

Globalization, uncertainty and changes in early life courses

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A theoretical framework¹

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INTRODUCTION

Young people in industrialized nations have experienced significant changes in the transition to adulthood in past decades. Globalization, via the internationalization and importance of markets, intensified competition, accelerated spread of networks and knowledge via new technologies and the dependence on random shocks, has transformed the transition to adulthood. The purpose of this study is to ask whether these changes have influenced young people's ability to establish themselves as independent adults, to form partnerships, and to become parents. Has globalization produced a fundamental shift in youth behavior as they cope with increasing uncertainty about the future? How are these transformations filtered by different domestic institutions?

To this point, there has been little empirical evidence regarding the consequences of such sweeping social change on the lives of youth. Our central aim is to study the consequences of globalization on the transition to adulthood in a cross-country perspective. We maintain that the impact of globalization will be experienced differently by youth in various countries due to nation-based institutional differences. Institutions such as the education system, employment relations, welfare regimes and family systems serve to buffer the forces of globalization. We examine how changes from national and global forces intersect, how these changes are defined and interpreted, and then how youth react when making pivotal life course decisions. A primary hypothesis is that the increased uncertainty in the early labor market experiences of youth seep into the partnership and parenthood domains of their lives.

Our comparative analysis in this book includes 14 countries from five welfare regimes. Canada, the United States, and Great Britain represent the liberal regimes, with Germany, The Netherlands, and France exemplifying the conservative regimes. Norway and Sweden characterize the social-democratic and Italy, Spain, Mexico, and Ireland are examples of the family-oriented regimes. What we term 'post-socialistic' regimes refers to Estonia and Hungary.

For our purposes, we have defined the transition to adulthood as a stepwise process in which young people adopt specific roles and participate in certain activities. We particularly focus on the age-graded character of labor market entry, the transition to first partnership (cohabitation or marriage), and entry into

parenthood. The study of the impact of globalization on this critical and turbulent phase of the early life course is important for several reasons. First, outsiders of the labor market are expected to experience recent shifts towards globalization more directly. Youth entering the labor market, who are unprotected by seniority or experience, are such outsiders. This relates to the second reason: changes that might first appear in the youth labor market indicate tendencies that may soon work their way through the entire age structure (Myles *et al.*, 1993). The findings of this research are thus pertinent to other social groups beyond youth. Finally, repercussions of decisions made at this stage of the life course are likely to have long-term implications. A higher level of volatility during the period of young adulthood has the potential to generate insecurity and conflict at a time when individuals must make long-term binding decisions that shape the remainder of their life course.

After an overview of the research topic, the section “Globalization and increasing uncertainty” describes the causal mechanisms that relate globalization to the generation of uncertainty in the lives of youth. The section “Globalization and institutional filters” chronicles the importance of national institutions such as educational systems, employment relations, welfare regimes and family systems in filtering the impact of globalization. A theory of how these processes are experienced at an individual level is introduced in the section “Micro-level response to increasing uncertainty”. The micro-level response to globalization positions the actor as attempting to make rational decisions in a context of increasing economic, employment relation and temporal uncertainty. The data and methods used in the empirical analyses are then briefly discussed in the section “Data and methods”, followed by a summary of results and concluding remarks.

GLOBALIZATION AND INCREASING UNCERTAINTY

Globalization is an inherently complex concept (Guillén, 2001). Yet in recent years, it has become a central point of reference for media, politicians, academics, and policy-makers to understand social change. Our concept of globalization can be summarized under four interrelated structural shifts which are affecting the life courses in modern societies during the last two decades: (1) the swift internationalization of markets after the breakdown of the East-West-Divide; (2) the rapid intensification of competition based on deregulation, privatization, and liberalization within nation states; (3) the accelerated diffusion of knowledge and the spread of global networks that are connecting all kinds of markets on the globe via new information and communication technologies (ICTs); and, (4) the rising importance of markets and their dependence on random shocks occurring somewhere on the globe. We point to these global mechanisms because together they are generating an unprecedented level of structural uncertainty in modern societies as described below and also illustrated in Figure 1. We then propose a causal connection between these global forces and various kinds of increasing uncertainty that are filtered by domestic institutions and channeled towards specific social groups. In particular, we create a bridge or middle-range

