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YOUTH INTEGRATION IN THE ALBANIAN SOCIETY

by

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Since the early 1990s, Albania has been taken in a rapid flow of changes that have affected its political, economic and social structures. Every generation has been hit differently, depending on the length of its past in the previous regime and individual capacities to adapt to the new situation. Young adults are the group now in their late teens or their early twenties who were born in the 1980s, who started their education and early socialisation in the communist era, who were taken in the turmoil of the financial crisis when teen-agers, at the time of school completion, and who are now entering the labour and the housing markets, two new realities of the Albanian society.

When they had started their trajectories, some twenty years ago, their curriculum appeared as broadly pre-designed: uncertainties were limited by the massive imprint of communism on everyday life and by the isolation of the country, at distance from many turbulences that affected the rest of the world. Reality has been very different and the individual biographies have become much harder to predict, due to rapid and repeated changes in the country and to the opening of the Albanian society to global influences.

We picture the trajectories young people are experiencing in their transition to adulthood, from school to work and from parental home to their own family life. We figure how society has changed in these two domains and how the young people are facing these transformations to get inserted in the adult world. Two dynamics are so combined: that of a generation moving from childhood to adulthood, while their society evolves from planned economy and totalitarianism to market and democracy. More than in any other context, integration is “aiming at a moving target”.

Space is another dimension of this complexity. In the 1990s, when Albania was taken in brutal and rapid changes in most spheres of social life, important flows of emigrants left the country, mostly to Greece and Italy. More than one fifth of the 3.2 millions Albanians did so between the last two census dates (1989-2001), in two large waves started in 1990 together with political unrest, then in 1997 during the financial crisis. Emigrants originated from the South of the country more than from any other region: when one fifth of the population left the country, they were more than twice as much emigrating from Delvine, Gjirokaster or Sarande districts. Closeness to Greece must have been a factor. Although the country was actually “drained” by emigration, it was not necessarily “brain-drained”: the Albanians in Greece at the last census do not differ from those remained home on educational attainment.

As it is generally the case in such circumstances, adults in their prime age were affected still more than the other groups and young men clearly more than young women: some one third of males and one fourth of females aged 25-29 in 2001 have emigrated from Albania. They are huge proportions compared to similar benchmarks elsewhere in the past, e.g. the German Democratic Republic before the erection of Berlin wall. If one considers not only those who have emigrated, but also those who envisaged to do it but finally remained in Albania, the proportions are doubled: more than two thirds of young male adults and nearly half of females have thought of emigration. Do we know of any other dream so widely shared by youth and likely to impact a large range of their behaviours? Except for their number, the emigrants are largely unknown to us, but their very absence from our picture of youth situation in Albania must be acknowledged: a non negligible proportion of the population moving to adulthood in the troubled context just described has “chosen” not to do so in the country. They will insert, at least for a time, in another society, possibly to come back home later.

Even at present, leaving the country remains a major option for the Albanians, but still more so for the young people. In the early 2000s, after the exhaustion of the major flow of departures, it is estimated that close to 30,000 persons have left the country each year, of which 12,000 aged 15-24. Out of the more than 500,000 young people in the age group, the drain no longer appears as massive, but it clearly remains. It is numerically partially balanced by movements back from abroad, when Albanians return home. They are close to 11,000 each

of the recent years, with a peak at ages 20-29: more than 4,000. There is still a deficit but signs of a rotation also appear.

In brief, transition to adulthood not only takes place in a rapidly changing society but also in a context of intense international migration: most young people have envisaged emigration; many did it and no longer participate by their presence; others are candidates to emigration and some actually do move out but others come back after a stay abroad. Though under-documented when compared to the situation of young people remained in Albania, these movements will be good to keep in mind when we study the insertion of youth in their home society.

Movements inside Albania also interfere with statutory changes that bring adolescents to adulthood. People leaving their town or village have been as numerous as those emigrating abroad in the same time interval, i.e. more than one fifth of total population between 1989 and 2001. In the very recent years, while out-migration has lost a large part of its momentum, internal migration has kept its pace. Every year, close to 60,000 Albanians leave their district and four times more their town or their village, to be compared with 'only' 30,000 leaving the country and 11,000 returning from abroad.

