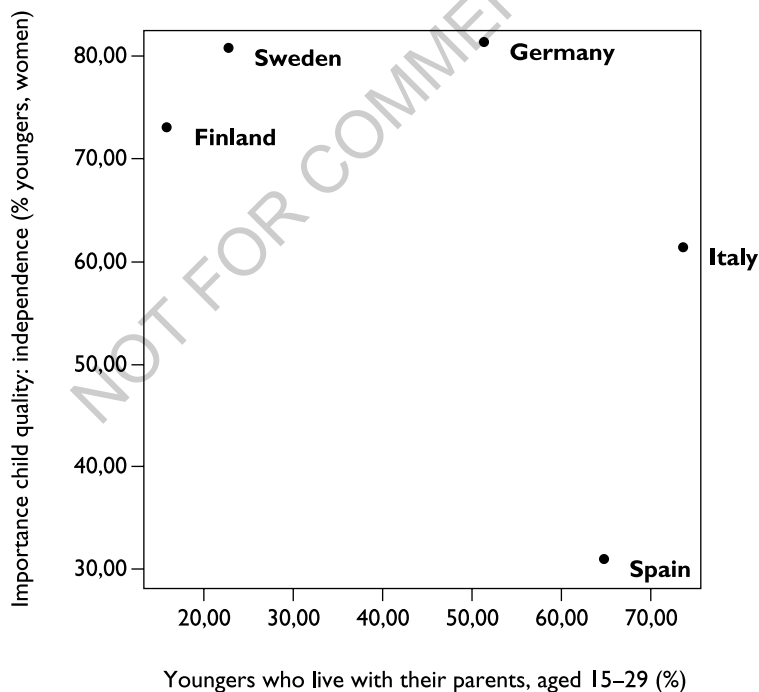
**Source:** UNECE Statistical Division Database, compiled from national official sources.

**Notes:** \*2001.

(1) Eurostat, LFS, 2007.

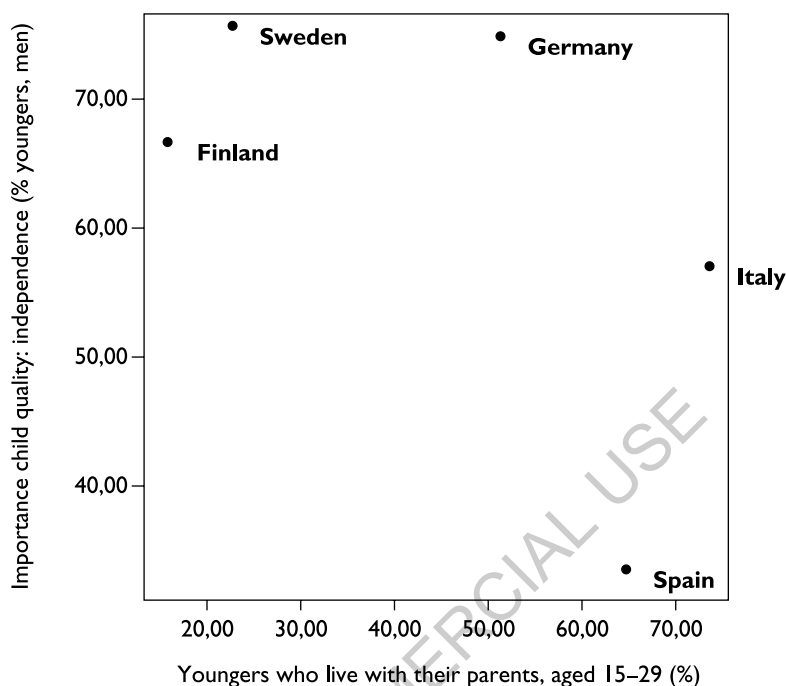
The continuity of traditional lifestyles in Southern European countries is also reflected in the family values of young people. Figures 1 and 2 show how Southern young people, especially women, regard family as much more important than those in Northern European countries. In Northern European countries, independence<sup>10</sup> (embedded in the cultural structure) is an extremely important value for young people, while in Southern European countries, cultural familism takes priority over independence (Figure 1). Gender is again the determining factor for explaining differences both within and between countries.<sup>11</sup> In the qualitative study carried out by Holdsworth and Morgan (2005) on leaving the parental home and the transition to adulthood in Norway, Spain and Great Britain, the link between independence and leaving home was found to be most explicit in Britain. In Spain, more young people regarded themselves as independent and able to 'do what they want' in the parental home.