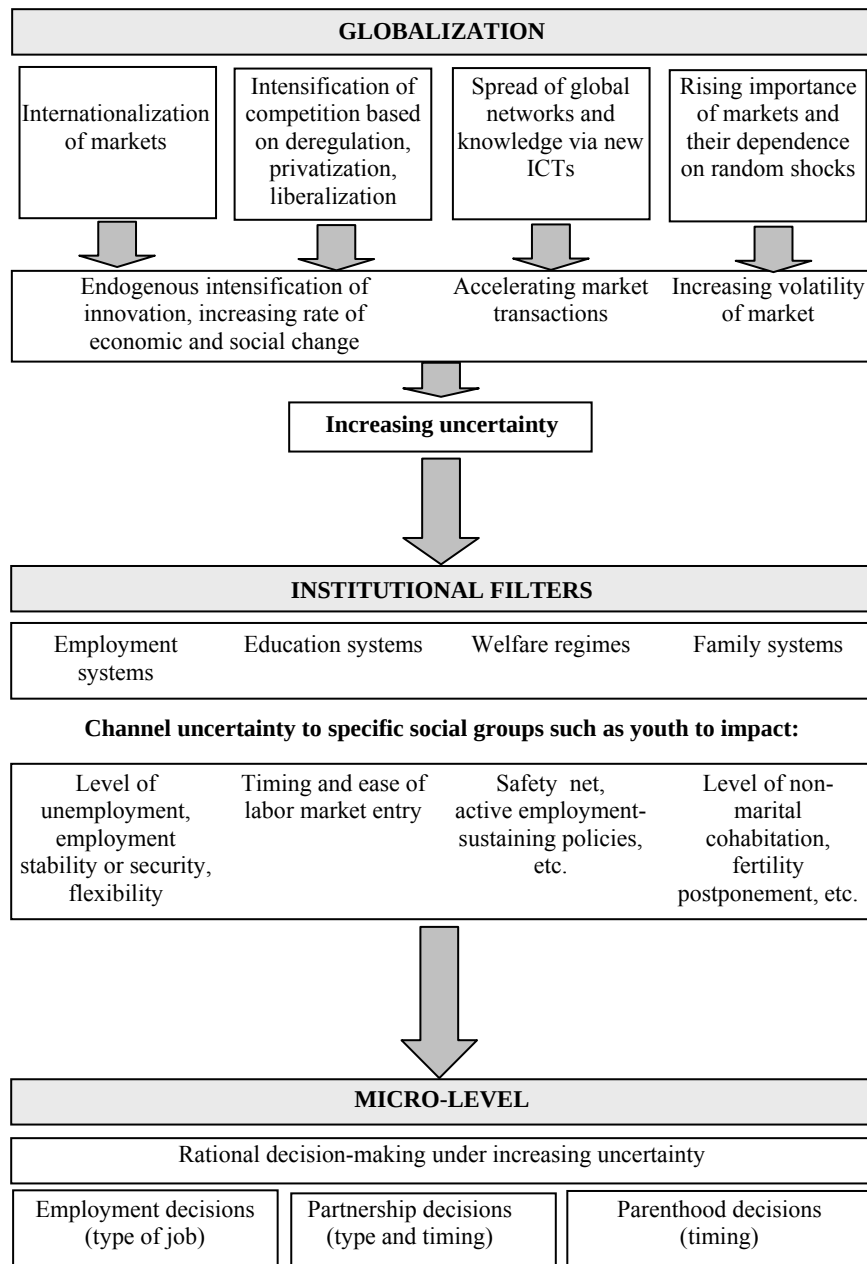


Figure 1 Globalization and increasing uncertainty in the transition to adulthood

theoretical approach that allows testable hypotheses at the individual level of the impact of globalization.

First, globalization refers to the *internationalization of markets and subsequent decline of national borders*. It is connected with changes in laws, institutions, or practices which make various transactions (in terms of commodities, labor, services and capital) easier or less expensive across national borders. The decline of national borders often relates to the modification of trade regulations and political discourse and treaties. We have witnessed global formal agreements such as the International Labor Organization, World Health Organization, World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, United Nations as well as various non-governmental organizations which intensify the interaction among nation states or link social groups from various countries (Verdier and Breen, 1999). As Montanari (2001: 471) argues, many of these organizations: “operate as pressure groups on governments to enact policies which would enhance and improve the functioning of markets, through measures such as deregulation and privatization.” Tariffs on trade, for instance, have been greatly reduced under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and between member states in the European Union (EU) and via the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The consequence is that capital flows are facilitated by these types of political agreements, which have also generally liberalized financial markets (Fligstein, 1998). Some have argued that this decline of national borders undermines the authority or even heralds the fall of the nation-state (Ohmae, 1990; Beck, 2000). Our position is that the nation state and in particular institutions that shape the lives of youth do not lose their significance, but generate country-specific problems that call for country-specific solutions and transformations (see also Sassen, 1996).

In economic terms, the internationalization of markets is particularly reflected in the rising number of firms conducting business in more than one country, through the presence of multinational corporations (MNCs) and foreign direct investment (FDI). In fact, MNCs are a driving force of the globalization of production and markets since they account for around two-thirds of world trade, 20 percent of world output, and play a primary role in the diffusion of technology (UNCTAD, 1995: 23; Reich, 1991). Internationalization of markets also means the *integration of previously ‘isolated’ nations into the world economy*. Several areas in our study experienced closure to outside global forces for varying reasons such as a dictatorship (Franco in Spain), communism (East Germany, Estonia, Hungary) or political conservatism tied to the Catholic church (Québec in Canada).

Second, globalization relates to the *intensification of competition*, i.e., the notion that capital and labor is increasingly mobile and forcing firms and national economies to continuously adjust. Within nation states, this is reflected in the increased importance of governments to make their national economies internationally competitive. These policy measures include the improvement of the functioning of markets through the removal or relaxation of government regulation of economic activities (deregulation). It also suggests a shift towards relying on the price mechanism to coordinate economic activities (liberalization), and a

transfer to private ownership and control of assets or enterprises that were previously under public ownership (privatization). This neo-liberal shift demands efficiency, productivity and profitability, and often means a push to adjust prices, products, technologies and human resources more rapidly and extensively (Alderson, 1999; Regini, 2000a; Montanari, 2001).

A third feature of globalization is the *spread of global networks of people and firms linked by ICTs* such as microcomputers and the Internet. These ICTs together with modern mass media transmit messages and images instantaneously from the largest city to the smallest village on every continent and allow a faster diffusion of information and knowledge over long distances. They increasingly allow people to share information, to connect and to create an instant common worldwide standard of comparison. Modern ICTs influence communications between individuals, organizations and communities by effectively rendering physical space and distance irrelevant. Thus, although the introduction of technology is not unique in itself, recent ICTs have fundamentally altered the scope (widening reach of networks of social activity and power), intensity (regularized connections), velocity (speeding up of interactions and processes), and impact (local impacts global) of transformations (Held *et al.*, 1999).

Finally, globalization is inherently related to the *rise in the importance of markets*. Globalization not only speeds up the process of exchange and communication across national borders, but due to the intensification of global competition also increases the relevance of markets in the coordination of decisions in all modern societies. These developments inherently strengthen the worldwide interdependence of decision-making.

As a consequence of these structural developments, market prices and their changes increasingly convey information about the global demand for various goods, services and assets, and the worldwide relative costs of producing and offering them. In a globalizing market, individual suppliers and consumers are increasingly exposed to a rising number of traders on each side of the market and become 'price-takers', able to buy and sell any quantity at a price which they generally cannot influence. Thus, prices produced by globalizing markets increasingly set the standards to which individuals, firms and nation states then try to comply.

However, globalization does not only mean that actors are increasingly in the hands of anonymous global markets. What is equally important is that the changes on these markets are becoming more dynamic and less predictable. First, the globalization of markets endogenously intensifies competition between firms, forcing them to be innovative, to use new technological developments or to invent new products. This in turn increases the instability of markets (Streeck, 1987). Second, modern ICTs and deregulation and liberalization measures allow individuals, firms and governments to react faster to observed market changes and simultaneously accelerate market transactions (Castells, 1996). This in turn makes long-term developments of globalizing markets inherently harder to predict. Third, global prices tend to become exogenously more liable to fluctuations because worldwide supply, demand, or both are getting increasingly dependent on *random shocks* caused somewhere on the globe (e.g., major scientific discov-

eries, technical inventions, new consumer fashions, major political upsets such as wars and revolutions, economic upsets, etc.). The accelerated market dynamics and the rising dependence of prices on random events happening somewhere on the globe produce a higher frequency of surprises and lead to market prices which are different to an important extent from what people reasonably could have expected given the restricted information available to them. In other words, the increasing dynamics and volatility of outcomes of globalizing markets makes it more difficult for individuals, firms and governments to predict the future of the market and to make choices between different alternatives and strategies. Increasing uncertainty about economic and social developments is therefore a definitive feature of globalization in advanced economies.

