# BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

# LIFE-COURSE TRAJECTORIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN RESIDENTIAL CENTRES

PhD thesis abstract

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Key words: youth, residential centre, life-course trajectory, habitus, labeling, trauma

## THESIS SUMMARY

This paper brings in discussion the life-course trajectories of youth who lived in residential institutions in Romania during 1980 and 2009. Our entire understanding is based on a qualitative approach. Life-course trajectories are seen from three different perspectives: the adolescent as being ready to leave the residential institution, the professional who worked/is working with youth living in placement centers and the youth who already left the Child Protection system.

After 1989, the situation of children from communist orphanages was one of the key aspects that brought attention to our country. Studies regarding the perverted effects of institutionalization (Bowlby, 1991; Dumitrana, 1998; Jewett, 1982; Macavei, 1989; Roth, 1999; Rutter, 1981; Spitz, 1945; Stativa, 2001) and international pressures lead in 1998 to the beginning of the child protection reform. Part of this reform consisted in restructuring old giant institutions and closing others. It's praiseworthy that some important steps were taken in this matter, but while all the resources were focused on improving the quality of life for children who lived in institutions, children who were about to leave the system were left aside with no specialized services being offered to them. By 2006, when the Government passed the bill regarding the "National strategy on social inclusion for youth leaving the child protection system" (GD 669/2006), this category was neglected. Once the child was 18, the child protection system ended all its responsibilities and no other institution was abilitated to support them for independent living.

So, one first argument in support of this research is the lack of Romanian studies dealing with these subjects (Muga, 2005; Anghel & Dima, 2008). There is no national monitoring system of these children, so there is no telling about their future trajectory. Also, there are no evaluations regarding the long term costs of institutionalization, not even financial ones. The life-course trajectories of youth who lived in residential institutions is an import theme today, both at national and international level. Recent

studies show an increased interest on this phenomenon (Dixon and Stein, 2005; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Stein and Munro (eds.), 2008). What should be noticed thou are that international studies are conducted on youth who lived in modern residential facilities and in countries where there is a large support system of services for adaptation to the independent life. The current study is conducted on youth who lived in "total institutions" during communist era and on youth who did not benefit from post-institutionalization services.

The second argument in favor of this research is provided by the methodological originality. This means having children involved in actual research. It is a qualitative research conducted through biographical interviews. This offers a wide perspective of the entire life of children by trying to understand the way by which the past experience of institutionalization is translated into present life-course trajectory

And not least, this paper offers a new conceptual framework. By tacking into consideration the risk and protective factors for child/adolescent development, most of the current studies are written from a psychological or social work perspective. Also, most of the researches focus on the delinqual and risk behaviors for these children. By combining sociological and psychological theories, the current paper brings an interdisciplinary approach. We reveal the profiles of both the "losers" as they are defining themselves and the "winners" in life-course trajectory

The current research has the following objectives:

- To describe the life-course trajectories of youth who lived in placement centers
- To identify the profiles of the life-course trajectories for youth who lived in residential centers
- To understand the issues that determines different life-course trajectories
- To understand the role that the institution has on life-course trajectory after leaving the institution
- To describe the way youth define "success" and "failure" in life and the way they are placing themselves as a function of these.

This doctoral thesis is structured into sever chapters. The introductory chapter is followed by two chapters that structure the theoretical discourse and by other three that present the empirical findings and analysis. The last chapter is dedicated to conclusions.

Second chapter "*Child protection institutions: from orphanage to residential center*" offers an analysis of child protection institutions, both internationally and nationally. There are many studies that deal with the perverted effects of institutionalization. The results lead to major changes into Child Protection System (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1965; Bowlby, 1951; Browne, 2005; Rutter, 1972, 1981); a big step was closing the big institutions and developing alternative family services. In Europe the information regarding child protection institutions is fragmented because the criteria by which it was collected are different. Because of that an international perspective regarding children living in institutions it is hard to offer (Guðbrandsson, 2006). Romania belongs to the Central and Eastern Europe countries that are characterized by a large number of institutionalized children and by an unfavorable developmental environment offered.

Back in the '60 the social work profession was seen as anti-ideological and therefore was forbidden. This was also happening in a time when large institutions for child protection were in a higher number. With no alternatives to institutionalization it is obvious that the number of children placed in these institutions rose. All this was happening in a time dominated by the Communist Party that in 1966 passed the pronatality bill. Institutions were structured as follows: for children up to 3 years old, for pre-school and school-aged children, special schools, home schools, and hospital houses (Roth, 2009). Even if the quality of life for children from institutions in Romania has been improved, we still have to deal with the perverted effects of the institutionalization (Dumitrana, 1998; Macavei, 1989; Roth, 2009; Stativa, 2002). By second analysis of the literature, we point out the quality of life and the hidden effects of placement, that interest us most. We therefore describe the effects of traumatic separation from parents and the lack of attachment (Allen, 2005; Bowlby, 1951; Killenn, 1998; Jewett, 1982; Muntean, 2002; Robert-Ouvray, 2001); building self-consciousness in the absence of personal history (David and Appell, 2001; Greenwell 2003; Macavei, 1989; Stativa, 2002); the effects of child abuse from the staff (Dolto, 2010; Dumitrana, 1998; Roth, 1999; Spitz,

1945; Stativa, 2002) and the insufficiency of social relationing skills and independent life training while being institutionalized (Rutter, 1998; Marcovitch and colab., 1997). The brain mechanisms that deal with the social behavior and attachment can be permanently affected (Glaser, 2000; Schore, 2001). The sample of children included in this study was born in '80 and lived mostly in big institutions. That is why we did not propose to improve their current quality of life.