Young people participate to this mobility in proportion of their cohort size (but not much more, contrary to what occurs with international migration), so that nearly 15,000 persons aged 15-24 leave their district annually. Imagine that such a flow is maintained along the ten-year period from the 15th to 25th anniversary: at least a quarter of youth would have paralleled their ageing process by a major change in their location. Half of these movements are in direction of Tirana or Durres district; half of the movements to Tirana come from Diber and Kukes prefectures, in the North-East of the country.

Contrary to the case of emigration abroad, which is little documented because emigrants are lost of sight for the Albanian statistics, internal migrants are well known, in particular thanks to their full enumeration at their place of destination. Whenever relevant, we compare geographical movers to stayers in their social trajectory to adulthood.

Protective institutions and copings mechanisms

Albania has been opened to foreign influence the more so brutally as it was previously locked in; a new political system has brought in multiparty, as a step towards a western-type democracy; market economy is introducing new rules regulating supply and demand of labour, of housing, of goods and services, etc. The regional and worldwide contexts have just added their effects to the Albanian situation, bringing clusters of neighbouring countries in a common process called globalisation. It emerges from the Albanian case and international comparisons that youth in various countries have different coping mechanisms to oppose the uncertainties linked to their coming-of-age, depending on the society they live in and the dominating means and institutions at their disposal.

Assuming that the main institutions to tackle the uncertainties attached to globalisation are the family, the market and the state, let us look at these institutions' role and ways they shape young's behaviours and choices in their transition to adulthood. By transition to adulthood we intend a stepwise process in which young people adopt specific roles and participate in certain activities, while moving away from adolescence. We focus on education, entry into the labour market, first partnership and birth of a first child. Each of these important aspects of young's life is affected by and reflects the role and importance of the above-mentioned institutions, family, market and state.

Strong social states combat the inequalities created by the market and transmitted from generation to generation by the family. Weak states leave more room to the market, for the production and the distribution of wealth, and to the family as a support to individuals. The reciprocal is not always true: the strong communist regime let family in central position. But

with the regime and state demise in the 1990s, the return to the family supportive role was inevitable. Even though the state is now being consolidated, its role is still residual and the major network of social support remains the family.

In three stages, the transition to adulthood puts the emphasis on the state during the educational phase, on the market during access to employment and on the family during movement to marriage, parenthood and residential autonomy. But at each stage, the other two institutions are also active backstage with more or less intensity depending on the strengths or weaknesses of the main actor (think of the part played by private schools and by parental investment in the educational process, by public policies and by relatives in youth access to employment or by family laws and by housing market at the time of family formation). The analysis of young adults' insertion in the Albanian is first of all that of the institutions which take part in the stepwise process.

Once the institutional scenery has been put in place, and the constraint attached to it has been evaluated, it will be time to analyse the coping strategies developed by youth in Albania and to estimate the part of choice in young people's behaviours in nowadays reality.

During the Communist regime, the choices were much limited in most areas of life. Besides a very strong supportive role, the state had also a very strong role in people's decision making. Youth had limited alternatives on education and employment (but they had no problem of access, which was generally equal for all). They had not more on family creation, where the state fainted not to intervene directly but let that part to a more subtle pressure exercised by family of origin and the whole society.

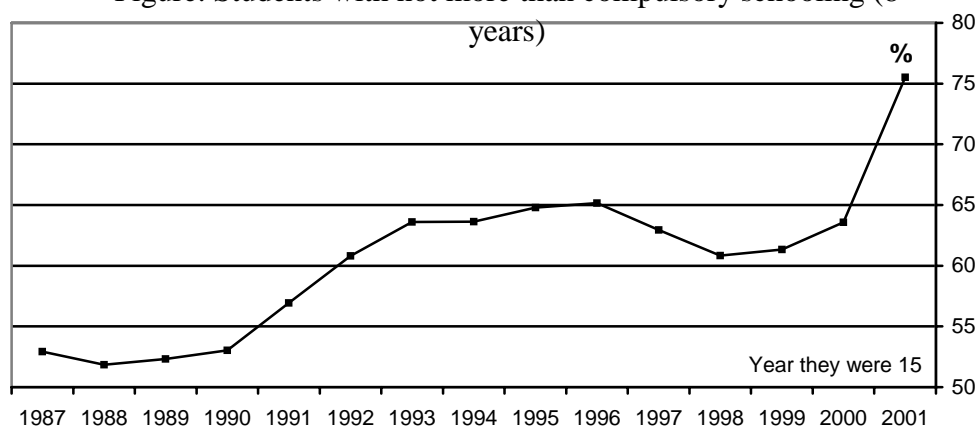
Now that the state is weaker than before, that exist new economic and political opportunities and new forms of constraint, how much is left for youth to make their own choices and face the uncertainties of transition to adulthood in a country opened to global influences?