GLOBALIZATION AND INSTITUTIONAL FILTERS

It is not essentially increasing uncertainty as such that is important if we analyze the consequences of globalization; rather, it is how rising uncertainty is 'institutionally filtered' and channeled towards specific social groups in various countries. Increasing uncertainty does not impact all regions, states, organizations or individuals in the same way. There are institutional settings and social structures, historically grown and country-specific, that determine the degree to which people are affected by rising uncertainty (DiPrete *et al.*, 1997). These institutions have a certain inertial tendency to persist (Nelson, 1995; Esping-Andersen, 1993) and act as a sort of intervening variable between global macro forces and the responses at the micro level (Hurrell and Woods, 1995; Regini, 2000a). Thus, we do not expect that increasing uncertainty leads to a rapid convergence of life courses in all modern societies, as claimed, for example, by neo-institutionalists (see for e.g., Meyer *et al.*, 1992) or the proponents of the modernization hypothesis (see for e.g., Treiman, 1970; Treiman and Yip, 1989). Rather we claim that there are path-dependent developments within countries (Nelson, 1995; Mayer, 2001). The institutions that most impact the life courses of youth are employment relations, educational systems, national welfare state regimes, and the family.

Employment relations systems

Given the specific phase of the life course, we expect that *in all countries* the global increase of uncertainty is experienced more directly by *youth entering the labor market*. They are unprotected by seniority and experience and they do not yet have strong ties to work organizations and work environments. Thus we propose a *life course hypothesis* that youth entering the labor market are more exposed to global uncertainty in all countries. In contrast, we assume that people who are already established in their job career or have already gained several years of labor force experience should be less influenced by global forces.

However, countries also differ significantly with respect to the nature of their employment relations between employers and workers and make it therefore

more or less easy for youth to establish themselves in the labor market. These country-specific differences surface in elements such as types of work councils, collective bargaining systems, strength of unions versus employer organizations, labor legislation or administrative regulations. They produce distinct national variations of occupational structures and industries, patterns of labor-capital negotiations, strike frequencies and collective agreements on wages, job security, labor conditions, and work hours (Soskice, 1993; Streeck, 1992). How these systems diverge has been characterized as 'coordinated' and 'uncoordinated' market economies (Soskice, 1998), 'individualist' or 'collective' regimes (DiPrete *et al.*, 1997), or 'open' and 'closed' employment relations (Sørensen, 1983). We first define these systems and position the 14 countries on a continuum according to the degree of open or closed employment relations, followed by a link to the type of labor market flexibility measures introduced within each nation.

The *open employment relationship* reigns in the United States, Canada, Ireland, and Britain (after Margaret Thatcher) and has a severe manifestation in Mexico. It is characterized as decentralized, dualistic and based on free market forces and competition. It is a system where employment relations are open in the sense that protective factors such as labor unions, legislation related to job security and stability are weak. Shielding of workers is at a minimum, market mechanisms are central and individuals' labor market resources or human capital such as social origin, education, labor force experience are crucial (DiPrete *et al.*, 1997). Many European countries, on the other hand, such as Sweden, Norway, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain, are often classified as having labor markets with relatively *closed employment relationships* and centralized procedures for negotiating wages (Regini, 2000a). Sweden and Germany are countries with particularly strong labor unions, while Southern European countries like Spain and Italy are taken as extreme cases of an 'insider-outsider' labor market.

A fascinating evolution of employment relation systems exists in countries which belonged to the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, which in our study includes Estonia (Katus *et al.*, this volume), Hungary (Róbert and Bukodi, this volume) and former East Germany (Kurz *et al.*, this volume). These countries not only experienced a severe political and economic 'shock' from a socialist to a more market driven economy, but also incredible transformations from an agricultural to industrial society, coupled with sudden exposure to the accelerated and volatile global market at the beginning of the 1990s. This meant a rapid shift from closed to open employment systems. Older cohorts grew up in a system where employment was guaranteed, with extraordinarily high job security, even for women, youth and older workers (see Katus *et al.*, this volume). Younger cohorts entered the labor market after this 'shock' during a period of economic depression and tumultuous change.

Based on these systems, we propose an *employment relationship hypothesis* regarding the early labor market experiences of youth in various countries. We expect that the main consequences of the open employment relationship for young people will be: (1) comparatively low economic security (e.g., wages,

benefits) for most jobs; (2) an environment that fosters precarious employment and labor market flexibility to the extent that it becomes more widespread among various social groups; (3) importance of individual human capital resources; (4) relatively easy entry into the labor market; (5) unemployment of a shorter duration; and, (6) a relatively high rate of job mobility (i.e., hire-and-fire principle). The central impact of a closed employment relationship is expected to be that: (1) precarious employment forms (e.g., fixed-term contracts, part-time work) are highly concentrated among specific groups seeking access to the labor market (youth, women, unemployed); (2) individual human capital resources are less important; (3) entry in the labor force is problematic, particularly under conditions of high general unemployment; (4) unemployment is usually of a longer duration; and, (5) the rate of job mobility is relatively low. Within these systems most of the already employed workers, the so-called 'insiders', will be relatively shielded against the growing uncertainty and flexibility demands of the world market, which is explored in the second volume of the GLOBALIFE project that examines mid-career men (see Blossfeld, Mills and Bernardi, forthcoming). Globalization in these countries tends to create a new kind of underclass of the socially excluded, while the employed have high levels of job security with relatively high wages, reminiscent of dual and segmented labor market theories (Piore, 1970; Fine, 1998).

The type of employment relation system also shapes the impact of the globalization process, which is witnessed in the level of unemployment, employment stability or security and labor market flexibility of young people (see Figure 1 and Klijzing, this volume). A key discussion is the type and degree of labor market flexibility that each nation institutes (Bernardi, 2000; Regini, 2000b; Standing, 1997). Labor market flexibility can be distinguished into five different types: external numerical (ability to adjust number of employees), externalization (outsourcing, subcontracting), functional (insider employees moved between tasks), wage (adjust labor costs, benefits), and temporal or internal numerical (adjust working time, cyclical or seasonal shifts) (Atkinson, 1984; Bruhnes, 1989; Regini, 2000b).