Another group of variables relates to employment and economic indicators. In countries where the transition to adulthood is difficult, especially with regard to attaining permanent employment, leaving the parental home and having a stable relationship is frequently postponed (Billari and Liefbroer, 2007; Saraceno et al., 2005). The results of the 2007 Second European Quality of Life Survey: Family life



**Figure 1.** The Value of Family Independence and Young People Living with Their Parents (Women)

**Source:** World Values Survey 2005. Official Data File 2008.

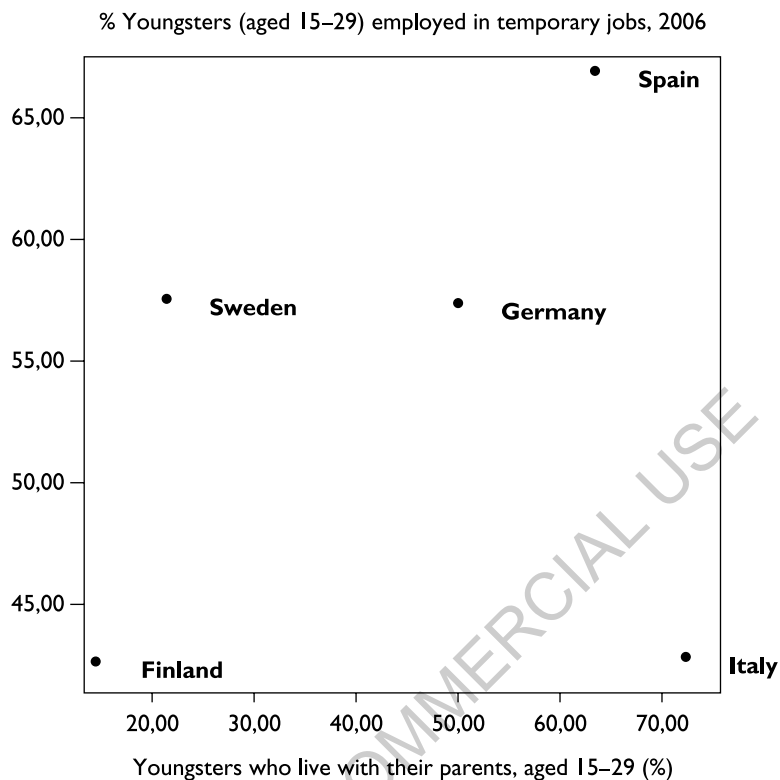


**Figure 2.** The Value of Family Independence and Young People Living with Their Parents (Men)

**Source:** World Values Survey 2005, Official Data File 2008.

and work, are consistent with the findings of the EQLS 2003, showing that permanent employment positively contributes to independent living among young adults, whether alone or in a couple. Hence, policies that aim to improve job prospects for young adults could facilitate their transition to adulthood.

Youth unemployment in the year 2005 was more or less similar across all European Union countries, with a greater incidence in the female population<sup>12</sup> (European Labour Force Survey, 2005). Spain and other Southern European countries have the highest rates of job insecurity as regards young people. A fundamental characteristic of the Spanish labour market is the spread of temporary contracts (Moreno, 2008). According to Martínez and Ruiz (2002), the Spanish labour market is a typical example of insider-outsider<sup>13</sup> job relations between young people. Numerous analyses have documented how job insecurity has a negative effect on leaving the parental home. It partially neutralizes long-term prospects of being able to maintain financial and residential independence without having to rely on financial help from the family, which contributes to delaying residential independence (Aasvve et al., 2001). Figure 3 shows the link between high job-insecurity and the high percentage of young people living with their parents in Spain. In contrast, Finland has a lower incidence of job insecurity and is the country where young



**Figure 3.** Youngsters Employed in Temporary Jobs (%) and Youngsters Living with Their Parents (%)

**Source:** OCDE database 2007, world values survey 2005, official data files 2008.

people become independent earliest. Curiously, the comparative data show no large differences in the incidence of job insecurity as measured by the number of temporary contracts in Spain, Germany and Sweden. The difference observed between Italy and Sweden (15 percentage points on the temporality index) could be explained by the fact that the high percentage of temporary contracts to youth in Sweden is compensated for by institutional assistance encouraging early emancipation as a cultural value. In Italy, economic and labour factors, a context of weak institutional assistance and a familist culture encourage later leaving. The data indicate that the delay in the emancipation of young people from their families in Southern European countries cannot be explained by economic and employment variables alone. Rather they are the outcome of a combination of economic, cultural and institutional variables.