Education

Since the 1990s, Albanian youth has been faced with enormous difficulties due to changes in the economic and the political system. In such conditions, it is customary that young people chose to lengthen their studies to avoid today's difficulties and uncertainties and to enter the labour market later. This is in particular the case in the Western European countries where youth are confronted with unemployment.

In Albania, the situation is much complicated by the deterioration of the educational system during these last years. The number of secondary schools – especially vocational secondary schools – has been reduced; there are constraints in attending University even though their number is increased. The infrastructure decline is more acute in rural areas than in urban ones and more in secondary than in primary schools. Apart from the reduction in the number of schools, the period after the communism fall has also been marked by the degradation of working conditions in existing schools. This may be one of the main reasons why youth enrolment has declined or stagnated in the education system at large – and more specifically in the secondary and tertiary education – , and why the number of years of study and the percentage of young Albanians who go to university is low by international standards.

Figure. Students with not more than compulsory schooling (8 years)



Source: Own elaboration on 2001 Census data

Regional comparisons for Education

In comparison with its neighbours, Albania has a high enrolment ratio in basic education (97%) but the lowest in secondary and tertiary education. It is little surprising when the comparison is with Greece or Italy, but Albania also lags behind countries with similar socio economic features like Macedonia, in particular at university level. Note also that the country has the lowest ratio between general and vocational schools (84% vs16%), and the lowest percentage (8%) of students in “science, mathematics and computing” and “engineering, manufacturing and construction” as a proportion of all tertiary education.

The state does not react much to this picture, since total expenditures for education as a percentage of GDP are the lowest among the countries selected. Albania has the weakest budget for education compared with the other countries of Balkan.

Table . Indicators of education on neighboring countries for the academic year 2002-2003

Countries	Net enrolment rates		Public expenditures as % GDP	Pupils/Teacher	
	Secondary	Tertiary		Secondary	Tertiary
Albania*	77	16	2.9	18	26
Greece	86	74	4.0	9	24
Italy	91	57	4.7	11	22
Macedonia	81	27	3.5	16	17
Serbia and Montenegro**	n.a	n.a	3.3	14	18

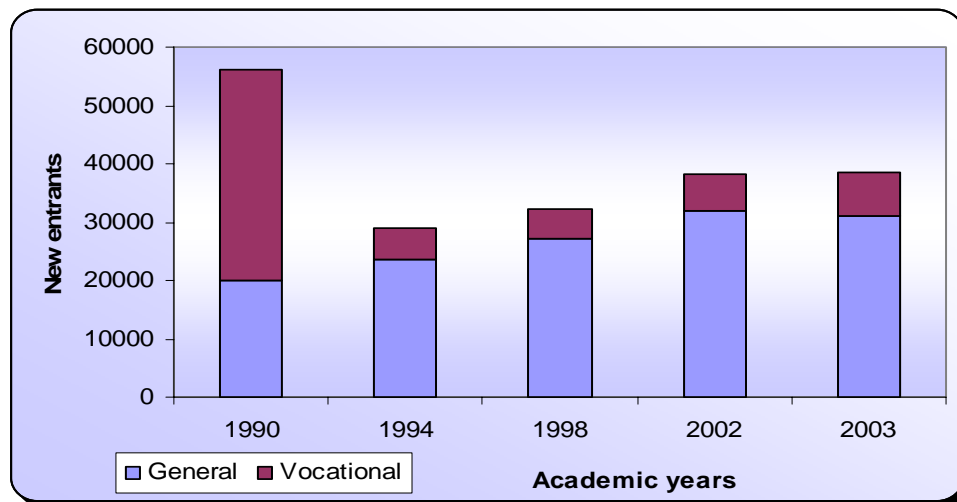
Source: UNESCO database

* Due to differences in the mode of calculation, UNESCO data on enrolment rates in secondary education for Albania is higher than the official figures from Albanian Ministry of Education and Science (42%). For the sake of international comparison we let the UNESCO version. Had we taken the MOES figure the contrast with the other countries would have been still larger

** Gross enrolment rate for secondary is 89% , for tertiary education 36 %. The remaining indicators refer to academic year 2000-2001.