We propose a *labor market flexibility hypothesis*, which contends that firms implement different types of flexibility depending on the rigidity of the employment relation system. Not only the level or type of flexibility will differ, but also the meaning and function attributed to it. Our anticipation is that in rigid closed labor markets, functional flexibility for labor market insiders is often the primary option for employers. However, for outsiders such as youth, one way to implement flexibility will be a combination of numerical/temporal flexibility in the form of fixed-term or temporary contracts. Furthermore, externalization – related to the growing number of self-employed youth not bound to a contract of employment – may also serve an increasingly important purpose (see Bernardi and Nazio, this volume). Whereas, in more deregulated open labor markets built on the premises of flexibility, market economic relations, and a non-interventionist state (Mayer, 2001), we expect flexibility to pervade in many forms. As new labor market entrants, youth will be party to numerical flexibility as the last hired and first fired, a pattern likely accentuated during periods of economic

recession. Externalization will also play a more central role (see Róbert and Bukodi, this volume). Since labor costs are more readily adjusted to the firms' needs in open markets, we likewise expect that this will translate into wage flexibility evident in lower earnings and more implicit economic reductions such as no or fewer benefits (e.g., pension, sickness). Our last expectation is that open systems are able to adjust labor using temporal flexibility in accordance with cyclical or seasonal shifts and to vary the hours worked in a day, week or year (Mills, this volume).

Regini (2000a) argues that the use of temporary contracts in Europe as a form of flexibility was more of a controlled exception or experiment in Italy, Germany, France, Spain and Norway. By contrast, in Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Denmark and to some extent Sweden, flexibility is a general or guiding principle for all employment relationships. In countries that experimented with fixed-term contracts, flexibility was not a permanent solution but was designed to inject flexibility into a certain segment of the labor market (Regini, 2000a). This technique achieves similar objectives without substantially lowering the level of protection enjoyed by the core insider labor market. The sweeping form of flexibility in Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands and North America enables firms to rapidly reduce costs and adjust more quickly to rapid changes in the global market, which in turn affords better competitiveness in the global market and higher employment. However, the long-term prospect of these short-term solutions remains to be seen.

Educational systems

In the globalized, knowledge-based society, education and labor force experience become the most important types of human capital. Since youth are generally lacking the latter they have to focus on the former, which is evident in educational expansion across most of the industrialized world (see Klijzing, this volume). We therefore propose a *human capital hypothesis* that gauges the significance of characteristics required in all knowledge-based economies. Educational attainment and occupational standing measure human capital, which may increase with labor force experience and age. The expectation is that those lacking human capital, such as youth with lower education, weak occupational standing or lacking experience, will feel the impact of globalization more immensely in *all* modern societies. In other words, they are at a higher risk to enter a more precarious, flexible and uncertain employment situation (e.g., fixed-term contract, part-time, irregular hours). Conversely, those with higher education or the 'knowledge workers' will conceivably have more favorable experiences.

However, we expect that white-collar workers are not entirely immune to changes such as the use of temporary short-term contracts. Thus there may be a change also for those in higher occupations or higher education. Yet the main difference is that for them, unstable or inadequate work may serve as a bridge whereas for lower skilled wage-workers, it may become a trap (see Bernardi and Nazio; Layte *et al.*, this volume). Therefore, a second general expectation is that

globalization accentuates or even cultivates inequality by offering better opportunities to the better educated youth and constraining the chances of the less educated. To test this hypothesis, many of the country chapters that follow examine the transition to employment by educational level, occupational class, age, sex, labor force experience, and in some cases, by migrant status (Estonia, Germany) or visible minority or race (Canada, United States).

There are, however, also great differences among nations in the way they (1) differentiate the maximum number of school years attended by all and tracking (stratification), (2) value certificates or ability-based learning (qualificational versus organizational), (3) standardize the quality of education (standardization), and (3) link education with entry into the labor market. Using Maurice and Sellier's (1979) regimes of school-to-work transitions, we can think of differences in terms of 'qualificational' versus 'organizational' space and, following Allmendinger (1989), the degree of educational 'standardization' or 'stratification' (see also Blossfeld, 1992; Shavit and Müller, 1998). In unstratified systems, all children have the opportunity to attend school, which may lead to post-secondary education until the age of 18, with the same range of options (theoretically) open to all students. In these countries, a larger proportion of a cohort attains the maximum number of school years provided by the general educational system. Countries with more unstratified systems include the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Sweden, post-1960s Italy, post-1970s Spain and post-1990s Estonia. Whereas in the 'stratified' systems that exist in Germany, the Netherlands, and Hungary, educational opportunities of youth are stratified as they are streamed into specific educational tracks at a younger age.

The manner that countries combine theoretical learning with practical work experience has direct implications for early labor market transitions (Blossfeld, 1992; Blossfeld and Stockmann, 1998/99). In a system of organizational space, education is academic or general in character with specific occupational skills learned on-the-job. These are often the unstandardized systems such as the United States. Whereas in qualificational space, education is closely tied to job requirements in the vocational system with more importance placed on diploma requirements and certificates. In these countries that value qualifications (e.g., Germany), nationwide standardized certificates are easily understood by employers. Here it is important to make a distinction between countries which organize training mainly through (1) 'theoretical' training in vocational schools (France, the Netherlands, Hungary, Ireland, Estonia, Mexico), (2) 'practical' on-the-job training (United States, Great Britain, Canada, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Norway) or (3) the so-called 'dual' system, a pragmatic combination of theoretical learning at school and job experience at the work place (Germany).

Based on these differences, we propose an *educational system hypothesis*, which specifies the impact of the type of educational system on labor market entry in the following way. First, we expect that *theoretical training in vocational schools* promotes a broader understanding of occupational activities, but does not confront youth with real work situations. Since practical experience is shifted to the period after theoretical vocational training, our anticipation is that youth engaged in training from these systems will have a relatively more difficult