Law	Aspects	
Child protection law no. 3/1970	No encouragement of alternative family services	
Law no. 47/1993 on judicial declaration of the abandonment of children	5	
Law no. 108/1998 regarding the protection of children in difficulty Law no. 87/1998 on adoption	<ul> <li>The opportunity of placing a child to a foster family it is given; therefore we move from an extremely institutionalized environment to alternative family services</li> <li>Emphasis on the best interest of the child and on his needs</li> </ul>	
Law no.18/1990 ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child	• Acknowledges the children's rights	
Law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child		

Table 1 The evolution of the legislation regulating child protection from residential centers

The third chapter, "*The state of youth from a sociological perspective*" reveals a meta-analysis of several previous studies. The European Commission Report *Youth–Investing and Empowering* (2009), indicate that about 96 millions people aged 15-29 reside in the European Union, representing almost 20% of the total population. In this report, 'youth' is defined as "the passage from a dependant childhood to independent adulthood". Young people are in transition between a world of rather secure and standard biographical development to a world of choice and/or risk where individuals have to choose and plan their own orientation and social integration" (EU Youth Report, 2009, p.7). Among the difficulties that young people deal are: the lack of a job, especially for youth belonging to marginalized minority groups that have poor working conditions, low

wages and mostly short time (Bradley and van Hoof, 2005); keeping a house (Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Iacovou and Berthoud, 2001) and low education. In capitalist societies education is a privilege based on class division and much more on racial and ethnic divisions. The educational system is manipulated by the middle and the upper class and so the advantages that they benefit from are further transmitted to their future generations. (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Willis, 1977). By contrast, both children and parents from working class deal with a lot of economical, cultural and social obstacles (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003; Furlong and Cartmel, 2004). Youth from Romania face the same problems. The difference here is that the access to a job does not guarantee the chance to a home, so most of them are still living with their parents.

In the second part of the chapter the emphasis is on the difficulties that youth who exit the child protection system face and on the services that they can benefit of. According to Anghel and Dima (2008), the evolution of the Child Protection system in Romania, and especially of the system dealing with young people living in institutions can be divided into 3 steps: the communist era - 1989 – from a centralized, closed model, but capable of offering a certain type of security for youth who were about to live independently to an universal system of protection; 1990 - 1999 – a period of legislative and organizational changes; 2000 - present - a stability of the system, the services available for children who are about to leave the protection system are diverse and better. During communism, the State was giving youth who left the protection system a home and a job. So, it can be said that in a certain way they were still living guided by similar rules from the institution they had just left. Usually the home was a one-room or a place in a family home, where they had to share a room with a stranger. The dormitories (hostels) had a canteen. As for the job, even if they did not excel on their position, there was no risk of losing it as in the communist unemployment was unacceptable. After 1989 youth had to face marginalization and social exclusion. That is why data from the end of 1994 show 409 youth lived illegally in placement centers, most of them being forced to return after facing negative experiences outside (Alexiu, 2000). After 1989, because of the wide media coverage of the orphans from Romania, all the attention was focused on the improvement of the conditions for children living in institutions. Therefore, another category was totally ignored: those who left the system. Once the law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child came in force we face the transition from a system focused on a child in difficulty to a system focused on promoting children's rights. It is the first law that makes children who lived in residential centers visible. According to this, if there is no support from the biological family once they reach the legal age of exiting they can ask for another 2 years of placement.

As for the persons who leave the system we notice that the difficulties that the Romanian youth face are similar to the ones from Europe. Among risk factors in their life-course trajectory are: the lack of a job and a home (Allen, 2003); ethnicity; weak social ties (Marsh and Peel, 1999; Morgan and Lindsay, 2006); lack of family support (Dixon and Stein, 2005; Jackson, 2002); low self esteem; lack of strategies for crisis management they face when they must live on their own; early leaving the institution, mostly done as a request from the system and not when the child was ready (Normann, 2003, apud. Kongeter, Schroer, Zeller, 2008; Del Valle, Alvarez-Baz and Fernanz 1999); low education (Biehal and colab., 1995; Stein, 1997; Stein and Wade, 2000); high mortality risk, mental health problems, and suicide attempts (Franzén and Vinnerljung, 2006; Vinnerljung, Öman and Gunnarsson, 2005, apud. Stein and Munro, 2008). Again, the difference between Romania and other European countries lays in the access to support services for adapting to independent life. In Romania there is a lack of mentors that would be able to support youth in the transitional stage, there are few available houses, and there is a lack of self-awareness, psychological counseling services for dealing with traumatic events.

Chapter four and five focus on the *empirical data* and the analysis. Chapter four is focused on the life-course trajectory as seen by adolescents from the child protection system and by professionals involved in this area. Chapter five is exclusively dedicated to researching life-course trajectories as seen by the social actors that had them.

Figure 1 Stage of research

	STAGE OF RESEARCH
	STAGE I
	S GROUP WITH THE TEENAGERS ROM RESIDENTIAL CENTERS
	STAGE II
SEMI-	STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH THE SPECIALISTS
	STAGE III

In order to become familiar to the theme we first need to know the institutional environment and the people who live there. Therefore in this stage we are focused on the

adolescents'/youth's perception on their projected future after leaving the child protection system; how well prepared for independent life they are feeling.

**Research questions:** 

- 1. What's the perspective of adolescents and youths form child protection system over their chances of succeeding in life?
- 2. How 'successes' and 'failures' are defined by them?