The case of vocational education, which has been so dramatically reduced after communism, is a clear example of institutional constraint. Not only has the number of schools become insufficient, but the diversity of the courses is limited and the curricula they offer are not compatible with the labour market demands. Given the failure of vocational education to fit the new needs of the economic system, the alternative between general and vocational education can hardly be considered as a choice. But there is some rationality and common sense in youth preferring general secondary education in order to be flexible in the future on a labour market much more difficult to foresee than it was in the past.

Figure. New entrants in general secondary and vocational secondary school



Source: Annual statistical report of education 2003, Ministry of Education

Similarly low and declining enrolment rates during the early 1990s may have been constrained by the brutal deterioration of the educational system after the fall of communism. But they may also be considered as a strategy for facing economic difficulties, in a time of acute unrest where others took the radical decision to emigrate. The early drop out could be taken as a choice dependent on the high opportunity cost of being educated versus the possibility to make one's own money by entering early the labour market. Here again, the question whether young people's behaviour on education has been a choice or an institutional constraint remains somehow opened. There has probably been a mix of the two.

The failure of the Albanian state to provide youth an adequate and updated educational system has been partly compensated by the development of the private sector and the financial efforts of the families. That puts the whole system at risk of inequity between children of the rich and children of the poor. During the communist regime the system was inclusive and education was accessible to all (may be not always perfect!!). In 2001, we have verified that the parents' own educational attainment had no impact on their children's achievement and that the system continues to be egalitarian from this point of view. But we have noticed too that access to education is much more infrequent for youth in rural areas than in urban ones, for youth in poor families (especially the extremely poor ones) than among the better off. Thus access to education depends mainly on geographical location, which was already the case before 1990 but not so deeply, and it tends to become wealth-dependent. Internal migration is a tightly connected issue because it mostly brings people from rural to urban settings. Those who migrate are more educated than those who do not. Internal migration in Albania is a brain drain, but people also quit regions that lack (educational and economic) opportunities to go where these opportunities look better. Better infrastructures and closer distance to schools in the receiving areas may be factors why migrants are better educated than non migrants. However it is to be feared that, in the future, migration results in an over population in the receiving areas and that education infrastructures no longer fit the needs and the size of population.

Table. Level of education by residence and age group.

Age-group	15-19			20-24			25-29		
Residence 1989	Diber Kukes		Tirana	Diber Kukes		Tirana	Diber Kukes		Tirana
Residence 2001	Diber-Kukes	Tirana	Tirana	Diber-Kukes	Tirana	Tirana	Diber-Kukes	Tirana	Tirana
No diploma	2.8	2.3	3.1	2.0	1.2	2.3	1.9	0.8	1.7
Elementary	86.5	85.2	76.2	72.0	65.1	45.3	60.0	49.2	39.1
Lower 2 ^{ary}	1.7	2.6	3.3	1.2	1.8	2.2	1.6	2.3	3.2
Upper 2 ^{ary} gener.	8.2	9.0	15.3	19.6	23.9	33.5	24.5	30.9	29.7
Upper 2 ^{ary} (v&t)	0.8	0.9	2.1	2.9	3.4	6.1	7.3	8.0	10.4
University +	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3	4.5	10.6	4.7	8.8	15.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Own elaboration on 2001 Census data

The new regime has inherited from its predecessor and has efficiently maintained gender equality in access to education. There are slightly more boys than girls enrolled in the secondary education system, while the inverse is true at university. There exists some correlation between the kind of education chosen by boys and girls and the profile of males and females on the labour market (fewer females in vocational and more males on technical education profile), but in general the absence of gender discrimination is a great achievement of the school system.