transition from school to work (see unemployment figures in Klijzing, this volume). Second, in the organizational system of *practical on-the-job training*, (often unstratified, unstandardized) we expect that young workers will be less restricted to narrowly defined occupational fields, have fewer structural barriers in terms of recognized certificates, and have a weaker link between the type of qualification they possess and the type of job they obtain. Due to the heterogeneous quality of on-the-job training, however, we foresee that this lack of shared definitions and standards with respect to skills, income and job requirements will increase the risk of workers to move between firms. Although the transition from school to work will be relatively easy in these systems, we predict intense mobility and a protracted duration for youth to find a suitable and permanent job match. In an analysis of entry into the labor force, Oppenheimer and Kalmijn (1995) demonstrate that young Americans increasingly start their job career in relatively unskilled and temporary jobs but, after a short period, they are able to move to normal career-entry positions. Thus, these unskilled occupational activities at entry into the labor force or 'stop-gap-jobs' have the character of temporary bridges (Myles *et al.*, 1993). The phenomenon and relative mismatch of stop-gap-jobs are particularly important as our study examines entry into first job. Finally, in the *dual-system*, (often qualificational, highly standardized and stratified), we expect youth to have less turbulent early labor market experiences (see Klijzing, this volume). This is due to the fact that the dual-system provides a smooth transition from the general educational school system to the employment system because the vocational training system feeds directly into the job system (Blossfeld and Stockmann, 1998-99). Young people are also effectively 'screened' during their education with exams and certificates expected to show their abilities. The disadvantage of such a system in a global era of rapidly shifting occupational structures is, however, that it leads to a close coupling of vocational certificates and educational opportunities, and thus to a high degree of rigidity and low level of job mobility (Blossfeld, 1992).

A related point is the *degree of educational expansion* in each country. When we examine the cohort-specific attendance rates across various levels of education for the 14 countries in this study, there has been a prolonged extension of school participation over time (see Klijzing, this volume). A longer stay in school proxies the degree to which the transition to economic independence has been postponed across birth cohorts in different countries. This belated timing in reaching economic independence is particularly important for our study of partnership formation and the transition to parenthood. There is a link between educational expansion and increasing youth unemployment, or an *alternative role hypothesis*. This identifies a tendency among young adults to opt - if this is structurally possible in a given educational system - for the role as a student instead of becoming unemployed in the process of transition from youth to adulthood. The educational system then serves as a reservoir for otherwise unemployed youth, which is increasingly strong in Southern European countries like Italy and Spain. There is likely also a relation to the national support systems for young adults who prefer to stay in education. Some countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden have a more generous system of

education grants or loans, which is limited (e.g., Canada, Great Britain, France, post-1990s Estonia, Ireland), highly insufficient (e.g., United States) or virtually non-existent in others such as Italy, Spain, Hungary and Mexico.

Welfare regimes

The impact of increasing uncertainty on social inequality among young people is strongly dependent on the welfare state. Modern countries have created different welfare regimes implying diverse national ideologies about social solidarity (Flora and Alber, 1981) as well as gender and social equality (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Orloff, 1996). We first outline the main characteristics of the five welfare regime categorizations of liberal, social-democratic, conservative, family-oriented and post-socialistic. Differences between welfare regimes manifest themselves in the priority of: (1) active employment-sustaining labor market policies (i.e., the commitment to full employment); (2) welfare-sustaining employment exit policies (i.e., support for those who are outside of the labor market such as youth, unemployed, ill, poor, family care workers, pensioners); (3) the scope and generosity of family allowances and services (i.e., maternity/paternity leave, childcare) (Gauthier, 1996); and, (4) the share of the public sector in the labor force. Together, these differences form a *welfare regime hypothesis*. The expectations of the impact of each regime on the lives of youth are formulated following the description of each regime.

To varying degrees, the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada in this study are viewed as *liberal* welfare regimes characterized by passive labor market policies, moderate support for the underprivileged, and relatively small public sector employment. As outlined in the previous section, the comparatively high employment performance is likely related to the reduction of rigidities such as union power, restrictive labor legislation, and general flexibility of the labor market. Due to these factors, our expectation is that although there will be an overall higher employment level for youth, it will be at the expense of greater inequality and poverty. This is the result of an environment of passive employment policies, a marginal safety net, such as limited or highly conditional unemployment benefits, and mixed (i.e., generous child allowance and limited parental leave in Ireland) or means-tested family benefits (Canada, United States), and more exposure to the competitive private sector.

Norway and Sweden are in contrast considered as examples of the *social-democratic* welfare regime model. Active labor market and taxation policies in these countries are aimed at full employment, gender equality at the workplace as well as at home, and a 'fair' income distribution with a high degree of wage compression. Achieving full employment is mostly attempted by a combination of Keynesian demand policies and mobility stimulating measures such as retraining, mobility grants, and temporary jobs. The large participation of (married) women in full-time employment in these welfare regimes rests on both: (1) the rapid expansion of job opportunities in the service and public sector, engendered in particular by the demands of social services (kindergartens, schools, hospitals, day care centers and homes for the elderly); and, (2) the highly pro-

gressive individual income tax that makes a second household income necessary for most families if they want to enjoy the products of a technologically advanced service society (Blossfeld and Drobnič, 2001). In this welfare regime, the government tries to achieve full-employment through an expanding public service sector with relatively low wages for public employees and a high rate of female employment, in particular. Our expectation is that youth making the transition to adulthood can fall back on a relatively generous safety net, which combined with other factors such as gender equality and full-employment, better enables them to combine work with family formation (i.e., forming partnership, becoming a parent).

Germany and the Netherlands are often cited as examples of *conservative* welfare regimes. Social policies in these countries are not so much designed to promote employment opportunities, job mobility, and full employment by Keynesian demand policy measures but rather to ensure that those workers who leave employment because of job loss, disability, or in some cases as part of an early retirement program, are protected against serious declines in living standards. Of course, this is costly and leads to tax increases, particularly during periods of high unemployment. This type of welfare regime is therefore strongly transfer-oriented, with decommodifying effects for those who are economically inactive. It is also committed to the traditional division of labor in the family that makes wives economically dependent on their husbands, often referred to as the 'male-breadwinner model'. In particular, it supports wives and mothers who give priority to family activities (taking care of children and the elderly) and seek to work part-time. Correspondingly, welfare state provisions (e.g., day care) are far less developed than in the social democratic model and female economic activity rates are considerably lower and mostly restricted to part-time jobs (Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997). Our main prediction is that the increased economic uncertainty combined with the lack of public support will impact the decision to enter parenthood for certain groups of youth, who, due to an inability to combine education or labor force participation with family careers, will increasingly postpone or even forgo parenthood (Blossfeld and Drobnič, 2001). France is hard to classify since it reflects features of various welfare regimes. We place it next to the conservative regimes, but expect that it will exhibit sharp contrasts due to pronatalistic policies, combined with measures that promote female employment and the combination of work and family careers (see Blossfeld, 1995).