One of the limits of the research is given by the location of the study carried on only in Cluj County. Because this study did not aimed to representativity we did not choose for focus-groups in several geographical regions. More than that, the focus-groups were primarily designed as an information source for a deep knowledge over the phenomenon.

The sample of the research consisted of 26 subjects aged 15-20, 14 females and 12 males and living in 5 residential centers (small). Part of the sample is the last generation born under the communism and lived the slow and difficult process of transition. Also, these small residential centers are of recent date because the subjects were previously living in those big institutions.

Gender	F	14
	М	12
Age	15-20	26
Ethnicity	Romanian	12
	Rroma	10
	Hungarian	4
Studies	Highschool	6
	Vocational School	14
	Secondary school	6
Admission to	Abandonment at birth	6
institution	Below age 1	5
	Age 2-6	5
	Below age 7	10
Personal relations	yes	15
with the family	no	11

Table 2 Socio-demographic characteristics

The method used is the focus-group (Krueger, 1988; McElroy, 1997; Morgan, 1997; Nix et al., 1998). Choosing the group interview rather than individual interview

was based on the cathartic dimension provided and on the feeling of empowerment given to participants (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999).

Subjects revealed that in order to be successful in life you need: a home, a job, a support person/institution, a good education, "to be honest", "to be hardworking", "to take responsibility for your acts", "to be optimistic", and "to have faith in yourself". Participants said that their relocation into small residential centres gave them the opportunity for developing their independent life skills. For this reason they do not see in the future as having difficulties in managing the house, but they don not have the certainty of having a house or a job. A gender perspective reveals that males think that is easier to find a job than girls. Meanwhile, because of their 'marriage option', girls have greater chances of having a house. The social capital of those youth is mainly of other youths who lived in institutions, the staff and only in some cases by the biological family. Research points out the following problems: adolescents/youths would face social exclusion on ethnicity and on their belonging to a orphanage, and they did not develop coping strategies for these; adolescents/youths know their priorities in order to manage themselves, but don't have sufficient resources for successful integration. Some of them will fail and they will end up being beneficiars of the social work system once again. This is a tragic and vicious circle as Romania does not provides enough postinstitutionalization support services and programmes.

In order to deal with data triangulation we conducted 15 interviews with the professionals who worked with children in the system or offered post-institutionalization assistance through different NGOs. This aimed to enhance the information collected from children assuring another perspective to the same phenomenon. The key-point was the risk and protective factors as defined by the staff. We were also interested in the major difficulties that these children face while adapting to independent life and in the solution foreseen by professionals involved.

Professionals considered that children have little chances of success in life. They emphasized the need of another approach in institutions and a much higher need of postinstitutionalization services, especially in the area of trauma coping and self-awareness strategies.

#### Table 3 Distribution of the interviewees

Social worker in a residential centre	3
Social worker – maternal shelter, center for homeless, day center for children, recreational center	5
for adolescents and youths	
Program coordinator for socio-professional inclusion of youths who lived in placement centers	3
Teacher in a placement center	3
Head of a placement center	1

**Research questions:** 

- 1. What professionals think about the difficulties that youth face after leaving the child protection system?
- 2. Which are the protective factors that help them succeed in life?
- 3. Which are the risk factors for the life-course trajectories of young people living in residential centers?
- 4. On what aspects the experience of living in an institution is affecting the youths' present?

Professionals talk about three stages for the children living in residential centers. First there are the big institutions from the communist era till 1989 when the child protection reform started; second there's the 1998-2004 period when big institutions were restructured and the alternative caring services were developed; last, the present period is characterized by children living in foster care and most of youths do benefit of support and assistance centers. Staff who used to work in those big institutions prior to 1989 discusses the high number of children they had to work with and the impossibility of individual care; they point out that activities were primarily carried on in groups and children were not at all involved in decision-making processes regarding their life. Constructing a sense of self-identity was primarily influenced by a feminine environment: females were the representatives of authority and power, often expressed in a violent way. Social-interactional skills were developed under a relation of power between the adult and the child, where the adult was the authority. Independent-life skills were not

developed. Because of these the residential centres were defined as 'total institutions' (Goffman, 2004).

Staff that's currently involved in child protection system discuss about the positive aspects brought by the reform. After 1989, the big institutions were restructured into modules or apartments that allowed youths to develop some skills for self-managing the house. Also, trained professionals from social sciences (with college degree) were hired and the ratio of children per adult was reduced. Children's inclusion in main-stream education system had a positive effect in the area of developing and performing relational skills in different social contexts. Still, teachers and social workers point out the stigma that these children had to face while at school. With all the measures taken in order to improve their quality of life, adults working in the system declare that the rate of success in life is extremely low for these youths.

Professionals offering post-institutionalization services declare that the biggest problems that youths who lived in residential centers have today are: low capacity of introspection and of self-awareness; mental health is affected by the lack of significant other and by the lack of consistent attachment relations; negative self-image and a low self-esteem; poor skills for managing their free time; poor social skills to interact outside the institution; unprocessed traumatic events experienced in biological family/residential centers block their psycho-social development.

What are they doing in their spare time?

Nothing really, as far as I can see. Nothing out of what could make them go ahead. They are unable of introspection, they lack this ability of looking inside and o saying: < today I will read because I feel like reading, because I enjoy it.> All they do is hang around with others, share with them the feelings they have in common, make other feelings, stuff to remember later on. They do not like to be alone for the cannot be alone. What could they do, all alone? They cannot find themselves in intimacy with their own being, they do not know what to make out of <being alone with oneself> that, they don't know. This is the point, for they do not know <who are themselves for themselves?> (program coordinator for "Youth in transition" World Vision Foundation.)