Labour market

Labour market is a new institution in Albania where the communist state totally planned the supply and demand of labour, the number and kind of jobs being shaped by consideration of the economic perspectives. The new market is ill-established and lacks proper rules. Its characteristics are difficult to define. Being new, it is mainly oriented toward the young cohorts. Like in most ex-socialist countries, it is a mixture between a liberal and a protective system¹. The older people occupy a considerable part of the public administration employment and access to these jobs is extremely difficult for youth. The older employees keep their positions, not only because they have preserved their previous jobs, but also because of no suitability regarding the skills required for new jobs. The labour market opened to young people is mainly in the private sector. However this sector is very new and not always sustainable, which makes it unsafe and which contributes to youth uncertainty. A lot of positions in industry were lost after 1990, and they were not replaced by new positions in sectors like services. The agricultural sector has been devastated and, with all the private incentives, it keeps its familiar appearance with small farms improper for the creation of new jobs. For all these reasons, the labour market is very restrictive for youth and it is difficult to define clearly the strategies of young people regarding their entry on such a market.

Table. Activity of males by age in 2001

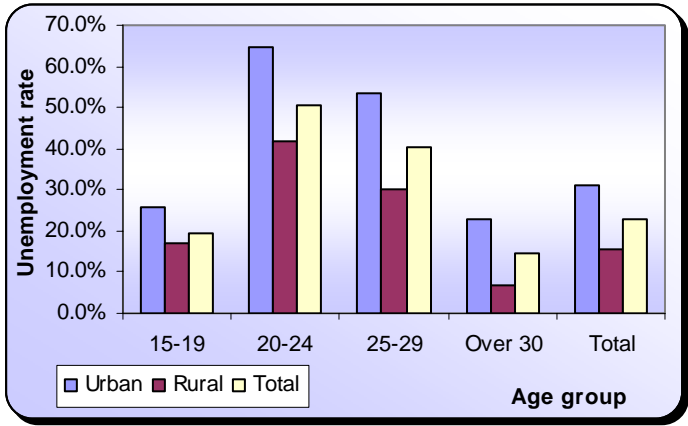
Age	Inactive (% M)	Unemployed (% active)	In agriculture (% employed)
20-29 years	12 %	51 %	60 %
30-44 years	3 %	10 %	44 %
45-54 years	4 %	2 %	40 %

Source: Own elaboration on 2001 Census data

¹ Mills, Melinda, and Blossfeld, Hans-Peter.- Globalisation, uncertainty and changes in early life courses.- *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, vol. 6, Heft 2, 2003 (quoted from a manuscript, 34 p.)

The very peculiar characteristics of youth employment evidence the constraints imposed by the institution. A disproportionate number of young people find activity in agriculture, in the rural parts of the country, not because it is a dynamic sector that creates jobs, but because it accommodates easily forms of hidden unemployment and because the other economic sectors are not more creative. Albania is one of the few countries where unemployment rates are higher in urban settings, and in particular in the capital, than in the rest of the country.

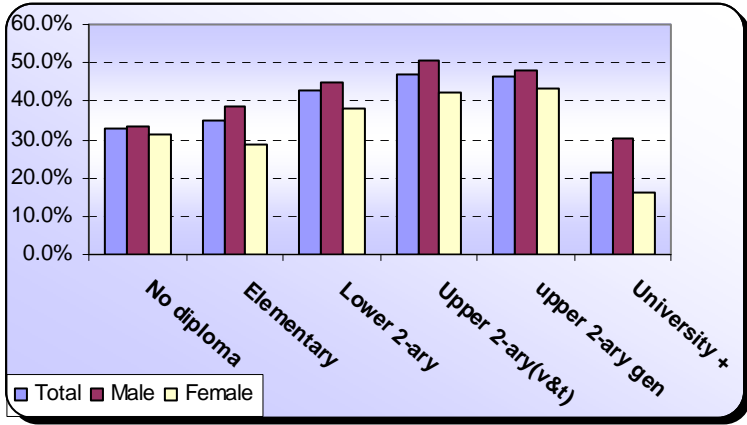
Figure. Unemployment rate by age group and residence



Source: Own elaboration on 2001 Census data

It results in some apparently paradoxical consequences. Since most of the employment offered by agriculture requires little qualification, youth with low education are less frequently unemployed than those with secondary degrees. Since cities do not provide adequate economic opportunities, young migrants who left their rural environment to settle in town are more frequently unemployed than those who stayed in their region.

Figure. Unemployment rate at 15-29 years by sex and level of education



Source: Own elaboration on 2001 Census data

Early drop out from school, which developed a while during the 1990s, and early entry on the labour market may have been a strategy answering the uncertainties of the economic situation and the absence of benefit gained from costly longer studies.