Southern European countries like Italy and Spain, and to some extent Mexico and Ireland, also share common features. They have developed a welfare regime model that might be called *family-oriented* (Jurado Guerrero, 1995). In terms of labor market policy, support for the less privileged, and the importance of public sector employment, this welfare regime is very similar to the liberal one. Unlike the latter, however, it is characterized by a strong ideological and indeed practical involvement of family and kinship networks in protecting its members against economic and social risks. Due to the meager or non-existent safety net (e.g., family support, unemployment benefits), the state shifts the responsibility for the support of the unemployed and other vulnerable 'outsider' groups to families and kinship networks. This model is based on the deeply rooted cultural

view that family and kinship represent an important institution of reciprocal help and that family members should thus support each other. Jurado Guerrero (1995) has argued that the long stay of youth in the parental home in Southern Europe is 'closely associated with the high labor market risks and the lukewarm protection that the state provides against them.'

In reality this family support is, however, mostly provided by women, with two important results: (1) their labor force participation (including part-time work) is, by international standards, extremely low (Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997); and, (2) especially if young women want to make a career, there is a particularly severe conflict between family tasks and (mostly full-time) job requirements. This leads to exorbitantly low fertility levels in Spain or Italy, for example. Thus, a paradoxical result in the family-oriented Mediterranean welfare regime appears to be that the extended family is rapidly disappearing.

Finally, we add the *post-socialistic* welfare regime to include countries in the former socialist Eastern Europe, which in this study include Estonia and Hungary. Hungary is perhaps closer to the social democratic regime, characterized by both egalitarianism and de-familialization. There is relatively more generous support for the family, with the dual-earner family model favored by fiscal arrangements, but with a highly conditional to limited degree of support for unemployed youth (Róbert and Bukodi, this volume). Whereas Estonia has taken a more liberal direction with limited next to non-existent unemployment and family benefits for youth (Katus *et al.*, this volume). However, considering the rapid transformations after 1990, the trajectory of these welfare regimes is still in evolution.

Family systems and interdependence of careers

The family system and the interdependence between family, education and employment careers have direct consequences for the transition to adulthood, specifically the transition to first partnership and parenthood. Family systems regulate the degree of pluralization of private living arrangements. Pluralization refers to lifestyles beyond the traditional marital couple or nuclear family to include non-marital cohabitation, remaining single, or postponement or forgoing of fertility (Corijn and Klijzing, 2001).

A north-south divide in the pluralization of private living arrangements emerges due to institutional, but also cultural differences (Blossfeld, 1995). Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Norway seem to have a pioneering role, while countries like Germany, France, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States and Canada appear to follow this trend. Familistic countries such as Italy, Spain, Ireland and Mexico are even less affected. The strong institutionalization of marriage in Southern Europe and Mexico, translates into small numbers of non-marital unions and one-person households among youth (Nazio and Blossfeld, 2003), low divorce and extra-marital birth rates as well as into an asymmetrical relationship between the sexes within the family.

There is *interdependence* between educational and employment systems on the one hand, and the family system on the other. Our expectation is that educational

expansion impacts entry into first union and parenthood in several ways. First, we anticipate that prolonged education requires that youth maintain the role of an economically dependent student for a longer period of time, which increases their level of economic uncertainty (see next section), and thus leads to postponement of partnership and parenthood across cohorts (Blossfeld, 1995). The growth of qualified women in particular means that women will have their first child later due to extended education, effective contraception and the competing demands of employment and childcare.

Second, we presume that highly educated individuals have different values and preferences such as independence, autonomy and a higher attachment to career building and the labor force (Liefbroer, 1991; Mills, 2000). Those with higher education are thus more willing and able to adopt flexible and innovative behavior that leads to the pluralization of living arrangements (e.g., cohabitation, voluntary childlessness). Others have also argued the contrary. Since educational attainment increases earning propensity and the capacity to marry, in some circumstances, those with less education may be more likely to cohabit (e.g., Rindfuss and Vandenheuvel, 1990; Thornton *et al.*, 1995). This is related to the theory that highly qualified women are more likely to postpone family formation (Becker, 1981). Yet postponement behavior is not only based on educational qualifications, but also on the compatibility of combining a family and a career. We expect that countries with poor maternity or parental leave and particularly childcare arrangements, such as the conservative or familistic welfare regimes, reduce the opportunity for women to have interdependent careers.

Third, based on previous research, we anticipate that educational enrollment status will 'compete' with family formation and will thus reduce both the chances of entering a union (specifically marriage), and having a child (Blossfeld and Huinink, 1991; Liefbroer, 1991; Blossfeld, 1995; Rindfuss and Vandenheuvel, 1990). Students are less likely to enter a union, especially marriage and enter into parenthood for several reasons (Mills, 2000). First, students possess fewer material resources. Second, they often have less leisure time, and finally, "due to their transient and uncertain position they may be less inclined to commit themselves to a long-term binding decision such as partnership or marriage" (Mills, 2000: 189). Conversely, being a student is more compatible with entering a cohabiting union due to the fact that it is less costly than a marriage, more flexible, has less legal restrictions, is easier to dissolve and has fewer normative expectations.

We therefore propose a *flexible partnership hypothesis*, which maintains that consensual unions represent a 'rational' reply to growing uncertainty that surrounds the transition to adulthood in a globalizing world. To reduce uncertainty, youth are more likely to bind themselves to the more flexible union of cohabitation as it is largely independent of the future (Mills, 2004; Wu, 2000). These living arrangements permit the postponement of long-term commitments and self-binding decisions such as marriage at least for the time being. Reminiscent of Easterlin's (1976) theory of economic deprivation, this applies in particular to historical periods of general economic uncertainty and rising unemployment, when the tendency to marry and have children appears to diminish. Our perspec-

tive also clearly relates to Oppenheimer's (1988; 2003; Oppenheimer *et al.*, 1997) work on the impact of uncertainty in social and economic roles on the timing of family transitions. As Oppenheimer (1988: 583) states: "Cohabitation gets young people out of high-cost search activities during a period of social immaturity but without incurring what are, for many, the penalties of either heterosexual isolation or promiscuity, and it often offers many of the benefits of marriage, including the pooling of resources and the economies of scale that living together provide." In many ways, the flexibility of cohabitation matches the flexible labor market circumstances that many youth experience during the era of globalization.

MICRO-LEVEL RESPONSE TO INCREASING UNCERTAINTY

Many decisions in the early life course have long-term implications. People have to opt for educational and professional tracks, enter job careers or make long-term binding family and fertility decisions. However, higher levels of uncertainty for youth generate insecurity and potential conflict and make it increasingly difficult to make such choices. Young people respond and adapt to the complex structural shifts brought about by globalization. A central hypothesis of this study is that the uncertainty generated by globalization at the social-structural level reduces or delays the propensity of youth to enter long-term binding commitments such as partnerships and parenthood (see Figure 1). Our attention thus turns to changes in rational decision-making under conditions of increasing uncertainty and descriptions of the schema developed to measure uncertainty at the individual level.