Adults working in residential centers declare that the protective factors for one children's future are: education (their access to higher education) and maintaining personal relations with the family even after their placement. Professionals involved in offering post-institutionalization services primarily work with youths who have fewer resources and ask for the support. As a protective factor they consider that these youths

have higher coping skills to extreme situations (e.g. living on the streets or at friends). Those who offered services back in the '90 point out differences between teenagers that left the system then and the ones that leave the system now. Differences reveal that youths who lived in restructured residential centers like apartments have better independent life skills, are more informed and know their rights. But still they have to face the stigma of 'institutionalized children'. All the subjects being interviewed noticed the lack of mental health services both while were in institutions and outside the institution.

Automatic behavior is very powerful, As I helped them, I noticed that, after a while, they do turn back to behavior that they learnt before taking part in these programs. Their forms of behavior are already part of their inner structure, and leaning a new way of acting engenders a strong inner change, a cognitive, emotional and a structural change. Yet, as the skeleton is already formed, its major components cannot be modified. You can add to them, but the essence stays the same. With all my optimism, my opinion is that the chances of recovering these young people are slim. Very few manage to face the need to change. Not all of them realize this need to change, for if they managed to understand that, it would mean a fundamental step ahead: for the change itself would came, at that point, only as a consequence of an exercise of determination and willingness. And, however, change is always painful, it is difficult, one has to give up something and replace it. If there is no one to guide them, to show them the existing alternatives and even to offer them alternatives, they lack this ability to built and rebuilt. (program coordinator for "Youth in transition" World Vision Foundation.)

As for the professionals' perspective they consider the youths' chances to succeed in life are low; they consider the need of some changes in the strategies of dealing with children from residential centers and the need of post-institutionalization services, especially in coping with the trauma and developing self-awareness strategies.

Chapter five focuses on "*Life-course trajectories of youths who lived in residential centers*". The aim of this narrative study is to reveal the life-course trajectories for 60 youths who during 1980-2009 lived in residential centers.

Research questions:

1. Which are the life-course trajectories for these youths?

- Which are the key-stones in their life?

- Which are the differentiating aspects of those trajectories?
- 2. How does living in institutions influence their current life-course trajectory?

- How does the time spent in institution influences the way they define

themselves?

- How do they relate to their past?

- 3. Which are the factors that influenced their life-course trajectory?
  - Which are the protective factors?
  - Which are the risk factors?
- 4. How do youths define 'successes and 'failures' in life?
  - Where do they see themselves according to the dichotomy success/failure?

A theoretical sampling was used. The sample consists of 60 youths aged 19-3 and coming from 15 Romanian counties and the capital city (Bucharest).

#### Table 4 Socio-demographic distribution of the subjects

Gender	F	30
	М	30
Ethnicity	Romanian	31
·	Rroma	24
	Hungarian	5
Studies	College	11
	Upper secondary school	4
	Vocational school	21
	School for special needs	13
	Lower secondary school	8
	Illiterate	2
Admission to institution	Abandonment at birth	23
	Age 0-3	15
	Age 4-6	6
	School aged	16
Exit the institution	Below age 18	11
	Over age 18	49
Personal relations with the family	Yes	28
	No	32
Number of brothers/sisters	<3	32
	>3	28
Post-institutionalization support	Yes	19
	No	41
Occupation	No occupation	20
-	Unqualified worker	21
	Qualified worker	3
	Other (secondary education)	6
	Medical doctor	1
	Sales consultant	1
	Student	4
	Unemployed	1
	Prostitution	2
Housing	Rent, alone or with other friends	17
	Rent with the partner	9
	Partner's family	3

Biological family	7
Free housing	12
Maternal shelter	2
In their own house	2
Living on streets	8

Data collection satisfied the triangulation principle. Three sources of data were used: narrative interview, document analysis and analysis of field notes. Data were then analyzed using content and thematic analysis procedures. Interviews were audio recorded, written and analyzed using Nvivo software. The 60 interviews were conducted during 2008-2010. For most of the cases there were many interviewing sessions, sometimes a few months apart. The length of an interview ranged between 60 - 180 minutes. A third person was always present in the room for the interviews conducted in prisons. Location of the interviews: subjects' homes, residential institutions were they used to live, different NGO's that offer post-institutionalization services, maternal shelters, shelters for homeless people, and prisons.

Youths' biographies point out a past marked by living in a 'total institution' and a present in which they were assimilated to different social structures. By analyzing empirical data we notice five assimilating groups. Each group is characterized by a certain profile. Those five groups are: group of youth with higher education, group of youth with families and with jobs, group of youth who are on the edge, group of youth who developed a dependency for institutions and the group of youth from prisons. Each profile will be further analyzed.