Lastly, the variables related to the welfare regime are particularly interesting. In our case, the variables relating to youth policies and the housing market were selected. Although several studies deal with the typologies of welfare-states in terms of family and social policies (Esping Andersen et al., 2002), few comparative studies



have examined the links between welfare regimes and youth policies. However, Gallie and Paugman (2000), the International Agency for Research and Development (IARD, 2001), and Walther (2006) have made some interesting contributions in this area. They use comparative models that include constellations of factors referring to youth policies, educational models, labour-market structure, the housing market, family models, etc. These are very useful for explaining the link between the rationale behind institutional behaviour and the individual decisions and strategies of young people on the circuitous transition path to adulthood.

The methodology of Chiuri and Del Boca (2008) was used to compare youth policies under different welfare regimes. It includes annual social expenditure on youth as a percentage of total public spending, based on the 2007 OECD SOCX database. This indicator makes it possible to establish an approximate comparative framework for youth policies and welfare regimes in European countries. In Table 3 we see that in Southern European welfare-states, social expenditure for youth is low (2.9 per cent in Spain, 1.5 per cent in Portugal and 1.3 per cent in Italy) compared to Northern European countries such as Denmark (6.5 per cent) and Sweden (4.4 per cent).

Börsch-Supan (2007) found no convincing evidence for the hypothesis that spending on the elderly crowded out spending on youth during the 1990–2005 period in Europe.<sup>14</sup> However, their analyses show a low negative correlation between expenditures for the elderly and expenditures for youth in Italy and Portugal. For Spain, the correlation was positive but not significant. According to these data, the Spanish welfare-state spent twice as much on social assistance for those over 65 than on youth in 2005. This, in conjunction with the comparatively low social expenditure on youth with regard to other European countries, indicates a degree of generational inequality in public policies in Spain. When combined with economic and labour-market precariousness and familist culture, it may partially explain the extended transition of youth in Spain. The data presented demonstrates the weakness of Southern European welfare-states in terms of public subsidies aimed at young people and at supporting their independence. The absence of a more explicit youth policy could explain the importance of family solidarity as a platform for achieving independence and autonomy in a delayed process that is always dependent on family support. Further analysis is needed to determine a possible association between public policies and the behaviour of families and youth.

Many empirical studies have documented the deep-rooted culture of property ownership in Spain that has been reproduced by successive generations as a financial investment strategy. A great many explanations have been put forward, the most significant of which refer to the nature of the housing market. Indicators for the ratio of people who own a home, the home loan/value ratio<sup>15</sup> and mortgage interest rates show the paradoxical nature of Spain's housing regime (Table 3). It is characterized by a lack of flexibility in the financial markets (high interest rates on mortgage loans) alongside a high rate of home ownership due to the familist strategy of transferring resources between generations (Poggio, 2008). This and the limited home rental market make access to housing difficult for young people, which in turn affects the process of acquiring independence in Southern European countries (Bićákova and Sierminska, 2008). The data show that 48.5 per cent of young Spaniards, even those

**Table 3.** Youth social expenditure and housing

	Youth Social Expenditure (% Total Public Expenditure) 05	Owner Occupation Rate % 2006	Average Ratio of Mortgage to Property Value (%) 2006	Residential Mortgage Loans as % of GDP 2006
Germany	3.8	43.2		47.7
Austria	2.1		80	
Belgium	3.1	78	83	36.8
Denmark	6.5	54		92.8
Spain	2.9	86.3	70	61.6
Finland	3.4	58	75	34.3
France	3.9	56.5		34.9
Greece	2.3	80.1		30.2
Ireland	4.4	74.5	66	75.3
Italy	1.3	80	55	19.8
Luxembourg	2.6	74.6		38.5
Netherlands	5.1	54	90	100
Portugal	1.5	76	83	62.1
United Kingdom	6.6	70		86.3
Sweden	4.4	50		57

**Source:** Own Elaboration on Data Set: Social Expenditure Agregated Data 2007, EMF Hyostat 2007

**Note:** Youth Social expenditure included: Active labour market programmes, housing and other social policy areas

who are working, state that they still live with their parents because they lack the financial resources to access housing, compared with 28.6 per cent of young people in Denmark or 31.8 per cent in Finland in the same employment circumstances (Eurobarometer, 2007).