Rational decision-making under increasing uncertainty

We propose the use of a dynamic rational choice model to understand individual decision-making under conditions of increasing uncertainty (Blossfeld and Prein, 1998). We do not advocate a model of individual action as deterministic behavior, but rather as a tool to find regularities among a larger number of actors. A dynamic rational choice model assumes in particular that typical actors try to act rationally. Following Elster (1989), such rational decision makers are characterized by trying to achieve three optimizations: 1) finding the best action that fits with their given beliefs and desires, 2) developing the most appropriate belief given the evidence at hand; and, 3) collecting the correct amount of evidence while taking into account their given desires and prior beliefs. Yet due to the process of globalization described at the onset of this chapter, such as the accelerating pace of change, volatility and unpredictability of social and economic developments, and deluge of information, youth now face three major decision problems.

First, there is *rising uncertainty about the behavioral alternatives themselves*. This issue becomes more important when young actors have to make rational choices among alternatives that become progressively more blurred. For

instance, due to the increased uncertainty that has emerged at the macro level it becomes more difficult for young adults to compare and rank the various options for educational, professional or partnership careers, simply because they know less and less about future alternatives. The problem here is not only which alternative to choose but increasingly when to choose it. Second, there is *growing uncertainty about the probability of behavioral outcomes*. This problem is especially acute when actors are less and less able to assign in a reliable manner subjective probabilities to the various outcomes of their future courses of action. In the process of globalization, this uncertainty becomes particularly severe when a decision requires beliefs about choices to be made by other people in the future (e.g., partner, employer). Third, there is *increasing uncertainty about the amount of information to be collected for a particular decision*. Collecting information is necessary, but costly and time-consuming. With the accelerated spread of global networks and knowledge, the question of how much information one should optimally collect before one is ready to form an opinion becomes more serious because the marginal costs and benefits for further information searches are increasingly unclear. One has therefore to assume that actors – whether consciously or not – will set certain threshold limits, which, once satisfied, stop the search for additional information.

As described in the previous section on institutional filters, decision-making and risk calculations to cope with uncertainty are firmly embedded within the social context of the nations in which the perceptions of risk are maintained. As Regini (2000a: 8) states: “The institutional context, in fact, provides actors with a set of resources and constraints that they must necessarily take into account when choosing among different alternatives and consequently shapes their actions.” Lindenberg (1983) and Esser (1991) use the terms ‘habits’ and ‘frames’ as nation- or class-specific ways to interpret decision situations. Heiner (1983) argues that cultural traditions, social institutions or norms serve as rule-mechanisms that restrict the flexibility to choose potential courses of actions, or which produce a selective alertness to information. For instance, a young person in Spain entering into a partnership has not only a restricted amount of choices that more likely leads to marriage than a consensual union, but also reflects cultural traditions that frame her/his decision in a very specific way. Rules and norms that stigmatize certain behavior also limit young people’s ability to see a consensual union as a viable partnership option. Country-specific institutions and national norms generate effective decision ‘heuristics’ (see also Gigerenzer *et al.*, 1999), which are not thoughtlessly repeated (as in the ‘homo sociologicus’), but used as problem-solving tools.

Types of uncertainty in the transition to adulthood

Since a main premise of this study was to either find evidence or dispute the impact of globalization on the early life course, we required an empirical research design that offered tangible findings. We therefore devised a measurement design to theoretically and empirically gauge the impact of uncertainty that arises from globalization factors on individual transitions in the early life course.

The schema consists of three types of uncertainty: economic, temporal, and employment relation.

First, *economic uncertainty* is defined as the caliber of economic precariousness of an individuals' employment and educational enrollment circumstances (Bernardi, 2000). We anticipate that labor market positions with high degrees of economic uncertainty will inhibit youth to make long-term binding commitments such as partnerships, and particularly marriage, or parenthood that require a secure economic basis (Oppenheimer, 1988; Oppenheimer *et al.*, 1997). Youth require a necessary minimum or what Rindfuss and Vandenheuvel (1990) refer to as the 'affordability clause' to enter into a binding relationship or have a child. As Oppenheimer (1988), we expect that youth will avoid commitment such as marriage and parenthood, but still desire the rewards of having a relationship (i.e., consensual union).

In this study, economic uncertainty is captured in four central ways. First it is measured by an activity status indicator of education and employment.² A second dimension is occupational class, using Erikson and Goldthorpe's (1992) class schema. Our expectation is that compared to the higher level service or routine white collar classes, the lower classes such as unskilled manual workers are more likely to be in economically precarious situations. In other words, skilled occupations (and as we will argue shortly stable employment) can reduce uncertainties (Oppenheimer *et al.*, 1997). Whether individuals receive extra benefits with their jobs (e.g., pension) is a third measure of economic uncertainty used in some of the country chapters. A final measure included in some of the country studies (e.g., France, Hungary) is earnings. Thus, the comparative yardstick to measure uncertainty is against the relative 'certainty' of youth holding certain statuses such as not being enrolled in education, being employed, and if so, in a higher occupational class, or receiving benefits or higher earnings.

Second, according to Breen (1997: 477) "Temporal uncertainty reduces the attractiveness of long-term commitment and increases that of 'contingent asymmetric commitment.'" In other words, due to *temporal uncertainty*, youth are less able to make long-term binding commitments which may translate into, for example, opting for cohabitation instead of marriage or forgoing partnership and parenthood until they feel they have obtained adequate certainty for their future life path (see also Kurz *et al.*, this volume). Contingent asymmetric commitment is a useful concept to understand the consequences of labor market flexibility experienced by youth. In relation to temporary contracts, for example, it refers to a relationship where one party of the agreement (employer) retains the option to withdraw from the relationship at any time, while the other party (youth) can only comply to what the first party requests.

Temporal uncertainty and the concept of 'long-term commitment' is reminiscent of Elster's (1979) notion of 'self-binding'. In order to reduce choice complexity of long-term courses of action under uncertainty, individuals tend to constrain or bind their own future actions (i.e., commit themselves to a specific action in the future). Self-binding is an effective technique to make one's promises to significant others (e.g., partners, actors in industrial relations) more credible. This technique makes communication about what one is going to do under

still unknown future conditions more reliable. According to Elster (1979), this credibility enhances the *trust* that actors will have in each other and enables them to interact and cooperate more effectively than without such self-binding commitments. Self-binding, however, is also paradoxical, particularly in a life phase in which the transition to adulthood takes place. On the one hand, it is a prerequisite for creating certainty for young people as well as credibility and trust in one's dealings with others. On the other hand, it diminishes the ability to react in a flexible manner during later stages of the life course, which clashes with the rapidly changing demands of a globalizing society.