On the contrary, longer studies produce substantial advantages for better entering labour market. Those who have completed secondary education and pursue their studies at university

level have many more chances than any other group to find a job rapidly. So, if making longer studies is a strategy, it is actually quite efficient. The increasing flux of young people in Albania entering universities is a clear sign in this direction, even if its future development depends a lot on the outcomes of the secondary education and the capacities of the tertiary institution.

Is internal migration a strategy to adapt to the new labour market? As abovementioned, migrants are more educated than non-migrants and their movement to towns appears as a tentative for finding better economic opportunities. But, their situation in the labour market is worse than that of non-migrants because of the difficulties faced in their new settlements, near urban populated areas. So, if migration is a strategy for adapting to the labour market or having more access to it, it seems not to have been efficient so far.

Weaknesses of the emerging labour market and the absence of efficient tools for its regulation reinforce the role of the strong family networks in these economic matters. They are much more important in finding jobs and being informed of new opportunities open in the market than the labour market offices, which are one of the state instruments in controlling the market. Once more, there are large differences in practices between towns and countryside. In rural areas the short distances between job seekers and employers and the different relations among members of rural communities give space to direct contact between “supply and demand”, while in urban areas the intervention of relatives and friends is more systematic and formally organised.

There is probably some relation between this increased interference of family networks in labour market issues and the differentiation of the roles devoted to boys and girls in economic activity. The number of young women who stay at home in a position of “housekeeper” has much increased between 1989 and 2001. Women have withdrawn from the labour market and are more often than before classified as inactive. Compared to other countries of the region, Albania is the one with the highest sex discrepancy on activity rate among youth.

Sex discrepancies and other regional comparisons

Youth in the neighbouring countries – whether EU like Greece and Italy or not EU like Macedonia – have substantially lower activity rates than young people in Albania, e.g. 47 percent in Macedonia as against 65 percent. It essentially reflects a later entry of youth on the labour market associated with longer studies at secondary and university levels.

Albania is the country with the highest sex discrepancy in the labor market where difference between male and female is 25 points (male activity rate 77 % and females 53%). In the neighbouring countries, the female deficit is not more than 15 to 17 points in Macedonia, less in Italy and only a 10 percent in Greece. It is the consequence of the higher involvement of women in Albania in housekeeping positions, at distance from the labour market.

It also results in a relatively favourable situation of women in Albania on unemployment, with lower rates than men. The situation is balanced in Macedonia, at very high levels, and clearly unfavourable to women in Greece and Italy, at much more moderate levels. It can be seen as a compensatory mechanism, with higher gender gaps on unemployment in the countries with lower gender gaps on activity.

Table. Unemployment and activity rate in the neighbouring countries for the year 2002

Countries	Activity rate			Unemployment rate		
	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females
Albania	65	77	53	37	41	32
Macedonia	47	55	38	53	53	54
Greece	52	58	47	20	14	28
Italy	51	58	44	20	16	23
Serbia and Montenegro*	39	n.a	n.a	50	n.a	n.a

Source: ILO database

This is another important issue to be analysed under the perspective of choice versus institutional constraint. A major reason for the low participation of women in the labour market is the lack of employment opportunities. Consideration must also be given to the deterioration of the social services (such as crèches and kindergartens for example). At the same time, traditional mentality has “preferred” for long that young girls and women stay at home and take care of the domestic works and the family, men being the main responsible for the incomes in the family. Communism had fought hard against this pattern and had tended towards equality between men and women in the economic sphere. Present trends, essentially visible among the young generations, look like a backlash movement.

In the future, the fact that young women have lost ground in the labour market could impact strongly on young girls’ confidence, as well as on the decision-making power that comes with economic independence. An impact is also to be expected in the closely connected domain of family formation by the new generations of young men and women.

Family formation and residential autonomy

The proportion of young people married before the ages of 25 or 30 is very high and the rate of marriage has remained stable for decades in Albania, contrary to what happened in former socialist and neighbouring countries. Family keeps a pivotal position in a context of changes. Marriage has a central role, while informal cohabitation has an insignificant place in youth’s behaviour.