The most notable feature of youth poverty is its strong connection with living arrangements. Aassve et al. (2007) found that the risk of poverty among European youth varied greatly between countries during the 1990s. Although the difference was also dependent on age group, youth poverty risk differences between countries were clearly explained by the differences in young people's living arrangements. As early home-leavers, young people in Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands are at a higher risk of poverty than in any other country. Conversely, in Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, where youth typically leave home much later, youth poverty rates are not disproportionately high compared to other countries. The data in Figure 3 confirm that in countries where leaving home occurs early (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway) the extra risk of poverty associated with this event is higher than in countries where leaving home occurs later (Greece, Spain, Italy). We also see that poverty affects young women to a greater extent than young men, providing further evidence of gender inequality in young people.

Most importantly, Figure 3 reveals that emancipation delay is not associated with a high poverty risk to young people in Spain, thanks to the fact that a growing number of them live with two employed parents. In the Spanish context of limited youth policies, residence with one's parents is a key factor in avoiding the poverty

likely to be generated by living independently. A 2008 study by the *Fundación La Caixa* estimates that if Spanish youth aged 26–35 all became independent, social exclusion rates would increase to 45 per cent; if they had to pay housing costs, such as mortgage or rent, this figure would rise to 57 per cent. The fragility of the welfare-state, job and financial insecurity, the culture of home ownership and the inflexibility of the financial market for accessing housing all combine to increase the importance of family solidarity as a strategy for accumulating educational and financial capital, avoiding poverty and preparing the arduous path to independence in a relatively stable context. In other words, the widespread Southern European practice of young people remaining in their parents' home for protracted periods has a protective effect against poverty (Aassve et al., 2007). Since most young people live with their parents, poverty among 15–24 year olds in these countries is linked more to the economic situation, the poverty of the family itself and labour market precariousness than to the transition process to adult life.

However, not all young people respond in the same way to economic and labour uncertainty, difficulty in accessing the housing market or the limited support offered by the welfare-state in Spain. Family solidarity associated with remaining in the parental home, or familism, is an effective strategy for delaying home-leaving, especially for young men and those with higher educational levels. After eliminating the age factor (the greater the age, the greater the likelihood of emancipation), the regression analysis in Table 4 reveals gender as the determining variable for all countries except Belgium. The differences between men and women are particularly significant in Greece, Italy and Spain, and are consistent with the fact that in these countries women are more likely than men to leave the parental home early to start a family.

In Spain, Italy and the Netherlands, education is the second most important factor governing the likelihood of leaving home. In these countries, the likelihood of young people becoming emancipated decreases as the educational level increases. In France, on the other hand, the likelihood of leaving the parental home increases with the educational level. This could be explained by the family culture of dependence and co-residence traditionally associated with the youth education process in Spain; whereas in countries such as France, acquiring residential independence and thereby self-reliance is seen as an integral part of the educational process.

The association between the work situation and leaving the parental home was found to vary according to the country of residence. In Spain, the work situation does not appear to be as decisive a factor as education, compared to other European countries. For example, the number of unemployed youth living with their parents is significant in Belgium, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, and is especially high in Greece and Portugal. In Spain, having a temporary contract increases the probability of youth remaining in the family home, in contrast with Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, where this figure is not significant. Finally, Spanish, Greek, British and especially French, Italian and Portuguese youth in non-qualified occupations tend to have an increased probability of remaining in the parental home. These results support the thesis that familism in Spain basically affects young people who