# Young people with higher education...or a lesson of how to get "from stupid to smart people"

There was a teacher.. in the first grade he placed the kids in two rows: the row of the clever ones, and the row of the dumb ones. I was in the dumb kids' row: my grades were low for I was running away quite a lot. And I learnt that if you were in the dumb kids' row it was easier: nobody bothered you, nobody bothered you to do your homework, yet it is also true one did not get the second course at lunch (he smiles). One day Mr. X came and announced that those who are not moving from the dumb kids' row into the clever ones in a month time would be sent to school A, a school for kids with special needs. We did not do well in school for they were beating us, they were really treating us inhumanely. So, we, those from dumb kids' row hold a meeting, and one of us said that at that school A they beat you even worse than here. So I felt that it's going to be bad, and that I have to act. So, lo and behold, after a month I was able to read (he smiles) and the teacher said "you are a rough diamond." And by the end of the year I was the second in the class. My grandfather was coming to see me. I lived with him for one month. He was very poor, but I liked it there, for he was giving me something I never had before: affection. I can be grateful to that teacher, for when he was drunk, and he was never sober (he smiles) he used to tell us that an institutionalized child has to learn in order to be successful in life. So I managed to get in the medical school, I graduated and I was considering to go and work abroad. Right now I am in my specializing year in the dental surgery; I have to study dentistry for three years. I know, I am being pathological with my never-ending studies (he laughs). (young, 29 years old, medical school graduate. He was institutionalized since he was 1 year old, he lived 26 years in 4 different institutions).

This sample consisted on 11 youths, 6 females and 5 males; 4 of them were abandoned in early childhood, 2 in pre-school years and 5 in school years; they spent between 9-26 years in institutions and only one of them left the institution before age 18; 8 of them did not benefit of any post-institutionalization services. Youths say that they had the chance of meeting families that offered them a model; therefore they wished to go beyond the socio-economical status of their biological family. Some think that living in institution undoubtedly offered them a positive trend to their life and if they would have lived in their biological families they wouldn't have taken any graduate classes. All the subjects declare that the presence of significant other, capable of support and trust is essential in attending higher education. It makes no difference if this person is a teacher, which provides help in registration issues or a person outside the institution. Youths regarded institution as a resource rather than a 'close environment'. As they gain more awareness of the disadvantages they have compared to other young people, for some of them going to college was a 'must'. They consider that this particular life-course trajectory was partly influenced by external factors (the supporting family was a reference point so they wanted more, teachers or instructors), but partly they also recognize an inner factor that determined them to choose (their own decision). Even if for most of them their experiences form institutions are characterized by a series of abuses, these youth develop a strong resilience sense. They see themselves as 'winners' in this 'battle of life' and they are proud of their accomplishments.

# "Hard-working" and "Family-man" youths

I recall, most of us were of the same age at the orphanage. After I grown up I tried to get over these sort of things. When you're a child you try to get near someone, but we did not have anyone to get near to, it was a disaster. The grown ups around us were really mean by, during Ceausescu's time it was very different from today. Let's face it: as long as you're a kid, you are nobody's kid, and everyone's kid.. so it was like in a jungle, even worse. The children were really mean, at school, and many of them were trying to beat us... We were doing all kinds of social activities to show that we are not handicapped, for that what the said about us, that we were mentally handicapped, as it was obvious we did not have any physical handicap. So we were sowing like crazy for exhibition, we were dancing until we felt flat.

Nobody told us when we had to leave. We know it was coming, for we saw other girls leaving. They gave me a blanket, a pillow, some bed sheets and my clothes. Nobody prepared me, nobody cared where I was about to go. I talked to a girl who was already in a vocational school, to let me live with her. I did not have an alarm clock. I used to wake up during the night and watch the buildings. If there were only few widows had the lights on, that meant that someone had a tooth ache, or something like that. When more lights were on that meant that it was the time for me to go to work. Sometimes I arrived at work around 5am, much to earlier. Then they did not have enough work, so I was unemployed. I left my things at a friend's place... I had some clothes from the orphanage and the blanket.. oh, how many times I carried those things everywhere I went. I wanted to try the evening classes, for I knew I had nowhere to go, but the people from the orphanage would not allow me to. They were asking what for I needed more schooling? During the night I was walking on the streets, to keep the cold away. I was buying a bread, and split it in several pieces, one piece per day. I was going to my friends to wash myself, and trying to sleep at my friends' places. This period in which I was out of work lasted 3 months. Then I got hired to work in a bar. Then I got married, I gave birth to V. Now I work at N. (young girl, 29 years old, graduated a vocational school, he was institutionalized since she was 3 years old and lived 15 *years in 2 different institutions)* 

This sample consists of 9 subjects, 3 of them were abandoned in early childhood, 2 in pre-school age and 4 in school age; they lived in institution for 5 to 19 years, and 5 of them lived in two or more residential facilities. Most of them did not benefit of any support when leaving the child protection system. The characteristic of this group is that they manage to keep a job for a long period of time so they have a constant income (salary), they value 'family' (4 are married and have a child) and 'work', they set long-term goals and act toward them. They are extremely motivated for achieving their goals and they learnt to treasure what they have. But, when they reach maturity they regret not pursuing or continuing their education (most of them graduated vocational schools). Also, similar to the group with higher education, they see institution as a resource. Even if their childhood is not characterized by strong affective relations with their biological family, they do show strong secure attachment patterns with their own children. Their current success is seen as a function of their seriousness and of their ability to sacrifice themselves.

# Youths on the edge

The sample consisted of 14 subjects, 11 of them were abandoned at birth. When they speak about the institution they recall the abuses suffered, but they refer to it as a quite secure place, providing them at least food and shelter (needs that now they have to struggle a lot in order to satisfy them). Results show that a risk factor for social exclusion is low education. Also, they did not have a significant other while living in residential center, their biological family is not a resource, but they do ask a lot their friends for help. They maintain personal relations with other young people living in institutions and they develop a 'common group help' system. Usually they live together, eat together, and help others who do not have a job. Most of the time they live on the streets and there is no stability in their life-course trajectory. For these reasons they see themselves as 'looser'.