In a large cross-national study on the consequences of increasing uncertainties created by globalisation on youth behaviours, M. Mills and H-P. Blossfeld note that “a rational reaction for youth is to choose a relationship that has less of a binding obligation”, for instance “the shift from more permanent unions to non marital cohabitation”². They identify two counter-examples, in Ireland and Mexico: “in these family-oriented regimes, partnership and fertility remained as bastions of security”³. A third one is Sweden, “which supports our hypothesis that welfare regimes with generous benefits can cushion economic uncertainty for youth”⁴. Albania is clearly on the Irish and Mexican line, with a strong family institution as a shield against economic and social turmoil, at large distance from the Nordic countries and their efficient welfare protection. In the present context of the country, family is the best and maybe the only refuge and people “choose” to fit into it as closely as possible. The situation is the more so radical as the strengthening of the family institution is the consequence of the weaknesses of the education and labour market institutions. The imbalance which had been partly corrected by communism is reintroduced between the three domains of major importance for transition to adulthood.

Gender inequalities in the family are no longer firmly combated. Males are favoured, given the paternalist structure of the family. “In Albania the patrilineal and patrilocal social organization dominated gender relationships in the private sphere. Meanwhile the socialist Albanian state imposed another structure for the public sphere, one that promoted equal opportunities for men and women in education and the labour market. Women were even given a number of key, high-level positions. As a result, literacy rates rose from low levels at the beginning of the socialist regime to nearly to 100 per cent by 1989. Nonetheless, women in the socialist regime had a triple burden: at home they had complete responsibility for child care and housework while men contributed much less; and at work women were expected to contribute as much time and effort as men.”⁵

² Mills, Melinda, and Blossfeld, Hans-Peter, cited, p. 21

³ *Ibidem*, p. 20

⁴ *Ibidem, ibidem*

⁵ INSTAT, Gender Perspectives in Albania, 2004, Tirana, p.21

Ages at marriage for boys and girls, and as a consequence the age gap between spouses, are significant indicators of the state of gender relationships⁶. The increase of the age gap since the 1990s is highly consistent with the abovementioned return to female housekeeping. Before communism, early marriages were frequent in Albania and in the region. But, while in the other Balkan countries marriage at early age was for both spouses, in Albania only the bride was very young, the bridegroom was quite older, the age gap was large and demonstrated a clear pattern of male dominance. During the communist regime, the age gap decreased illustrating also the women emancipation policies such as education for all, full employment for all and also more participation of women in the public life.

Table. Average age at marriage by sex, and average age gap between spouses

Years	Females	Males	Age gap
1948	22.5	28.7	6.2
1950	22.0	27.7	5.7
1960	21.4	26.9	5.5
1970	21.8	27.1	5.3
1980	22.7	27.0	4.3
1985	22.9	27.1	4.2
1990	23.0	27.3	4.3
2000	23.0	28.1	5.1
2003	23.3	28.9	5.6

Source: Vital statistics and Women and Men in Albania, INSTAT, 2004

Nowadays, boys delay their marriage to find a more suitable job (this might also respond to the traditional mentality that designs men as the holder of the household), while girls are withdrawn from the labour market and continue to marry early.

Note that the pressure of the social norm is on marriage, not so much on fertility. The first childbirth is postponed, which is no surprise after the substantial decline of overall fertility started during the communist period, despite the honours distributed to the largest families. It may be taken as a “rational reaction” to uncertainty. But the child must be born in wedlock. The number of children born out of marriage is close to zero, notwithstanding the Albanian legislation which makes no difference between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” children. Similarly, the frequency of sexual relations before marriage is insignificant at least for women. The majority of young girls have their first sexual experience with their husband or the boy they are engaged to.

Table. Circumstances of the first sexual intercourse, men and women aged 15-24

	Women				Men			
	No sex	In wedlock	Out of wedlock	All	No sex	In wedlock	Out of wedlock	All
Albania, 2002	72	15	12	100	79	2	20	100
Romania, 1999	47	13	41	100	29	1	70	100

Sources: Reproductive Health surveys

Florina Serbanescu, Reproductive health in transition countries in the European context, *European Population Forum 2004: Population Challenges and Policy Responses*, (Geneva, 12-14 January 2004), 39 p.

