"Adulthood is Responsibility for myself and others": Interpretations of Adulthood by Student Youth
(on the Example of Graduate Students of the National Research University Higher School of Economics)

Since the last quarter of the 20th century, adulthood has been conceptualized as a process characterized by a series of events. It includes traditionally moving from parents, entering the labour market, getting married, having children (Elder, 1975[[1]](#footnote-1); Neugarten & Datan, 1973[[2]](#footnote-2)). But today many of these possibilities are unreachable. The reasons for that are the increasing uncertainty in the economic, political and social spheres (Bauman, 2001[[3]](#footnote-3)), and  the dominance of the idea of ​​individual life course planning (Giddens, 1991[[4]](#footnote-4)).

Thus, young people find themselves in a situation where the “traditional” trajectories of growing up proposed to them turn out to be difficult to realize due to the tendency towards “individualization and pluralization of individual models of growing up” (Chernova, Shpakovskaya, 2020, p. 98[[5]](#footnote-5)). Often these changes have led to the conclusion that today's youth is infantile, refusing to mature, and preferring to remain in a state of extended adolescence (Côté & Allahar, 1996[[6]](#footnote-6)). However, it seems that maybe we just should rethink our understanding of adulthood.

Thereby, today in Anglo-Saxon sociological research we can observe a growing popularity of the concept “new transition to adulthood”. It allowed to take into account the influence of the above circumstances on the biographical courses of young people. For example, patterns of new adulthood include the desire of young people to keep open to several opportunities by combining work and education for a long time (Woodman & Win, 2011[[7]](#footnote-7)), postponing marriage and childbirth, abandoning the final move from their parents (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010[[8]](#footnote-8)).

Moreover, the destandardization of the trajectories of growing up leads to the development of a subjectively oriented concept of adulthood, based on the self-identification of young people. According to Arnett (1994[[9]](#footnote-9)), from a subjective point of view, adulthood is primarily determined by the growing independence of young people, the acceptance of family responsibilities and adherence to social norms.

For the Russian sociocultural context, this theme is poorly studied, despite a several works (Зубок & Чупров, 2020[[10]](#footnote-10), Павленко & Якубовская, 2020[[11]](#footnote-11)). They are focused on the problems of the position of youth in the social structure of modern society and the risks associated with it. In this regard, within the framework of this study, it is proposed to analyze the existing interpretations of "adult life" and "adulthood" by young people. Thus, the key research question is following: how do young people interpret the transition to adult life and the corresponding to it state of “adulthood”?

The empirical object of the research is the students of the final courses of the humanities educational bachelor's programs at the Higher School of Economics in 2021 (History; Philology; Philosophy; Culturology). The choice of programs is due to the breadth of the subject area and the focus on the training of specialists in the humanities of the "general profile". Despite the possibility of finding oneself in various fields, due to the “breadth” of the education they receive, graduates of these programs tend to perceive their employment opportunities as rather low. This aspect contradicts the “traditional” trajectory of growing up, which in turn allows us to consider graduates of humanitarian specialties [with potentially low chances of timely employment] as a specific social group forced to adapt to the challenges of the social structure and the regulatory system.

The research methodology was based on a qualitative strategy. We conducted 20 narrative interviews with graduate students of the Federal State Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow) in 2021. The recruiting of informants was carried out in social networks, by using the “snowball” method.

The empirical object and methodology determine the limitations of the study, as it focuses on a specific case. It should be said that the choice of the empirical object of research was determined by the institutional context. The study of subjective interpretations of the “adulthood” of HSE humanities students was one of the tasks of the project “humanitarians in the labour market: expectations and reality” supported within the framework of the II Competition of initiative collective research projects of students of the National Research University "Higher School of Economics". However, based on the results of this study, it seems possible to substantiate the relevance of subject-oriented view to the study of the transition to adulthood in the Russian sociocultural context.

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(pp. 5–28). Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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