## Youth dependent of institutions

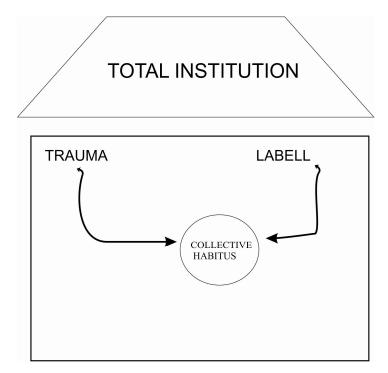
In this sample there were 7 youths, most of them being abandoned at birth, 6 of them lived in more than 2 institutions and spent between 5-21 years in a residential facility. The highest education level is vocational school. Youths from this group did not managed to live on their own and they are depending on the support of other institutions for more than a year. There are young females that gave birth to a child and lived in a maternal center, persons who ask help at homeless people centers or people who benefit of support from different NGOs for more than a year. They are characterized by the lack of a significant other, low education, poor skills of independent living and poor social-relational skills. As the youths from the previous group they consider that the institution satisfied their basic needs and that is very hard to do now by them. These persons depend on the support of other institution creating so a vicious circle: they exit one institution to enter another. They did not have real difficulties in adapting to the rules of the new institution because they are used with the general rules of living in a community. They were placed in a sort of familiar place and that gave them a psychological comfort state of mind; they knew what to expect next, everything was predictable.

# Youths in detention or a different type of choice

Those 14 youths who were in detention are characterized by their description of the institution as a closed one, where the staff represented the only authority, 5 of then ran before being 18 and preferred living on the streets. Half of them were placed there in early childhood and most of them lived in more than 2 facilities; the length of their placement was de 3-18 years. Most of them graduated from a vocational school, they did not maintain any personal relations with their biological family and did not benefit of any post-institutionalization services. Their profile is one of the child coming from a dysfunctional family, characterized by violence and then moved in another hostile environment were abuses continued. With no support and with the lack of perspective they have no motivation in changing their life. Sometimes he sees himself as a victim of an unfair system. Because he was constantly told he worths nothing he built a negative self-image and he did not developed social acceptable coping skills to stressful situations. The characteristic of this group is that violence continues even after he leaves the institution in a more obvious way than other groups. After leaving the institution the most of them did not had any job therefore living on the streets for longer periods. 5 youths are imprisoned for theft, 4 for robbery, 4 for murder (infanticide) and one for fraud; half of them are recidivists. Youths who are recidivists (2 of them for 7 times) declare that they had to deal with a double, and sometimes a triple stigma: 'a child from the orphanage', 'criminal', 'Roma'. That is how they explain their inability to social inclusion.

Sixth chapter "A new theoretical framework", aims to offer a new theoretical model in understanding the life-course trajectory of youths who lived in child protection residential centers. This interdisciplinary thesis encompasses both psychological and sociological approaches. Looking through sociological spectacles the paper is based on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. Key terms in his sociological thought are 'social field, 'capital' and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1987, 2000). Other important key terms are 'labeling' (Becker, 1963) and 'total institution' (Goffman, 2004). From a psychological perspective we appeal to the concepts of 'attachment' and 'trauma' (Bowlby, 1951).

#### Figure 2 Relation between collective habitus, trauma and labeling



We consider that a total institution space is characterized by a collective habitus constructed through labeling and traumatic experiences that children had to face. Habitus is not a theory, but a meta-theory – a theory about the theory (Brubaker, 1985, pag. 761). Piere Bourdieu sees habitus as an internal structure or a set of structures that determines the way an individual acts and reacts to the world; this generates practices, perceptions and attitudes that are regulated without being voluntary coordinated or even governed by a rule (Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu characterized habitus as a history transformed into nature. We assume collective habitus as being 'habitus for the institutionalized children' because whenever they are talking about themselves they are referring to "we (the children) from the institution" and the community they lived also referred to them as a "children from the institution". The elements of the habitus are the body, clothes, food, and free-time. In the current paper the body is the object of violent behavior, the one who bares the scars. In most of the cases the youths were physically abused, sexual abused (some cases). The incorporated habitus is that the body is the place for violent manifestations. Perception towards the body is strongly related to construction of a selfimage and a gender-identity.

Constructing a gender habitus realized through the attention towards the physical aspect. The hair-cut was identical for both boys and girls till 7 years old when they were

going to school, and even after that. In public space it was easy to recognize children because they were wearing the same type of clothes were and sometimes same color. There were unisex clothes, dresses were only for 'special occasions' usually when activities were carried on in the community. Only then the dresses sent the message of 'normality' compared to other children. Daily routine said that always someone was there to wake them up, to set the table, to clean, to wash their clothes, to set their daily programme. In their inner structure children were set to know that always someone will take care of their life and all they have to do is to do tasks.

The new theoretical frame of collective habitus of 'children from the institution' is constructed under the pressure of labeling and experienced traumatic events. According to Becker's labeling theory (1963), by constant naming a child as a "institutionalized" ultimately he/she will act accordingly. Because the self-image and one's identity is a function of other, the way they will relate to him/her will influence the way a child develops his inner structures (Rock, 1994). They were named "grasshoppers"..."CCN-iştii" (casa de copii N.). Youths declared that the label of "institutionalized children" had two aspects: the fact that you have no family and that you are inferior. By traumatic events we conceptualize both the personal and collective ones (Alexander, 2004; Erickson, 1994; Wilkomirski, 1996). All the institutionalized children experienced the traumatic event of parent-separation, but most of them have also declared living repeated abusive experiences while in placement.