⁶ “Research from developing countries... shows that the age difference between spouses can also serve as an indicator of power. The age difference between a husband and a wife increases (the wife is usually the younger of the two), the wife’s decision-making power decreases. Age at marriage may- in some contexts- therefore be considered as an indicator of decision-making power within the household” (INSTAT, Gender perspectives in Albania, cited).

International comparison about the proportion of births of unmarried parents

Countries close to Albania exhibit much higher proportions of births out of wedlock. There is a wide diversity from Greece (less than 5%) to Serbia & Montenegro (more than 20%), and it would still be larger if some other countries were considered, like Bulgaria (more than 40%). Most of these differences are rooted in the past and the ranking of the countries would be similar if observed in 1960 or even earlier.

Proportions have risen in all neighbouring countries since the 1980s, which is also a marked contrast with Albania. This trend is generally taken as a sign of declining importance of marriage as an institution and as a frame for childbearing and childrearing. It is shared by almost all European countries, Albania being a rare exception.

Extra marital births, per 100 births

Country	1985	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003
Albania						0.5	0.5
Greece	1.8	2.2	3.0	4.0	4.3	4.4	4.8
Italy	5.4	6.5	8.1	10.2	11.1	12.3	
Macedonia	6.6	7.1	8.2	9.8	10.4	10.7	11.2
Serbia and Montenegro	10.7	12.7	16.4	20.4	20.2		

It is extremely rare that unmarried young people have left parental home to live on their own. Evident economic constraints may explain this behaviour, given the difficulties for youth to find a job and a housing on ill-established markets. But it is not a new phenomenon likely to be explained by current circumstances. Strict control on marriage by families is well in line with keeping youth at home, as long as single. It may seem more surprising that a great proportion of young married couples also live with their parents instead of on their own. Can it be taken as a coping mechanism against difficulties and uncertainties? In fact, this is not a new phenomenon either; it was frequent before communism, when pastoral economy requested the cooperation of the different generations of the same family on a joint land and around a joint cattle. During the communist regime, as long as the state remained strong enough, not only politically but also economically, it occupied itself with finding apartments for the youth and provided social support for the elderly and youth.

Table. Married young people living with parents
(p. 100 married persons in each age group)

Age	Male	Female	Total
15-19	70.1	63.0	63.4
20-24	60.3	49.1	51.4
25-29	46.1	32.0	37.5

Source: Own elaboration on 2001 Census data

We are now back to the non-existence of the welfare state and family has resumed its role as the primary social network. Young couples are constrained to co-reside not only because of the difficulties that they face, but also because of the lack of supporting institutions and policies for themselves and for the elderly.

The picture we have given here is not so much that of youth in transition to adulthood, as that of a specific generation gaining its insertion in the Albanian society in a peculiar historical context. Young people now in their twenties were born around 1980 and spent their prime childhood in the last decade of the communist regime. They were at school when the country moved dramatically from an economic and political system to another. They have completed their education, searched a job and started the formation of their own family in a society under

renovation (under construction?). In parallel with the transformations that define adolescence and passage to adulthood, societal context has deeply moved and goes on doing so.

There are apparent contradictions in the way the generation has envisaged its coming of age. In education, some have opted for early drop out in order to make their active life as soon as possible, others have chosen to go as far as possible in their curriculum to face labour market in the best conditions. Searching employment, some have found a refuge in agriculture in the absence of possibilities in industry or services, others have fled away from their rural environment to find more opportunities in town. Large flows of emigrants have looked for better conditions abroad, some are returning now, often with increased entrepreneurial capacities.

These may be taken as contradictions, hesitations or diversity in coping behaviours. But these are also signs that history is going on and the process is still active. After years of turmoil, the education system may have benefited from recent improvements under the pressure of an increasing demand for longer studies, unemployment seems to have regressed in the last years. And of course emigration has turned into a regular flow of moderate size, partly compensated by returns from abroad.

By its very arrival at adulthood, the new generation is changing the society in which it inserts. Even family, which has regained so much strength in a period of increased uncertainty, seems promised to evolution. The new Family Code has opened the couple and the family to diversified forms that will offer an enlarged range of choices to the future cohorts of youth. The two stories can hardly be disentangled, that of young Albanians inserting in their society and that of the Albanian society changed by the arrival of a new generation in adult ages. Let us take as a positive indication the fact that a generation is now completing its transition to adulthood in a context now stabilising after years of unrest.