**TYPE OF WORK**

Fixed-term contracts  
Temporary

0,691 0,719 0,724 0,619 0,659 0,314

**OCCUPATION**

Managers

1,309  
1,244

3,736  
2,129

1,998  
1,755

0,659  
0,314

1,755  
1,292

0,556  
0,393

5,904  
3,226

2,489  
1,490

0,719  
0,724

0,619  
0,659

0,314  
0,379

1,755  
1,292

1,998  
1,755

1,299  
1,299

0,556  
0,393

3,736  
2,129

Senior officials

1,309  
1,244

3,736  
2,129

1,998  
1,755

0,659  
0,314

1,755  
1,292

0,556  
0,393

5,904  
3,226

2,489  
1,490

0,719  
0,724

0,619  
0,659

0,314  
0,379

1,755  
1,292

1,998  
1,755

1,299  
1,299

0,556  
0,393

3,736  
2,129

Professional occupations

1,309  
1,244

3,736  
2,129

1,998  
1,755

0,659  
0,314

1,755  
1,292

0,556  
0,393

5,904  
3,226

2,489  
1,490

0,719  
0,724

0,619  
0,659

0,314  
0,379

1,755  
1,292

1,998  
1,755

1,299  
1,299

0,556  
0,393

3,736  
2,129

Administrative and secretarial

1,309  
1,244

3,736  
2,129

1,998  
1,755

0,659  
0,314

1,755  
1,292

0,556  
0,393

5,904  
3,226

2,489  
1,490

0,719  
0,724

0,619  
0,659

0,314  
0,379

1,755  
1,292

1,998  
1,755

1,299  
1,299

0,556  
0,393

3,736  
2,129

Personal service, sales and customer occupations

1,309  
1,244

3,736  
2,129

1,998  
1,755

0,659  
0,314

1,755  
1,292

0,556  
0,393

5,904  
3,226

2,489  
1,490

0,719  
0,724

0,619  
0,659

0,314  
0,379

1,755  
1,292

1,998  
1,755

1,299  
1,299

0,556  
0,393

3,736  
2,129

Skilled trade occupations

1,309  
1,244

3,736  
2,129

1,998  
1,755

0,659  
0,314

1,755  
1,292

0,556  
0,393

5,904  
3,226

2,489  
1,490

0,719  
0,724

0,619  
0,659

0,314  
0,379

1,755  
1,292

1,998  
1,755

1,299  
1,299

0,556  
0,393

3,736  
2,129

Process, plant and machine operatives

1,309  
1,244

3,736  
2,129

1,998  
1,755

0,659  
0,314

1,755  
1,292

0,556  
0,393

5,904  
3,226

2,489  
1,490

0,719  
0,724

0,619  
0,659

0,314  
0,379

1,755  
1,292

1,998  
1,755

1,299  
1,299

0,556  
0,393

3,736  
2,129

Elementary occupations

1,309  
1,244

3,736  
2,129

1,998  
1,755

0,659  
0,314

1,755  
1,292

0,556  
0,393

5,904  
3,226

2,489  
1,490

0,719  
0,724

0,619  
0,659

0,314  
0,379

1,755  
1,292

1,998  
1,755

1,299  
1,299

0,556  
0,393

3,736  
2,129

R2 Nagelkerke

0,546  
0,576

2,382  
2,515

0,726  
0,726

0,706  
0,706

0,514  
0,514

0,379  
0,379

0,640  
0,640

0,458  
0,458

0,696  
0,696

0,625  
0,625

9,989  
9,989

36,745  
36,745

12,530  
12,530

18,556  
18,556

0,539  
0,539

15,065  
15,065

N

0,603  
0,603

0,539  
0,539

18,497  
18,497

5,063  
5,063

39,102  
39,102

18,556  
18,556

15,065  
15,065

7,695  
7,695

Source: European Labor Force Survey 2006.

Note: Coefficients reported are hazard ratio significant at 10%, 5% and 1%.

are better educated (Table 4). This form of family solidarity encourages the dependence of young people on their families as a strategy for offering protection against economic risk. In contrast with other European countries, where unemployment or temporary contracts are not statistically significant indicators, in Spain these indicators increase the probability of youth residing in the parental home.