<I will not go>

<You go>

<*I* will not go. Do what you want, beat me, kill me> *He hit me with a broom-stick, he hit me with stones.* 

We lived at the first floor, and the older girls, who lived at the second floor used to descend and smash us. The older girsl were beating us for that made them feel good. Behind the school was in TG. and nobody could see what was happening there. They gathered all us children there. They asked us to sit in two rows, the girls in one, the boys in the other. The older boys forced us to fight, boys against girls. After we fought they forced us to knee on the stones and we were crying. Could you tell someone about it?

No, we could not tell anyone. The principal was always at the local pub. He was drunk most of the time, and he could not care less, he went into his office and slept.

When we received gifts, the older boys took away our toys, they broke them, or put them on fire. They did not allow us to use the swing, or the slide. When we eat, they threw our food on the floor, so we cannot eat it. In the evenings they forced us to hide under our blankets and they used to hit us in the head with their feet. Nobody was protecting us. The boys were beating us also when they wanted to rape us, and we tried to resist. I preferred to be beaten. He came and told me: <Let's go to the toilet>

Did you know girls who were raped? Yes, lots of them. And with who were they talking about it? With nobody. They were sitting in the room, crying and shouting, with that thick voice: <He raped me!> To whom could we complain? Nobody cared. Now, when I see young children being hit by their parents on the street, I can't stand it. I can stand seeing that a child is being hit, irrespective whether it is by someone known, or unknown. (Young girls, 24 years old, graduated 8 grades, was abandoned in the hospital after birth, she lived for 18 years in 3 different institutions)

We must mention that there are as many habitus as individuals. It is impossible that each member of a class or group to live identical lives (Throop, Murphy, 2002, pag. 187). Therefore the habitus of a child abandoned at birth is different than the one who lived in family until a certain age. For this second group, there are differences between children who were placed early childhood or in middle childhood. On the other hand, the individual, the interactions among social actors in different social situation determines different habitus. Children who had a significant other (teachers, instructors, parents, and friends) also have a very important social and emotional capital asset.

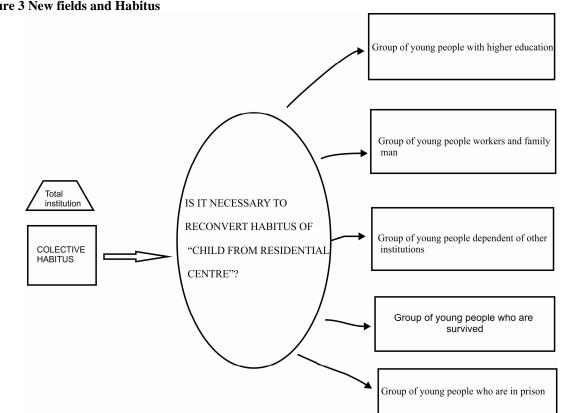


Figure 3 New fields and Habitus

When leaving the placement centre children enter different social fields. What interest us are the capitals that they bring into these fields, if the collective habitus matches the habitus of the new field or if it's necessary a reinvention. Bourdieu defines the social field as the arena where people play a game with precise rules. The rules from one field are different from field to field. Each field or autonomous universe constitutes itself as a social and historical field where individuals with different habitus interact among them (Bourdieu, 1991, pag. 215). One characteristic is that social agents compete among them in order to accumulate different forms of capital. Wacquant (1998) explains that the habitus depends on the place that the agents have in society and it is based on the capital that he possess.

The field reproduces the habitus and the habitus reproduces the field, but the field doesn't determine the habitus (Saphiro, 2004). Analyzing those five profiles from the "children from the institution" perspective shows us that for the youths with higher education and working people and family-oriented group habitus must be reconverted in order to act accordingly to the new field. Youths that are members of the dependent group and those in detention assimilate easily these fields as their own fits the existing ones. As for the youths on the edge there are both aspects that facilitate their integration and some that need reconversion.

Bourdieu (1977) says that social capital takes three forms: economic (money, possessions), social (social network) and cultural (education, qualification, objects – books, art objects). Group of youths with higher education and the "hard-working" and "family-man" one have economic and emotional capital. Youths from other groups declare that they were pushed to leave the center (it was not their choice) so that is why they were assimilated to groups that do not need a reconversion of the habitus. This is a long a painful process and they did not possessed the needed capital for entering other fields. Youths who are on the edge are characterized by social capital. Those who enter the group and have economic capital (e.g. income) manage to convert it into social capital. Dependent youths are those who live in maternal centers, centers for homeless people; they face difficulties in "social integration" and are marginalized because their habitus is

totally different. Youths from detention are characterized by expressed violence as symbolic capital.

As for labeling, subjects try to hide the environment they come from. Youths with higher education, "hard-working" and those on the edge try to keep their past hidden in order to avoid future labeling. They consider being easy to be assimilated to the new field this way. Youths in detention declare they are victims of the child protection system, but for those living on the streets stigma can act as a prestige. As for the dependent group their habitus is "children from institution" and they act accordingly in order to benefit of more services. Unprocessed traumatic events block their development thus making adaptation to the new groups, rules or requirements more difficult.

The seventh chapter reveals the *conclusions*. It brings out together those three perspectives on the life-course trajectory and presents the implications of such interpretation. Also it focuses on the limits of the research. In order to pass the traumatic event of parent separation, children from institutions must benefit of specialized services as a priority and not as a supplemental. Also, there is a need for a transitional period from the institutional environment to the independent living. In this transition they must access specialized support services.