Third, *employment relationship uncertainty* is characterized as whether youth are a) self-employed (with no employees), or, b) dependent workers (see Bernardi, 2000). We hypothesize that the lone self-employed worker will have a higher degree of uncertainty, due to lower protection measures. Depending on the labor market context, uncertainty for dependent workers is measured by whether workers are in: a) public or private sector employment, and, b) a less precarious relationship such as a permanent versus a temporary contract (in closed employment systems), or by measures such as a regular versus irregular work shift (in open employment systems). Whether an individual is employed in the public or private sector is a key factor in determining how they are sheltered from risk, with those employed in the public sector 'relatively isolated from the operation of market forces' (Esping-Andersen, 1993). Employment in the public sector is much farther removed from the impetus of productivity and profitability of global competition. Here we expect that those with lower levels of relationship security (i.e., self-employed, private sector, temporary contract, irregular shifts) will experience higher levels of uncertainty, which will in turn generate a similar response of postponement or forgoing binding life course commitments. Employment relation uncertainty is closely tied, yet distinct from temporal uncertainty. Although temporal uncertainty can include types of employment relation insecurity, it has a broader scope to capture how different kinds of uncertainty make it more difficult for youth to make long-term binding decisions.

We expect that the effects of uncertainty will, however, differ for men and women, particularly those from conservative welfare regimes. A *gender hypothesis* anticipates that in countries where the male-breadwinner model is predominant, it will be more important for males to establish themselves in a more secure job as opposed to females (Oppenheimer *et al.*, 1997). For this reason, we predict a stronger effect of uncertainty on men than women, which will be particularly evident in the male-breadwinner countries of the conservative and family-oriented welfare regimes.

DATA AND METHODS

Our intention to strive for empirical evidence to either confirm or disconfirm the impact of globalization on the lives of youth led to the use of individual-based event history data and longitudinal analytical methods and techniques (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 2002). The majority of data used in this study came from retro-

spective or longitudinal panel surveys collected in the 1990s. This included the German Socio-Economic Panel (1984-1998), data pooled from seven retrospective life history surveys and the Panel Study of Social Integration (1987, 1989, 1991, 1995) for the Netherlands, and for France, the Young People and Careers survey (1997). The Swedish analysis draws on the Swedish Level of Living Survey (1991), with Norway using KIRUT (10% sample of public register data, 1989-1996) and the Database of Generations (1950-1990). The Hungarian study employs the Way of Life and Time Use Survey (1999-2000) and the General Youth Survey (2000). Both Estonia and Spain used the Fertility and Family Survey from 1994 and 1995 respectively. The British Household Panel Survey (1991-1999) was used for the United Kingdom, the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (1993-1998) for Canada, the National Survey of Family Growth (1995, women only) for the United States and the National Retrospective Demographic Survey (1989, women only) for Mexico. The analysis of Italy was based on the Italian Longitudinal Household Survey (1997) with work for Ireland using both the Irish School Leavers Survey (1987-93, 1992-98) and the Follow-up of the School Leavers Survey (1992, 1998).

For our purposes, event history methods were ideal as they allow for 'causal-type' analysis of events that represent changes from one discrete life course state to another. Since we also wanted to examine empirical consequences at the individual level, this general approach was the most desirable. The analyses examined the transition of entry into employment, first union formation, first child and in some cases, entry into unemployment. Statistical applications included piecewise exponential, piecewise constant exponential, logistic, and Cox semi-parametric proportional hazard models. Since technical and mathematical aspects of the models and methods have been specified elsewhere (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 2002), we focus on substantive results instead of explanations of the methods.

As with any secondary data analysis, comparability of analyses is dependent on the various available datasets. All countries explored entry into employment and transition to first partnership and parenthood in a way befitting to their country-specific context. The diverse pathways and impacting factors in the transition to adulthood across the 14 countries is reflected in the choice of dependent and explanatory variables. The analyses for each country differed slightly due to data availability, but also for substantive reasons. For example, non-marital cohabitation has taken over as the choice of first partnership in Sweden, necessitating a model of transition to first union that examines only cohabitation. Conversely, only the transition to marriage is included in the analysis of first partnerships in Italy due to the fact that there are too few individuals reporting a consensual union (Bernardi and Nazio, this volume; Nazio and Blossfeld, 2003).

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Chapter 2 sets the country studies into context by providing a short comparative description of selected economic and demographic trends: educational expan-

sion, youth unemployment, change in the occupational structure, trends in atypical employment and female labor force participation, as well as the pluralization of living arrangements. The country-specific chapters then follow. The book is divided into five sections that partition the countries by welfare state regimes. The first section contains the conservative regimes of Germany (Chapter 3), the Netherlands (Chapter 4) and the related country of France (Chapter 5). This is followed by the social-democratic regimes of Sweden (Chapter 6) and Norway (Chapter 7), the post-socialistic countries of Hungary (Chapter 8) and Estonia (Chapter 9), and the liberal regimes of Britain (Chapter 10), Canada (Chapter 11), the United States (Chapter 12), and finally the family-oriented regimes of Mexico (Chapter 13), Italy (Chapter 14), Spain (Chapter 15), and Ireland (Chapter 16). Chapter 17 synthesizes the results, confronts the expectations from this introductory chapter and discusses the added value of this approach for the field of youth studies and globalization research.

NOTES

- 1 The authors would like to thank Wout Ultee and members of the GLOBALIFE project for detailed comments on a previous version of this chapter.
- 2 Measures befit the country context. In some cases it measures combinations of whether the individual is enrolled in education, working, unemployed or out of the labor force (e.g., Bygren *et al.*; Francesconi and Golsch; Kurz *et al.*, this volume), or it gauges their educational and work status including the number of work hours (e.g., Simó *et al.*, this volume). Others include employment status and divide educational enrollment further by whether youth are in full or part-time school or work or work throughout the year (e.g., King; Mills; Parrado, this volume). While others include activity status in combination with aspects of employment uncertainty (e.g., Kieffer *et al.*; Liefbroer; Róbert and Bukodi, this volume).

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