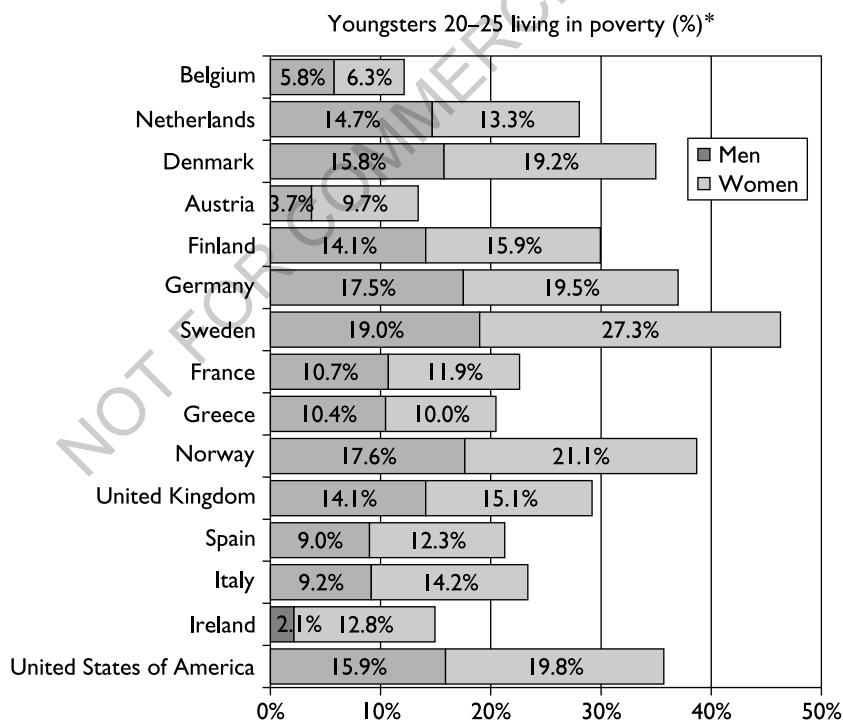
The results of the regression analysis by gender indicate a stronger association of marital status with male and female youth emancipation in Spain than in other European countries, such as Germany or France. Actually, the probability of becoming independent has a greater correlation with being married in Spain than in the entire set of EU-15 countries. In most of the EU-15, leaving the parental home does not necessarily imply forming a family. The regression analysis of work status indicates gender differences in how being unemployed affects youth. Generally, unemployment negatively affects male emancipation in all countries, but varies for women. It has a negative effect on female youth independence in Belgium, Germany, Greece and the United Kingdom. However, in Portugal, France, Luxembourg, and to a lesser extent Spain, being unemployed correlates with emancipation more than being employed. This might be explained by the fact that some unemployed women become emancipated more quickly by choosing to form a family.

In sum, the comparative analyses in this article show different patterns of achieving residence autonomy in Europe, which are associated with macro-social structural characteristics of the welfare regime and family culture. Late emancipation in Spain can be explained by a combination of factors such as job insecurity, limited youth policies and the transition regime (involving a familist culture of group belonging expressed in intergenerational solidarity and specific forms of property ownership). Though Spain shows certain singularities in youth transitions to adulthood, it coincides with all European countries in presenting early emancipation for women, with a variety of national forms. Many authors acknowledge that the transition to independent living differs between men and women with regard to the influence of family structure, individual and family background characteristics, parental resources, and the atmosphere in the parental home (Blaauboer and Mulder, 2009; Cañada-Vicinay, 2005). Yet few studies have linked this pattern of differences between sexes with the new gender roles and dilemmas involved in work and family conciliation arising from the increasing participation of women in the labour market. In Spain these data may indicate some sort of association between the early emancipation of young women and their roles as mothers, which is usually associated with the male bread-winner model. The late emancipation of young males from their parents could be associated with the role of men as workers and the main providers in their new family.

With regard to the choice of living arrangements, women are more likely than men of the same age to live with a partner and independently from their parents. The data in Figures 1 and 2 indicates that this may be due to young women giving more importance to gaining independence than males. Several studies have shown how the trajectories of young women in the transition to adult life are more heterogeneous and turbulent than those of males. For women, entering and leaving the labour market and residential and economic independence depends more on factors linked to family changes (break-ups) and the family cycle. Especially in the case of Spain,

the transitions of young women are more discontinuous than those of men, since they are associated more with the family life cycle than with employment cycles (Miret and Melo, 2010; Vitali, 2010).