This research aims to understand what happens with the young people after they leave the system of child protection, and what factors are responsible for their different life trajectories. Identifying the troubled spots in the system of child protection does constitue a worthy goal in my endeavour.

My data suggest that the personel working the institutions I studied adopt two types of attituides toward the children: either they mistreat them calling them "Gipsy," "Handicaped" or "Stupid" or they treat them as "normal" children, and act as if the people surrounding them do not know that there children went through a series of traumatic experiences.

The institutionalized children ought to be at the receiving end of a set of services in order to face the trauma of being separated from their families (sometimes correlated with being abused in their families) –and this should happened not only as an annex to an already existing set of services, but as a priority. I suggest, for a future research, to evaluate how many experts we have in Romania, who are prepared to assist these children in their dealing with their traumas. We were surpised to learn that the teachers and the social workers we interviewed declared that they do not have access to forms of specilized training, and that they do not feel they are prepared to answer the specific needs of the institutionalized children. One of the teachers declared: [If I could] *"I'd sent all my personel to follow this form of training. Education is very important. People do need to understand that these kids are not like the children they rear at home, they are in distinct situation and they need a special treatment"* 

Another aspect that is so very often overlooked its the ethnicity of the child. The usual approach to this issue is summaried by the "we offer non-discriminatory services" statement. We treat everyone equally. One of the main objectives of the intervention plan aims at the social integration of the child. All the studies indicate that Rroma people face a multitude of forms of social exclusion.

While the teenagers still living in institutions, declare they do not fear being discriminated against just because they are Rroma, the young people who left the child protection system, and are facing the real job market declare that they have more dificulties in finding a job, and that sometimes they are socially excluded by their colleagues and that they find it more difficult to for a couple. These findings suggest that it is necessary to prepare the children in advance for the social discrimination they are going to face in the future.

Most of the young people I studied too large the discrepancy between the conditions they enjoy while being institutionalized and the situation they find in once they are not any longer under the umbrella of the child protection system: "When I left [the system] I wanted a house, with central heating, with modern insulated windows, as we had in our institutions. It was hard to learn that I cannot afford to take five showers a day, as I did there, and it was hard to adjust to the new reality." (young girl, 25 years old, she lived in 3 different institutions for 17 years).

Another complaint is that they do not have the opportunity to develop the habitus related to an independent life, and that they not have access to life experiences in varied environments. We find that the process of preparing the child for an independent life should begin in the moment in which she or him enters the child-protection system.

They are assisted, there's an entire army of people working for them. They have access to social workers, psychologists, and teachers. In theory, they should end up very well prepared, for they have access to people that are unreachable by the children from normal families. The problem is that there are too many people working for them, that they are not required to do anything – anything, everything is settled for them. At the beginning they even asked us to wake him up, for they did not know how one does it. Everything is done for them: somebody wakes them in the morning, cooks them food, sends them to school, absolutely everything. I even wondered how important are we for them, as they depend so much on these forms of automatic behavior. Constantly pushed from behind, they are taught and re-taught to assimilate these rhythms, and I have no idea what happens after they remain alone. I think these forms of automatic behavior ar deeply rooted in them. (program coordinator, Save the Children Foundation, Sibiu 1994-1999, social worker, LOGOMEDICA Foundation)

The severance of the institutional connection with the child protection system is a process that is loaded with anguish, fear and uncertainty for these young people. The passage from an istitutionalized life style to an independent one should be eased by a transition stage that unfortunately does not exist.

Most of the young people I studied declared that this passage occured very fast; some of them did not even know that they are about to leave the system, and were not prepared in this sense. Some other did understand, even if they were not told so, for they saw those older than them leaving.

We do state that these young people do need a form of assistance during the firsts months after leaving the institution, to help them adapt to their new situation. Mentoring services are very necessary in this stage.

Tell me how you experienced the moment of leaving the system? It was very impersonal. I graduated college, I called the institution to let them know and, as I did not have the intention to continue my studies, they just let me know that I will have to leave. That was all. (young girl, 22 years old, she lived for 9 years in a single institution).

They did not explain anything. They did not care where you go: take your luggage and get out. The principal came and said: <you and you, prepare your luggage and leave!> He asked a teacher to stay with us until we prepare the luggage, and he asked the gatkeeper not to let us reenter the building.We had lunch at 2pm and we left. They did not allow us to say ,good bye' to anyone. We went in the centre of the town, we set on a bench and we tried to see what to do next. We agreed that each of us should go and search for a job, and that in the evenig we should meet again in the same place: we wanted to live together, so that no one of us could be harmed. I returned and I waited for them until 9pm but not of them came. Then I went into some bushed, actually a sort of path through the bushed. I slept there, for it was silence, it was autumn. In the mornings I looked for my colleagues, I know some places in the town where they could hang out. I was jobless for two months.

This year Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Familiei și a Drepturilor Copilului entered under the authorith of the Ministry of Work, Family and Social Work. We state that it was only natural to have a conection between child protection and family. We need services aimed at helping parents to improve their parental skills. The results of this study illustrate that "forcing" the integration may cause long term failure: two of the cases covered ended up as prostitutes, another one is in prison for killing her baby, and yet another one was sexually abused by her father after being reintegrated into her natural family and run away from home. Finally, another girl ended up homeless and placing her two children in a the child protection institution. Parents as well as children should be prepared for the reintegration in the natural family.

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