The comparative data presented in this study indicate that more Spanish women aged 25 to 29 live with a partner (with or without children) than in other European countries. The difference between men and women in this regard is especially significant in Spain and Italy. However, the proportion of cohabiting unions, used here to indicate acceptance of new family models, is comparatively low in Spain. This may allude to the persistent traditional gender roles found in cultural familism, which associate female transitions to adult life with the formation of a new family unit through marriage. Such an interpretation is supported by the low percentage of young females who live in uni-personal arrangements in Spain and Italy, compared with other European countries such as Finland, Sweden, France and the Netherlands. Early home-leaving or early child-bearing are generally associated with an increased risk of poverty and disadvantage for women in all European countries (Aassve et al., 2007). Figure 4 indicates that, in Spain, the differences between men and women are especially large in this regard.



**Figure 4.** Youngsters Aged 15–20 Living in Poverty

**Source:** Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Key Figures 2009.

**Note:** \*Poverty is defined as household equivalised income < 50% of median equivalised income based on LIS variables.

The data presented reveal specific gender patterns for Spain in female trajectories towards independence from their parents that differ from those found in the rest of Europe. Structural determinants and the cultural familism associated with traditional gender roles and the family cycle are key explanatory factors for the early emancipation of women in Spain. A general interpretation of the data in this study seems to indicate that women in Spain leave the parental home earlier due to the traditional family itinerary of forming a couple through marriage, which can sometimes endanger job stability and promotion. In contrast, males associate independence with stable work and the responsibility of becoming heads of families. This would explain late male emancipation, in which residential autonomy is delayed until a certain job or professional status is attained. Finally, we can state that in Spain the gender differences in the ages of transition to adult life are partly linked to cultural familism and the enduring male bread-winner model that still permeates gender and family relations.

## Conclusion

The transition to adulthood shows diverse trends in the various European welfare regimes, with significant differences between countries. The delay in leaving the parental home in Southern European countries and specifically in Spain has been explained as the result of a combination of economic, institutional and cultural factors. The results of this study raise questions regarding the emerging adulthood theory as applied to Spain.

The empirical analyses discussed in this article show similarities among Southern European countries, particularly Spain and Italy: familism embedded in the culture and a transition regime within a welfare system characterized by limited development of youth emancipation support policies. Thus, intergenerational solidarity and a dependence culture play a much greater role than in Northern European countries, as a protective mechanism against the risk of exclusion and poverty. In the case of Spain, the combination of both factors has given rise to a strategy based on negotiation between parents and children for limited autonomy within the parental home. This is reflected in the extended transition to adulthood and the scarce value placed on independence.

Additionally, in Spain, financial insecurity is reflected in high unemployment and temporary and seasonal jobs and hinders strategies for leaving the parental home. This is exacerbated by a culture that prefers owned property to alternative forms of independent residence. Such a situation, combined with a rigid financial market and high housing prices, makes it difficult for young people to establish their own residence as an intermediate step towards forming a couple and becoming parents. This cultural and economic context reinforces economic and affective dependence on parents, delaying the attainment of autonomy.

The results of the regression analysis show the importance of gender: women leave the parental home earlier in all the European countries included in the analysis.



This phenomenon is more pronounced in Spain and Italy, partially because women tend to leave home to form their own families. Another interesting point in the case of Spain is the incidence of educational level in explaining delayed emancipation from the parental home. Unlike other countries, there is a cultural familial tradition of staying in the parental home while pursuing higher education, which is consistent with the culture of family support and dependence. Finally, young people who are unemployed or who are employed in temporary or unskilled jobs are less likely to become emancipated in Spain.

This article offers a comparative analysis of how structural factors such as education, age, gender and work circumstances have differing effects on the likelihood of young people leaving the parental home in various European countries. For Spain, the findings highlight how the pursuit of education, a culture of family dependence, difficult access to housing, labour-market insecurity and limited youth policies converge to explain why young people, especially young men, delay leaving the parental home. This leads us to question the adequacy of the emerging adulthood theory for explaining the late emancipation of Spanish youth. The results obtained in this analysis seem to corroborate those of other studies (Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005; Sgritta, 2001; Van de Velde, 2008), indicating that the extended transitions to adulthood in Spain are more the product of structural factors, which include education and gender, than of a new lifestyle featuring a prolonged period of exploration and self-focus. Finally, the findings from this investigation underscore the importance of a holistic approach to understanding the complexity of the extended transition to adulthood in Spain.

I have identified general trends regarding the impact of structural factors on transitions to adult life in different European countries. These analyses have also allowed us to identify a common tendency in all the European countries examined: the earlier emancipation of women. In Spain, this pattern appears to be related to women forming couples and remaining within traditional gender and family-structure roles. In other European countries, it may be associated with new gender roles and individualism, although detailed research would be needed to confirm this for each country. The comparative, macro-social tendencies presented in this study require further national and regional analyses by gender, because patterns of transition to adult life also vary according to socio-economic status, educational level, gender and institutional context. The comparative tendencies uncovered here raise new questions regarding youth transition experiences throughout Europe.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am very grateful for the support given to the project 'Informe de la Juventud 2008' by the Instituto de la Juventud de España and the support by the European Commission through the Sixth Framework Programme (Project UP2YOUTH, Contract no. 028317). I am also grateful for the helpful comments received from the anonymous referees and the editors.

### **Notes**

1. The concept of familism refers to a cultural expression of protecting the family from risks in the social and economic environment through solidarity between family members

- as a response to a precarious institutional context that threatens the safety of the family (Moreno, 2008; Reher, 1998).
2. This theme was already introduced by Erikson (1963).
  3. The processes explained by these concepts have also become reversible and plural in meaning when used to interpret transitions. That is, a young person may have residential independence but still depend partially or entirely on parental economic assistance. Conversely, a young person may live at home and be economically independent from his or her parents. In this study, young people living with their parents are considered not to have made the transition out of the parental home and those living independently are considered to have made that transition.
  4. Four types of transition regimes are defined in the project: universalistic (Scandinavian countries), employment-centred (e.g., Germany and The Netherlands), liberal (e.g., the United Kingdom) and sub-protective welfare regimes, which are prevalent in Southern European and post-socialist countries. See Bendit et al. (2009).
  5. Specifically, Mulder (2006) argues that ownership culture, difficulties in getting a mortgage and the limited rental market in Southern European countries (Spain, Italy and Greece) result in a regime where a high percentage of people own their home.
  6. Along these lines, Bendit et al. (2009) refer to the model of advanced residence autonomy that characterizes Northern European countries and shapes the residential independence expectations of young people and their families. In these countries, domestic independence is regarded as being inherent to personal development.
  7. See Machado Pais (2007), EGRIS (2001) and Walther (2006) for a detailed analysis of the de-standardization and fragmentation that characterizes the processes of transition to adulthood in young Europeans, expressed metaphorically as 'yo-yo' transitions.
  8. Computed on the basis of the OECD SOCX (2007); youth social expenditure includes housing, active labour market policies and policies for other contingencies related to youth such as income support programmes.
  9. The average ratio of mortgage to property value (home loan/value ratio) measures the availability of mortgage finance by country for conventional home-purchase loans to first-time buyers. Residential mortgage loans refer to total residential loans on lenders' books at the end of the period. Residential loans are loans for the purchase of private property which can be either secured or not secured by the residential property.
  10. This refers to how youth perceive independence in terms of residential and economic autonomy in relation to other values such as effort at work, responsibility or tolerance towards others, as reflected in the World Values Survey.
  11. Nevertheless, these data must be interpreted cautiously; the relationship between both variables cannot be used to infer a direct causation, although it allows us to compare and describe certain trends in the transition processes of young people.
  12. In this respect, the economic crisis has hit young Spaniards especially hard, due to the nature of the economic system. In 2008, Spain had the highest rate of youth unemployment in Europe (24.6 per cent) compared to 7.6 per cent in Denmark. The increase in youth unemployment in Spain as a consequence of the economic crisis will very likely put an end to the more recent trend of leaving the parental home earlier, which was reflected in the last Youth Report in Spain (Moreno Mínguez, 2008).
  13. In labour economics, the insider-outsider theory examines the behaviour of economic agents in markets where some participants have more privileged positions than others. The theory was developed by Lindbeck and Snower (2001).

14. The empirical analyses were carried out using a mixture of aggregate data from EUROSTAT, the OECD and survey data, in particular from the new Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) for the time period indicated.
15. The loan/value ratio defines the proportion of the amount of mortgage loan compared to the estimated ownership value or sale price, whichever is lower. For example, if the ownership value or sale price is 100,000 euros and the mortgage amount is 80,000 euros, the home has an LTV (loan/value ratio) of 80 per cent.

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